

Sea change in foreign policy thinking puts Canada on world stage

By Bob Bergen

Canada matters.

That's right. Canada matters in the world now. That's going to take some getting used to.

But, look at the news lately.

The New York Times actually knows that Canadian Forces are slogging it out in Afghanistan.

The fact that Canadians are in Afghanistan was mentioned in the lead editorial of the *Times* international edition on Sunday July 23.

The newspaper argued that it would be a mistake for Washington to abandon Afghanistan now in the face of a resurgence of the Taliban just as Canadian and European NATO forces plan to take over security operations in Taliban strongholds in the south and east by the end of July where up to 22,000 Americans have recently been involved in a counterinsurgency war.

It is planned that up to 16,000 NATO troops will move into those areas by the end of the month, but they will still need the Americans for reconnaissance, supplies and transport.

In all of this, the world seems a bewildering place nowadays.

Russia is retreating from democracy; North Korea is toying with nuclear bombs and missiles that could reach North America; Africa is being devastated by war and AIDS; nuclear-armed Pakistan is a jihadis launching pad; India is still searching for terrorists who bombed trains in Mumbai earlier this month; Iraq is becoming a quagmire for the United States; and Iran is trying to develop nuclear bombs all the while supporting Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian Authority's Hamas in their attacks on Israel while Israel is fighting back.

And, that is just a one sentence summary.

Then, there is NATO's war against insurgents in Afghanistan where 2,300 Canadians are getting more deeply and ever more dangerously involved.

Those brave Canadians are making a difference in Afghanistan and are the reason Canada was recently recognized in *The New York Times*.

Now, Canada being mentioned in a newspaper editorial – even if it is the prestigious *Times* – is hardly the be-all and end-all of foreign policy considerations.

But, it is an indication of something much larger that is taking place as the result of meaningful foreign policy decisions being made by Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

At the recent G8 summit Harper both declared Canada an international "energy super power" and agreed to explore a \$1.5-billion Canadian-Russian joint venture to ship liquefied natural gas to North America through a Quebec port.

The Harper government clearly understands that in order to be recognized and listened to on the world stage, Canada must combine both economic policy and realistic military spending and difficult foreign policy decisions that enable the controlled application of armed force in the pursuit of national interests when diplomacy fails.

That is a lesson previous Liberal governments and others – married to the notions of human security, soft power and the myth that Canada is a nation of peacekeepers – would like to ignore.

With regard to the Middle East, Interim Liberal leader Bill Graham thinks that by condemning Hezbollah attacks against Israel as strongly as Prime Minister Harper did, the government compromised Canada's historical position as a neutral honest broker in the search for peace.

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton, meanwhile, thinks Canada should be lobbying for an immediate ceasefire and an international peacekeeping force in Lebanon and continues to do his best to link Harper and U.S. President George Bush at every opportunity he can and in the same sentence if possible.

Two thirds of Canadians support Israel's military action in Lebanon, but it's almost as if Graham and Layton can't make the link that a terrorist is a terrorist is a terrorist.

It doesn't matter if those launching missiles at Israel from Lebanon with the backing of Syria and Iran are called Hezbollah.

It doesn't matter if the insurgents in Afghanistan are called the Taliban.

Let's not sugarcoat this. They are all terrorists who are indiscriminate in their attacks on soldiers and civilians alike.

Afghanistan is the one case in this bewildering world where Canadian boots are on the ground and Canadian lives are being lost in ever increasing numbers in an attempt to halt the some of the madness unleashed on the world from Taliban-led Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda on Sept. 11, 2001.

Americans who matter know that.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke to Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay for 20 minutes, seeking Canada's perspective, prior to her trip to the Middle East to try to put an end to the misery spawned by the Israel/Lebanon crisis.

As a result of Prime Minister Harper's strong support for the stance that Hezbollah must be ousted from southern Lebanon, Foreign Minister MacKay was invited to Rome for high level talks on ways to end the Israel/Lebanon conflict.

Canada does matter. That's a refreshing thought.

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