



Kim Richard Nossal, “Kicking It Old School: Romanticism with Conservative Characteristics,” in *Seeking Order in Anarchy: Multilateralism as State Strategy*, ed. Robert W. Murray (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016), 131–51 (page turns indicated thus: [132])

Introduction

In 2004, Allan Gotlieb, a former deputy minister of foreign affairs and ambassador to the United States, observed in a widely publicized lecture that Canadian governments have tended to swing between the poles of romanticism and realism in their foreign policies. One pole “ties us to hard reality, *Realpolitik* if you will, and makes us want our governments to protect our national interests when it deals with other states.” The other pole is idealism, “a visionary, at times almost romantic, approach to our position in the world.” This “idealistic vocation” emphasizes the pursuit of justice globally, the promotion of freedom and democracy, and the improvement of the condition of the poor, the weak, and the oppressed.¹ In Gotlieb’s view, the pull of the romantic had been particularly pronounced under Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and his foreign minister from 1996 to 2000, Lloyd Axworthy. The Benefactors Lecture, with its call for a “reality-based” foreign policy, was intended to be a corrective.

[132] Initially, it seemed that the victory of the Conservative Party under the leadership of Stephen Harper in January 2006 promised to deliver such a corrective. The Conservatives came to power embracing the rhetoric of the national interest as the primary driver of foreign policy. They promised to restore the relationship with the

¹ Allan Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism in Canadian Foreign Policy,” Benefactors Lecture, November 3, 2004, (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 2004), esp. 28–31,
https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/attachments/other-research/pdf/benefactors_lecture_2004.pdf.

United States that had so frayed under both Chrétien and his successor, Paul Martin. In opposition, Harper had been on record approving Canada's participation in the Ballistic Missile Defense program, and a new approach to the Canadian Armed Forces was promised, as was a more muscular policy in the Arctic. Once in power, "Canada's New Government," as the Conservatives took to calling themselves, seemed determined to change the attitudes towards multilateral institutions that had been a mark of previous governments, both Liberal and Progressive Conservative: henceforth, a much harder-nosed approach would be taken, or so it was promised. In short, the romanticism of the Liberal years was going to be a thing of the past.

In the nine years that it was in office, however, the Harper government failed to embrace a purely "reality-based" foreign policy. Rather, the tendency observed by Gotlieb in 2004 persisted: "long spasms of bipolar behaviour" ranging between the poles of realism and romanticism.² On the one hand, the Conservatives pursued an economic and trade policy driven by changes in Canada's location in the global economy, and thus "reality-based." But in the non-economic areas of international policy, we saw a romantic foreign policy, albeit with Conservative characteristics (to borrow a phrase from Chinese Communist discourse, which promises "socialism with Chinese characteristics"). While the Conservatives tried hard to put Canada's "Liberal past" behind them, as I have argued elsewhere,³ and while they tried to create a new narrative for Canadian foreign policy, as John Ibbitson suggests,⁴ by 2015 foreign policy had a distinctly "old school" flavour. For while no one would ever mistake Stephen Harper's foreign policy for that of either Jean Chrétien or Paul Martin, there were distinct similarities in the degree to which foreign policy under the Conservatives did not swing markedly away from the pole of romanticism after 2006.

[133]This chapter looks at the degree to which the Conservative government pursued the kind of "reality-based" policy prescriptions outlined by Gotlieb in 2004. I show that while the inclinations of the Conservatives, and the prime minister himself in particular, might have been towards the Realpolitik pole, the Harper government was never able to actually pursue a "reality-based" foreign policy. Rather, it found increasing comfort in the very kind of "feel-good" foreign policies so beloved by Liberal governments prior to 2006. During this earlier period, according to Denis Stairs, policy was marked by "the tendency to indulge in inflated and self-serving rhetoric" and "the spinning of tales—tales not false, but certainly canted" designed "to bridge the gap between what well-intentioned Canadians think and what the government really is

² Ibid., 41.

³ Kim Richard Nossal, "The Liberal Past in the Conservative Present: Internationalism in the Harper Era," in *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy*, ed. Heather A. Smith and Claire Turenne Sjolander (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–35.

⁴ John Ibbitson, "The Big Break: The Conservative Transformation of Foreign Policy," CIGI Papers no. 29 (2014), https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/cigi_paper_29.pdf.

doing.”⁵ I characterize this as the “ear candy” approach to foreign policy: Liberal governments fed Canadians feel-good rhetoric about Canada’s foreign policy that sounded sweet to the ear, so sweet that Canadians came to expect such rhetorical excesses, “and, as importantly, to be entirely unsatisfied with more honest, realistic, or sober assessments available to Canada in the real world of world politics.”⁶

This chapter also seeks to understand why we have seen the persistence of the romantic tradition in Canadian foreign policy. I conclude that the Harper Conservative government showed us why the romantic pole identified by Gotlieb has had such an enduring attraction for governments in Ottawa: it is so much cheaper and politically more advantageous than a “reality-based” foreign policy.

Did the Conservatives Pursue a “Reality-based” Foreign Policy?

To what extent was the Conservative approach to foreign policy, broadly speaking, based on Realpolitik considerations? One way to approach this question is to look at whether the “requirements” of a reality-based foreign policy outlined by Gotlieb were reflected in Canadian foreign policy under the Conservatives.⁷

[134] Gotlieb’s first requirement is that Canadians “recognize that transcendent US power is the dominant feature of the contemporary international order.” From that, he argues, it follows that Canada should not try to create counterweights to American power, and certainly not seek to forge a different path from the United States simply for the sake of being different. On the contrary: Gotlieb argues that Canada’s comparative advantage lay in its special relationship with the United States, and that Canada should therefore concentrate on trying to influence the government in Washington.

The Harper government embraced some elements of this first requirement, but not others. It is clear that on major issues in contemporary global politics, the Conservatives did not try to take different approaches from Washington simply for the sake of being different. On the key global security issues involving the use of force—the mission in Afghanistan, the intervention in Libya in 2011, or air support for the battle against the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in 2014—the Harper government firmly aligned itself with the United States and other allies. Certainly there was no break with American policy comparable to Chrétien’s “impolite no” to the request by the administration of

⁵ Denis Stairs, “Challenges and Opportunities for Canadian Foreign Policy in the Paul Martin Era,” *International Journal* 58, no. 4 (2003): 489–90, 503. See also Stairs, “Myths, Morals and Reality in Canadian Foreign Policy,” *International Journal* 58, no. 2 (2003): 239–56.

⁶ Kim Richard Nossal, “Ear Candy: Canadian Policy toward Humanitarian Intervention and Atrocity Crimes in Darfur,” *International Journal* 60, no. 4 (2005): 1018.

⁷ I look at five of Gotlieb’s seven “requirements.” I do not examine his contention that “Canadians need to recognize that Canada’s historical role as a middle power can never be regained,” or his final requirement—“the recognition that our destiny as a sovereign nation is inescapably tied to our geography”—by which he meant the negotiation of a North American community along the lines of the European Union. Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism,” 32, 39.

George W. Bush to join the US-led “coalition of the willing” that invaded Iraq in 2003.⁸

On the other hand, Harper himself made it clear that he did not regard “transcendent US power” as the dominant feature of the contemporary global system. As he put it in 2011, “The world is becoming more complex, and the ability of our most important allies, and most importantly the United States, to single-handedly shape outcomes and protect our interests, has been diminishing.”⁹ In this, Harper was reflecting a rather different vision of the role of the United States, not only in the world more broadly, but in Canada’s future, than the vision of Gotlieb. This alternative vision has been put most clearly by Derek Burney, a former chief of staff to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and ambassador to the United States, and Fen Osler Hampson of Carleton University. They argue that while the United States will continue to be “vitally important to Canada’s future,” Americans have been turning inward, giving greater priority to their own concerns. In such an [135]environment, they suggest, “Canada will face an uphill battle getting its voice heard and its concerns addressed.” They argue that Canada should be “shrewdly cultivating relations elsewhere,” a strategy they call the “Third Option with Legs”¹⁰—in other words, an effort to counterbalance the relationship with the United States by developing a strategic focus on Europe and emerging markets.¹¹

Nor was the Harper government inclined to follow Gotlieb’s prescription for leveraging Canada’s special relationship with the United States by seeking to influence American global policy. To be sure, Harper was not hesitant to proclaim that “Canada is there to be not just an ally and a partner of the United States but its most reliable ally and its best friend and partner in the world.”¹² While he and President Barack Obama did not enjoy the kind of close relationship that, for example, Mulroney enjoyed with Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush or that Chrétien enjoyed with Bill Clinton, Colin Robertson was arguing in 2012 that the relationship was in sound shape.¹³ However, the interpersonal relationship became increasingly soured by irritations over the Keystone

⁸ Kim Richard Nossal, “*Toujours la Politesse?* The ‘Impolite No’ on Iraq in Historical Perspective,” in *Australia, Canada, and Iraq: Perspectives on an Invasion*, ed. Ramesh Thakur and Jack Cunningham (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2015), 228–46. On Harper and the Iraq war, see Manuel Dorion-Soulié and Stéphane Roussel, “Oui” à l’Irak? Le baptême du feu de Stephen Harper et l’émergence du néocontinentalisme (2002–2003), *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 20, no. 1 (2014): 9–18.

⁹ “In Conversation: Stephen Harper,” by Kenneth Whyte, *Maclean’s*, July 5, 2011, <http://www.macleans.ca/general/how-he-sees-canadas-role-in-the-world-and-where-he-wants-to-take-the-country-2/>.

¹⁰ The Third Option was a foreign policy initiative undertaken by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the mid-1970s that sought to strengthen the economy by diversifying both investment and trade. See J.L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 158–77.

¹¹ Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, *Brave New Canada: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), xii–xiii, 174–87.

¹² Randall Palmer, “Harper to Obama: Canada’s Your Best Friend,” *Reuters Canada*, November 6, 2008, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idCATRE4A58D720081106>.

¹³ Colin Robertson, “Stephen Harper’s Management of the Canada–United States Relationship,” *Policy Options* (April 2012), 31–36.

XL pipeline. By some accounts,¹⁴ Harper was exasperated by Obama’s characterization of the Alberta oil sands as “tar sands,” and considered the president as a kind of “frustrator-in-chief.” For his part, Obama was reportedly annoyed that Harper called the pipeline decision a “no-brainer” and insisted on pursuing the Keystone issue using what Jeffrey Simpson has called “bullhorn diplomacy.”¹⁵ In short, while the relationship between president and prime minister during Harper’s tenure was nowhere near the nadir of 2003, there was nonetheless little capacity for the Harper government to engage in the kind of reality-based leverage envisaged by Gotlieb in 2004.

Gotlieb also suggests that “Canadians liberate themselves from the belief that the UN is the sacred foundation of our foreign policy,” and, in a related requirement, he suggests that Canadians should abandon their fixation with international rule making.¹⁶ These prescriptions were a response to what Gotlieb saw was an inappropriate tendency of Canadian governments—and ordinary Canadians—to accord the United Nations a central importance in Canadian foreign policy [136]making, and to use international treaties, such as the convention on land mines or the International Criminal Court convention.

Some might think that the Conservatives met these requirements. After all, the Harper government tended to avoid the kind of global international rule-making initiatives that were the mark of its Liberal and Progressive Conservative predecessors. In its nine years in power, its one sustained global initiative was the ten-year maternal, newborn, and child health initiative launched by Harper at the 2010 Muskoka G8 summit,¹⁷ and that initiative did not explicitly involve international rule making. Indeed, in some areas, such as climate change, discussed in more detail below, the Harper government was what Alan Bloomfield has called a “norm antipreneur”—a global actor that seeks to disrupt the efforts of “norm entrepreneurs” to change global norms.¹⁸

Likewise, the Harper government made no secret of its skepticism about the UN

¹⁴ Edward Greenspon et al., “How Keystone XL Soured the ‘Special Relationship’ between Stephen Harper and Barack Obama,” *National Post*, April 24, 2014, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/04/24/how-keystone-xl-soured-the-special-relationship-between-stephen-harper-and-barack-obama/>; John Ibbitson, “Obama, Harper Don’t Like Each Other, and Only a New Leader Can Thaw Relations,” *Globe and Mail*, November 21, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/obama-harper-dont-like-each-other-and-only-a-new-leader-can-thaw-relations/article21691812/>.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Simpson, “The Trouble with Bullhorn Diplomacy,” *Globe and Mail*, August 2, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-trouble-with-bullhorn-diplomacy/article19887707/>.

¹⁶ Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism,” 32, 36.

¹⁷ Keith H. Christie, “Setting a New High-Water Mark for Canadian Multilateralism: Canada’s 2010 G8 and G20 Summits,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 16, no. 2 (2010): 143–48.

¹⁸ Alan Bloomfield, “Norm Antipreneurs and Theorising Resistance to Normative Change,” *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S026021051500025X>; and Bloomfield and Shirley Scott, ed., *Norm Antipreneurs and the Politics of Resistance to Global Normative Change* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016). On global norm entrepreneurs, see Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.

as an international institution.¹⁹ That skepticism was on display from the outset, when Harper addressed the General Assembly in 2006 and spoke openly about the failings of the UN as an institution, and his expectation that the UN would become more accountable and more effective.²⁰ Harper did not return to the General Assembly for another four years, and his absence was held up as indicative of his government's attitude towards the UN. For example, when he chose to miss Obama's address to the UN General Assembly in 2009 in order to attend an event at the research and development arm of Tim Hortons in Oakville, he was criticized for making a "donut run" rather than being at the UN.²¹

Following Canada's failure to secure election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2010—the only time since 1946, when Canada lost to Australia in the elections for the very first Security Council, that a Canadian candidacy had been unsuccessful—Harper's attitude towards the United Nations clearly soured. At a Conservative convention in 2011, the prime minister claimed that his government had a purpose in global affairs: "And that purpose is no longer just to go along and get along with everyone else's agenda. It is no longer to please every dictator with a vote at the United Nations." Pointedly, he added, "I confess that I don't know why past attempts to do so were ever thought [137]to be in Canada's national interest."²² The line "Canada no longer goes along just to get along" quickly became a mantra, repeated by both the prime minister and his foreign minister, John Baird. Indeed, it was repeated so often that Robert Fowler, a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, claimed that the mantra was tiresome and smug, and was causing Canada's international reputation irreparable harm.²³ But behind the mantra lay a deeper disaffection. As Fen Osler Hampson put it in 2012, when Harper was in New York when the General Assembly was in session but chose not to attend, "Whatever lukewarm enthusiasm he had for the United Nations, I think he now views it as a cold tub of bath water and he's not about to jump into it."²⁴

The unwillingness to "go along with everyone else's agenda" and bend to the demands of multilateralism was most evident in the Harper government's approach to

¹⁹ For example, see Louise Fréchette, "Canada at the United Nations: A Shadow of Its Former Self," in *Canada Among Nations: 2009–2010: As Others See Us*, ed. Fen Osler and Paul Heinbecker (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 265–74.

²⁰ Stephen Harper, "Address by the Prime Minister to the 61st Opening Session of the United Nations General Assembly," Prime Minister of Canada, New York, September 21, 2006, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2006/09/21/address-prime-minister-61st-opening-session-united-nations-general-assembly>. [Archived on the Former Prime Ministers' Archive on the Privy Council Office website: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&doc=/pmarchive/pmarec-eng.htm>]

²¹ Steve Chase, "Harper Makes Donut Run," *Globe and Mail*, September 22, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-notebook/harper-makes-donut-run/article4286299/>.

²² Laura Payton, "Harper Speech Fires up Convention Crowd," *CBC News*, June 10, 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/harper-speech-fires-up-convention-crowd-1.976268>; "Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2011 Convention Speech," Conservative Party of Canada, Ottawa, June 16 [sic], 2011, <http://www.conservative.ca/prime-minister-stephen-harpers-2011-convention-speech/>.

²³ Mike Blanchfield, "UN Official Praises Canada's Stand on Iran," *Canadian Press*, October 30, 2014.

²⁴ Bruce Cheadle, "Silence Speaks Volumes as Harper Snubs UN," *Canadian Press*, September 27, 2012.

climate change. In opposition, Harper had argued that the Kyoto Protocol was not in Canadian interests, and in power the Conservative government formally withdrew from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 2011. In office, Harper was consistent in his support for a different multilateral approach to the global problems of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.²⁵ As a result, the Conservative government engaged in what Heather A. Smith has called “cowboy diplomacy” in global climate change negotiations.²⁶ At the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009, for example, Harper made himself almost invisible,²⁷ and in 2014, he deliberately avoided attending a UN summit on climate change, even though he was in New York at the time.²⁸

But while the Conservative government made clear that it did not believe in the idea that the UN is the “sacred foundation” of Canadian foreign policy, it does not necessarily follow that disdain for the UN per se constitutes a “reality-based” foreign policy. Realpolitik demands the engagement of governments in international society, not withdrawal from it. As Tom Keating argues, traditionally Canadian governments were “both conscious of and attentive to the idea of an international society based, in part, on diplomacy, the rule of law, and institutions”—the central precepts of the English School of international relations.²⁹ The purposeful snubbing of the UN, to the extent that it takes Canada [138]out of the game, to use Paul Heinbecker’s characterization,³⁰ is a highly romantic approach to global politics.

Even the snubbing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which appeared to be driven by national interests, was in fact romantic. Purposely abandoning the diplomatic process on the grounds that Canada “doesn’t go along with everyone else’s agenda” relegated the Harper government to the sidelines of global negotiations on this issue, without the opportunity to be taken seriously, much less exercise any influence on outcomes. But this did not immunize Canada from having to embrace the consequences of those negotiations. For the Harper government had tightly tied itself to the United States on this issue. Although the Conservatives painted their approach to climate change as a “made-in-Canada, made-for-

²⁵ Heather A. Smith, “Unwilling Internationalism or Strategic Internationalism? Canadian Climate Policy under the Conservative Government,” in *Readings in Canadian Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed., ed. Duane Bratt and Chris Kukucha, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011), 452–68.

²⁶ Heather A. Smith, “Political Parties and Canadian Climate Change Policy,” *International Journal* 64, no. 1 (2008/09): 58, 63.

²⁷ Shawn McCarthy, “Harper Lies Low in Copenhagen,” *Globe and Mail*, December 17, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/harper-lies-low-in-copenhagen/article4296046/>.

²⁸ Thomas Walkom, “Stephen Harper Did Climate a Favour by Skipping UN Summit: Walkom,” *Toronto Star*, September 23, 2014, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/09/23/stephen_harper_did_climate_a_favour_by_skipping_un_summit_walkom.html

²⁹ Tom Keating, “The Transition in Canadian Foreign Policy through an English School Lens,” *International Journal* 69, no. 2 (2014): 168–82.

³⁰ Paul Heinbecker, *Getting Back in the Game: A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010).

Canada” policy, the less-canted reality is that in 2010, it adopted a “made-in-the-US” policy for Canada, linking Canadian GHG reduction targets to targets adopted by the Obama administration. And, as the November 2014 climate change agreement between China and the United States demonstrates,³¹ when the administration in Washington decides to change its approach, Canada will find itself dragged along regardless, which was very much evident in Paris in December of 2015.

Gotlieb’s list of requirements for a reality-based foreign policy includes an admonition that “utopianism, millenarianism and visionary crusades should have no place in Canadian foreign policy.”³² It can be argued that in its pursuit of a “principled foreign policy,” the Harper government embraced precisely the kind of crusading policy against which Gotlieb was inveighing. In particular, a signal feature of Harper’s approach to foreign policy was a tendency to see the world as filled with friends and enemies—good states and bad states. Whether this was a truly Manichæan division is the subject of debate,³³ but there can be no denying that the Conservative approach to the world began with a binary division of the world into “black hats” and “white hats.” To be sure, the colour of the hat is deeply related to a particular definition of Canadian interests that are “fundamentally tied to the kind of values we have in the world: freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law”: the division is between “those societies that promote those values tend [139]to share our interests, and those that do not tend to...become threats to us.”³⁴

From such a division moralizing and sanctimony need not necessarily follow, but in the case of the Harper Conservatives they did. As the prime minister has admitted with some considerable pride, the big difference between him and his predecessors was that “We know where our interests lie and who our friends are. And we take strong, principled positions in our dealings with other nations—whether popular or not...And that is what the world can count on from Canada!”³⁵

And the Conservative government was as good as its word. It resolutely stood up for those it considered Canada’s friends. This was most notable in the case of Israel, where from the beginning of its tenure in 2006, the Conservative government more than fulfilled the promise made by Prime Minister Harper in January 2014 in his speech to the Knesset, when he echoed a Rosh Hashanah prayer: “Through fire and water, Canada will

³¹ The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, “US-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change, Beijing, China,” News release, November 12, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/11/us-china-joint-announcement-climate-change>.

³² Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism,” 37–38.

³³ Roland Paris, “What Is Stephen Harper Afraid Of?” *Embassy*, July 20, 2011, <https://www.opencanada.org/features/what-is-stephen-harper-afraid-of/>. By contrast, Derek Burney, Fen Osler Hampson, and Simon Palamar suggest that the division “is not quite Manichæan.” See also “The Call of Duty: Harper’s Doctrine on Military Intervention,” in *Canada Among Nations 2015: Canada’s Military Interventions in the Post-9/11 Era*, ed. Steven Saideman and Fen Osler Hampson (Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2015), 199–224.

³⁴ “In Conversation: Stephen Harper,” by Kenneth Whyte.

³⁵ Harper, “2011 Convention Speech.”

stand with you.”³⁶ For example, in May 2008 Harper declared that “Our government believes that those who threaten Israel also threaten Canada, because, as the last war showed, hate-fuelled bigotry against some is ultimately a threat to us all, and must be resisted wherever it may lurk....In this on-going battle, Canada stands firmly side-by-side with the State of Israel, our friend and ally in the democratic family of nations.”³⁷ This symbolism reached new heights in February 2010 when Peter Kent, Harper’s minister of state for foreign affairs, claimed that “an attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada”—an extraordinary statement given that there is no alliance between the two countries.

And the Harper government resolutely criticized and punished “black hats.” For example, after Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in 2006, the newly elected Conservative government limited contacts with the Palestinian Authority and imposed sanctions. Likewise, Canada consistently moved to thwart Palestinian attempts to secure upgraded status at the United Nations. Other “black hats” fared no better. Canadian diplomats were routinely ordered to boycott meetings of the UN Conference on Disarmament when North Korea or Iran took the rotating chair. The Canadian government broke diplomatic [140]relations with Iran in 2012, closing down the embassy in Teheran and expelling Iranian diplomats in Canada. Harper refused to attend the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to protest against the human rights violations there and for having “failed to uphold the Commonwealth’s core values, which are cherished by Canadians.”³⁸ Ottawa imposed economic sanctions against Hamas, North Korea, Myanmar, Iran, and the Russian Federation.

One of the strongest “principled” positions taken by the Harper government was over the crisis that began in November 2013 when the Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovych decided to abandon plans for a “tilt” towards Europe, sparking protests that resulted in the overthrow of Yanukovych three months later. When the Russian Federation intervened militarily, seizing Crimea on February 27–28, 2014, and formally absorbing the territory into the Russian Federation on March 18, the Canadian response was highly critical. The government in Ottawa joined other Western states in imposing a series of sanctions on the Russian Federation; Canada also offered a range of assistance to the new government in Kiev. The punitive measures were intensified when the Russian government expanded its intervention in March by seeking to destabilize eastern Ukraine,

³⁶ “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada in Jerusalem,” Prime Minister of Canada, Jerusalem, January 20, 2014, archived on the Former Prime Ministers’ Archive on the Privy Council Office website: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&doc=/pmarchive/pmarec-01.htm>.

³⁷ Steven Chase, “An Attack On Israel Would Be Considered an Attack on Canada,” *Globe and Mail*, February 16, 2010, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-notebook/an-attack-on-israel-would-be-considered-an-attack-on-canada/article4187892/>.

³⁸ “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada,” Prime Minister of Canada, Bali, October 7, 2013, archived on the Former Prime Ministers’ Archive on the Privy Council Office website: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&doc=/pmarchive/pmarec-01.htm>.

offering direct military assistance to insurgent forces in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, including the suspension of Russian membership in the G8. Sanctions were again ratcheted up in July after a Russian anti-aircraft missile fired from rebel-held territory in the Donbass destroyed a Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777 on a flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, killing 298 passengers and crew.

But from the outset, the Harper government also launched a sustained verbal attack on the Russian Federation and its president, Vladimir Putin: as Jeffrey Simpson noted, “no government has unleashed more angry rhetoric against Russia...than ours.”³⁹ For example, the foreign minister, John Baird, who was in Kiev when the Russians seized Ukraine, likened Russia’s move to the Nazi seizure of the Sudetenland in 1938, a comparison echoed by Harper.⁴⁰ The foreign minister kept up a steady barrage of anti-Russian attacks over the course of 2014, delivered in both speeches and in tweets, pulling few punches about Russian aggression in Ukraine.⁴¹ For his part, the prime [141]minister was relentlessly critical of Russian actions in Ukraine, and of Putin personally. These attacks were not only delivered in speeches, but also on Twitter (@pmharper) and on Harper’s promotional “24 Seven” video series that were produced weekly by the Privy Council Office.⁴² In May, he decried what he called “a slow-motion invasion on the part of the Putin regime.”⁴³ In the aftermath of the shoot-down of MH17 in July, Harper published an extensive critique of what he claimed was Russia’s “aggressive militarism and expansionism” in the *Globe and Mail*, accusing Putin of threatening Europe with “the politics of intimidation and aggression.”⁴⁴ And on the first day of the G20 summit in Brisbane in November, when Putin approached Harper and extended his hand, Harper

³⁹ Jeffrey Simpson, “Canada’s Foreign-Policy Deeds Fail to Match its Words,” *Globe and Mail*, September 26, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/canadas-foreign-policy-deeds-fail-to-match-its-words/article20791402/>.

⁴⁰ Leslie MacKinnon, “John Baird Compares Russia’s Actions in Ukraine to Nazi Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” *CBC News*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/john-baird-compares-russia-s-actions-in-ukraine-to-nazi-invasion-of-czechoslovakia-1.2558118>; Leslie MacKinnon, “Stephen Harper, John Baird Compare Russia to WWII Era Germany,” *CBC News*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stephen-harper-john-baird-compare-russia-to-ww-ii-era-germany-1.2559643>.

⁴¹ For tweets by month, see “Canada’s Response to the Situation in Ukraine,” Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, last modified August 27, 2015, <http://www.international.gc.ca/international/ukraine.aspx>.

⁴² Glen McGregor, “Stephen Harper’s ‘24 Seven’ Videos Require up to Four Staffers to Produce,” *National Post*, March 25, 2014, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-politics/stephen-harpers-24-seven-videos-require-up-to-four-staffers-to-produce>; 24 Seven videos are archived on the Former Prime Ministers’ Archive on the Privy Council Office website: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&doc=/pmarchive/pmarchive-eng.htm>.

⁴³ Canadian Press and Associated Press, “Vladimir Putin Mounting a ‘Slow-motion Invasion’ of Ukraine, Stephen Harper Tells NATO,” *National Post*, May 5, 2014, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/05/05/vladimir-putin-mounting-a-slow-motion-invasion-of-ukraine-stephen-harper-tells-nato/>.

⁴⁴ Stephen Harper, “Our Duty Is to Stand Firm in the Face of Russian Aggression,” *Globe and Mail*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/our-duty-is-to-stand-firm-in-the-face-of-russian-aggression/article19767742/>.

responded by saying, “I guess I’ll shake your hand, but I have only one thing to say to you: You need to get out of Ukraine.”⁴⁵

In sum, the Conservative government’s “principled foreign policy” looked not unlike the “visionary crusades” pursued by Liberal governments that Gotlieb was criticizing in 2004. This is no coincidence: as Gerd Schönwälder argues, “both Conservative and Liberal foreign policy makers have been influenced...by their underlying values, ideologies, and belief systems,” with the result that both parties pursue “value-based” rather than “reality-based” foreign policies.⁴⁶

Finally, another requirement for a “reality-based” foreign policy outlined by Gotlieb in 2004 was “the willingness to commit significant resources to achieving Canada’s goals.”⁴⁷ Here we also see the dominance of the romantic under the Conservative government. In all areas of resource allocation in the area of international policy, we saw a reluctance to spend in a way that would match the rhetorical commitments made by the government. Spending on diplomacy continued to shrink, mirroring the disdain that the Conservative government appeared to have had for diplomats and the diplomatic process. In the case of defence, the Conservative government continued to drive down spending, producing what David Perry showed to be a “growing gap between defence ends and means.” Adjusting for inflation, the defence budget at the end of Harper’s tenure in 2015 was smaller than it was in 2007; procurement of key weapons systems remained dysfunctionally stalled; the operational readiness of the Canadian Armed Forces was [142]being constantly reduced.⁴⁸ The Harper government’s defence policy confirmed Jeffrey Simpson’s contention that the Conservatives liked the *idea* of the Canadian military—in theory, just not in practice.⁴⁹ Likewise, in the case of Arctic policy, Robert W. Murray among others noted the

⁴⁵ Canadian Press, “Stephen Harper at G20 Tells Vladimir Putin to ‘Get out of Ukraine,’” *CBC News*, November 15, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/stephen-harper-at-g20-tells-vladimir-putin-to-get-out-of-ukraine-1.2836382>. In October, the Australian prime minister, Tony Abbott, had promised that the next time he met Putin, he would “shirtfront” him over the deaths of twenty-eight Australians on MH17 (a shirtfront is an Australian Rules Football expression for a hard front-on shoulder charge designed to knock a player to the ground). James Massola and Lisa Cox, “Tony Abbott Vows to ‘Shirtfront’ Vladimir Putin over MH17 Tragedy,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 13, 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/tony-abbott-vows-to-shirtfront-vladimir-putin-over-mh17-tragedy-20141013-115cm3.html>. However, when Abbott and Putin met at the APEC summit in Beijing and then again in Brisbane some days later at the G20, Abbott chose not to make good his earlier promise. Ben Doherty, “G20: Canadian Prime Minister Shirtfronts Vladimir Putin Instead,” *The Guardian*, November 15, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/15/g20-canadian-prime-minister-shirtfronts-vladimir-putin-instead>.

⁴⁶ Gerd Schönwälder, “Principles and Prejudice: Foreign Policy under the Harper Government,” CIPS Policy Brief no. 24 (June 2014), <http://cips.uottawa.ca/publications/principles-and-prejudice-foreign-policy-under-the-harper-government/>.

⁴⁷ Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism,” 38.

⁴⁸ David Perry, “The Growing Gap between Defence Ends and Means: The Disconnect between the Canada First Defence Strategy and the Current Defence Budget,” Vimy Paper no. 19 (2014).

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Simpson, “The Harper Government Loves the Military—in Theory,” *Globe and Mail*, June 28, 2014. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-harper-government-loves-the-military-in-theory/article19355276/>.

yawning gap between the rhetorical commitments of the Harper government in the Arctic and the failure to follow through with the allocation of resources. Promises for three armed naval icebreakers and six to eight Arctic patrol ships operating out of a major, permanent military air and naval base in the North were not met.⁵⁰ As Matt Gurney concluded, “the Prime Minister’s support for the Arctic is sadly similar to his support for the Armed Forces in general: Loud, seemingly heartfelt, and only occasionally turned into concrete action.”⁵¹

In sum, when the requirements for a “reality-based” foreign policy outlined by Allan Gotlieb are applied to the Conservative government’s foreign policy, we see policy swinging between the poles of realism and romanticism depending on this issue. While the Harper government had a clear interest-based (and “reality-based”) view of Canada’s location in the contemporary global economy that drove its economic policies, it continued to be attracted to the romantic pole until the very end.

Conclusion: The Enduring Appeal of the Romantic Pole

Why do Canadian governments find romanticism so attractive? One obvious reason is that romanticism is an incredibly cheap policy option. Governments need relatively few resources to produce torrents of “principled” verbiage on any given global issue. One does not need a global network of diplomats with extensive local knowledge, able to analyze local conditions and work to advance national interests quietly behind the scenes, or a robust foreign ministry in the national capital with deep analytical capability about the world. One does not need to spend serious money on developing and maintaining armed forces capable of providing protection against the predations of others, or one’s allies with additional hard power resources in times of crisis. One does not have to devote ongoing resources to increasing “soft power” capabilities. On [143]the contrary: because the “truculent moralizing”⁵² of bullhorn diplomacy is actually not diplomacy at all, “lecturing and leaving,” to use Joe Clark’s characterization of the Harper government’s approach to foreign policy,⁵³ requires little more than a small but adept communications staff and a social media presence. But unlike Canada’s “pinchpenny diplomacy” of the 1990s,⁵⁴ when Canadian foreign policy was overwhelmingly driven by the demands of deficit reduction, Harper’s cheapness appears to have been driven by a simplistic belief that Canada actually did not need a large apparatus devoted to the global pursuit of

⁵⁰ Robert W. Murray, “Canada’s Arctic Interests: Good Rhetoric and Bad Policy” (unpublished paper, 2014).

⁵¹ Matt Gurney, “Minister of Arctic Neglect,” *National Post*, January 7, 2015.

⁵² Jeffrey Simpson, “Truculent Moralizing for a Domestic Audience,” *Globe and Mail*, February 4, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/truculent-moralizing-for-a-domestic-audience/article543446/>.

⁵³ Campbell Clark, “Joe Clark’s New Book: Canada is the Country that ‘Lectures and Leaves,’” *Globe and Mail*, November 1, 2013. See also Joe Clark, *How We Lead: Canada in a Century of Change* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2013), esp. 98–101.

⁵⁴ Kim Richard Nossal, “Pinchpenny Diplomacy: The Decline of ‘Good International Citizenship’ in Canadian Foreign Policy,” *International Journal* 54, no. 1 (1998/99): 88–105.

national interests.⁵⁵

The second reason why romanticism is so attractive is that it is so politically rewarding domestically. The Liberal romanticism that drove Gotlieb to plead for a “reality-based” foreign policy in 2004 was in large part driven by the realization of Liberal policy makers that voters responded positively to the vision of Canada in the world that they were articulating. But the “ear candy” dynamic that I identified in the case of the Martin government also applied to the Conservative government.⁵⁶ What differed was the vision being peddled, and the audience to which it was being sold. What remained the same was the visionary moralizing and the huge gap between rhetoric and reality.

For Liberal governments, the vision was of a Canada deeply committed to a Pearsonian internationalism, thus an internationalism that was deeply connected to the Liberal party.⁵⁷ Indeed, it is this brand of internationalism that Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government, elected in 2015, seems interested in resurrecting. In this vision, Canada was deeply committed to international institutions such as the UN; it was a peacekeeper in global politics; and it was always different from the United States. Canada’s purpose was to “do good” in the world—by building global institutions and developing norms. In this often moralistic vision, Canada had something to teach the world. It was not by coincidence that Paul Martin borrowed the slogan from Chapters: “The world needs more Canada.”

The Conservative government of Stephen Harper presented an equally moralistic vision, but it was of a Canada that acted in the world by doing the right thing; a Canada that spoke out against wrong-doing [144]and wrong-doers; a Canada that supported its friends and those who share the broad values of Canadians; a Canada that was willing to stand up and be counted. Like the Liberal vision, however, this Conservative vision was always framed as ear candy, designed to sound sweet enough to listeners to attract their political support.

These visions were sold in different ways. The Liberal vision was aimed at the broad mass of Canadians, although it resonated most fully with a certain group of voters: urban and educated.⁵⁸ By contrast, the Conservative vision was peddled in a highly targeted way and designed to appeal to very specific groups of voters. Diasporas were carefully targeted with policy initiatives and pronouncements shaped to appeal explicitly

⁵⁵ Indicative of this attitude is the decision of the Conservative government to put scores of diplomatic properties owned by Canada up for sale, reducing Canada’s diplomatic footprint across the world. Bill Curry, “Government Defends Foreign Property ‘Fire Sale,’” *Globe and Mail*, December 4, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/government-defends-foreign-property-fire-sale/article21964864/>.

⁵⁶ Nossal, “Ear Candy.”

⁵⁷ Nossal, “Liberal Past.”

⁵⁸ In other words, the educated urban voters to whom Liberal internationalism appealed went well beyond the somewhat stereotypical “Laurentian elite” identified by Darrell Bricker and John Ibbetson in *The Big Shift: The Seismic Change in Canadian Politics, Business, and Culture and What It Means for Our Future* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2013).

to their members. The Harper government's approach to Ukraine was a good example of "diaspora-driven foreign policy," as Christopher Westdal, a former Canadian ambassador to both Russia and Ukraine, put it.⁵⁹ Other targets were those usually referred to by Harper as "hard-working Canadians," or by some in the media as the "Tim Hortons crowd"—in other words, middle-class or blue-collar workers who live in the suburbs and small towns. In short, as Peter Jones argues, this was the foreign policy counterpart to the Conservative approach to domestic politics: "finding wedge issues with which to detach segments of the population and play to their fears and angers."⁶⁰

But the ear candy approach of the Liberals and Conservatives shares at least one commonality: foreign policy rhetoric has little to do with changing the external environment. Rather, it is all about affecting domestic politics. In the early 2000s, critics such as Gotlieb worried that Liberal foreign policy had "metastasized from a do-good to a feel-good foreign policy," echoing Denis Stairs's concerns that "the grandiose and self-serving rhetoric so common now in our foreign policy pronunciamentos could be quietly abandoned in favour of more honest (and hence, more cautious) accounts of what is likely to be feasible in the real world."⁶¹ It can be argued that the underlying behaviour that prompted such complaints did not change much with the change of government in 2006, which is why the Conservative government's foreign policy seemed so "old school": the rhetorical flourishes that emanated from the Conservative government may have worked well to [145]make those who heard them feel good about their country's role in the world, but this rhetoric was actually not intended to achieve anything of substance in global politics. On the contrary, under the Conservatives, foreign policy increasingly became about nothing more than winning at the ballot box.⁶²

[Endnotes: 145–50]

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⁵⁹ Kathryn Blaze Carlson, "Canada Makes Strong Commitment to Ukraine," *Globe and Mail*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-supports-ukraines-territorial-integrity-in-face-of-russian-aggression/article17165279/>.

⁶⁰ Peter Jones, "Canada's Bitter, Small-Minded Foreign Policy," *Globe and Mail*, January 2, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/canadas-bitter-small-minded-foreign-policy/article16147665/>.

⁶¹ Gotlieb, "Romanticism and Realism," 5; Stairs, "Challenges and Opportunities," 491.

⁶² Kim Richard Nossal, "Primat der Wahlurne: Explaining Stephen Harper's Foreign Policy," paper presented at International Studies Association, Toronto, March 29, 2014, http://post.queensu.ca/~nossal/papers/Nossal_2014_Harper.pdf.

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