

Alan Bloomfield and Kim Richard Nossal, "A Conservative Foreign Policy? Canada and Australia Compared," paper to Canadian Political Science Association, Montréal, 3 June 2010

Other papers on this panel examine the degree to which we can identify a particularly conservative – or Conservative – approach to different aspects of *domestic* policy-making in Canada. The purpose of our paper is to answer what at first blush may appear to be a deceptively simple question: is there a particularly conservative – or Conservative – approach to policy-making's *international* counterpart, the different strands of Canada's international policy: diplomacy, defence, development assistance and trade?

To answer this question our paper proceeds in three steps. First, we examine what the characteristics of a "conservative foreign policy" might be, since identifying whether there are principles or practices that distinguish the foreign policy of conservatives from the foreign policy of others. We then compare the foreign policies of conservative governments in two middle-power countries, Australia and Canada: the Liberal/National Coalition government under John Howard, which held power from 1996 until 2007; and the Conservative Party government under Stephen Harper, which took power in February 2006 with a minority in the House of Commons. We agree with Michael Wesley (2007) that one can see conservative principles animating many (but not all) aspects of the Howard government's foreign policy in the eleven years that the Coalition was in power. Likewise, in the Canadian case we can see any comparable ideology at work. The Harper government may have come to power in 2006 with some of the foreign policy inclinations of the Howard government – indeed there were important links between the Canadian Conservatives and the Australian Coalition¹ – but in many areas it abandoned a foreign policy based on dogmatic principles in favour of a more pragmatic approach. Instead, it can be argued that Canadian foreign policy since 2006 has generally been guided by a single over-riding principle, to the exclusion of other, more dogmatic, ideas: to do what is necessary to make the Conservative Party of Canada the country's "natural governing party."

Defining a Conservative Foreign Policy

Contemporary conservative thought in the Anglo-American tradition is marked by a huge diversity of approaches, formal and informal. Some discussions of contemporary conservatism begin with the work of English writers: Edmund Burke, whose reflections on the French Revolution are regarded as the foundation of modern conservatism; Michael Oakshott (1962), widely recognized as the leading conservative philosopher of postwar Britain; or Roger Scruton (1980/2001), who carried forward the attempt to articulate the essence of what it means to be a conservative. Others, by contrast, focus on American contributions to conservative thought, reflecting the often profound differences between American and British conceptions of the origins and nature of conservative dogma (Aughey et al. 1992): for example, the toryism that has been entwined in British conservatism tends to be absent in contemporary American conservative thought, a function, it is usually argued, of which European "fragments" dominated the making of the United States (Hartz, 1955, 1964).

And within American conservatism itself, there is a considerable heterogeneity of approaches (for a history, see Allitt, 2009). Early twentieth century conservatives who arose to oppose the New Deal are now called the Old Right, to distinguish them from the New Right that emerged in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, a "neo-conservative" strand emerged: led by such commentators as Irving Kristol and

¹ Harper's Conservative team paid careful attention to how the Howard Liberals organized their campaigns, copying a number of the tactics used by the Coalition: see Laghi, 2006, Barns, 2006. In October 2008 what Cooper (2008) called a more explicit example of copying came to light: a speech that Harper had delivered on Iraq in 2003 was revealed to have been plagiarized by one of Harper's speechwriters from a Howard speech on Iraq.

Norman Podhoretz, commonly regarded as the “godfathers” of the neoconservative movement. Kristol described the neoconservative “persuasion” (as he called it) “the first variant of American conservatism in the past century that is in the ‘American grain’” – that is, “hopeful, not lugubrious; forward-looking, not nostalgic...” (Kristol, 2003). By the early 2000s, there was a clearly identifiable group of neocons: writers such as Kristol and his son William; Podhoretz and his spouse Midge Decter and their son John, and Max Boot; academics Robert Kagan; together with key officials in the administration of George W. Bush, including Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and David Frum. But the ascendancy of the “neocons” – or what Nancy Love (2009) has called the “Newest Right” – produced a reaction from more “traditional” conservatives (e.g., Kirk 1993) and led to a “revived” Old Right – the so-called “paleoconservatives” (Scotchie, 2002).

Given the lack of agreement – and indeed often deep antagonisms, particularly within American conservative circles – it will not be surprising that there is no agreement on what might constitute an explicit set of “conservative” beliefs about international affairs, or on what principles a “conservative foreign policy” might be based. Rather, proponents of different approaches – and their ideological opponents – have bruited particular visions of what constitutes a conservative foreign policy.

One way to do this is to begin with the explicit attempts to define a conservative foreign policy, to be found most clearly in the literature on American foreign policy. In 1993, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, who served in Ronald Reagan’s first administration, offered what in essence was a Reaganite approach to foreign policy. A conservative foreign policy, she argued, “should, of course, reflect conservative values, attitudes and methods.” Among the values she listed was: a respect for history; a respect for individual freedom; a suspicion of government; and a love of country, patriotism. A conservative, she suggested, will expect the future to look not very different from the past, and thus sceptical of utopian claims that humankind can be rid of the scourge of war; on the contrary, conservatism does not seek to deny the inevitability of conflict. A conservative “accepts the human capacity for evil as for good; for indifference as well as empathy; for selfishness as well as generosity.” From such attitudes Kirkpatrick, who served as the United States ambassador to the United Nations from 1981 to 1985, could advocate an American approach towards the United Nations that was sceptical and cautious (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Likewise, George F. Will, a columnist in the traditional conservative mode, advocated this brief recipe for American foreign policy:

Preserve U.S. sovereignty and freedom of action by marginalizing the United Nations. Reserve military interventions for reasons of U.S. national security, not altruism. Avoid peacekeeping operations that compromise the military's war-fighting proficiencies. Beware of the political hubris inherent in the intensely unconservative project of “nation-building” (Will, 2003).

A very different line was taken by William Kristol and Robert Kagan, who articulated what they termed a “neo-Reaganite” foreign policy. Writing after the end of the Cold War, they decried what they argued was acquiescence of conservatives like Will to a diminished role in the world. Rather, in their view, the most appropriate conservative foreign policy for the United States should aim for “benevolent global hegemony” (Kristol and Kagan, 1996: 20). While in an 1821 address to Congress John Quincy Adams had celebrated that the United States “goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy,” they argue that because “the peace and security of the international order rests so heavily on America's shoulders,” America should not shirk from trying “to contain or destroy many of the world’s monsters” (Kristol and Kagan, 1996: 31).

While Kristol and Kagan describe their foreign policy as “neo-Reaganite,” in fact they were articulating a neoconservative foreign policy. In the view of Kristol’s father, Irving, there was no identifiable “set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a set of attitudes derived from historical experience.” Kristol (2003) outlined these attitudes in the form of four “theses”:

First, echoing Huntington (1999-2000), who had noted that “patriotism is a – perhaps the – prime conservative virtue,” Kristol suggested that “patriotism is a natural and healthy sentiment and should be encouraged by both private and public institutions.”

Second, “world government is a terrible idea since it can lead to world tyranny. International institutions that point to an ultimate world government should be regarded with the deepest suspicion.”

Third, Kristol argued that “statesmen should, above all, have the ability to distinguish friends from enemies.” As Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke argue, moralism is deeply entrenched in the neoconservative foreign policy vision: “a belief deriving from religious conviction that the human condition is defined as a choice between good and evil and that the true measure of political character is to be found in the willingness by the former (themselves) to confront the latter” (Halper and Clarke, 2005: 11).

Finally, while most conservatives embraced the tautologous argument that the purpose of foreign policy should always be to support the national interest (Huntington, 1999-2000; Scruton, 2004), Kristol took the argument a step further, arguing that “the ‘national interest’ is not a geographical term... Large nations [like the United States] inevitably have ideological interests in addition to more material concerns.”

Kristol’s neoconservative theses typify what Samuel Huntington (1999-2000) characterized as “doctrinal conservatism.” In Huntington’s view, “classical conservatism” never had a program for fundamental change; indeed, as Welsh (2003: 174) reminds us, traditionally conservatives sought to manage change, seeking to render it “safe.” By contrast, doctrinal conservatism has a clear vision of change that they sought to realize. The neocons advocated a crusading foreign policy (McDougall, 1997), unabashedly seeking to use American power to promote the American dream abroad in what Illan Peleg (2009: 66) has called “imperial universalism.”

While it is easy to agree with Max Boot that stories of the neocon “ascendancy” during the administration of George W. Bush have been much exaggerated, and that “neocon” itself has become “an all-purpose term of abuse for anyone deemed to be hawkish” (Boot, 2004: 21), there can be little doubt that the neocons did indeed reshape the conservative agenda in America. As Will (2003) lamented, “Foreign policy conservatism has become colored by triumphalism and crusading zeal.” For Scruton (2004), the crusading neocon agenda was an abandonment of “true” conservatism: “For me, the true conservative approach in international relations is that adopted by the paleo-conservatives – namely to do whatever is required by the national interest, but to leave others to their fate.” Peleg has gone so far as to deny that neoconservative foreign policy was in any way *conservative*; on the contrary, in his view it was “one of the most revolutionary, nonconservative movements in the history of American foreign policy” (Peleg, 2009: xi).²

The idea that the crusading neocon agenda is not real conservatism flows naturally from an alternative way to determine what a conservative foreign policy might look like: examine traditional articulations of conservative thought, virtually all of which focus on politics *within* rather than politics *between* states, and then extrapolate from those to the foreign policy arena. For example, because Oakeshott’s 1956 essay, “On Being Conservative,” captured the conservative “disposition” (as he liked to call it³) so succinctly, his writings are often used as a template from which to extrapolate, even though it did not specifically discuss international affairs. Moreover, his eminently quotable and thus oft-quoted line – “in political activity, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel” (Oakeshott, 1962: 127) – can readily be applied to international politics as to domestic

² Jennifer M. Welsh, however, would disagree. In her discussion of “crusading conservatives” – those who seek to defend existing order against change (2003: 181–83) – she argues that the Bush administration’s “crusade” against global terrorism and Saddam Hussein was designed to uphold and defend the existing order, and thus “should therefore be seen as part of an older and deeper conservative practice.”

³ “To be conservative is to be disposed to think and behave in certain manners; it is to prefer certain kinds of conduct and certain conditions of human circumstances to others; it is to be disposed to make certain kinds of choices” (Oakeshott, 1962: 168).

politics. Both Adam Chapnick and Jennifer M. Welsh used this extrapolatory method to sketch the outlines of a generic conservative foreign policy.

Chapnick (2005) extrapolates from traditional conservative thought to argue that Canadian foreign policy has historically been “conservative,” even when Liberal governments have been in power. Noting the traditional conservative “disposition” – lacking confidence in humankind’s potential; fearful of the potentially destructive potential of human emotion, and therefore not as concerned about the involvement of the state; a belief in a hierarchy that must be stable; a tendency towards caution and order and a scepticism about radical change; and a belief in an objective moral order – “a clear difference between right and wrong in human behaviour” (Chapnick, 2005: 638). Using this template, Chapnick argues that Canadian foreign policy has historically been essentially conservative – though he notes that the growing efforts of the government in Ottawa to export “Canadian values” abroad – he was writing during Liberal government – “invite a shift towards a new type of conservatism that is more unCanadian than anything that has come before it” (Chapnick, 2005: 650).

For her part, Welsh draws on a variety of conservative thinkers from David Hume to Oakeshott and Roger Scruton. Although it was not her primary intent – the purpose of the article was to assess the role and impact of conservatism on International Relations theory – she provides us with a useable – and useful – heuristic template of a conservative foreign policy. In Welsh’s view, a conservative foreign policy is characterized by three core concepts: an attachment to a particular political *order* that is “assumed rather than accounted for,” and which needs to be entrenched, legitimized and given longevity; a *scepticism* about progressivist assumptions about humankind that is born of an unwillingness to contemplate the possibility of human perfectibility, and that gives rise to the embrace of a prudential politics that worries about the unintended consequences of change, particularly radical or rapid change; and, finally, a veneration of *tradition*, including established institutions and practices (Welsh, 2003: 169–74).

While Americans have been at the forefront of trying to conceptualize a conservative foreign policy, their reflections are, paradoxically, of limited utility in trying to arrive at a more generic definition of a conservative foreign policy. Since no other state has the capacity or power to actually pursue the kind of foreign policy advocated by either the neocons or the paleocons, much of the theorizing about a conservative foreign policy tends to be unselfconsciously Americo-centric and parochially self-referential. And because few outside the United States have attempted to replicate the kind of American debate over what a “conservative” foreign policy in their country might look like, the default definition in many discussions of what constitutes a conservative foreign policy outside the United States tends to be the neoconservative definition.

To what extent do the foreign policies of the conservative governments that held power in Australia from 1996 to 2007 and in Canada since 2006 approximate the conservative templates surveyed above? To a discussion of each country we now turn.

Australia: The Howard Coalition Government

John Howard and the Liberal-National Coalition came to power after the March 1996 elections, and held office until the November 2007 elections, when they were defeated by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) under Kevin Rudd – and Howard himself went down to defeat in his own electorate of Bennelong. In between, however, Howard led the Coalition to majority wins in the 1998, 2001 and 2004 elections.

There can be little doubt of John Howard’s conservatism. In a political culture where the conservative label has historically not worn well – for example, the conservative party in Australia is the Liberal Party – Howard has been an unabashed conservative, describing himself, for example, as “the most conservative leader the Liberal Party ever had” (Aly, 2010: 63). As treasurer in Malcolm Fraser’s Coalition government from 1977 to 1983, Howard favoured Thatcherite neoliberal fiscal policies. He embraced a conservative social agenda, equally unabashedly. As he put it in 2006, “I have often described myself [...] as somebody who is an economic liberal and a social conservative. I see no incompatibility between the two. [...] And from my own personal point of view I have always thought

that that mix best suits both the needs and the temper of contemporary Australian society” (quoted in Hollander, 2008: 97).

However, once in power, Howard proved to be “a bundle of contradictions,” as George Brandis, a Liberal senator from Queensland, put it (quoted in Wear, 2009: 349). On some issues, such as privatization, or the introduction of WorkChoices,⁴ Howard’s conservatism was clearly on display. Likewise, on the issue of the monarchy, he took what he called an “unashamedly Burkean view” that changes to Australia’s head of state should be resisted because an institution such as the constitution was not “a play-thing” (quoted in Irving, 2004: 95). But on a number of issues, Hollander argues, Howard’s “conservatism was far from complete and he eschewed other elements of conservative dogma” (Hollander, 2008: 98). Moreover, he was also a pragmatic prime minister, with an eye always on elections and electoral support. As a result, clear patterns were not always evident.

Brandis’s characterization might equally be applied to the Howard government’s foreign policy. On the one hand, can see some clear evidence of a number of the characteristics identified as constituting a conservative foreign policy. Michael Wesley has attested to the degree to which Howard’s “conservative cast” helped shape his approach to Australian relations with Asia (Wesley, 2007: 39–41). Likewise, As Hugh White has observed (2003), Howard’s approach was “inherently conservative”: he did not come to power with a *transformative* agenda, but rather a well-developed critique of foreign policy as it had been pursued under the ALP governments of Bob Hawke (1983–91) and Paul Keating (1991–96) that the Coalition wanted to *oppose*. During the election campaign, the Coalition had promised that rather than make Asia the sole focus of Australian foreign policy – as it claimed the Keating government had done – it would “re-balance” the relationships with key bilateral partners, and in particular would “reinvigorate” the security relationship with the United States, particularly the Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States, or ANZUS, signed in 1951. The Coalition also targeted the ALP’s approach to multilateral diplomacy, arguing that Australia should avoid “inflated expectations or an exaggerated perception of our likely influence which can be seen as meddlesome.” Generally, the Coalition argued that insufficient attention had been paid by the ALP to defending Australia’s national interests. Over the subsequent eleven years, the main elements of the Howard government’s foreign policy reflected this general critique.

First, if conservative foreign policy is marked by a strong emphasis on the national interest, we can see this characteristic emerge shortly after the Coalition took office. Almost immediately the Howard government published the first foreign policy white paper in Australian history. Not surprisingly, it was entitled *In the National Interest: Australia’s Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, and committed the government to engage in “the hard-headed pursuit of the interests which lie at the core of foreign and trade policy: the security of the Australian nation and the jobs and standard of living of the Australian people” (Australia, 1997: iii). A second theme was the importance of bilateral relationships rather than multilateralism as the cornerstone of Australian foreign policy. While multilateral approaches were not dismissed outright, the white paper asserted that bilateral relationships were described as the “basic building block” for advancing Australian national interests (Australia, 1997: chap. 4; also Goldsworthy, 2001; Nossal, 2006).

To these ends, Howard worked hard to push the bilateral: aligning Australia more explicitly with the United States in global affairs and reinvigorating the relationship with the United States, especially the ANZUS alliance (Kelton, 2008: 17–38). This involved overt Australian support for the role of the United States in the region, such as supporting the ballistic missile defence program, and more globally. It also involved the pursuit of a free trade agreement with the United States, a process that accelerated after the election of George W. Bush as president. Howard, who happened to be in Washington on 11 September 2001, immediately offered Australian support (DeBats et al., 2007): Australia symbolically invoked the security provisions of the ANZUS treaty, and the government in Canberra committed 1300 troops to the

⁴ This was the name given to a series of amendments to the Workplace Relations Act, 1996, that changed industrial relations across Australia.

US-led coalition that invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime, including Special Forces, naval vessels in the Persian Gulf, Hercules aircraft for strategic lift, and Boeing 707 air-to-air refuellers.

Australian support for the American-led “War on Terror” became even more pronounced after attacks by Islamist extremists were overtly directed at Australians, with the planned bombing on the Australian high commission in Singapore in late 2001 that was thwarted by security forces, and the successful bombings of nightclubs in Bali in October 2002, which killed over 200 people, including 88 Australians. The Howard government supported the United States-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 by contributing 2000 troops, including special forces, F-18 fighters and naval units to the coalition (O’Neil, 2003).

A second white paper on foreign policy, issued merely a month before the Iraq war, also stressed the national interest. *Advancing the National Interest* (Australia, 2003) stressed the importance of a hard-headed realist approach to the defence of national interests, including the measures to be taken to combat terrorism and efforts to negotiate a free trade agreement. And unlike the 1997 white paper, the 2003 white paper articulated an explicit connection between Australia’s economic relationship with the United States and its security/strategic relations with Washington. The free trade agreement was often framed in security terms. For example, Mark Vaile, Australia’s minister for trade, claimed that the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement was going to be “the commercial equivalent of the ANZUS treaty” (quoted in Capling, 2005: 53–4, 75).

The Howard government also sought to reorient Australia’s defence policy to assist in this bilateral push. In 2000, the government published a white paper on defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, that outlined an aggressive and comprehensive restructuring of the Australian Defence Force and a plan for multi-year guaranteed funding that enabled a substantial increase in the ability to use force in pursuit of policy objectives (Bloomfield and Nossal, 2007). Indicative of this strategic re-orientation was the articulation of a wide-ranging objectives that ranged from the most immediate – protecting Australia from an attack without having to rely on help from other states – to the broad goal of “supporting the international community to uphold global security.” In between were goals of a distinctly regional/neighbourhood nature, reflecting the reorientation of foreign policy to pay closer attention to stability in the approaches to Australia. However, the government made it clear that the forces would be structured for neighbourhood and regional operations only, not specifically structured for operations beyond the region (Australia, 2000). There was also a dramatic increase in defence spending military – approximately \$24 billion over 10 years that would see the size of the defence force grow from 51,000 to 54,000, with the idea that the ADF would be capable of deploying two brigades overseas simultaneously (Nossal, 2005).

While much of the emphasis of the Howard government’s foreign policy focussed on the bilateral, there was a concomitant reduction in Australia’s emphasis on the multilateral. Not only did the Coalition government change the multilateral “push into Asia” in favour of a more bilateral approach to the Asia-Pacific, but the Howard government had no hesitation in expressing opposition to multilateral efforts that he judged were not in Australian interests (McCraw, 2008: 472–74). Thus, for example, the Coalition government took what Shirley Scott describes as a “hard-headed pro-industry stand ... designed to protect Australian jobs” (Scott, 1997: 226) at the Kyoto negotiations, eventually deciding in 2002 that Australia would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

However, as McCraw noted in his examination of the degree to which Howard’s foreign policy was in the realist tradition, looking at a full range of policy decisions can reveal important deviations (McCraw, 2008: 477). Thus, while one can point to these particular foreign policy positions that accord with the characterizations of a conservative foreign policy, there are also a number of foreign policy decisions that might suggest alternative conclusions.

Consider, for example, the decision to join the “coalition of the willing” in 2003. On the one hand, Howard’s decision to commit Australian forces to the US-led invasion of Iraq could be seen as an example of a conservative decision. (Indeed, given the broader objectives of the neoconservatives in the Bush administration, one might be tempted to conclude that the Coalition decision was an example of the embrace of neoconservative policy.) Certainly the decision to go with US despite the absence of United

Nations Security Council authorization could be interpreted as conservative scepticism about multilateral organizations. One could even point to the manner in which the decision was justified by the prime minister. Just as Howard took an “unashamedly Burkean” view of the republican issue, we can see an equally Burkean disposition on display in March 2003. Knowing that public opinion was split on Australian participation in the invasion (on reading the polls, see Goot, 2003), Howard sought to ensure that public opposition to the war was taken not out on Australian troops, as it had been during Australia’s participation in the Vietnam war. Howard’s appeal for support for the troops was, however, framed in a way that echoed Burke’s 1774 speech to the electors of Bristol, a rare move among contemporary elected politicians. He began by acknowledging that “not all will agree with me,” but, he continued,

I ask them to understand this Government has taken a decision which it genuinely believes is in the medium and longer-term interests of this country. I say to people who disagree – have your beef with the Government, have your beef with me, do not have your beef with the men and women of the Australian Defence Force.... Let none of your rancour go in their direction, let it come, as it should in a great democracy, in the direction of those who have taken this decision (Howard, 2003).

In December 2008, long after the end of Australian involvement in Iraq, Howard was still maintaining that Iraq was “a classic example that from time to time if you believed something is right you have to go against public opinion” (quoted in McDougall and Edney, 2010: 214).

However, while it is possible to construct this decision as a conservative, a neoconservative, or a Burkean decision, it is also possible to analyze the Australian participation in the invasion of Iraq as being driven less by Howard’s conservative disposition, and much more by his careful and quite pragmatic calculus of Australian interests – just as the prime minister said. The linkage between core Australian interests – in particular its security dependence on the United States – was admitted explicitly in a series of statements throughout March 2003. When Howard sought to justify the decision to the House of Representatives, he said that “Our alliance with the United States is unapologetically a factor in the decision we have taken. The crucial, long term value of the United States alliance should always be a factor in any national security decision taken by Australia” (quoted in Kelton, 2008: 141). Given the widespread belief in official Canberra that going to war with the United States was of critical importance for maintaining the closeness of the alliance, it is not at all clear that had the ALP under a figure like Kim Beazley been in government, Australia would have stayed out of the conflict.⁵

Similar “deviations” from a conservative approach can be seen in other decisions. For example, although some conservatives are supposed to be sceptical of using foreign policy for values-promotion and especially for nation-building. Yet Australia took a leading role in interventions in East Timor (Cotton, 1999; Maley, 2000) and the Solomon Islands (McDougall, 2004), though there is little evidence that Howard’s policies in either intervention were driven by neoconservative enthusiasms for values-promotion. Likewise, the Coalition’s often-expressed scepticism about multilateralism (for example, see Downer, 2003) did not lead the Howard government to side with the United States when Washington opposed such multilateral initiatives such as the Canadian-led initiative to achieve a global ban on anti-personnel landmines or the initiative to create an International Criminal Court.

In short, over his eleven years in office, Howard moved to “reposition” and “rebalance” Australia strategically. But the nature of Australian foreign policy during the Howard era remains unclear. It is

⁵ Simon Crean, ALP leader in March 2003, broke the historical bipartisanship on Australian participation in every multilateral conflict that the US has been involved in since 1917 (both world wars, Korean War, Vietnam War, first Persian Gulf war, invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq) by criticizing Howard. But given Crean’s low popularity, he was unlikely to have been prime minister. It is widely believed that had Kim Beazley, who served as ALP leader both before Crean and after the resignation of Mark Latham, Crean’s successor, and is presently Australian ambassador to the United States, been prime minister in March 2003, he would have committed Australian troops to the US-led invasion.

possible to see the Coalition's approach to international affairs as "conservative." By the same time token, however, it would not be inappropriate to characterize it the way a former Australian diplomat, Tony Kevin, did – as John Howard's "foreign policy radicalism" (Kevin, 2004: 294).

Canada: The Harper Conservative Government

In January 2006, during the election campaign, the Liberal Party ran a series of attack ads aimed at Stephen Harper and the Conservatives. One of the ads quoted from an article run in the *Washington Times* the previous month. Over a grainy blurred image that comes into focus over the course of the ad to reveal a highly unflattering image of Harper's face, a female voice-over read the words that appeared on the screen:

From the *Washington Times*, Dec. 2, 2005: "Canada may elect the most pro-American leader in the Western world. Harper is pro-Iraq war, anti-Kyoto and socially conservative. Bush's new best friend is the poster boy for his ideal foreign leader. A Harper victory will put a smile on George W. Bush's face." Well, at least someone will be happy, eh?⁶

For francophone voters, a French-language ad contained even more reminders of Harper's positions. On a screen with the words *Pour* and *Contre*, a male voice-over says that if Harper becomes prime minister, there will be "des *pours* et des *contres*" (pros and cons); a female voice-over reads phrases as they appear and fade into the background: "*contre* l'accord de Kyoto; *pour* la guerre en Irak; *contre* le droit des femmes au libre-choix; *pour* la présence de l'armée dans toutes nos villes; *contre* les mariages entre conjoints de même sexe; *pour* le programme américain de bouclier antimissile; *contre* le bannissement des armes de poing."⁷ The ad concludes with an admonition to "Votez contre sur un retour en arrière" – vote against going backwards, or regressing (Liberal Party of Canada, 2006).

These ads sought to portray Harper in the minds of voters as a right-wing neoconservative, on the "wrong" side of a range of foreign and domestic policy issues, and linked to a president who was widely and deeply disliked in Canada. The portrayal of Harper in these ads was not historically inaccurate. Though he had worked for the Progressive Conservative party, traditionally the carrier of both conservatism and the "tory touch" in Canada (Horowitz, 1966: 156), he was no "radical tory" (Taylor, 1983). In fact Harper had abandoned the Progressive Conservative party. Harper was a founding member of the Reform Party, serving as its chief policy officer, and then served as a Reform MP from 1993 to 1997. But he was no great fan of that party either, and left politics to become vice-president (and then president) of the National Citizen's Coalition, a conservative lobbying group, from 1998 to 2002. In 2002, he was elected leader of the Canadian Alliance (and leader of the opposition), and in 2004 became leader of the Conservative Party of Canada that had been formed from the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative party. During these years, Harper had accumulated a long record of positions that were unambiguously ideologically on the right, *pace* Johnson (2005), whose portrait of Harper is suggests that he was more moderate from the outset, and *pace* Kirton, who argued that Harper had "fully absorbed the Progressive Conservative tradition" (2006a: 35).

Just as the French-language Liberal ad claimed, Harper was on the record as personally opposing spousal benefits for same-sex couples and same-sex marriage (but also on the record as voting at the 1994 Reform Party convention against the party taking a position on these matters). He was also on the record

⁶ Liberal Party of Canada, 2006; also Akin, 2006. The ad quoted from an article by Patrick Basham (2005), director of the Democracy Institute, a think tank based in Washington and London, and formerly with the Fraser Institute. It should be noted that Basham's article actually appeared on December 1, not December 2.

⁷ Against the Kyoto accord, in favour of the war in Iraq, against women's right-to-choose, in favour of deploying the army in all our cities, against same-sex marriage, in favour of the American ballistic missile defense system, against banning hand-guns.

as opposing the establishment of the Canadian Firearms Registry. The Liberal claim that Harper opposed the legal entrenchment of a woman's right to an abortion was technically correct, but a disingenuous stretch: what Harper said was that he would do nothing to change the legal vacuum created by the 1988 Supreme Court decision that rendered existing abortion law unconstitutional (CBC News, 2004a); what the Liberals did not say was that they, too, had done nothing to fill that vacuum in their thirteen years in power.

Harper had also expressed himself on a number of foreign policy issues. In March 2003, during the American-led invasion of Iraq, he had taken the initiative to write to the *Wall Street Journal* with the Canadian Alliance's foreign affairs critic, Stockwell Day, claiming that the Chrétien government's decision to remain outside the coalition of the willing was "a serious mistake." The Canadian Alliance, they wrote,

supports the American and British position because we share their concerns, their worries about the future if Iraq is left unattended to, and their fundamental vision of civilization and human values. Dismantling Iraq is necessary for the long-term security of the world, and for the collective interests of our key historic allies and therefore manifestly in the national interest of Canada (Harper and Day, 2003).

Likewise, after the Liberal government of Paul Martin had announced in February 2005 that Canada would not be participating in the ballistic missile defence system being put in place by the United States, Harper had clearly indicated that the Conservative party was in favour of participation, and promised that a Conservative government would hold a free vote in Parliament on the issue (Denholm Crosby, 2006: 164). On Kyoto, Harper clearly opposed Canadian participation in the Protocol. He claimed that he did not believe that the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien had any way to implement the targets which they had agreed to at Kyoto and called Canada's spending on Kyoto "another boondoggle" (CBC News, 2004b).

In short, the picture that the Liberals painted of Harper, particularly in foreign policy, was not inaccurate. However, Harper's previous stands on issues proved to be an inaccurate guide to how the Conservative government that took power in February 2006 actually governed.

In foreign policy, the Conservative government did not behave as its critics had anticipated (Kirton 2006b). While Harper had supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as being in Canada's national interest, he had backed away from that enthusiasm soon after the United States government demonstrated that it had no capacity to manage the occupation successfully. Certainly as prime minister Harper gave no indication of his earlier enthusiasms; his government was almost entirely silent on the civil war in Iraq. Certainly no additional assistance of any kind at all has been offered to the United States or Iraq – not even any rhetorical support. Likewise, once in power, Harper backed away from his promise to negotiate Canadian participation in the Ballistic Missile Defense System.

It is on the mission in Afghanistan that we see the sharpest departure from earlier policy stands that could be seen as shaped by conservative concerns for the national interest and national security. Harper began his term as prime minister a strong and enthusiastic supporter of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan: his first trip was to visit the troops in Kandahar, where they had arrived shortly before the Conservatives took office. Harper's speech to the troops in Kandahar revealed an admixture of justifications. He placed much emphasis on the national interest, arguing that Canadian security depended on ensuring that Afghanistan did not again become an "incubator" for terrorist attacks, reminding his audience of the Canadians who had died in the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and of the recent inclusion of Canada on the list of countries that al-Qaeda would seek to attack. He also argued that Canadian security was affected by the opium trade, which, he argued, "wreaks its own destruction on the streets of our country." But he also invoked other justifications for the mission: the importance of a country like Canada taking a leadership role in global politics, the importance of the humanitarian mission, and the importance of "standing up for Canadian values." The prime minister also

promised that Canada would remain in Afghanistan even if the going got tough, since “Canadians do not cut and run” (Harper 2006).

However, as it became clearer over the course of 2006 that public support for the mission was not responding to these justifications, the justifications of the government shifted. Mention of national interest justifications, such as terrorism, became briefer; by contrast, much more emphasis was laid on the humanitarian elements of the mission. And when shifting the justifications *still* did not move public opinion, and the situation in Afghanistan was not improving, Harper essentially gave up on the mission. In March 2008, he negotiated an termination date with the Liberal opposition, agreeing to withdraw Canadian troops from the mission, regardless of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. While Harper did not participate in the parliamentary debate in March 2008, leaving open the possibility that he would revisit the Afghanistan pull-out date later (Nossal, 2009), by the fall of 2008, he closed the door completely. On the first day of the general election campaign, he committed Canada to withdrawing in 2011, thus taking the war completely off the table.

Nor has he tried to change any minds on the mission: the last speech Harper gave on Afghanistan was in May 2009. Moreover, his government has not revisited the decision, even after President Barack Obama launched a “surge” of American troops and put a reinvigorated counter-insurgency strategy in place. Indeed, in April 2010, Harper’s office began to put about the idea that for at least two years the prime minister had been having “deep doubts” about the mission (e.g., Clark, 2010b). In short, with the Afghanistan mission essentially off the table, Harper seems happy simply to wait until 2011, claiming that the government is bound by the parliamentary resolution of March 2008.

On climate change, Harper also moved. In opposition, Harper was keenly aware that Canada’s commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emission to six per cent below 1990 levels was a number that Jean Chrétien had essentially pulled out of thin air at the Kyoto negotiations in 1997. He understood that given that Canada’s population is *structurally* designed through immigration policy to grow at a massive rate annually, no government of Canada is able to maintain greenhouse gas emissions at a steady state, much less reduce them, and certainly not to a figure of six per cent below 1990 levels (Simpson et al, 2007). Thus, between 1997 and 2006, when the Conservatives took office, Canada’s GHG levels steadily grew, even as the Chrétien government was ratifying the protocol in 2002. Harper was not hesitant to tell the truth about Canada’s GHG levels. But an important transformation occurred as he and his government discovered that truth-telling attracted high levels of domestic criticism from a public that took Liberal promises about Kyoto seriously. Rather than adopt the attitude of John Howard, who remained opposed to Kyoto until he himself went down to defeat, Harper instead decided to adopt the very kind of targeting that he argued could not be achieved. Indeed, the so-called 20/20 target – reducing Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions to 20 per cent below 2006 levels by 2020 (Baird, 2007) – will for purely structural reasons be as unachievable as the fanciful figure that Chrétien embraced in 1997.

There is one area of foreign policy, however, where we do see no change in Harper’s approach, but a change in Canadian policy after 2006: Canada’s policy towards Israel. While certain aspects of Canadian policy towards the Middle East remained constant, such as Canada’s long-standing commitment to a two-state solution to the conflict, the Harper government began to take decisions that diverged from the continuities of the past (Zahar, 2007; Martin, 2010). For example, the election of the Conservatives in Canada coincided with the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Legislative Council; Harper immediately moved to limit Canadian contacts with the Palestinian Authority. During the war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the Conservative government came down unequivocally on the Israeli side. Funding was cut to Canadian groups deemed to be too openly anti-Israel. More importantly, in February 2010, Peter Kent, Harper’s minister of state for foreign affairs, claimed in an interview that an attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada,” reflecting Harper’s statement in 2008 that

Our government believes that those who threaten Israel also threaten Canada, because, as the last world war showed, hate-fuelled bigotry against some is ultimately a threat to us all, and must be resisted wherever it may lurk... In this ongoing battle, Canada stands side-by-side with the State of Israel, our friend and ally in the democratic family of nations (Chase, 2010).

Only in one area of policy can we see an unambiguous example of an appeal to the Conservative Party's social-conservative base. In January 2010, the Harper government formally announced that as host of the G8 summit, it was planning to launch a global maternal health initiative (Harper, 2010). However, when it was revealed in March that the Canadian initiative explicitly excluded family planning and abortion services, the government was widely criticized, prompting Harper to abandon the family planning exclusion two days later. However, because the abortion exclusion lined the Conservative government up with Republicans in the United States, the Democratic Obama administration openly criticized the exclusion: at a meeting of G8 foreign ministers, Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, openly rejected the Harper government's position, claiming that "You cannot have maternal health without reproductive health... And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortion" (Clark, 2010). David Milliband, the British foreign secretary, also openly criticized the Canadian government for its stand on abortion. Harper tried to defend the government's position by claiming that "We want to make sure our funds are used to save the lives of women and children and are used on the many, many things that are available to us that frankly do not divide the Canadian population" (Fitzpatrick and Foot, 2010). However, the exclusion continued to be widely criticized in Canada as not only hypocritical,⁸ but also as "pandering" to the government's conservative base (Clark, 2010a).

In short, Harper came to power in 2006 with a record that suggested that his foreign policy would be marked by what could be argued was a more neoconservative foreign policy agenda: an emphasis on the national interest, an emphasis on military power and national security, a willingness to take a moralistic view of policy and a propensity to promote values. But, as in the case of Howard in Australia, by 2010, we see some, but not much, evidence of the kind of conservative that would have put a smile on George W. Bush's face.

Conclusion

In foreign policy, John Howard and Stephen Harper proved to be far more pragmatic and far less ideological than their critics had expected. Pragmatics, for example, drove the Canadian decision to allow BMD off the table after 2006: because Canada was already deeply locked into the BMD system as a result of a decision of the Martin government in August 2004 (for details, see Fergusson, 2005; Nossal, Roussel and Paquin, 2011: 30–31), there was no particular policy urgency to put the issue on the table once the Harper government had also taken NORAD itself off the table in 2006, when the Parliament agreed to make NORAD permanent and thus not subject to periodic parliamentary debate and approval. Likewise, pragmatics drove Howard's commitment to the invasion of Iraq: there was little evidence that he had bought into the Washington neocon vision of using American power to "remake" the Middle East; rather, he calculated that Australian interests would be better served by joining the coalition of the willing and receiving whatever "credit" in American eyes there might have been than by taking the Canadian route of refusing to join in a showy way (particularly given that while the prime minister was being cheered in the House of Commons for refusing to join the coalition, Canadian forces were in fact deeply involved in supporting that coalition).

In both countries, broader domestic political considerations always tempered whatever temptation there might have been to take a harder line. In Australia, Howard prided himself on not being "poll-driven," but he did not win three majorities in a row by ignoring the correlation of electoral forces, and, as McDougall and Edney (2010) demonstrate, in some cases public opinion may have prompted Howard in particular foreign policy directions. In Canada, it can be suggested that Harper's foreign policy *instincts* were commonly subordinated to his broader goal: to effect a major and longer-term reorientation in Canadian politics that involved both the rise of a "united right" and the collapse of the Liberal Party over

⁸ As the Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, put it, the government was "in the ridiculous position of failing to defend overseas the rights that Canadian women have here at home" (Fitzpatrick and Foot, 2010).

the course of the 1990s and early 2000s (Wells, 2006). Simpson and Laghi (2008) stress the incrementalism that appears to be deeply embedded in Harper's approach to politics. Behiels begins his assessment of Harper's prime ministership by reminding us of the prime minister's view of his broader political objectives, expressed on 17 September 2008:

My long-term goal is to make Conservatives the natural governing party of the country. And I'm a realist. You do that two ways. . . . One thing you do is you pull conservatives, to pull the party, to the centre of the political spectrum. But what you also have to do, if you're really serious about making transformations, is you have to pull the centre of the political spectrum toward conservatism (quoted in Behiels, 2010: 118).

As Tom Flanagan notes, in the campaign to propel Stephen Harper into a leadership position, "traditional Harper conservatism was refined to present a more moderate image" (Flanagan, 2007: 115). The same process of "refinement" can be seen to have occurred in a range of foreign policy areas examined here.

At the same time, we can see consistent evidence of traditional conservative views. We can see the same scepticism about multilateral solutions to the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. We can see the realism at work that would lead Howard to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq the moment that Bush declared that victory had been achieved in May 2003 (thus sparing Australian troops the disaster of the occupation) or Harper to hang tough on a withdrawal from Afghanistan. And we can see examples of both leaders to "do the right thing" even when the polls indicated it was unpopular simply because it was "the right thing to do." Howard's decision on Iraq is one example; Harper's consistent support for Israel is another.

The result is that in neither case can we see policy clearly and unambiguously reflecting both leaders' conservatism. Rather, there were in both cases a mixture of different factors at work. As Wear concluded, "Howard blended liberalism, conservatism, opportunism, populism and desire for power in a mix that kept coalition governments in office for more than a decade" (Wear, 2009: 442). A similar mix appears to be working in Canada – though in Harper's case the mix consists of conservatism, pragmatism, opportunism, partisanship and desire for power. But as in Australia, the mix may keep the Conservatives in office for more than a decade.

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