Canadian Foreign Policy
The Justin Trudeau Approach

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The election of Justin Trudeau on October 19, 2015 constitutes an enormous sea change in Canadian politics. It was "time for change in this country.... Real change. We beat cynicism with hard work. We beat negative, divisive politics with a positive vision that brings Canadians together."[1] But what exactly is that vision, and how does it apply to Canadian foreign policy?

In the months since Justin Trudeau was elected there have been several indications that significant changes in Canadian foreign policy are pending. Some are symbolic, such as dropping the name of the foreign ministry (now known simply as Global Affairs Canada) and replacing in its foyer a large portrait of the queen with two paintings by Alfred Pellan, reversing a Stephen Harper's decision four years ago.

Others are more concrete. Canadian bombing missions against ISIL were stopped within a week of Trudeau taking office, and Canada will not take part in any military missions unless requested by the United Nations. A commitment to multilateralism, unlike the unilateral approach favored by the Harper government, will now be the order of the day.

Dealing with the Harper Legacy

While the election of Justin Trudeau and his approach to politics are seen as a refreshing change by most Canadians, a complex legacy of challenges has been left by almost a decade of Harper government. In 2006, for example, Canada was the only country among 47 to express opposition to the new UN Human Rights Council. In 2010 it failed in its bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, losing out to Portugal. In 2011, it was the first country to leave the Kyoto Accord, an action condemned by the Liberal Party at the time. In 2012 the government broke diplomatic relations with Iran.

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In Latin America, the Harper approach to strengthening ties was particularly short-sighted. The prime minister had a Manichean understanding of regional politics, supporting countries of a conservative or right-wing nature (for example, Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Peru), while often criticizing those with socialist or social democratic bent, like the ALBA countries. He enthusiastically supported Canadian mining companies, despite their often controversial records in human rights, environmental degradation, and community dislocation.

This rather simplistic approach to Latin American politics can best be seen in Mr. Harper's role in the Summits of the Americas, and in particular his rejection in Trinidad and Tobago and Colombia of Cuba's participation in the meetings, despite the overwhelming support from every other country apart from Canada and the United States. His caustic comments on the Venezuelan government after the death of Hugo Chávez and support for the 2009 coup in Honduras that saw the overthrow of Manuel Zelaya also illustrate this aspect of foreign policy.

It can also be seen in his fervent support for the governments of Israel and Ukraine and his strong words of condemnation for Palestinian and Russian authorities. In part this can be explained by domestic politics, given Canada's large Ukrainian (1.2 million) and Jewish communities. But it also reflects his strong personal relationship with Benjamin Netanyahu and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and his belief in their conservative political approaches. Significantly, Justin Trudeau also does not shirk from criticizing Vladimir Putin: "That's why Canada needs to once again re-engage as a robust and helpful member of the international community. That's where we have to turn it around by re-engaging as a strong partner in international efforts to hold bullies like Vladimir Putin to account.")[2]

In short, while 31 percent of Canadians supported the Conservative Party and arguably held to these values, an overwhelming majority (with a high voter turnout of 68 percent of eligible voters) was opposed. While most of that opposition was based upon concerns about domestic policy and Harper's authoritarian style of government, many were also disturbed at his foreign policy, and in particular his rejection of multilateralism and desire for military solutions. It now remains to be seen how Justin Trudeau can generate enthusiasm for a reinvigorated foreign policy.

So Where Do We Go from There?

There are so many demands for a reinvigorated Canadian foreign policy, so many initiatives that need to be pursued, that it is difficult to know where to begin. The months after the election were particularly busy ones for the incoming government, with the G-20 summit in Turkey and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, both in November, followed by the Commonwealth summit in Malta, and then the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (December). In addition to participating in those meetings and showing Canada's dramatically new image, many substantial changes have also taken place in Canadian foreign policy.

Prior to the election Justin Trudeau promised to bring 25 000 government-sponsored Syrian refugees to Canada, and this process has already started. Extra funds have also been provided for refugee assistance and resettlement. In addition, a new approach to immigration is in the works, expanding the family sponsorship immigration program. Finally, healthcare benefits to those awaiting immigration hearings have now been restored after being cut off by the Harper government. The immigration file is starting to move very smoothly.

The appointment of Stéphane Dion as foreign minister is particularly significant, since it illustrates the importance that environmental matters will now have in foreign policy. A former minister of the environment and chair of the UN Conference on Climate Change held in Montreal in 2005, his first order of business was the December 2015 conference in Paris, where Canada played a leading role. Ottawa invited the premiers of all Canadian provinces to attend, emphasizing the need for a national cooperative approach to environmental issues by the newly-minted Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. The question of climate change, the minister informed journalists after the first cabinet meeting of the new Liberal government, was "the most important of the century," and he promised "to make sure that Canada will be a part of a solution to give this world a sustainable development."[3]

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Canadian-U.S. relations had suffered during the Harper years, with obvious tensions between the prime minister and U.S. President Barack Obama. These difficulties are typified by the question of the Keystone XL pipeline, for which Harper had tirelessly —and at times rudely— lobbied, only to be rebuffed by Washington. A priority for the Trudeau government will be to shore up the diplomatic relationship, particularly during the short time left for the Obama presidency. Both men are widely travelled, with a sophisticated understanding of international politics and a commitment to multilateral politics, and undoubtedly bilateral relations will improve.

The thorny issues of defense and peacekeeping will change radically under the new government. It has pledged to scrap plans to buy the new F-35 stealth fighter plane, a popular Harper government policy. The traditional Canadian commitment of peacekeeping, for which the Liberal government of Lester Pearson won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1957 after organizing the UN Emergency Force that resolved the Suez Canal crisis, will be reinstated. In 1990, Canada was the largest single contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, with 1 002 soldiers, whereas nowadays there are only 116, placing the country in sixty-eighth place, between Paraguay and Mali.

Canada will probably be less bullish on military missions abroad, preferring to provide local military training and financial support for local civilian populations. Greater funding will also be offered to support UN efforts in mediation and conflict resolution. The ending of bombing missions against ISIL within days of the election illustrates this new approach.

Development assistance, heavily politicized by the Harper government, will be refocused. The view that aid should be given mainly as a tool to assist Canadian investment will be replaced with a more traditional Canadian approach of reducing poverty. Aid to Africa will probably become a priority. The much-vaunted Canadian government support for a maternal and child health program worth Can$2.85 billion will continue, but will broaden in scope, funding all reproductive health services. (At present only 1.4 percent focuses on contraception measures, and no funding is given to pregnancy terminations, reflecting the fundamentalist Harper government mindset.)

One major challenge to be faced is a Canadian government position on the —extremely complex and multifaceted— Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This offers massive market potential to members, but is also a threat to farming and automotive interests in Canada, while also potentially affecting intellectual property and pharmacology interests of Canadians. Prior to the election, the Liberal Party adopted a cautious position, stating that in principle it favored the agreement, but would study it in detail and seek Parliament's support before approving it. The Liberals are also on record as supporting free trade agreements with the European Union and the TPP, as well as for pushing for an agreement with India. This is a complex issue that could potentially affect the daily lives of millions of Canadians, and to date the government has been notably unsure of a direction to take.

Improved Relations with Latin America?

On September 28, 2015, the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs organized a debate on foreign policy. All the leaders of the major parties took part, and a spirited discussion ensued. The debate was important for what it covered: the war in Syria, the situation in Iraq, Russian aggression and the Ukraine, the need for better relations with the United States, the refugee crisis, the threat of terrorism, the war against ISIL, Arctic sovereignty, relations with the European Union, and the need to protect "Canadian values." But it was also important for what was not discussed: China, Latin America, Africa, and the TPP.

Trade and security were clearly the two dominant themes in the discussion, and particular attention was paid to the possible threat posed by ISIL. Trade was examined to a lesser degree, which was somewhat surprising, given the fact that Canada is an extremely significant trading nation: foreign trade is responsible for about 45 percent of GDP. Table 1 illustrates the major trading blocks Canada participates in, and it is immediately evident how trade with the United States and China dwarf trade with Latin America.

Government officials of course maintain that Latin America is extremely important for Canada, but the data obtained from Statistics Canada show that this claim is rather exaggerated. In fact, only two Latin American countries, Mexico and Brazil, are among Canada's top trading partners. In 2014, for example, in dollar terms, Mexico imported Canadian goods for a value of Can$6.75 billion, while exporting to Canada mer-

chandise worth Can$17.24 billion. This, it must be remembered, is based upon generous tariff releases resulting from NAFTA. For Brazil, the corresponding figures were Can$2.28 billion and Can$2.84, respectively.[4] No other countries from Latin America or the Caribbean are included in this table.

TABLE 1
CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL TRADE (2014)
(BILLIONS OF CAN$)

United States	653.51
Asia/Oceania	155.18
Europe	107.43
Latin America	59.29
Others	26.88

Source: http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/tdo-dcd.nsf/eng/Home.

Due to several geographical and economic factors, Canada's relations with Mexico are clearly the most significant. Canadian mining interests are the largest in the country, and according to a list of foreign companies with mining projects there, 181 of 241 were Canadian.[5] Canadian tourism continues to grow, with approximately 1.5 million tourists a year, while an estimated 50 000 Canadians live in Mexico. In addition, approximately 25 000 temporary workers from Mexico are employed in Canada each year.

Before the election, in an interview with the author, the Liberal spokesman on foreign affairs, Marc Garneau, made it very clear that the relationship with its two North American neighbors was particularly important. The decision by the Harper government to insist that Mexicans visiting Canada apply for visas was particularly unfortunate, he claimed, since it stifles Mexican tourism to Canada. This would be revoked by the Trudeau government. Also important was the revival of the "three amigos" summits, cancelled by Stephen Harper in January 2015.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Everything to date indicates that, rather than follow a megaphone diplomacy approach as his predecessor did, the Trudeau government will follow a more proactive and compassionate foreign policy, one less dominated by a limited conservative ideological filter. To a certain extent, the new approach will follow the traditional Pearsonian philosophy of multilateralism, adopting a more constructive and engaged role in world affairs. There is a clear move back to presenting Canada as a pragmatic yet sensitive middle power, an "honest broker" as it was seen for many years. Moreover, Trudeau will undoubtedly develop the respect owed to the Canadian foreign service, scorned in recent years by the Harper government.

> "Time for change in this country…. Real change. We beat cynicism with hard work. We beat negative, divisive politics with a positive vision that brings Canadians together."

Speaking at a rally shortly after the election, Justin Trudeau sought to present this message to Canadian allies: "Many of you have worried that Canada has lost its compassionate and constructive voice in the world over the past 10 years.… Well, I have a simple message for you: on behalf of 35 million Canadians, we're back."[6] His jubilant claims were well received by most Canadians, eager to put the Harper years behind them. At the same time others might remember similar claims made by Barack Obama when he was first elected, only to see his optimism ("Yes we can") overtaken by the cold hard facts of a faltering economy, a fiercely partisan Congress, and changing world circumstances. We will have to see if the exuberant, hopeful tone of Justin Trudeau's message succeeds in inspiring a rejuvenated, balanced foreign policy that the country so badly needs. But at least it has started well, and looks promising. VM

NOTES

[1] Cited by Mark Gollom in his October 20, 2015 CBC report, "Justin Trudeau Pledges 'Real Change' as Liberals Leap Ahead to Majority Government," http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-elections-2015-voting-results.

[2] "Trudeau Promises to Sign Arms Treaty, Swings at Harper's Foreign Record," *The Globe and Mail*, October 7, 2015.

[3] John Ibbitson, "Trudeau Aiming to Rebalance Foreign Policy," *The Globe and Mail*, November 5, 2015.

[4] See Statistics Canada, "Imports, Exports and Trade Balance of Goods on a Balance-of-payments Basis, by Country or Country Grouping," http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/gblec02a.

[5] General Direction of Mining Development, "Companies with Mining Projects in Mexico," portalweb.sgm.gob.mx/…economia/en/mexico-mining-companies.html?tmpl=component&print=1&page=.

[6] Jim Bronskill, "'We're Back,' Justin Trudeau Says in Message to Canada's Allies Abroad," *National Post*, October 20, 2015.