

The Group of 78
ALL POLITICS ARE GLOBAL:
Canadian Foreign Policy in an Inter-connected World

Address by Carolyn Mc Askie
Canada in the World: Image and Reality
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Many of us here tonight began our careers in the Trudeau era, when the government he led, following in the footsteps of great Canadian post war and Pearsonian diplomacy, made Canada a player in the world on many fronts. After the post WW II period when Canada played a central role in building the institutions of peace; the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions; when Pearson made Canada a respected international partner and won his Nobel Peace Prize for the role he played in consolidating modern peacekeeping, Trudeau's government built up Canada's role in international development, international economics and international relations. Immigration expanded beyond the traditional European immigrants and people from all cultures came to our shores and became Canadians. We had money to spend and places to go, but most of all we thought we had something to offer, and we cared, we wanted to make a difference, to improve the quality of life on the planet. We defined ourselves as multicultural, bilingual, socially responsible and respectful of human rights at home and abroad, and responsible international players.

Being a Canadian in multilateral negotiations was a proud place to be. We were the institution builders and the problem solvers; those who would work in public or behind the scenes to come up with solutions that everyone could live with. We were not a big power seeking to imprint ourselves on the globe; we were seeking a better globe, because as a middle power (remember that phrase?) we knew that we would be better off if the world were a better place. Enlightened self-interest we called it, but it spawned a generation of people who genuinely wanted the world to be a better place and to define Canadian values in those terms. The Government provided leadership and flair and discovered that in not seeking power for power's sake, you gain power through influence and reputation based on your ideas and your commitment.

Slowly, as we moved into the nineties, it gradually dawned on those of us still working on these issues that we felt we were working alone; that we were a last vestige of an ideal which was no longer grounded in deliberate government policy. The political class in Ottawa was becoming more and more mired in domestic politics as they struggled to control a runaway deficit (remember deficits?) and deal with a growing rise in regionalism. Not only the fear of losing Quebec, but Western alienation and provincial rights. The international stage and Canada's role on it was sacrificed as a result, perhaps victim to the law of unintended consequences, and Canadians descended into navel gazing and domestic backbiting.

There were notable exceptions, Canada's role in the Mine Action Treaty and the creation of the International Criminal Court, for example, but they seemed to be the product of small, enlightened partnerships among individuals, whether ministers, mandarins or civil society. Canada served an exceptional two years on the UN Security Council when as usual, dedicated individuals put us back on the map temporarily, but by and large, by the time I went down to join the UN Secretariat in 1999, the voice of Canada was less and less heard in the halls of multilateralism. Prime Ministers pretended we still had clout, but the story, particularly in the development institutions, was that Canadians were resting on their laurels, and pretty old laurels at that. We spoke the language but we had less and less to contribute in concrete terms. Deficit management had emptied the development coffers, and reduced not only peacekeeping capability but also our ability to back up foreign policy and trade positions with substantial contributions and we never came back. We had lost the knack. Development budgets were not restored, nor were peacekeeping and political capabilities, despite budget surpluses. A senior colleague in DFAIT, in 1998, trying to persuade CIDA to allocate more funds to back up Canada's stance on the Balkans insisted that we were obligated by our membership in the Group of 7, to which I replied that we no longer had a G-7 budget to draw on.

Interestingly enough, while it is easy to blame one or other side of the political spectrum, the sad fact is that governments on both sides of the Canadian coin have presided over this decline in our overseas role. We have become what I would call "issue based", rather than being defined by an overall philosophy, or concept, of what Canada represents and what Canadians can achieve. Much of what Canada does abroad is still valid, but does not seem to stem from a coherent policy framework which provides the basis for decision-making. We invest millions in Afghanistan, but won't invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in potential future hot spots for example. From my time in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, it is more and more obvious what price the world pays for ignoring those countries. Paul Collier's thesis of the Bottom Billion, countries which are falling off the edge, should be obligatory reading for all governments. We invest considerable intellectual effort in launching the concept of Responsibility to Protect, but will we be part of developing the strategy to make it work or accept the interventionist stance it can require. We announce that Latin America will be a priority for Canada, but where are the political, trade or cultural initiatives, or the investments in being a player in the region and its institutions such as the OAS and the IDB.

Never before has it been so blatantly obvious that we actually have no foreign policy, nor are we led by people who understand what a foreign policy is or how to behave on the international scene. What government in the world would do to one of its most eminent citizens and high-ranking International Civil Servants what this government did to Louise Arbour, outgoing High Commissioner of Human Rights. We are projecting a knee jerk philosophy of "we like this group and don't like this group" onto complex international situations and developing a mentality of "your either with us or against us". If this sounds frighteningly familiar, it is obvious to those of us who have been living in the United States lately.

Why is this true? And why have Canadians let it happen? Or worse, why are Canadians so unaware that it is true? Many Canadians, those who care in any event, (an ever shrinking minority), still believe that we are a proud and active leader on many of the pressing global issues, environment, security, peacekeeping, human rights, development, trade, but where is that leadership? In the fall of 2006, a McLean's poll uncovered the lie that while 85% of Canadians identify themselves with the blue berets of UN Peacekeeping which we founded under Lester Pearson, Canada has long ago abdicated from that role. Instead, like other NATO members, we leave UN peacekeeping to unprepared and under-equipped troops and then criticize when problems arise. At the last UN conference on the Environment in Bali, Canadians backed away from committing to the Tokyo targets, insisting that we would do nothing till some of the new big producers of greenhouse gases signed on. Where is the leadership when a first world country, supposedly one with a conscience, refuses to lead the way, and prefers temper tantrum diplomacy, i.e. either I get my way or I won't play.

Despite all this, it must be emphasized that Canadians are still respected when we speak in the halls of the major global institutions, drawing on a deep history of respected Canadian international behaviour and a broad image of Canada, still known as bilingual, multicultural, socially responsible, respectful of human rights, a functioning economy and political system. Our senior diplomats are still, many of them, problem solvers, bridge builders and champions of what is right. Many envy us our standard of living, our clean, safe cities, our health care and our decency and tolerance.

But gradually, we are becoming less reliable. Our leaders ignore the United Nations, saying it is ineffective, without realizing that the UN is no more than the sum of its parts, and that when players like Canada walk away, we are creating a self fulfilling prophecy. Why are we so ignorant of what multilateralism is and can be? Why have we become more and more enamoured of the US go-it-alone philosophy, a philosophy which is now showing its enormous deficiencies even for the powerhouse that is the United States. And now, why is there no discussion of our approach to international issues in the current election, not just by the party in power, but by the other parties, all vying separately (and I fear, futilely) to unseat them?

And what has all this done for our reputation abroad? I spoke to a number of experienced friends to get their views while I was preparing to talk to you, and one of them said unhappily that most Canadians don't care much for what the world thinks of us. We should be asking instead the question of what do Canadians think of the world, because the depressing truth is that most Canadians don't think about the world and are more focused on their material comforts. With prosperity, Canadians have become a more complacent consumer society seduced by the superficialities of the American Dream.

There are a number of reasons for this which I would like to explore, some international and some national.

One of my own personal theories is that over time, Canadians have lost touch with their political and social roots, which came out of our history of the founding settlers, not the French and the English only, but the French and the Scottish. Both the French and the Scots shared concepts of community, equality and social responsibility, coming out of the French revolution, and the Edinburgh enlightenment. French settlers built a concept of culture-based community, honed in a difficult environment, protected in its own language and based on social responsibility. Of all the provinces, Quebec's social system is the most thorough and ingrained in the politics and economics of the province. Scottish settlers brought with them the egalitarian education system which made Scotland the best-educated population of the 18th and 19th Century. They founded Canadian universities in the same tradition as the Scottish university system, publicly funded and non-elitist. Eight of the ten Fathers of Confederation were Scotsman, and the social democratic underpinnings of Canadian politics and society were built by Canadian Scots such as William Lyon Mackenzie King, Agnes Macphail and still well known and loved, Tommy Douglas. King's book "Industry and Humanity" would be relevant today, as *he recognized capitalism as the main engine for social progress, providing governments legislated against capitalism's inherent tendency to abuse workers. Unchecked capitalism, he believed, had brought "desolation to the very heart of the human race"*. (Great Scots!, Matthew Shaw, p.98). Pierre Trudeau, interestingly enough, embodied both French and Scottish lineage, so reflected two of our dominant founding cultures.

I believe that much of this has been gradually eroded by the cultural onslaught, particularly in English speaking Canada, of the American cultural machine. (It is interesting today that a major assault on the cultural cuts of the current government is coming from Quebec which has for obvious reasons succeeded in protecting its own culture, although English Canadians are not far behind.) As a result, many Canadians today are unaware of the fact that the US model of economics, of domestic politics, of international behaviour and of social responsibility or the lack thereof, is an isolated one; that it is the American model of rugged individualism, a frightening anachronism for a modern complex society that is out of step with the rest of the world. Elsewhere, especially in Europe, governments on the left and on the right, believe they have a responsibility to ensure that the systems they oversee work for the good of their populations. Social democracy and a regulated economy remains the dominant model in all members of the OECD except the United States. (William Lyon Mackenzie King, "Canada has need of you at this hour".)

It is this influence which has given rise to a form of political conservatism which is at odds with Canada's history and which is taking us away from the concepts of egalitarianism and social responsibility of our founding fathers. Not so long ago, not only did Conservatives call themselves Progressive Conservatives, they could happily live with "Red Tories" in their midst. And it is this influence which has led the current government to follow the US model of politics and economics; an approach which doesn't care what others think of you, which sees the world in terms of pure self-interest, far from the enlightened self-interest of the middle power. Those of us who feared the consequences of this approach, an approach which says my country right or wrong, my allies right or wrong, forget international conventions, forget the poor and the powerless,

have lived to see our worst fears come true. As America grapples with the fall out from an illegal invasion, the demonization of those who disagree with them (remember those ridiculous “freedom fries”?), a militarist economy and an economy of massive de-regulation and greed which has presided over the greatest income disparities of their history, how can Canadians stand by and see their government ally themselves more and more with such a dysfunctional economic and military model?

But if the majority of Canadians haven’t seen what is happening, or worse, have encouraged it and have been complicit in this shift from positions of domestic and international responsibility to positions of self-interest, where are our leaders? Are we not capable of electing leaders who inspire us, who understand the world and the potential of Canada’s role in it? Can we no longer produce first class civil servants who will “speak truth to power”, the abiding philosophy of the Westminster model? Do we not have military leaders who can see beyond the short sightedness of the US model? Thankfully we have not seen in Canada the same kind of business and financial behaviour which has led to the housing crisis in the US, but being so closely linked financially, we will pay for it nonetheless. Moves by the party in power to loosen our regulatory framework, in the false interest of “boosting economic growth” should be resisted forcefully by Canadians in the wake of the blatant example in front of us. Remember William Lyon Mackenzie King on unregulated capitalism!

We can’t blame everything on the United States, however, despite that having been a favourite Canadian pastime for a long time. Another reason for the decline of Canadian influence is that we may not have come to terms with the shift in the overall global power structure. With the growth of the new middle industrial powers, Brazil, India and of course China, Canada’s share of the world economy, no matter how efficient, is falling and will continue to fall. Our place in what was the G-7, now the G-8, is based on history, not a claim to economic or political clout. Our original claim was tenuous at best, and represented a real triumph of Canadian diplomacy, but we continued to earn our place with our positions within the group, taking a stance in favour of global goals and seeing our role as moving the G-7/8 away from looking at the world through a totally Western lens. If we lose that principled stance our claim to membership can easily be challenged, and we can remain only through the inertia which makes change difficult. (Think of the inertia in changing the UN Security Council structure.)

Another global evolution has been the growing strength of regional groupings, a movement that has distanced us from traditional allies. The obvious one is the European Union, which makes it difficult for Canada to pick out individual European states as natural allies in advancing common concerns. Remember the “like-minded” groupings which brought progressive European governments and Canada together around development and economic issues in the eighties? Africans see themselves more and more in alliances within the African Union as it grows in strength and maturity, a major pull for many of Canada’s allies in the Commonwealth and la Francophonie? We were one of the founding members of the Asia Pacific Economic Council and among the first to support ASEAN when it was created. On the West Coast, this is an important alliance, reflecting the growing immigration and economic interest in the Asia Pacific region, but

far away in the Maritimes this doesn't resonate in the same way. After a period of vigorously building our relationships with Latin America, we lack a clear concept of our place in the Western Hemisphere. Perhaps we were spread too thin in the first place. The joke used to be that there wasn't a club we wouldn't join, and if there weren't a club, we would create one. Prioritizing relationships was not, therefore, easy. We had roots in Europe, a big neighbour in the US, we had African and Asian friends through the Commonwealth and la Francophonie, we were a member of the Western Hemisphere, although late to join the OAS, and we were part of the impetus behind APEC to celebrate our situation on the Pacific Rim and the growing Canadian Asian population and interest. Rather than making decisions, we spread ourselves thinly and perhaps it became too much to keep up with. But does the answer have to be none of the above?

For Canada, the shift in our relative economic position and changing global political alliances means that we no longer have a natural constituency of like-minded countries to work with on Global issues, nor do we have a constituency which can influence our own stance and keep us in the game. Once again, we are back in the situation which throws us into the arms of the US, a partner who, lets face it, doesn't really care too much for us, except for the dangers presented by a long and porous border. Living in New York, the only time Canada is in the news is in the weather report, as in "a cold front from Canada". Australia is of more interest to Americans and appears more often in the New York Times than do we. (More on that later)

In the UN, we link up with Australia and New Zealand (CANZ) sometimes also with Japan and the US, as the remnants, or non-European, members of the Western Grouping in the UN. With Australia and New Zealand we have a close and friendly relationship, but the total of CANZ doesn't make an influential group. When Japan and the US are added to the mix, we are just one of the smaller ones. As a group it is not very "like-minded". This means we have to play it alone or ally ourselves with larger more coherent groups, such as the Europeans. Often this leaves us alone or on the outside.

It appears that Canada has not adjusted to this shift in global alliances and our relative position. We need to redefine ourselves in light of these shifts; we need to define better what we represent and what we want to achieve; and then choose our positions and our actions around this definition of ourselves and our objectives. Instead we react to issues that arise, that politicians think will enhance our status. Instead of understanding the world, we react on the basis of narrow concepts. Our leaders have lost the commitment to international policy and institution building and no longer see the world as a place we can build and rebuild. Instead they see the world as static, as something we react to. A problem here? Let's develop a position. A problem there, lets develop another one. Public doesn't like that? Some lobby doesn't like it? Either, lets move on, or no, we've decided, so let's not discuss it any more. Stubbornness has become synonymous with leadership.

It should not be an impossible task to define a Canadian foreign policy, if Canada wants one. Two interesting models stand out, Australia and Norway, both very different but

both successful in their own way. Neither are great powers, although both have influence in their regions and beyond.

Australia has the advantage of not being overshadowed by a big neighbour; in fact to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands it **IS** the big neighbour. Australian policies have changed as their governments have changed, but it has always been possible to know what they stand for. They have also succeeded in projecting a uniquely Australian personality. Everyone knows the Sidney Opera House, Australian wines, Australian movies, Australian aboriginal art, the Sidney Olympic Games. Note that much of this depends on real investment in culture and image by successive governments, and has contributed to a widespread knowledge of what it is to be Australian in the world. (Canada, take note!) Norway, with its oil windfall has made sound decisions based on good financial management and a strong national concept of what Norway stands for. It is a tightly knit but tolerant society which unlike some other European nations has not shied away from immigration. It has a policy of investing time, money and diplomacy in worldwide conflict prevention and peace negotiations. Just think of the Oslo accords, Sri Lanka, Sudan and many others, often unknown, as they work behind the scenes. They are quiet, professional and reliable and step up to the plate, not only with ideas but with resources, wherever they see a place where they can provide value added. Not a member of the European Union, Norway has carved out a respected identity for itself based on its own vision and its own efforts.

In closing, let me stop ranting and come back to the basic question of **THE VIEW FROM ABROAD**. Let me mention three constituencies.

Firstly, Canadians working abroad, particularly those of us who have worked both in Canadian and international public institutions, continue to recognize the good work done by our development, political and security colleagues all around the world. Canadians are still inspired to go abroad and make the world a better place. But we have become increasingly frustrated, and even on occasion embarrassed, by the abdication of responsibility for the whole picture, the erosion of a systemic world view underpinning the work of Canadians in official positions. The total dismissal of the United Nations, which provides the only truly global forum to address critical world problems, is nothing short of ignorant. We see our government kow-towing to US positions, even at the expense of supporting Canadians abroad. They are not proud to see so many Canadians in high level positions and do not work to get more in the system. When the government complains that they are one of the few “stepping up to the plate” in Afghanistan and castigating allies for not taking the same risk, do they not know that the world has been criticizing Canada for many years now for not “stepping up to the plate” on UN peacekeeping and for refusing assignments offered? In the eighties, sitting behind the sign that says CANADA in an international meeting was a proud place to be. Now civil servants are instructed to stay quiet at best.

Secondly, individual Canadians are serving abroad in the thousands, whether young people serving in humanitarian and development NGOs, or career people working in peacekeeping and in international institutions. I received no official support from Canada

for my Burundi mission, despite repeated requests, but the second largest national group in the mission, after the Senegalese, was the Canadians, all of whom had applied and joined the UN on their own. The young idealists who joined Foreign Affairs and CIDA in the 60's and 70's to build a better world are still out there, but doing it their way. They have not found the same inspiring leadership in Canadian institutions that we found. One can hope that they will form a constituency of the next generation that will bring Canada back to a sense of its place in the world.

Thirdly, non-Canadians in official positions still admire what they think Canada is, i.e. a successful, if somewhat boring model, the only country that actually **welcomes** immigrants, encouraging people from all over the world, that defines itself as a bilingual and multicultural society, that is not afraid to limit freedom of speech judicially to prevent abuse of freedoms, which legislates respect, human rights and tolerance, which doesn't hang people, which doesn't murder children in schools, which supports women's rights and freedom of choice, the list is endless. But the questions are more and more asked, where is Canada, as the Canadian contributions, once counted on, disappear one by one. Not just peacekeeping and the environment, but anti-feminists join Canadian delegations to Women's Conferences, Canada votes against international Aboriginal rights, and the Canadian Ambassador is the only one, NOT to congratulate Louise Arbour on her farewell to the Human Rights Council.

So what will the future bring? I do not believe we will solve the question of the missing Foreign Policy until we re-invigorate the debate over what Canada is, what we stand for and how we reach a consensus on who we are. Can we drop the competitiveness that pits Provincial Premiers against each other in a fight with the Federal government over health care, equalization payments, environmental standards and so many other cross-Canada issues? Can we come together around a common definition of what matters to Canadians, and re-build a country on this basis? Or is it too late? Have we become too far apart in our beliefs over what are the fundamentals of society; what is the responsibility of government and the responsibility of citizens to create an environment in which everyone can not only thrive, but be protected. Society and the economy should be all about providing unlimited opportunity for growth in every sense, while protecting the globe and providing a framework within which all citizens are granted the respect and dignity of a decent standard of living. It is only based on a consensus of who we are as Canadians that we can define a Foreign Policy aimed at how we can expand such a vision to the world stage.