

## AN ALBERTA FOREIGN POLICY?

Where is Stephen Harper's government going on foreign policy and defence? Much will depend on the economy and events in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, of course, but some directions seem clear.

First, with a majority and with all three Opposition parties under temporary stewardship, the Conservatives can do just about anything they want. This means that the continental security deal with the United States will go through, much to the chagrin of Canadian anti-American nationalists and privacy advocates. If the government can speed up access to the United States for individuals and exporters, the complaints of the left will likely amount to very little.

Such a move, moreover, will reinforce the Harper government's efforts to paint itself a good ally of the United States. The anti-American rhetoric that was such a feature of Liberal governments has disappeared completely, replaced by an apparently friendly relationship with President Obama's administration. Obama may have proven himself a weak president thus far, but it is much harder for anti-Americans to denounce the Democratic Obama than it was to assail the despised Dubya, President George W. Bush. And if Harper is getting in bed with the Yankees, his effort to slap monarchical symbols on the Canadian Forces and to hoist the Queen's picture at the Pearson Building and in embassies abroad brilliantly camouflages this. No one yet has suggested the obvious truth: Harper's Canada will simultaneously be a psychological colony of both Britain and the United States.

Stephen Harper also took Canada into Libya under NATO, keeping a frigate offshore and CF-18s and support aircraft overhead. The fighter jets flew more than their fair share of missions and, after a slow start, the rebels seem to have toppled Libya's mad ruler. But after Afghanistan and after NATO's rather inept, but ultimately successful, performance in Libya, there is likely little admiration left in the government for the North Atlantic Alliance. The Germans won't fight, the Dutch can't, the British can no longer afford a military, and the French want to run everything. This is not an alliance on which anyone can or should rely, and the reality, whether or not Canada declares that NATO has served its purpose and bids it adieu, is that coalitions of the willing will be the way Canada will wish to proceed in future operations. Where these missions might take us is unclear, but one thing is almost certain: Canada will not participate unless the United States takes the lead. The one big lesson of Afghanistan and Libya is that only the U.S. has the power and will to fight and fight well. The second clear lesson is that the only ally on which the Canadian Forces can rely is the American military, the one force with which Canadian soldiers and airmen now identify.

How much the coming cuts in the defence budget—and the Transformation Report by General Andrew Leslie—will reduce the (none-too-great) combat power of the Canadian Forces is yet to be decided. The RCAF needs new fighters, but the F-35 is in trouble with budget-cutters in Washington, and this may give the Harper government pause. The RCN needs new ships to replace its supply vessels, frigates, and destroyer escorts, not to mention ships for Arctic patrols, and the Coast Guard is on the verge of obsolescence. Finding the money for such big budget items and for the Army's renewal will not be easy.

The government will do so, however. The Canadian public still thinks of the Canadian military as a peacekeeping force, resplendent in blue berets, at the same time as it is proud of the way Canadians have conducted themselves in war in Afghanistan and Libya. But for the Harper government, the new reality is that Alberta attitudes drive defence policy, not Quebec opinions. Virtually every opinion poll over recent decades has shown attitudes in Alberta consistently more hawkish than quasi-pacifist opinion in French Canada. The Tories have little support in Quebec, and the last election confirmed that they don't need Quebec M.P.s to create a parliamentary majority. The coming addition of some thirty more seats in the House of Commons for Ontario and the West will entrench this new reality. In the circumstances, the Conservatives have a free hand to build the defence and foreign policy that suits their view of the world. And they will.

So, Canada's back. Not the old Axworthyian Canada that talked a good game but did nothing. The new Canada wants to act to advance Canada's interests, but is less interested in multilateral organizations, closer to the United States, and more focussed on defence. Hang on to your hats—the next four years will be interesting.

**Historian J.L. Granatstein is a Senior Research Fellow of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.**