



FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ELECTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foreign policy rarely plays a major role in Canadian elections and, CDFAI Senior Research Fellow, Derek Burney contends 2011 will be no exception.

Differences about the purchase of new fighter aircraft to replace the aging CF-18 Hornets will surface during the campaign. The Liberals have adopted a preference for “butter” instead of “guns” and should there be a change of government, defence equipment purchases could be curtailed more generally.

While other differences are evident, e.g. on Middle East issues and Climate Change, the two major parties are essentially on the same page on the key issues of war and peace – Afghanistan and now Libya.

The new bilateral initiative for a security perimeter with the US has attracted little opposition to date, primarily because it is a process not a result, yielding little to attack or defend.

Uncertainties about the global economy may simply reinforce public concerns about Canada’s economic prospects.

The Conservatives have delivered on what they said they would do: strengthening the military to give more capacity for a global role, engaging constructively with the US and enhancing relations in our hemisphere, notably with a substantial contribution to Haiti. The Liberal alternative seems more rhetorical than prescriptive, citing grievances with the Conservative record along with nostalgic calls for a return to Pearsonian emphasis on peace-keeping and multilateralism.

Regardless of who wins, and excepting the possibility of different commitments to defence, the main lines of Canadian foreign policy are unlikely to change significantly.

SOMMAIRE

La politique étrangère joue rarement un rôle dans les élections canadiennes, et l'associé principal de recherche du CDFAI, Derek Burney, soutient que 2011 ne fera pas exception à cette règle.

Les différences concernant l'achat du nouvel avion de chasse pour remplacer les Hornets CF-18 devenus vétustes fera surface pendant la campagne. Les Libéraux ont adopté une préférence pour le « beurre » au lieu des « fusils » et, s'il y avait changement de gouvernement, les achats d'équipement de défense pourraient être freinés de façon plus générale.

Malgré que d'autres différences apparaissent, par exemple, sur les enjeux du Moyen-Orient et sur le changement climatique, les deux principaux partis sont essentiellement sur la même partition pour ce qui est des enjeux essentiels en matière de guerre et de paix - l'Afghanistan et maintenant la Libye.

La nouvelle initiative bilatérale pour un périmètre de sécurité avec les États-Unis s'est attirée peu d'opposition jusqu'à maintenant, principalement parce qu'il s'agit d'un processus et non d'un résultat, ce qui donne peu de substance à attaquer ou à défendre.

Les incertitudes qui entourent l'économie mondiale peuvent simplement renforcer les inquiétudes du public concernant les perspectives économiques du Canada.

Les Conservateurs ont tenu les promesses qu'ils avaient faites : un renforcement de l'armée pour donner une plus grande capacité à jouer un rôle mondial, un engagement constructif avec les É.-U. et l'amélioration des relations dans notre hémisphère, notamment avec une contribution substantielle à Haïti. L'alternative libérale semble plus rhétorique que prescriptive, qui fait mention de griefs avec le dossier conservateur parallèlement avec des appels nostalgiques pour un retour à l'emphase pearsonienne sur le maintien de la paix et le multilatéralisme.

Peu importe qui va l'emporter, et excepté pour la possibilité d'engagements différents à la défense, les grandes lignes de la politique étrangère du Canada ne changeront probablement pas de façon significative.

With the notable exceptions of the 1988 Free Trade election and the Bomarc missile controversy in 1963, foreign policy is rarely a major focus for Canadian election campaigns. Bread and butter issues closer to home, like the economy, taxes and health care are usually more critical in the eyes of voters and that will almost certainly be the case again in 2011.

The government's planned purchase of F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft will attract attention during the election and the debate will be about the dollars involved and, more fundamentally, about the choice between "guns or butter", reminiscent of a similar debate over helicopters in 1993. Despite having signed the original Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) involving Canada in the production of the F-35, the Liberals are now having second thoughts and undoubtedly sense that the electorate may prefer to see the funds spent on social programs. The NDP and Bloc are fervently opposed to the JSF and always have been.

Few deny that the aging CF-18 Hornets will need to be replaced. The fact that the proposed purchase is sole-sourced and that the dividends for Canadian firms are, at this point, more conceptual than tangible have raised legitimate questions and concerns. The discrepancy between the \$16B cost estimate from the government and the \$29B forecast by the Parliamentary Budget Officer – much of which reflects his 30 year calculation versus the government's 20 year costing – will inject more spice into the debate. Should there be a change of government, the defence budget would be a likely target for cuts. Quite apart from the decision on the Joint Strike Fighter, several capital increases for new armoured vehicles, naval ships and helicopters are mostly in a holding pattern and could easily become outright casualties if the Conservatives are defeated.

Canada's loss in the campaign for a UN Security Council seat was clearly a setback for the government, one that Opposition parties will continue to point to as a failure of foreign policy. But the UN as an institution for good in the world has lost much of its lustre, even in Canada, and the defeat was seen by many as more of a verdict on the UN than on Canada. By volunteering to join the military action against Libya – a decision that gained, somewhat surprisingly, unanimous support in Parliament – the government may be attempting to re-establish its UN credentials, notably support for the "Responsibility to Protect" concept. Acting militarily in compliance with UN resolutions is a generally well-accepted standard for Canadians. Values trumping interests.

Afghanistan, where Canada has been actively engaged in military combat for almost a decade under both Liberal and Conservative governments, might have provided a point of differentiation. However, the decision to switch to a training role in the summer of 2011 was supported by both major parties and with minimal Parliamentary debate. Concern about the treatment of "detainees" was a persistent target of Opposition attacks in Parliament and continues to smoulder. Given the rampant corruption in Afghanistan, there may also be some questions about the effectiveness of Canadian economic assistance to the beleaguered country – the highest recipient of all aid allocations by Canada. But, barring a major, negative event during the campaign, Afghanistan will likely remain below the radar. The more immediate focus may be on the objective and the effect of our engagement in Libya.

Aspects of the government's foreign policy that have attracted the most criticism relate to the Middle East, Climate Change and China. By tilting overtly and consistently to Israel, the government has been attacked for abandoning Canada's customary "balance" on Middle East issues. Inevitably, the difference is seen as driven more by domestic, political concerns than by foreign policy analysis and, given the limited nature of Canada's actual interests in the Middle East, the distinction does not resonate much beyond our borders. But the government's

determined support for Israel is often cited as having influenced the negative UN vote on Canada's candidacy for the Security Council. (Certainly announcing a Free Trade Agreement with Israel on the day of the UN vote did not help!)

Canada's perceived foot-dragging on a global Climate Change consensus featured prominently in the same UN calculus. The Opposition parties may very well decry the Harper government for its stance on climate change. Yet, no party has laid out a credible plan for tackling the issue. Stéphan Dion tried the last time around and it failed to resonate with the electorate. (Not all the hot air on climate change comes from Greenhouse Gas emissions!) Climate change is both a foreign and domestic policy issue but the debate seems to be overwhelmed, for now, by the inability of the US to endorse a concrete abatement plan. Rising energy prices as a result of instability in the Middle East blur matters even further. The tactic of working in parallel with the US attracts broad support in Canada, except from ardent environmentalists who would prefer that Canada proceed to act on its own.

The Prime Minister has been criticized for being slow to recognize the accelerating economic strength and importance of China to Canada. His penchant for democracy, (which also underpins his unflinching support for Israel), restrains him at times from adopting a purely realpolitik approach to global affairs but, somewhat perversely, fails to arouse support from many who usually attach greater significance to values than to interests. It may be simplistic to assume that attitudes about the Middle East and China both reflect a streak of democratic principle (or morality) in the Conservative view of the world. It may also, of course, be their lack of experience dealing rationally with a world as it is rather than as the government would like it to be. But, at least in the case of China, matters are on the mend and there is little now to differentiate the positions of the two major parties.

The silly spat with the UAE over landing rights in Canada for Emirates and Etihad airlines ballooned into a major squabble costing Canada the use of Camp Mirage as a staging base for our troops in Afghanistan. To say the dispute was badly handled on both sides would be an understatement. But it is unlikely to excite many on the campaign trail.

The Prime Minister has committed substantial time and resources to assertions of sovereignty over the Arctic – “use it or lose it” being the mantra. Although this is essentially a nationalist pitch for domestic political purposes, there is a foreign policy dimension as well. The challenge for any government – Conservative or Liberal – will be to reconcile outstanding disputes, primarily with the US over the status of the Northwest Passage and the ownership of a portion of the Beaufort Sea, against the desirability of closer cooperation with various Arctic partners on security, transportation and the shared environment.

At a time when the major public concern is about the economy, about jobs and the prospects of future prosperity, it might be hoped that foreign policy, or at least the trade dimension, might loom larger in an election campaign. Canada is more vulnerable than most to protectionist lunges, especially from a weakened America. That is why a more robust US recovery would be welcomed by many from both major parties.

The bold declaration on the concept of a North American security perimeter is a singular acknowledgement of the importance of the US to Canada's security and prosperity and is, potentially, the most significant bilateral initiative in 20 years. While initial polls suggest a fair degree of support for the initiative, the details are complex and the objective is much less riveting than that of the Free Trade negotiations. The concept of enhanced security cooperation seems plausible in the face of new forms of terrorism and potential attacks from cyberspace.

And workmanlike measures to facilitate easier access for people and goods across our shared border are not likely to inspire fear or latent anti-Americanism, except from some of the more predictable sources. There may well be some concerns about “sovereignty” and about the protection of privacy and other civil liberties but, before anything has actually been agreed, these allegations are not likely to gain much traction. The proof, of course, will be in the pudding, i.e. judgments on what is actually achieved. Political opposition has been modest to date in large part because there is nothing other than a process to oppose or defend. President Obama remains very popular in Canada and that provides a cushion of sorts for the government on almost any bilateral initiative.

Otherwise, Canada’s track record on trade policy is decidedly mixed. Largely because of prompting by Quebec, the government is heavily engaged in negotiations with the EU but, as the results are at this point somewhat opaque, there is little to attack or support during an election campaign. In sharp contrast to the success of the US, Canada’s negotiations with Korea have hit a wall, due to fierce opposition by auto manufacturers and auto workers in Ontario whose concerns, curiously, are not shared by their American counterparts. The EU has also succeeded in negotiating with Korea, leaving Canada very much on the outside looking in.

Trade talks have been initiated with India, Japan, Morocco and China among others but, at this stage, are known more from the press releases announcing them than from any tangible results.

The all-party stubborn defence of supply management for fewer than 20,000 dairy and poultry farms in Ontario and Quebec has relegated Canada out of the major league in trade negotiations. Supply management, along with absence of Copyright reform legislation, are the reasons why the US is blocking Canada’s entry into the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations. The new copyright legislation, intended in part to respond to these concerns, died once again when Parliament was dissolved. Conditions like these have not been stipulated by the US regarding the participation of others like Malaysia or Japan in the TPP so the leverage in Washington Canada might have expected from its commitments to Afghanistan and now to Libya has not materialized on trade. (At the time of NAFTA, bureaucratic resistance to Canada’s involvement was widespread in Washington, but was over-ridden due to the positive chemistry between Prime Minister Mulroney and President George H.W. Bush.)

The fact that the Doha Round of Multilateral trade negotiations remains in the doldrums is, on balance, probably good news for all Parliamentarians determined to defend supply management literally at all costs.

On aid policy, the Conservatives continued the Liberal doctrine further reducing the number of countries for concentration from 25 to 20. Despite doubling allocations to Africa, and the Prime Minister’s personal leadership on special funding for maternal and children’s health, mainly in Africa, the government has been criticized for “neglecting” the continent. There is very little public or Parliamentary debate on any of this, however, and it is doubtful that the Liberals would advocate anything radically different if they are elected. The government has indicated that the \$5B aid budget will not be increased over the next few years as part of the effort to bring the books back into balance. This, too, provoked little response. It is unlikely that Opposition will see electoral merit in campaigning to increase foreign aid spending while the economy is still in the early stages of recovery.

Where Canada has stood tall internationally is in the fiscal and financial regulatory discussions at the G-8 and G-20 Summit tables. Our economic performance fared best among G-7 countries during the recession and, thanks to prudent regulations, our banks were less exposed

than many in Europe and the US. These credentials enabled us to punch above our weight in debates about how best to recover and how to avoid similar episodes of macro-economic mismanagement in future. But high marks for good performance are rarely campaign fodder. Our role as host of the G-8 and G-20 Summits should have provided an opportunity to herald our performance as prudent stewards of the economy. Instead, both events were overshadowed by excessive security costs for back to back sessions in Canada's largest city – in retrospect, a curious choice. Nonetheless, the fragility of the global recovery and the upheavals in the Middle East may inject a note of uncertainty into the election and help keep the focus on the economy.

By their very nature, minority governments tend to focus primarily on short-term tactical manoeuvres with a sharp eye on the mood of the electorate, leaving little scope for vision or long-term thinking. One observer, Peter McKenna of the University of PEI, observed that “no Canadian Prime Minister in recent memory has injected more domestic electoral calculations into the crafting and implementation of our external relations than Harper.” In his view, “almost every foreign policy initiative is viewed through a prism of either broadening the party's political tint or firming up its electoral base.” But one might wonder what is wrong with that approach, especially coming from a minority government. Criticizing a government for adopting positions that appeal to its electoral base seems a bit obtuse. Queen's professor Kim Nossal more accurately stated that Harper and the Conservatives “really have only one overreaching priority – the establishment of a majority government – and all other priorities, including foreign policies, are used as tools to achieve domestic political goals.”

The Conservatives have essentially delivered on what they said they would do on foreign policy: strengthening the military to give us more capacity for a global role; engaging carefully but constructively with the US – our most vital partner – and enhancing relations in our hemisphere, including a substantial contribution in response to the devastation in Haiti.

On key issues of war and peace – Afghanistan and Libya – they have managed to broker either bipartisan or all-party consensus in support of our engagement. Otherwise, they have tended to walk softly for the most part, seeking to avoid rash diversions and major gaffes. Uninspiring, perhaps, but prudent in the circumstance. The Opposition partners have found fault with various elements or actions but seldom have these criticisms or differences commanded more than fleeting public attention. That is why foreign policy differences are likely to be understated during the campaign.

The Liberal platform on foreign policy looks more to the past than the future, invoking images of Pearsonian diplomacy, with more emphasis on peace-keeping than military combat, on the importance of the UN generally and multilateralism as the rudder for Canadian foreign policy. In short, it appeals to nostalgia and to an age when Canada purportedly “punched above its weight” in global affairs. When Michael Ignatieff announced the Liberal position in November, he combined a list of grievances about the Conservatives changing the country into “not the Canada we thought we were” with a call for a return to Peacekeeping and Responsibility to Protect themes of the past. Tom Axworthy's 3D's were amended to 2D's and an M. Multiculturalism replaced Defence to accompany Development and Diplomacy as priorities and the deleted “D” may be significant. It was more a critique than a platform and offered little that was strikingly different or bold, prompting a Globe and Mail editor to observe that the “Liberals' unwillingness to support their principles and proposals [on foreign policy] with adequate equipment and other resources leaves questions they will have to answer before and during the next federal election campaign.”

What might have been a clear strength for Mr. Ignatieff – his knowledge and expertise in foreign policy – will likely be underplayed in a campaign where his main challenge will be to identify with the more immediate domestic concerns of Canadians and his capability to lead a government.

The fighter aircraft purchase may prove to be a major differentiator in the campaign but, if the Liberals are elected, with or without a coalition of sorts, they will be obliged to finesse the fighter aircraft issue much as they did with their pledge in 1993 not to approve NAFTA. Otherwise, regardless of the election outcome, the main lines of Canadian foreign policy – the primacy of Canada – US relations, the need for greater attention to the Emerging Powers and the perennial pursuit for balance between promoting values and defending interests – are unlikely to change significantly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek H. Burney (71) is Senior Strategic Advisor to Ogilvy Renault LLP. He is Chairman of GardaWorld's International Advisory Board and a Director of TransCanada Pipelines Limited. Mr. Burney is a Senior Research Fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute and a Visiting Professor and Senior Distinguished Fellow at Carleton University.

Mr. Burney headed the Transition team for Prime Minister Harper from January to March, 2006. He was President and Chief Executive Officer of CAE Inc. from October 1999 until August 2004. Prior to joining CAE, Mr. Burney was Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Bell Canada International Inc. (1993-1999).

From 1989-1993, Mr. Burney served as Canada's Ambassador to the United States. This assignment culminated a distinguished thirty-year career in the Canadian Foreign Service, during which he completed a variety of assignments at home and abroad, including a period as a Deputy Minister of External Affairs.

From March 1987 to January 1989, Mr. Burney served as Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister. He was directly involved in the negotiation of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. He was the Prime Minister's personal representative (Sherpa) in the preparations for the Houston (1990), London (1991) and Munich (1992) G-7 Economic Summits.

In February 1992, Mr. Burney was awarded the Public Service of Canada's Outstanding Achievement Award.

In July 1993, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Mr. Burney was conferred Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Lakehead University, Queen's University, Wilfrid Laurier University, Carleton University and the University of Windsor.

His memoir of government service - "Getting it Done" - was published by McGill-Queen's in 2005.

Mr. Burney was born in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario, and was educated at Queen's University, where he received an Honours B.A. and M.A. He is married to Joan (Peden) and has four sons.

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CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

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