

## **Jack Granatstein: Harper's foreign policies have made Canada a world player**

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After two minority governments and ten months of majority rule, we can see the outlines of the Harper government's vision of the world. The military side of the picture is very easy to discern. Clearly, Prime Minister Harper sees the Canadian Forces (CF) as important to Canada and to his efforts to assure our allies, not least the United States, that Canada is a good and reliable partner once again — one that can be counted on to share in the dirty work. That is why Canada kept a thousand trainers in Afghanistan and did not pull out completely. That is why Canada sent fighter aircraft to bomb Gaddafi's Libya and continues to have a Royal Canadian Navy frigate operating in the Mediterranean. Canada playing its part matters to Harper — and to the White House and the Pentagon.

Peter MacKay may not be the most sure-footed minister in the Cabinet, nor the most beloved of his Prime Minister, but after Afghanistan and Libya he is popular with the troops, and that matters, too. While the CF will take a big hit as part of the government's spending reductions, the Department of National Defence will continue to spend at least \$20-billion a year; and the projected massive equipment purchases, though slowed by almost incomprehensible procurement delays, seem very likely to be continued. If MacKay were replaced today, his record as Defence minister would rank with the nation's best.

None of the CF's high public standing amounts to the militarization of Canada, despite faux cries of alarm from a few columnists and the opposition. Restoring the CF to capability was essential, and Harper rebuilt the military because it simply had to be done. Sending a servicewoman to a citizenship ceremony is optional, of course, but in no way harmful, and if hockey team owners want to salute the troops, who could complain other than dyed-in-the-wool pacifists in the opposition ranks?

Canada's foreign policy is also clear. U.S. power may be in decline, its leaders trapped in political gridlock, but the United States remains Ottawa's number one priority, as shown by the security partnership deal outlined in December. Exactly what will come of this deal will be determined by the results of the upcoming American elections. But there is no doubt that U.S. trade will remain vital to the Canadian economy, no matter how much the government tries to diversify. Free trade deals with the European Community and South Korea can never replace the U.S. market. The government has its priorities right.

Moreover, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade now has a leader. Lawrence Cannon was a popgun at best. Trusted by Harper, John Baird is vocal, vigorous and smart, pounding the Syrian regime with ever-tougher sanctions, visiting the victorious Libyan revolutionaries and making the rounds of conferences. Baird and Harper both are much less multilateralist than their predecessors, less willing to pretend the United Nations matters. It was Harper's mistake to try for a Security Council seat when it was clear Portugal had the European and African votes sewn up — an error, Baird says, that is not to be repeated. Showing up where it matters with a good record is worth more than empty posturing any day.

NATO is much more important to us than the UN, and it is in disarray: The Libyan success has not erased the Afghan debacle of allied caveats and shirking. The Alliance may yet be revived, but Ottawa will surely look to the Western hemisphere and Asia more than to a Europe in military and financial decline.

Above all, it is the economy that matters most in 2012 and likely into 2013 as well. The Finance minister and the Governor of the Bank of Canada will have more influence than Baird or MacKay on how Canada operates abroad — and at home. But Stephen Harper is in charge, and if his Canada no longer pretends to be a moral superpower, it is a principled, responsibly ready to play a credible security role in the world. Reality is always much better than pretense. It's not Lloyd Axworthy's foreign policy now.

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