

# Are Canadians still liberal internationalists? Foreign policy and public opinion in the Harper era

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## Abstract

Since coming into office in 2006, the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has rejected many of the symbols and practices of the liberal internationalist approach to foreign affairs that Canadian governments of all political stripes broadly embraced during the preceding six decades. As part of this change, the Harper government has also promoted a new narrative about Canada's history and foreign policy, which encourages Canadians to change how they think about their country and its role in the world. By examining recent opinion surveys, this article asks whether Canadian public attitudes on foreign policy have shifted away from liberal internationalism and toward the Harper government's narrative since 2006.

## Keywords

Canadian foreign policy, liberal internationalism, Stephen Harper, Canadian public opinion, Conservative Party of Canada, role theory

## Introduction

Since coming into office in 2006, the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has rejected many elements of the liberal internationalist consensus that underpinned Canadian foreign policy in the decades after the Second World War. This consensus included the conviction that working through international institutions generally served Canadian interests and values, that energetic multilateral diplomacy provided Canada with opportunities for international influence which it

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would have otherwise lacked, that strengthening rules and norms in all areas of international affairs was critical for a country in Canada's position of openness and vulnerability to global forces, and that promoting reconciliation and the peaceful settlement of disputes abroad was both a reflection of Canada's success as a multi-cultural society and a means of contributing to international security.

Although there are still fragments of liberal internationalism in Harper's foreign policy—including his party's attention to negotiating new trade agreements and its promotion of religious freedom and certain other rights—the Conservative government has clearly, if not ostentatiously, distanced itself from this broad approach to international affairs. Harper and his colleagues seem to regard the principles of liberal internationalism as more Liberal than liberal—that is, as a hallmark of the Liberal Party of Canada—even though they provided a largely non-partisan basis for foreign policy over the preceding 60 years. Indeed, the most enthusiastic and effective practitioner since Pearson was arguably a (Progressive) Conservative prime minister, Brian Mulroney, who reinvested in multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations (UN) and elsewhere, championed Canada's role in international peacekeeping, negotiated new global environmental accords and trade agreements, and cultivated close relationships with a broad array of foreign leaders.

Harper's Conservatives signalled a departure from this approach even before they came to power. Their campaign platform for the 2006 federal election asserted that previous Liberal governments had “compromised democratic principles to appease dictators.”<sup>1</sup> This language, a harbinger of what would become a new Conservative narrative about foreign policy, portrayed liberal internationalism not only as a failure, but also as morally flawed. Harper and his ministers have since presented a different reading of Canada's history and its role in the world, one that plays down the accomplishments of Canada as a multilateral entrepreneur and peacemaker, and instead highlights Canada's participation in wars and great moral struggles—including the War of 1812, the two world wars, and the Cold War. Previous governments, they have argued, lost sight of this older and truer tradition of moral steadfastness and martial valour. As we shall see, the Conservatives have sought to reinstate this older tradition, in part, by attempting to convince Canadians to discard the symbols and practices of liberal internationalism and to embrace, in their place, Harper's vision of Canada as a valiant fighter.

Is there any evidence that Canadian public attitudes have shifted away from liberal internationalism and toward the foreign policy values articulated by the Harper government? This article seeks to answer this question by examining recent public opinion surveys and focusing, in particular, on three indicators of change: (1) attitudes toward the UN, a proxy for public opinion toward multilateral institutions more generally, and also a particular target of Harper government criticism; (2) attitudes toward peacekeeping, historically the most prominent symbol of liberal internationalism; and (3) attitudes toward the Canadian military,

1. Conservative Party of Canada, “Stand up for Canada: Federal election platform 2006,” 44.

the centrepiece of Harper's narrative about Canada being, as he put it, a "courageous warrior."<sup>2</sup>

As we shall see, the results are intriguing. While there are signs of some attitudinal shifts during this period, a closer examination reveals that Canadians continue to perceive their country's foreign policy role through predominantly liberal internationalist lenses. Moreover, these findings apply equally to first-generation Canadians, who are sometimes said to have more Conservative policy views. Although some diaspora groups have strongly embraced certain Harper government policy positions, new Canadians generally appear to be just as liberal internationalist as the rest of the population in their attitudes toward foreign policy.

To explain these results, I draw upon role theory in international relations—a body of scholarship that examines "national roles," or deeply held assumptions about the kinds of functions that a given state is expected to perform in international affairs.<sup>3</sup> Such assumptions tend to be tenacious; they are not readily abandoned or changed.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian case seems to provide an illustration of this phenomenon, but it also poses something of a challenge to role theory, which has tended to focus on the assumptions of policymakers rather than those of the mass public. To date, Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo note, this literature has made "little use of polling data and other measures that would tap into whether the masses really do agree with the elites on a country's national roles."<sup>5</sup> This article, by contrast, uses polling data to expose an apparent divergence between the foreign policy roles articulated by Canadian government officials and those embraced by the general public: there have been fundamental changes in the substance and rhetoric of Canadian foreign policy under the Harper government, but we have yet to see a corresponding transformation in public attitudes about Canada's role in the world.

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. First, I review the Harper government's foreign policy behaviour, arguing that it has turned away from key elements of liberal internationalism. Second, I examine the government's foreign policy narrative, which calls into question core assumptions of liberal internationalism. Third, I investigate recent public opinion surveys that have probed Canadians' attitudes about foreign policy. Fourth, I examine the views of particular segments of the electorate, including first-generation immigrants. Finally, I use role theory to explain the apparent tenacity of liberal internationalism in Canadian public opinion.

2. Stephen Harper, "Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2011 convention speech," speech to the 2011 Conservative Party convention, 16 June 2011, <http://www.conservative.ca/?p=110>. Unless otherwise noted, all electronic documents referenced in this article were last consulted on 10 April 2014.
3. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull, eds., *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
4. Glenn Chafetz, Michael Spirtas, and Benjamin Frankel, "Introduction: Tracing the influence of identity on foreign policy," *Security Studies* 8, nos. 2–3 (1998): xii.
5. Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, "Contested roles and domestic politics: Reflections on role theory in foreign policy analysis and IR theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, no. 1 (January 2012): 7.

## The turn away from liberal internationalism

There are many definitions of liberal internationalism, but in this article I use Kim Richard Nossal's formulation.<sup>6</sup> He sets out five distinguishing features of the liberal internationalist approach to international affairs: (1) a premium on the idea of "taking responsibility for playing a constructive role in the management of conflicts"; (2) an emphasis on multilateral approaches to cooperation; (3) support for, and involvement with, international institutions; (4) a willingness "to use national resources for the system as a whole"; and (5) an emphasis on international law.<sup>7</sup>

To its proponents, liberal internationalism is a time-tested approach to promoting Canada's interests and values in foreign affairs. As an open trading nation, but one of middling size situated next to a much more powerful partner, Canada's multilateral entrepreneurialism has historically allowed it to gain a voice in international forums (some of which Canada had a hand in helping to create) and to use this influence to advance issues of importance to Canada. Active multilateral diplomacy did not prevent Ottawa from taking clear, strong stands on important issues of the day—from nuclear arms control to South African apartheid. Nor did it prevent Canada from maintaining close alliances with other Western nations, most notably through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). By placing an emphasis on multilateral diplomacy, international institutions and law, as well as on the management of conflicts and disputes, Canada helped reinforce a rules-based international system, which served its own interest in a more stable world order, while also reflecting its domestic experience of managing diversity and divisions at home through institutionalized politics.<sup>8</sup>

After reviewing the record of the Harper government, however, Nossal concludes that "one would be hard-pressed to argue that [liberal] internationalism has been a guiding idea in the foreign policy realm in Ottawa" since 2006.<sup>9</sup> *Globe and Mail* columnist John Ibbitson agrees, arguing that Harper's foreign policy has been, "in many respects, the polar opposite of everything that came before."<sup>10</sup> This shift has been especially evident in Canada's behaviour toward

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6. Kim Richard Nossal, "The Liberal past in the Conservative present: Internationalism in the Harper era," in Heather A. Smith and Claire Turenne Sjolander, eds., *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–35.

7. *Ibid.*, 23. This is one of several possible formulations of liberal internationalism, which is subject to many interpretations. See Heather A. Smith and Claire Turenne Sjolander, "Conversations without consensus: Internationalism under the Harper government," in Smith and Sjolander, eds., *Canada in the World*, xiii–xxvii.

8. Others have also pointed out that Canada often strengthened its bilateral diplomacy with key partners, including the US, by working effectively in multilateral forums and that effective bilateral diplomacy conversely also provided Canada with additional leverage in multilateral settings. See Paul Heinbecker, *Getting Back in the Game: A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2010).

9. Nossal, "The Liberal past in the Conservative present," 29.

10. John Ibbitson, "The Harper doctrine: A Conservative foreign policy revolution." Lecture delivered at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, Waterloo, ON, 29 January 2014,

multilateral institutions, including the UN, which is still the centrepiece of the global multilateral system. Although the Conservative government has continued to pay Canada's contributions to the UN and has championed certain issues at the world body, including measures to censure Iran and to promote maternal and child health, Harper and his colleagues have not hidden their lack of affection for the institution, especially since they failed to win a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2010. In the wake of that loss, the government recast the defeat as a kind of moral victory. It declared, on several occasions, that Canada would no longer seek to "go along to get along" with the "moral relativist crowd" at the UN.<sup>11</sup> These remarks conveyed a degree of disregard for the organization that contrasted sharply with the pronouncements of previous Canadian governments, which had sometimes criticized the world body, but rarely derided it.

Harper reinforced this message through his actions, including his decision not to address the UN General Assembly during its annual fall sessions, when national leaders gather in New York. It is unusual for a head of government to be in New York City at the time of the session and not to address the General Assembly. After the 2010 Security Council defeat, Harper did this not just once, but twice—gestures that even his supporters interpreted as a "snub" of the United Nations and an indication that Canada was "turning its back on the UN."<sup>12</sup> In 2012, Foreign Minister John Baird went further, announcing that Canadian diplomats would no longer involve themselves in discussions of the UN's internal workings. Canada was tired, he said, of the organization's "preoccupation with procedure and process" and would no longer pursue discussions of "how the UN arranges its affairs."<sup>13</sup> Yet, Baird neglected to note that there is little meaningful distinction between what the world body does and how it "arranges its affairs." As in other large organizations, determining *how* UN policy is implemented usually has implications for the content of the policy. He therefore seemed to be suggesting that Canada would be less involved in the substantive work of the organization. These comments and actions were particularly unusual coming from a country that had always associated itself with efforts to improve the organization, rather than withdrawing from such efforts and disparaging them—and the institution as a

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<http://www.cigionline.org/videos/harper-doctrine-conservative-foreign-policy-revolution>. See also John Ibbitson, "The big break: The Conservative transformation of Canada's foreign policy," *CIGI Papers*, no. 29 (April 2014).

11. For example, see John Baird's remarks to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference, 3 March 2013. Quoted in Mike Blanchfield, "You'll face 'consequences' from Canada if you take Israel to International Criminal Court: Baird to Palestinians," *National Post*, 6 March 2013, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/03/06/youll-face-consequences-from-canada-if-you-take-israel-to-international-criminal-court-baird-to-palestinians>.
12. Derek Burney and Fen Hampson, "No more Mr. Fixit at the UN," *iPolitics*, 1 October 2012, <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2012/10/01/burney-hampson-no-more-mr-fixit-at-the-un>.
13. Quoted in John Ibbitson, "Canada gives cold shoulder to the UN," *Globe and Mail*, 1 October 2012, <http://www.globeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-gives-cold-shoulder-to-the-un/article4581231>.

whole. In the words of one observer, Canada's attitude appeared to be one of "open contempt" toward the UN.<sup>14</sup>

Not all multilateral bodies fared as badly as the UN in the first 8 years of Prime Minister Harper's foreign policy, but many did. In 2013, for example, Canada announced that it would withdraw from the Convention to Combat Desertification, becoming the only country in the world to do so. Some observers wondered if Ottawa made this decision because the desertification body sought to minimize the environmental effects of global climate change, a subject of considerable political sensitivity for the Canadian government.<sup>15</sup> The Conservatives' public explanation for this decision, however, was that the institution was a useless "talkfest"—the same message they levelled at the UN as a whole.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this was part of a pattern of actions and rhetoric that revealed the Harper government's profound skepticism toward multilateral institutions more generally.

This skepticism was also visible in the Harper government's approach to international arms control. Rather than being a leader of multilateral efforts to stem international weapons proliferation, Canada became a follower—and a seemingly reluctant one, at that. One need only recall Ottawa's role in the negotiation of an international convention on anti-personnel landmines during the 1990s and contrast that episode with the Harper government's ambivalent position on the Arms Trade Treaty, which Canada, unlike most of its allies and partners, did not move quickly to ratify. In international negotiating forums on climate change, too, Canada came to be viewed as a "spoiler and saboteur."<sup>17</sup> There were even questions raised about Canada's commitment to NATO, a body that one might expect the Harper government to champion, given the Conservatives' emphasis on military prowess. Nevertheless, a senior NATO official expressed consternation in November 2013 that Canada seemed to be backing away from the alliance<sup>18</sup>—a view that this author also heard expressed in off-the-record interviews with diplomats and officials at NATO headquarters in Brussels the previous February. In Ottawa, journalists also reported that Harper had "sourred on NATO" and that his government had been "quietly cutting Canadian ties to the Brussels-based alliance" in part, they said, because the prime minister believed that Canada had carried a disproportionate burden for the alliance in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup>

14. Robin V. Sears, "John Baird's mission: Transforming Canada's role on the global stage," *Inside Policy: The Magazine of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute* (December 2013): 22.

15. Mike Blanchfield, "Harper defends pulling out of UN desert convention, says it is too bureaucratic," *Globe and Mail*, 28 March 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/harper-defends-pulling-out-of-un-desert-convention-says-it-is-too-bureaucratic/article10510768>.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Thomas Walkom, "At Rio +20, Canada furiously backpedals on environment," *Toronto Star*, 22 June 2012, A18.

18. Alexander Vershbow, deputy secretary-general of NATO, quoted in Jane Taber, "NATO official questioning Canada's commitment," *Globe and Mail*, 24 November 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/nato-officials-questioning-canadas-commitment/article15580910>.

19. John Ivison, "Crimea crisis forces rethink of defence; Harper may now have use for NATO, Arctic," *National Post*, 17 March 2014, A6; and Murray Brewster, "Defence experts call warm

An even starker example of this approach was Stephen Harper's decision to boycott the meeting of the Commonwealth in November 2013 (and his April 2014 decision to withhold funding from the organization's secretariat) in protest against the behaviour of the summit's host, Sri Lanka. By contrast, British prime minister David Cameron held views on the Sri Lanka government that were just as critical as Harper's, but he decided to attend the meeting. Cameron's foreign secretary, William Hague, explained Britain's participation in the conference as follows: "This is what diplomacy involves: talking to people whom you don't agree with on every issue and being ready to have tough conversations. We will have more impact doing these things than we could by leaving our chair empty."<sup>20</sup> Hague was, in effect, articulating a liberal internationalist argument about using multilateral diplomacy to exercise leverage, and using this argument implicitly to rebut Canada's boycott decision.

Together, these Canadian actions and statements appeared to expose the Harper government's distaste for—and general disengagement from—multilateral diplomacy and institutions. Of course, there were counter-examples: Canada launched a strategic dialogue with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, joined negotiations for a Trans-Pacific Partnership, and continued to channel much of its development assistance through multilateral aid organizations, among other things. The Harper government has not pursued an isolationist foreign policy, nor has it rescinded its membership in most of the international organizations to which it belongs. Under its watch, however, Canada has become markedly less interested and less involved in multilateral diplomacy and institutions. Indeed, as noted with regard to the UN, it has regularly scorned and caricatured the practices of multilateralism as a kind of "moral relativism" involving "worship at the altar of compromise and consensus."<sup>21</sup>

To understand how far the Harper government has departed from previous Canadian governments, consider the foreign policy of Brian Mulroney in the 1980s and early 1990s, when Canada pursued a very active multilateral agenda in the UN, NATO, and Commonwealth, and joined the Organization of American States. Mulroney believed strongly in supporting the work of the UN, in particular, and in later years he boasted that during his time in office "Canada... responded to every request for added assistance from the secretary general of the UN."<sup>22</sup> These actions, he argued, reflected his conviction that "a

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embrace of NATO by Harper gov't an about-face," Canadian Press, 2 April 2014, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/defence-experts-call-warm-embrace-of-nato-by-harper-gov-t-an-about-face-1.1757906>.

20. William Hague, "A boycott of Sri Lanka would be wrong," *The Telegraph*, 6 November 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/srilanka/10430540/William-Hague-a-boycott-of-Sri-Lanka-would-be-wrong.html>.
21. Quoted in Paul Koring, "Baird's stance on Iran shows that Ottawa has abandoned consensus building," *Globe and Mail*, 6 December 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/globe-politics-insider/bairds-stance-on-iran-shows-that-ottawa-has-abandoned-consensus-building/article15803036>.
22. Brian Mulroney, *Memoires: 1939–1993* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007), 331.

strong UN enhanced Canada's position in the world and greatly benefited the world community."<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the Harper government expressing similar enthusiasm for either the UN or multilateralism. Mulroney himself drew attention to this gap in October 2013, when Harper was still considering his boycott of the Commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka. At that time, using language quite similar to that of William Hague, Mulroney publicly remarked: "Working within the Commonwealth, we were able to score more heavily than sitting outside."<sup>24</sup> Joe Clark, who served as Mulroney's foreign minister for six-and-a-half years, went further, noting in his 2013 book that the Harper government's "disdain for multilateralism," including its sometimes "hostile" treatment of the UN, set it apart from both Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments of recent years.<sup>25</sup> These and other actions represented a fundamental departure from an approach to Canadian foreign policy that had been practised, Clark wrote, for "the six decades after the end of the Second World War."<sup>26</sup> John Ibbitson has reached a similar conclusion, saying that the Harper government's foreign policy is "so unlike what came before" that it should be called "the big break."<sup>27</sup>

## Harper's new narrative

In addition to adopting a new approach to international affairs, the Harper government has also presented a very different narrative of Canadian foreign policy. This narrative has both a positive and a negative version. The positive variant portrays Canada as a defender of "freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law" and as country that favours "action over words."<sup>28</sup> The negative version is encapsulated in the Harper government's often-repeated statement that Canada will not "go along to get along" in international affairs, meaning that it will never compromise its values or interests for the sake of obtaining international cooperation or approval.

The Conservatives have clearly used these declarations to differentiate themselves from previous governments. Harper's assertion in 2011 that Canada's goal was "*no longer* to please every dictator with a vote at the United Nations," for example, suggested that pleasing dictators had been the prevailing Canadian

23. *Ibid.*, 896.

24. Quoted in Andrea Hill, "Brian Mulroney speaks out against Harper's plan to boycott Commonwealth meeting," *National Post*, 21 October 2013, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/10/21/brian-mulroney-speaks-out-against-harpers-plan-to-boycott-commonwealth-meeting>.

25. Joe Clark, *How We Lead: Canada in a Century of Change* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2013), 29.

26. *Ibid.*, 25.

27. Ibbitson, "The big break."

28. See, for example, Harper's remarks in Ottawa on 17 May 2006, "Prime Minister stands by Canada's commitment to Afghanistan," <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2006/05/17/prime-minister-stands-canadas-commitment-afghanistan>.



practice before he took office.<sup>29</sup> In case there was any doubt about this, he then added: “I confess that I don’t know why past attempts to do so were ever thought to be in Canada’s national interest.”<sup>30</sup> That liberal internationalism had served for decades as a largely non-partisan basis for Canadian foreign policy did not diminish the fact that it was, in the view of the Conservatives, a misguided and morally dubious approach to international affairs—or, as Harper put it in his January 2014 speech to the Israeli Knesset, “weak and wrong.”<sup>31</sup>

Harper has suggested that there is another tradition of Canadian foreign policy that predated the rise of post-Second World War liberal internationalism, an older approach rooted in what he has described as quintessentially Canadian values of moral steadfastness and martial valour. In an interview with *Macleans* magazine in 2011, he traced a connection between these values and the development of the Canadian nation, arguing that the War of 1812 “essentially began to establish our sense of national identity” and was the “genesis of the geographically wide and culturally diverse nation we have today.”<sup>32</sup> The prime minister then explained that Canada has consistently been “on the right side of important conflicts”—including the Second World War and the Cold War—“that have shaped the world and that are largely responsible for moving the world in the overall positive direction in which it is moving.” There was a theory of history encapsulated in this short statement—one that emphasized an enduring, Manichean struggle between the forces of good and evil, and the transformative and redemptive potential of this struggle.<sup>33</sup> These “big conflicts,” he explained, have been “the real defining moments for the country and for the world.”<sup>34</sup>

He was partly right: there have been a number of “dominant ideas” about Canada’s international policy in different periods of the country’s history, such as imperialism and isolationism.<sup>35</sup> In recent decades, a military tradition—including memories of sacrifice and valour in war—has always coexisted with liberal internationalism. The single clearest example of this combination has been Canada’s long-standing commitment to the collective defence within NATO, which is simultaneously a multilateral institution and a military alliance. Canadians also tend to express pride in the part that Canada played in the First and Second

29. Quoted in Paul Wells, “Why Harper wants to take on the world,” *Macleans*, 15 July 2011 (emphasis added), <http://www.macleans.ca/authors/paul-wells/why-harper-wants-to-take-on-the-world>.

30. Ibid.

31. Stephen Harper, speech to the Israeli Knesset, 20 January 2014, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2014/01/20/pm-addresses-knesset-injerusalem>.

32. Quoted in Kenneth Whyte, “In conversation: Stephen Harper,” *Macleans*, 5 July 2011, <http://www.macleans.ca/general/how-he-sees-canadas-role-in-the-world-and-where-he-wants-to-take-the-country-2>.

33. Roland Paris, “What is Stephen Harper afraid of?” *OpenCanada.org*, 14 July 2011, <http://opencanada.org/features/what-is-stephen-harper-afraid-of>.

34. Quoted in Whyte, “In conversation.”

35. Kim Richard Nossal, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin, *International Policy and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2011), 117–153.

World Wars.<sup>36</sup> Yet, rather than acknowledging these multiple strands of Canadian foreign policy, Prime Minister Harper has seemed determined to displace and delegitimize liberal internationalism and to *replace* it with the “courageous warrior” tradition. Practices such as peacekeeping, conflict resolution, norm-building, and multilateral diplomacy have not featured in this narrative. Also missing is an appreciation that Canada’s capacity for judicious compromise and its penchant for rules, institutions, and procedures might be just as “Canadian”—and just as important to the country’s history and development—as moral righteousness and martial prowess.

When *Maclean’s* asked the prime minister if he believed that Canadians thought of their country as a “courageous warrior,” Harper replied: “Well, not recently.”<sup>37</sup> In this response, he seemed to acknowledge that his interpretation of Canadian history was not yet widely shared by the public. He also hinted at the narrative’s instrumental purpose: to change the way in which Canadians think about their country, its history, and its role in the world. This intent would be consistent with what we know about Harper’s view of the political functions of history, including his attention to what he has called the “[s]tories that bind us together as a people, and define us as a country.”<sup>38</sup> As one of his former aides reportedly said: “The prime minister is a big believer in the idea that nations are built by narratives—stories they tell themselves.”<sup>39</sup> The narrative of Canadian nation-building through military heroism and moral virtue is one such story, and the Harper government has communicated it through numerous channels, including the commemorations surrounding the anniversary of the War of 1812 (branded “The Fight for Canada”<sup>40</sup>), in the manual for people aspiring to become Canadian citizens (which the Conservatives rewrote along similar lines<sup>41</sup>) and in countless speeches and official ceremonies at home and abroad. There seems little doubt that the government has, through these and other means, attempted to change the stories Canadians “tell themselves.”

One of the best analyses of the prime minister’s use of Canadian history can be found in the February 2013 issue of *Policy Options*.<sup>42</sup> Georgian College’s Scott

36. In a *Globe and Mail* survey conducted in 2003, for example, 59 percent of respondents said they were proud of “Canada’s participation in key battles of World War I and World War II.” See “*Globe and Mail* Survey on the New Canada-2003,” Canadian Opinion Research Archive, <http://www.queensu.ca/cora>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Stephen Harper, “Canada’s new government announced support for local military museum,” Speech to the Calgary Military Museums Society in Calgary, Alberta, 25 May 2007, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2007/05/25/canadas-new-government-announces-support-local-military-museum-0>.

39. Unnamed former aide, quoted in Steven Chase, “Myth versus reality in Stephen Harper’s northern strategy,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 January 2014, [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north/myth-versus-reality-in-stephen-harpers-northern-strategy/article16397458](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north/myth-versus-reality-in-stephen-harpers-northern-strategy/article16397458).

40. See Claire Turenne Sjolander, “Through the looking glass: Canadian identity and the War of 1812,” *International Journal* 69, no. 2 (June 2014): 152–167.

41. Government of Canada, “Discover Canada: The rights and responsibilities of citizenship,” <http://www.cic.gc.ca/English/resources/publications/discover>. See also John Ivison, “A Tory guide to blue Canada,” *National Post*, 13 November 2009, A1.

42. Scott Staring, “Harper’s history,” *Policy Options* (February 2013): 42–48.

Staring explains how Harper's historical reconstruction had been assembled from "vague notions of a noble war-fighting past," the purpose of which has been nothing short of "rebranding" Canada, including its foreign policy. The "central casualty of the Conservatives' bid to return to an earlier foreign policy era," argues Staring, is Canada's postwar peacekeeping tradition: "For decades, Canadians have rightly or wrongly seen peacekeeping as an activity that provided their country with a defining role on the world stage, and the Harper government has been slowly, but determinedly, trying to cure Canadians of their fixation with blue helmets." Yet, these rebranding efforts have gone far beyond peacekeeping. The Harper government's vision of a strong, clear, principled foreign policy rooted in moral virtue and martial valour has been presented, in effect, as the antithesis of liberal internationalism. Promoting a new approach to international policy was apparently not enough; the old approach also had to be delegitimized—as weak, mealy-mouthed, unprincipled, pusillanimous, and mired in moral failure.

The brusqueness of the Harper government's rhetorical attacks on the liberal internationalist tradition should not, however, be mistaken for a lack of sophistication; on the contrary, the rhetoric appears to be part of a multi-pronged communications strategy. First, the Conservatives have presented a stylized version of the liberal internationalist approach to diplomacy, caricaturing it as a feckless quest to make Canada an "honest broker" in world affairs—a desultory image of a Canada with no guiding principles and no will to pursue its interests. Second, they have contrasted this image with another caricature, this one a positive depiction of the Harper government's "principled and strong" foreign policy. Third, they have promulgated a rendition of patriotic history that purports to establish a connection between the new policy and the more genuine traditions of Canadian foreign policy—indeed, the essential qualities of the Canadian nation and people. These qualities, they suggest, had been forgotten by Canadian governments (and presumably also by the Canadian public) for the better part of a half-century. It is only under the Harper Conservatives that they have been retrieved and restored to their rightful place.

Through this three-step rhetorical manoeuvre, the Conservatives have effectively turned liberal internationalism on its head. Consider, for example, how John Baird integrated all of these elements at a 2012 event, where he told an audience: "[A]fter the Second World War, some decision makers lost sight of our proud tradition to do what is right and just. Some decided it would be better to paint Canada as a so-called honest broker. I call it being afraid to take a clear position."<sup>43</sup> With these few words, Baird established the historical, ethical, and patriotic bases of the new policy—and the fundamental illegitimacy of the old one. This blending of historical revisionism and political campaigning, with its seamless shifts from past to present, has the effect of casting liberal internationalism as vaguely un-Canadian. It has also allowed the Conservatives to portray their own sweeping changes to foreign

43. John Baird, "Address by Minister Baird at Religious Liberty Dinner," Washington, DC, 24 May 2012, <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/speeches-discours/2012/05/24a.aspx>.

policy—including the repudiation of the liberal internationalist tradition—as the *opposite* of radical: namely, as the return to “real” Canadian values.

In making such arguments, the Conservatives have been aided by sympathetic commentators in the media and academe. The columnist Conrad Black, for instance, has echoed Harper’s language in praising the prime minister for returning morality to the core of Canadian foreign policy. Canada “often has taken principled positions and made sacrifices,” Black wrote. “[This] was in fact what Canada did in both World Wars.”<sup>44</sup> He has also echoed the tone and substance of the government’s critique of liberal internationalism: “We have finally got beyond the self-righteous fairy tales about peace-keeping and ‘soft power.’”<sup>45</sup> Two distinguished Canadian academics, Fen Osler Hampson of Carleton University and Janice Stein of the University of Toronto, have made similar comments. “The notion advanced by some that Canada’s position as an ‘honest broker’ is now deeply compromised is a partisan fiction,” wrote Hampson. “We never were and never will be.”<sup>46</sup> Stein put it this way: “A nostalgia for some romantic view of Canada as a peace-maker is misplaced. It describes a very brief period in the fifties and sixties.”<sup>47</sup> It was, in other words, little more than a mirage—a fleeting and evanescent moment in Canadian history.

Indeed, these arguments suggest that the liberal internationalist era from the end of the Second World War to the election of the Harper Conservatives—a period during which Canadian governments, regardless of their political stripe, more or less continuously practised a foreign policy that emphasized energetic multilateral diplomacy in order to advance Canadian interests and address transnational problems—was either a period of misguided amorality in Canadian foreign policy, or an illusion that never really existed. Either way, such arguments serve an important function: they pre-emptively discredit criticism that the Harper government has departed from the liberal internationalist tradition. By definition, anyone who offers such a criticism must be a naïf, a partisan, a moral weakling, or a nostalgic fantasist—or perhaps all of these things.

In spite of such efforts to neutralize criticism of the Harper government’s approach to international affairs, there is now a widespread view among scholars and journalists that the Conservatives have, indeed, sought to rebrand the country’s foreign policy—not only by rejecting liberal internationalism, but also by caricaturing and disparaging it.<sup>48</sup> Some commentators take this observation

44. Conrad Black, “A great moment for Canada,” *National Post*, 25 January 2014, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2014/01/25/conrad-black-on-harper-in-israel-a-great-moment-for-canada>.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Quoted in Mike Blanchfield and Lee-Anne Goodman, “Harper’s Israel, Jordan visit more likely to resonate at home than Middle East,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 January 2014, <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/Harpers+Israel+Jordan+visit+more+likely+resonate+home+than/9430169/story.html>.

47. Interview on “Power and Politics,” CBC News Network, 19 December 2013.

48. For example: Nossal, “The Liberal past”; Tom Keating, “The transition in Canadian foreign policy through an English School lens,” *International Journal* 69, no. 2 (June 2014): 168–182; John Ibbitson, “How Harper transformed Canada’s foreign policy,” *Globe and Mail*, 31

further. Noah Richler, for example, contends that the Harper government has pursued a “full-scale eradication of the country’s foundation myths.”<sup>49</sup> In *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety*, Ian McKay and Jamie Swift also contend that the Conservatives have conducted a campaign of “intensive indoctrination” which, if successful, “could change the country beyond recognition.”<sup>50</sup> Phrases such as “full-scale eradication” and “intensive indoctrination” are overstated, but these authors are onto something. The words and deeds of the Conservative government indicate that Prime Minister Harper and his colleagues have sought to persuade Canadians to embrace a very different narrative about their country’s history and role in the world.

### Impact on Canadian public opinion

To what extent, if at all, has the Harper government succeeded in shifting Canadians’ attitudes about foreign policy? Some analysts suggest that these efforts are already producing discernible effects. Richler, for example, contends that the Conservatives have been “able to effect the transformation” in the country’s “foundation myths” and in “the public’s perception of Canada’s role in the world.”<sup>51</sup> But is there any evidence to support this claim?

Answering this question is a tricky task. For starters, public opinion measures must be treated with caution: leading questions, unrepresentative samples, and other methodological flaws can have profoundly distorting effects on the results of individual surveys. Furthermore, even if we find evidence of attitudinal change, the question of whether the Harper government’s actions or language were responsible for such change is a different matter. The most we can hope to find in the polling data is evidence of attitudinal shifts that *correlate* with the Harper government’s apparent efforts to shift public opinion but were not necessarily *caused* by these efforts.

Bearing these provisos in mind, what would count as evidence that public attitudes had shifted away from liberal international and toward the Harper government’s competing narrative? Below, I focus on three indicators. The first is public support for the UN. As I have noted, support for and active engagement in this organization was central to the liberal internationalist approach to Canadian foreign policy. The world body is widely viewed as a cornerstone of the global multilateral architecture, and it has been a target of considerable Conservative government criticism. For these reasons, the UN seems to be a reasonable proxy

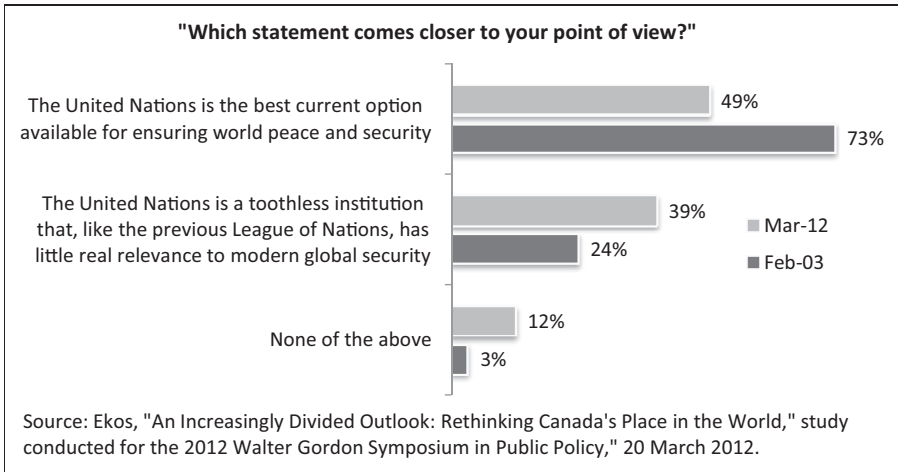
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January 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/how-harper-transformed-canadas-foreign-policy/article16626348>; and Jeremy Kinsman, “A betrayal of Canada’s multilateral tradition,” *National Post*, 17 January 2014, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2014/01/17/jeremy-kinsman-a-betrayal-of-canadas-multilateral-tradition>.

49. Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 2012), 45.

50. Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012), 280 and 297.

51. Richer, *What We Talk About*, 42.



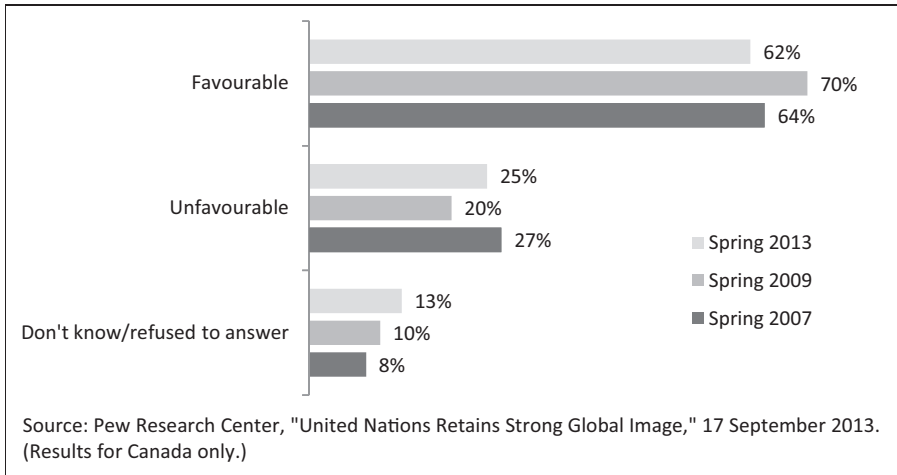
**Figure 1.** Public attitudes towards the UN (Ekos).

for attitudes toward multilateralism. The second indicator is public support for peacekeeping, which after 1956 became the most prominent manifestation and symbol of Canadian liberal internationalism. Although Canada's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations began to decline many years before Harper became prime minister,<sup>52</sup> peacekeeping has historically combined many elements of liberal internationalism, including the commitment to multilateral diplomacy and support for international organizations, the defence of international law and norms, and the desire to help resolve disputes. The third indicator is public perceptions of the Canadian military—specifically, its purposes and place in Canada's foreign policy. Is there any evidence that Canadians have come to view their country as, in Harper's words, a "courageous warrior"?

We begin, then, with attitudes toward the UN. Has public support for the world body declined during Harper's tenure in office? At first glance, the answer appears to be yes. An Ekos poll conducted in March 2012 asked respondents which of the following statements came closest to their point of view: "the United Nations is the best current option available for ensuring world peace and security" or "the United Nations is a toothless institution that, like the previous League of Nations, has little real relevance to modern global security." Forty-nine percent chose the first statement, a large number, but down from 73 percent in 2003, which suggests a significant weakening in public confidence in the world body (see Figure 1).

Other polls, however, point to very different conclusions. For example, the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, which was conducted in 2007, 2009, and again in 2013, found that Canadian attitudes toward the UN have remained relatively constant and very positive during this period (see Figure 2). In 2007,

52. See below for details.



**Figure 2.** Public attitudes towards the UN (Pew).

64 percent of Canadian respondents indicated that they had either a “very favourable” or “somewhat favourable” opinion of the UN. In 2013, the figure was still 62 percent. Taking the margin of error into account, this effectively means no change over time.

One difficulty in comparing these two surveys is the fact that they cover different time periods. The second iteration of the Ekos poll, for example, took place in March 2012 when the dominant news about the UN was its paralysis in the face of mounting violence in Syria. Had the same question been asked a year earlier, in March 2011, the results might have been very different: In that month, the Security Council passed (with no dissenting votes) a resolution authorizing international military action to “protect civilians and civilian-populated areas” in Libya (an operation to which Canada contributed naval and air forces), which might have made the UN appear considerably less “toothless” to survey respondents. A more fundamental problem is that the Ekos poll was first conducted in 2003, whereas Harper came into office only in 2006, leaving open the question of whether some attitudinal change may have preceded the arrival of the Conservative government. By contrast, the first iteration of the Pew survey took place in 2007, shortly after the 2006 election, and it suggests that Canadian public support for the UN remained strong and relatively stable from that year until 2013, or for most of the time Harper has been prime minister.

The paucity of time-series data on Canadian attitudes toward the UN makes further clarification difficult. Canadians have been asked for their views on the world body on occasion, but most questions have not been repeated in subsequent polls, complicating the task of assessing attitudinal change over time. In December 2003, for example, a Globescan survey asked Canadians about how much trust they had in the UN. Some 77 percent responded by saying that they had either

“a lot of trust” or “some trust”—an apparently high number—but this question does not appear to have been asked since, so comparison with the Harper era is not possible.<sup>53</sup> Other polls have been repeated, but not during the Harper years. For instance, Environics asked Canadians in 1977, 1980, and again in 2003 if they believed that the UN contributed “a great deal to world peace.” Of respondents, 74 percent agreed this statement in 1977, 69 percent in 1980, and 74 percent in 2003.<sup>54</sup> These results suggest that Canadian public views of the organization were positive and relatively stable, but unfortunately they tell us nothing about the years during which the Harper government was in power. The BBC has also sponsored an annual global poll since 2005, whose first waves asked people in different countries if the UN’s influence was “mainly positive” or “mainly negative.” Although Canadians expressed quite favourable views (in 2005, 65 percent said the UN’s influence was mainly positive), the question was dropped from the survey after 2007, once again making it difficult to evaluate attitudinal changes during the Harper years.<sup>55</sup> In the absence of additional data, the Pew poll (in Figure 2) comes closest to providing an answer—and it suggests that Canadians’ views of the UN have remained very positive and relatively stable.

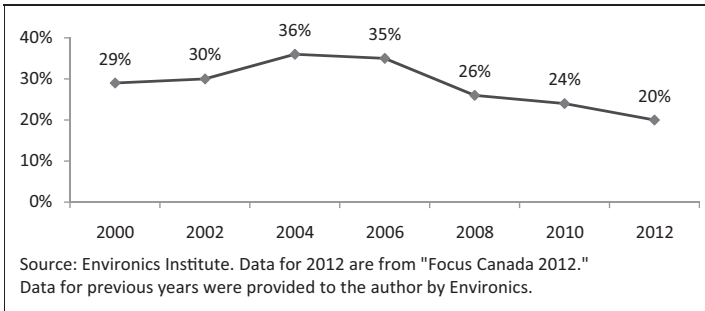
We turn next to peacekeeping. At first glance, there are indications that public support for this role, too, has eroded in recent years. A 2006 Environics poll asked respondents to identify Canada’s “most positive contribution to the world”; 35 percent cited peacekeeping. When the poll was repeated in 2012, however, only 20 percent named peacekeeping—a sharp decline (see Figure 3). Expressed differently, over the first 6 years of the Harper government, 15 percent of Canadians ceased thinking of peacekeeping as Canada’s most positive contribution to the world. However, we must be careful when interpreting these results. The poll asked what the most positive contribution *is*—not what it *has* been or *should* be. As a statement of fact, peacekeeping is now a decidedly less important activity in Canadian foreign policy than it was in the past. During the Cold War, Canada was the leading troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, a place it continued to hold in the early 1990s, when over 3200 Canadian troops served on UN operations (see Figure 4). That number fell below 1000 in 1996. One year later it was less than 500, falling below 25 in 2006. Given this reality, one would expect a declining number of Canadians to identify peacekeeping as their country’s most positive contribution to the world. Yet, the 2012 poll results were striking because

53. Globescan, “19 Nation Poll on Global Issues,” undated document, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jun03/GlobalIss\\_Jun04\\_quaire.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jun03/GlobalIss_Jun04_quaire.pdf).

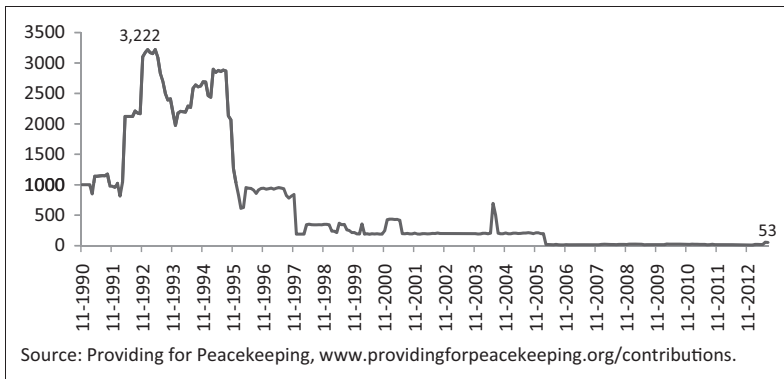
54. These percentages represent the combined number of respondents who “strongly agreed” and “agreed” with the statement. Environics, “Focus Canada 1977,” [http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC774\\_V119](http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC774_V119); Environics, “Focus Canada 1980,” [http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC801\\_V21](http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC801_V21); and Environics, “Attitudes towards Internationalism and Federalism 2003,” [http://odesi2.scholarsportal.info/webview/index.jsp?object=http://142.150.190.128:80/obj/fVariable/FC-31\\_V12](http://odesi2.scholarsportal.info/webview/index.jsp?object=http://142.150.190.128:80/obj/fVariable/FC-31_V12).

55. “BBC World Service poll: Evaluations of global institutions and economic conditions, questionnaire and methodology,” undated document, [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan06/GlobalPlayers\\_Jan06\\_quaire.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan06/GlobalPlayers_Jan06_quaire.pdf).





**Figure 3.** Percentage of Canadians who say that ‘peacekeeping’ is Canada’s most positive contribution to the world.

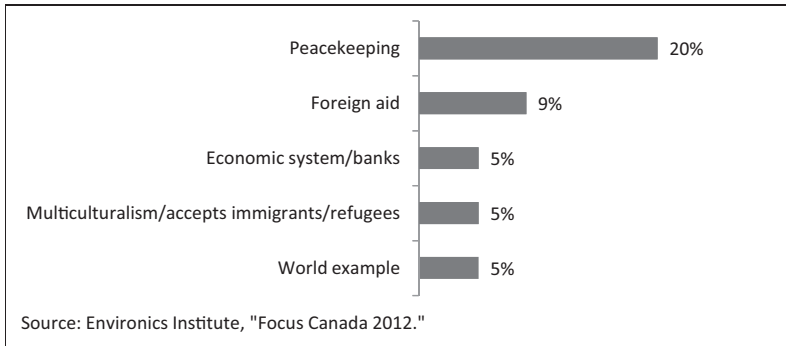


**Figure 4.** Number of Canadian troops serving on UN peacekeeping missions.

peacekeeping continued to be the most common response to this question—and by a wide margin (see Figure 5).

Consider the context: not only had two decades passed since Canada had made its last major troop contribution to UN peacekeeping, but in the preceding decade the most visible activity of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) had been a counter-insurgency combat mission in Afghanistan, an operation that most Canadians regarded as a “war mission,” not a “peace mission.”<sup>56</sup> As noted, there was also a steady stream of public statements from government officials lauding the war-fighting role of the Canadian military in this period, along with repeated assertions by private commentators that the “big myth” of Canada as a peacekeeper had

56. In a poll conducted by AngusReid in 2007, 57 percent of Canadians described the Afghanistan operation as a “war mission” versus 31 percent who characterized it as a “peace mission.” AngusReid, “Canadians Grow Impatient with Afghan Mission,” 25 April 2007, <http://www.angusreidglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/archived-pdf/2007.04.25%20Afghanistan%20Press%20Release.pdf>.



**Figure 5.** Canada's most positive contribution to the world: top responses in 2012.

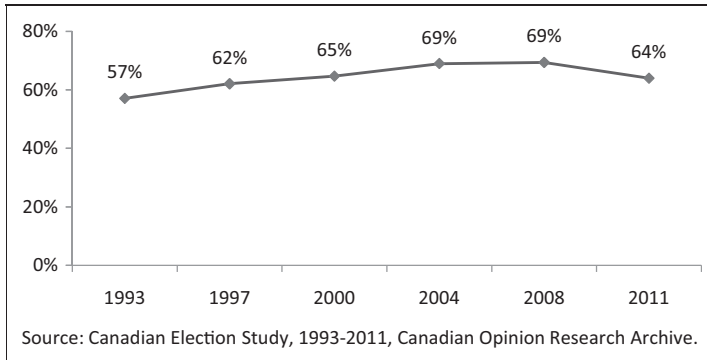
finally been put to rest.<sup>57</sup> For these reasons, some observers expected the experience of the Afghan war to “tear down the dated poster of Canada as the world’s peacekeeper.”<sup>58</sup> Yet, in spite of this, Canadians continued to identify peacekeeping as Canada’s most positive international role, far ahead of foreign aid, the next-most-cited international contribution. In short, while the public’s attachment to peacekeeping appeared to decline from 2006 to 2012, a closer examination yields a more complex story, including indications that this attachment has remained surprisingly strong under the circumstances.

The enduring strength of this attachment is also visible in the Canadian Election Survey, conducted at each federal election, which has asked respondents if “Canada should participate in peacekeeping even if it puts the lives of Canadian soldiers at risk.” If the public’s predilection for peacekeeping were merely a casual top-of-mind association, rather than an attachment (which implies some affective connection or underlying conviction), we might not expect expressions of willingness to pay high costs for peacekeeping. Yet, a large majority of survey respondents in 2011 said that Canada should participate in peacekeeping even if it means risking soldiers’ lives (see Figure 6). Although there has been a modest decline in the percentage of Canadians responding positively to this question since the Harper government came into office, the more arresting fact is that nearly two-thirds of participants continued to believe that Canada’s participating in peacekeeping warranted such risks.

The third indicator—Canadians’ attitudes toward the role of the military—reinforces these conclusions. For many years, the Department of National Defence (DND) has commissioned annual tracking surveys and focus groups to gauge perceptions of the CAF, among other things. As in the previous examples, a quick glance at the DND-commissioned surveys might suggest that the Harper

57. For example, see Lewis MacKenzie, “Canada’s army—post-peacekeeping,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 12, no. 1 (fall 2009): 3.

58. James Travers, “A military at war with peacekeeping,” *Toronto Star*, 24 February 2007, [http://www.thestar.com/opinion/columnists/2007/02/24/a\\_military\\_at\\_war\\_with\\_peacekeeping.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/columnists/2007/02/24/a_military_at_war_with_peacekeeping.html).



**Figure 6.** Percentage of Canadians who say that Canada should participate in peacekeeping even if it puts the lives of soldiers at risk.

government's efforts to recast the CAF as a symbol of Canada as a "courageous warrior" may have worked. Between 2008 and 2012, the proportion of respondents describing the military as a "source of pride" increased from 71 percent to 82 percent.<sup>59</sup> The Afghanistan mission, in particular, offered an opportunity to boost public support for the forces and to reassert their war-fighting role, a point that Chief of the Defence Staff Rick Hiller made clearly in 2005: "We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."<sup>60</sup>

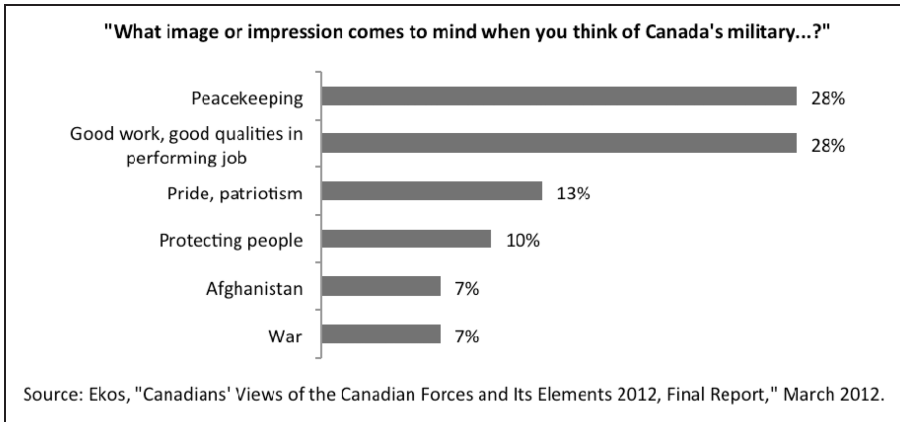
Greater pride in the military, however, did not necessarily translate into heightened support for militarism, or the celebration of the armed forces as a fighting organization. As it happens, respondents to one survey were asked to identify the "image or impression" that came to mind when they thought about Canada's armed forces.<sup>61</sup> This was an open-ended question: participants were not provided with a list of options or sample responses to prompt their reply, so their responses came from them alone. In 2012, the top answer to this question was "peacekeepers," cited by 28 percent of respondents, with considerably fewer respondents mentioning "Afghanistan" or "war" (see Figure 7). Thus, while Canadian pride in the military had evidently increased, the target of this pride was an organization that Canadians, for better or worse, still tended to associate with a non-combat role—contrary to claims that the Afghanistan experience had demolished the myth of Canada as a peacekeeping nation.

Several other polls and focus groups have arrived at similar findings. For example, DND commissioned a survey in March 2013 and asked Canadians what they believed to be the most important roles and responsibilities of the CAF. According

59. Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, "Final report: Views of the Canadian Forces, 2012 tracking study," prepared for the Department of National Defence (April 2012), 18.

60. Quoted in *The Economist*, "Canada's military: Hockey sticks and helicopters," 24 July 2008, <http://www.economist.com/node/11791604>.

61. Ekos, "Canadians' views of the Canadian Forces and its elements—2012: Final report," submitted to the Department of National Defence (March 2012), 11.



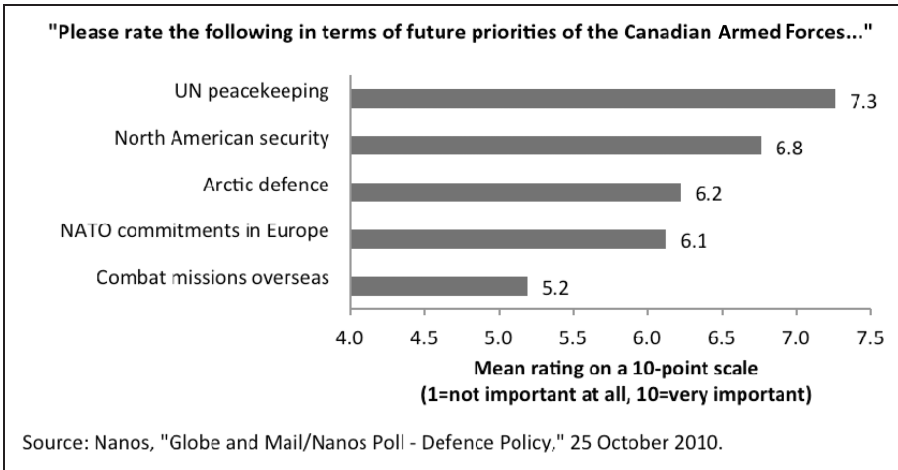
**Figure 7.** Public impressions of the Canadian Armed Forces in 2012.

to the firm that conducted the survey and wrote the summary report, two themes stood out in the discussion: first, "Canada's role as a peacekeeper in the international domain" and, second, the task of "protecting Canadians and Canada's sovereignty."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, respondents to a Nanos poll in October 2010 rated several possible "future priorities" for the CAF on a 10-point scale, with 10 indicating high importance and 1 signifying low importance (see Figure 8). The highest-rated priority in this poll was "UN peacekeeping," whereas "combat missions by Canadian troops overseas" received the lowest rating. Once again, from the perspective of the Canadian public, the role of the CAF as a fighting organization appeared to be secondary to its non-combat functions.

Broadly speaking, Canadians continue to conceive of international relations in predominantly non-military terms. An Ekos poll in 2012 asked respondents to choose the phrase that best described Canada's foreign policy: Is Canada a "more diplomatic peace-maker" or a "more muscular peace-maker"? (see Figure 9). Almost three times more people chose "diplomatic" than "muscular"—not what one would expect if the public was broadly concurring with the Harper government's emphasis on Canada as a "courageous warrior." Indeed, the government's effort to portray the War of 1812 as "The Fight for Canada" on the war's bicentennial left many Canadians unmoved: In another Nanos survey conducted in January 2013 immediately after the year-long \$30 million publicity campaign, only one in three Canadians said that the campaign gave them "a more positive sense of patriotism."<sup>63</sup> By large margins, respondents indicated that they

62. Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, "Views of the Canadian Armed Forces, 2013 tracking study: Qualitative report," prepared for the Department of National Defence (March 2013), 5.

63. Nanos poll for the Institute for Research on Public Policy, conducted on 18–19 January 2013. Results reported in Bruce Wallace, "National pride in more than war," *Policy Options* (February 2013), <http://archive.irpp.org/po/archive/feb13/wallace.pdf>.



**Figure 8.** Public views on the future priorities of the Canadian Armed Forces.

would have preferred that Ottawa promote the anniversary of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* or women's suffrage instead of the War of 1812.

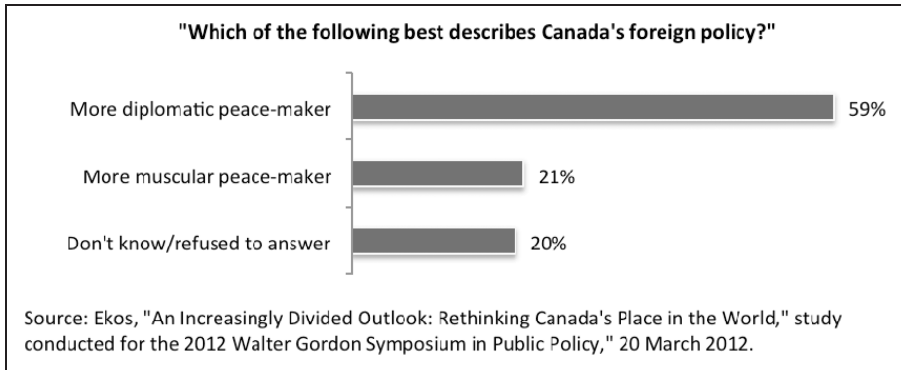
Each of these polls offers a limited glimpse into Canadian public opinion on these subjects. Taken together, however, a larger picture begins to emerge—and it indicates considerable continuity in public attitudes. The Harper government's foreign policy narrative does not appear to have prompted a major shift in Canadians' views about the UN, peacekeeping, or the role of the military. Although survey evidence is mixed and fragmentary, it suggests that the Canadian public remains largely attached to liberal internationalist values.

### Another hypothesis: "Voter slices"

Thus far I have described Canadian public opinion in the aggregate, based partly on the presumption that the Harper government has been seeking to change Canadians' attitudes about foreign policy and Canada's role in the world. On the other hand, it is possible that the prime minister's aims have been more limited and targeted, and that he has used foreign policy as a means of mobilizing support from specific segments of the Canadian electorate.<sup>64</sup> According to this argument, the Conservative government's international policy positions are based mainly on calculations of how to "impress a key domestic constituency that it hopes to attract or retain as part of its 'base,'"<sup>65</sup> including by appealing directly to diaspora groups living in Canada and by highlighting "wedge" issues that energize Conservative

64. My thanks to David Black and Philippe Lagassé for encouraging me to explore this matter in this article.

65. Peter Jones, "Canada's bitter, small-minded foreign policy," *Globe and Mail*, 2 January 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/canadas-bitter-small-minded-foreign-policy/article16147665>.



**Figure 9.** Public views on Canada's foreign policy in 2012.

partisans.<sup>66</sup> Harper's new narrative about foreign policy, in other words, might be directed not toward Canadians in general, but rather, toward carefully identified segments of the electorate, or "voter slices."<sup>67</sup>

There is some truth to this argument. Canadian governments, like those in other democracies, have always crafted foreign policy with one eye on domestic politics,<sup>68</sup> and the Harper Conservatives have reportedly developed a particular skill in "micro-targeting" the populace to assemble and maintain a winning electoral coalition—for example, by focusing on "very ethnic" constituencies judged potentially sympathetic to the party and its candidates.<sup>69</sup> Although Harper's positions on Israel, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine, for instance, may reflect his convictions and other considerations, these positions have also been consistent with a "voter slice" strategy of targeting electorally significant diaspora groups.<sup>70</sup>

The Conservatives' broader narrative about Canada's role in the world may also be consistent with this strategy. In their 2013 book, *The Big Shift*, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson suggested that the liberal internationalist narrative that long underpinned Canadian foreign policy has tended to reflect the interests and world view of "Laurentian elites"—the urban professionals of central Canada—and that

66. Jeffrey Simpson, "Israel is just a campaign stop for this prime minister," *Globe and Mail*, 25 January 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/israel-is-just-a-campaign-stop-for-this-prime-minister/article16488226>.

67. Tim Harper makes this observation about the political strategy of the Harper government more generally. See Tim Harper, "Stephen Harper's 10 per cent challenge," *Toronto Star*, 3 November 2013, [http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/11/03/stephen\\_harpers\\_10\\_per\\_cent\\_challenge\\_tim\\_harper.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/11/03/stephen_harpers_10_per_cent_challenge_tim_harper.html).

68. Nossal, Roussel, and Paquin, *International Policy and Politics in Canada*, 85–116.

69. Laura Payton, "Ethnic riding targeting key to Conservatives' 2011 victory," CBC News, 23 October 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ethnic-riding-targeting-key-to-conservatives-2011-victory-1.1142511>; and Tom Flanagan, "The emerging Conservative coalition," *Policy Options* (June–July 2011): 104–108.

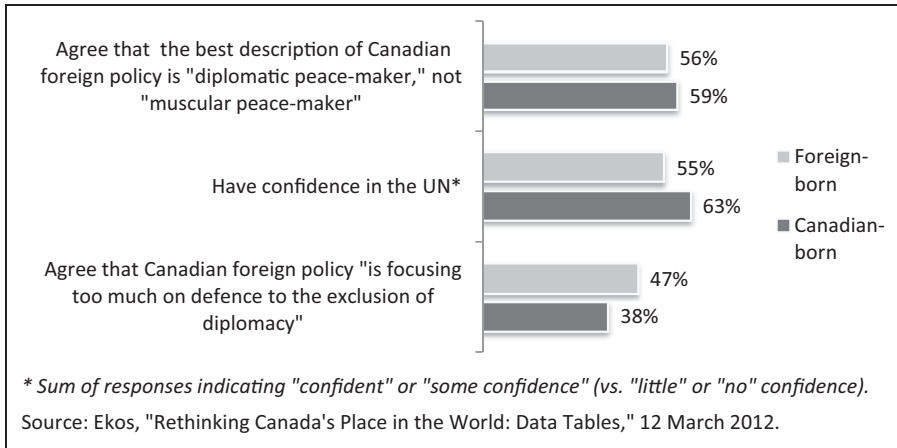
70. By "electorally significant," I mean groups that are sufficiently large in number, yet also sufficiently concentrated geographically, to have a decisive impact on electoral outcomes in one or more constituencies.

the Conservative counter-narrative has given voice to the attitudes of the Conservative electoral coalition.<sup>71</sup> This coalition includes new Canadians as well as Western and rural Canadians, groups that tend to have more conservative social and economic attitudes than those held by “Laurentian” politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, and academics in Ontario and Quebec, according to Bricker and Ibbitson. By articulating anti-liberal internationalist positions, therefore, the Harper government may have been speaking directly to its electoral base rather than trying to change the way in which Canadians think about international affairs.

While parts of this analysis may be correct, it should not be taken too far. Not only do polls suggest that liberal internationalist beliefs are more widespread in the Canadian public than the “Conservative coalition vs. Laurentian consensus” storyline implies, as we have seen, but there is evidence that these beliefs are also broadly embraced by certain groups making up the Conservative coalition itself. The expressed values of many first-generation immigrants, for example, appear to be at odds with the anti-liberal internationalist components of the Harper narrative. In the 2012 Ekos poll mentioned above, new Canadians were only slightly less likely than Canadian-born respondents to describe Canada as a “more diplomatic peace-maker” rather than a “more muscular peace-maker” (see Figure 10). Although first-generation immigrants expressed somewhat lower levels of confidence in the UN (55 percent of new Canadians said they had at least “some” confidence in the world body, versus 63 percent of respondents born in the country), they were considerably *more* likely than Canadian-born respondents to agree with the statement that “Canada’s foreign policy is focusing too much on defence to the exclusion of diplomacy” (47 percent versus 38 percent, respectively). The latter result also coincides with the findings of a 2013 Environics poll in which new Canadians were considerably more likely than native-born respondents to say that Canada’s foreign policy should be “based on peacekeeping and mediation and being a global leader on environmental and humanitarian issues.”<sup>72</sup>

Similar conclusions emerge from other polls, including a 2008 Environics survey that asked Canadians if they would “prefer to see Canada work more closely with the United States or with the United Nations” on global problems (see Figure 11). Overall, respondents expressed an overwhelming preference to work with the UN (79 percent) over the US (15 percent). This was also true of foreign-born participants in the survey, who favoured working with the UN by a larger margin than those born in Canada. The poll also provided details on the birthplace of immigrants: the US, the United Kingdom, a European country other than the UK, or outside of both the US and Europe. This breakdown allows us to focus on the non-US/non-European—mainly Asian—immigrants who figure prominently in Bricker and Ibbitson’s analysis about the new Conservative electoral coalition. As reported by Environics, this group of non-US and non-European

71. Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, *The Big Shift: The Seismic Change in Canadian Politics, Business, and Culture and What It Means for our Future* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2013).
72. Results reported in “Canadian values are progressive values: A snapshot of the views of new and Canadian-born urban/suburban Canadians, 2013,” Broadbent Institute (May 2013), 5.



**Figure 10.** Comparing the foreign policy attitudes of foreign-born vs. Canadian-born respondents.

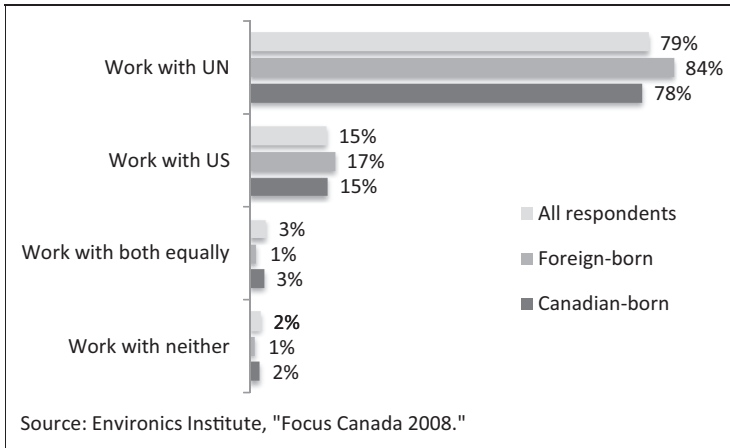
immigrants was the *most* willing to work through the UN to deal with world problems (see Figure 12).

The same Environics survey also explored attitudes toward the CAF and peacekeeping, juxtaposing two conceptions of the role of the military in the following question: "Some people say that Canadian Forces should adopt a traditional peacekeeping role, which means trying to keep the two conflicting sides apart. Others say that Canadian Forces should adopt a peacemaking role, which might involve fighting alongside other UN troops to force peace in a disputed area. Which view is closer to your own?"<sup>73</sup> Some 59 percent of foreign-born Canadians chose the peacekeeping option (see Figure 13). Once again, foreign-born respondents expressed a position that seemed inconsistent with the Harper government's foreign policy narrative—and they did so by an even wider margin than Canadian-born respondents. As in the case of attitudes toward the UN, the subset of new Canadians born outside Europe and the US evinced the *strongest* support for this position.

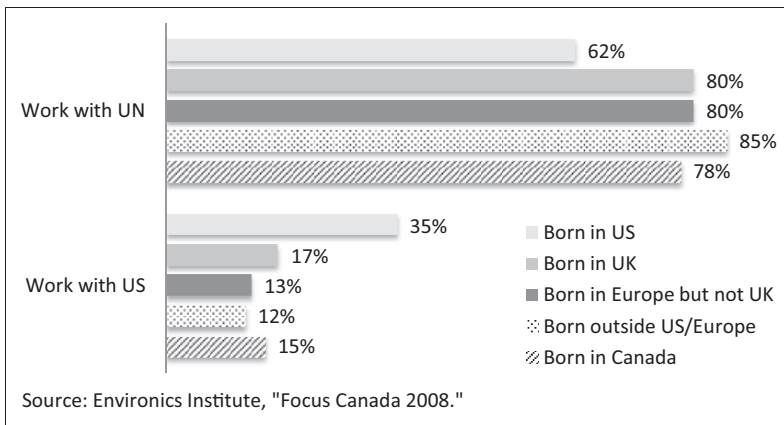
Nevertheless, this is not a simple story. Although the anti-liberal internationalist elements of Stephen Harper's foreign policy narrative have gained little traction among new Canadians, we have already noted that the Conservative government appears to have used targeted foreign policy positions to gain support from electorally significant diaspora groups in Canada. Further, certain elements of Harper's broader narrative resonate positively with segments of the Conservative electoral coalition. This becomes visible when results from the poll question about peacekeeping and peacemaking are disaggregated by region (see Figure 14). On the whole, Western Canadians were considerably more likely than residents of other regions to support a peacemaking role that

73. Environics, "Focus Canada 2008," [http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC801\\_V21](http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC801_V21).





**Figure 11.** Should Canada work with the UN or the US? Foreign-born vs. Canadian-born respondents.

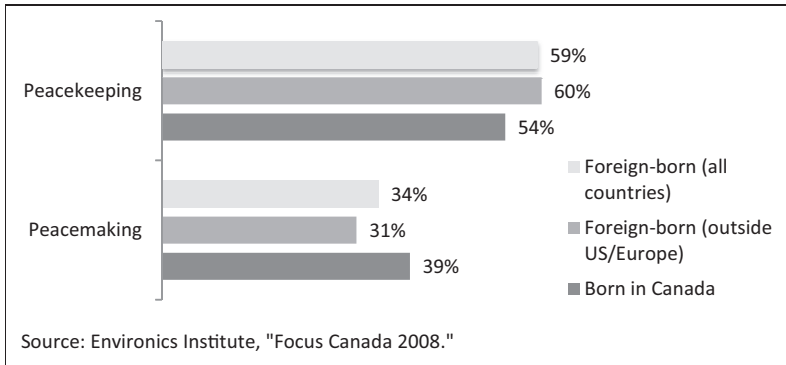


**Figure 12.** Should Canada work with the UN or the US? Responses by birthplace.

“might involve fighting.” A closer look reveals that Alberta and Saskatchewan accounted for much of this regional result: they were the only two provinces in which a majority of respondents preferred peacemaking over peacekeeping.

This finding lends support to scholars who contend that there are “regional strategic cultures” in Canada, or regionally specific perspectives on the use of armed force abroad.<sup>74</sup> Harper’s narrative might thus be viewed as the expression

74. Justin Massie, “Regional strategic subcultures: Canadians and the use of force in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Canadian Foreign Policy* 14, no. 2 (spring 2008): 19–48. Massie argues that two regional strategic cultures are clearly discernible—Alberta and Quebec—and that they have diametrically opposed views on the use of armed force internationally. On Quebec’s strategic subculture, see also



**Figure 13.** Should the Canadian military play a peacekeeping or peacemaking role? Responses by birthplace.

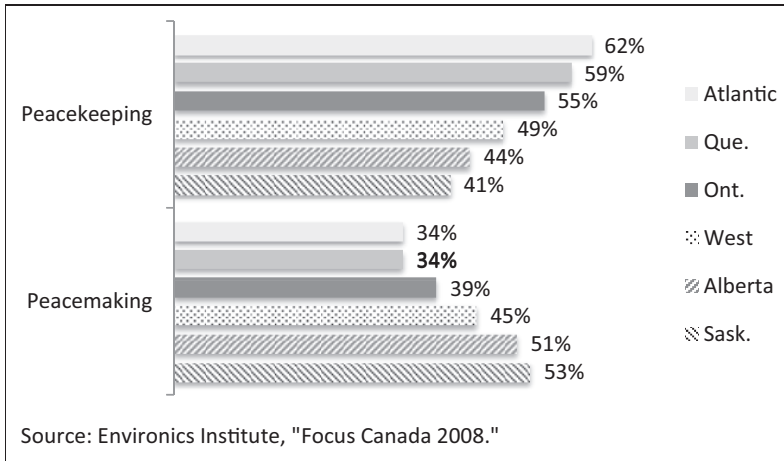
of an Albertan (or Prairie) strategic subculture. However, certain *cross*-regional groupings also appear to hold attitudes that align with this narrative. People who express an intention to vote Conservative in the next federal election, for instance, supported the peacemaking role over the peacekeeping role by a wide margin nationally (57 percent vs. 39 percent), including in every province except Quebec and Manitoba. In addition, the gender of respondents also appeared to be an important predictor of views: 60 percent of women favoured the peacekeeping role, compared with only 49 percent of men.<sup>75</sup>

However, these regional and demographic divisions are neither monolithic nor consistent. In some surveys, Albertans and male respondents appear to be just as liberal internationalist in their convictions as other Canadians. When asked in 2008 whether Canada should work more closely with the UN or the US to resolve global problems, for example, a large majority of Albertans expressed a *pro-UN* position at levels comparable with respondents in other provinces (see Figure 15). Further, residents of the Prairies were also just as likely as other Canadians to cite peacekeeping in the 2012 Environics poll that asked people to cite Canada's "most positive contribution" to the world.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, party affiliation appeared to have little bearing on how they answered this question: 22 percent of people who identified themselves with the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, and the Green Party, respectively, cited peacekeeping as the most positive contribution, as compared with 20 percent of Conservative Party adherents—close results on an issue one might expect to be the subject of partisan difference. Furthermore, there

Justin Massie and Jean-Christophe Boucher, "Militaristes et anti-impérialistes: Les Québécois face à la sécurité internationale," *Études Internationales* 14, no. 3 (September 2013): 359–385.

75. By contrast, there appeared to be little relationship between responses to this question and the income level or age of the respondents.

76. Environics Institute, "Focus Canada 2012," [http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC2012\\_V119](http://130.15.161.246:82/webview/index.jsp?object=http://130.15.161.246:82/obj/fVariable/EFC2012_V119).



**Figure 14.** Should the Canadian military play a peacekeeping or peacemaking role? Responses by region.

was little difference between men and women on this question: 19 percent of male respondents cited peacekeeping, as did 21 percent of females.

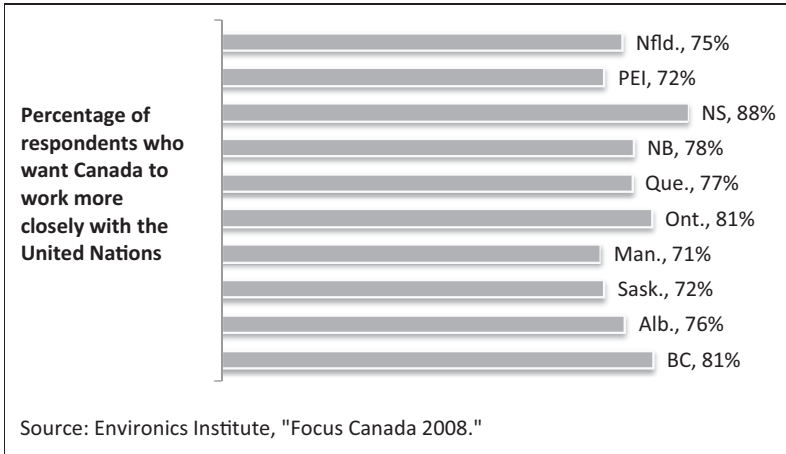
A complex picture emerges from these polls, one that is considerably more diversified than the “Conservative coalition versus Laurentian consensus” schema implies. This is one reason to doubt claims that the Harper government’s foreign policy narrative is intended solely to mobilize the Conservatives’ electoral base, rather than to change the views of Canadians more generally: Core elements of this narrative appear to be discordant with the views of important segments of the Conservative coalition. New Canadians, in particular, seem just as liberal internationalist as other Canadians, if not more so.

There is another reason to be dubious of such claims: Many of the journalists and academics who follow Stephen Harper closely have concluded that his political objectives are broader than simply maintaining his electoral coalition intact and himself in power. As David Akin puts it: “He wants to transform the country so Canadians will come to see his Conservatives and not the Liberals as the natural governing party.”<sup>77</sup> Paul Wells makes a similar argument in *The Longer I’m Prime Minister: Stephen Harper and Canada, 2006-.*<sup>78</sup> Stephen Harper came to Ottawa with a “mission,” writes Wells, “to ensure that Conservatives governed as frequently and as durably in the twenty-first century as Liberals had in the twentieth.”<sup>79</sup> Yet, because the prime minister is also “an incrementalist to the bone,” he has pursued a strategy that Wells compares with Charles Lindblom’s model of

77. David Akin, “Harper’s history key to a Conservative future,” *Toronto Sun*, 28 March 2004, <http://www.torontosun.com/2014/03/28/harpers-history-key-to-a-conservative-future>.

78. Paul Wells, *The Longer I’m Prime Minister: Stephen Harper and Canada, 2006-* (Toronto: Random House, 2013).

79. *Ibid.*, 21. See also Peter Loewen, “Stephen Harper’s not-so-secret agenda,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 December 2012, B1.



**Figure 15.** Should Canada work with the UN or the US? Responses by province.

“muddling through”—an approach involving the gradual transformation of politics through small steps.<sup>80</sup>

These incremental actions have included attempts to change the dominant narratives and iconography of Canadian politics by promoting a different set of symbols and stories. In its official communications, for instance, the Harper government has de-emphasized the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which came into force under Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau, while repeatedly lauding the earlier *Canadian Bill of Rights*, which was introduced by Progressive Conservative prime minister John Diefenbaker. History has thus become a political battleground. As Akin observes: “Conservatives need history on their side. They need a narrative of Canada in which Conservative Party values are integral to the story. Voters who buy this history will then turn to Conservative leaders as the default choice in this century the way Canadians turned to Liberal leaders by default in the last century.”<sup>81</sup> This is the context in which Harper has promoted the new narrative of Canadian foreign policy—a narrative that has been built, as we have seen, on a stylized rendering of the country’s history and role in the world. To suggest that this reformulation has been intended merely to strengthen the Conservative Party base and to attract new “voter slices” into the ruling coalition is to overlook this larger context. By all appearances, the Harper government’s foreign policy narrative has sought, among other things, to change the way that Canadians think about themselves and their country, such that they will come to associate their history, national symbols, and personal values with those of the Conservative Party.

Foreign policy is one of the vehicles that Harper has used to drive toward this goal. To date, however, there is little evidence that Canadians have shifted away

80. Wells, *The Longer I’m Prime Minister*, 118 and 297–304.

81. Akin, “Harper’s history key to a Conservative future.”

from liberal internationalism and toward the foreign policy values that the prime minister has articulated. How, then, do we explain the tenacity of liberal internationalism? I address this question in the final section of this article.

## Conclusion: Continuity and change

Writing in 2001, Don Munton and Tom Keating noted that there was a “narrow but lengthy trail of empirical evidence stretching back to the early 1940s suggesting that Canadians support internationalist policies.”<sup>82</sup> Over the ensuing decades, commentators regularly proclaimed the demise of liberal internationalism, both in Canadian policy and in public sentiments, but after examining the details of an opinion poll conducted in 1985, Munton and Keating concluded that “the structure of Canadians’ internationalist attitudes is reasonably enduring.”<sup>83</sup> In this article, I have reached a similar conclusion about the tenacity of liberal internationalist attitudes in the Canadian public today.<sup>84</sup> This finding is striking because the Harper government has not only eschewed many practices and policies of liberal internationalism, but has apparently also sought to discredit the idea of liberal internationalism in the minds of Canadians, replacing it with a different narrative about Canada’s role in the world.

One explanation for the seeming constancy of public opinion might be that the Harper government has not been in office long enough to change public attitudes about foreign policy. It may be true that more time would be needed for Canadians to internalize the Conservatives’ new narrative, or for evidence of eroding public support for liberal internationalism to become visible in opinion polls. Nevertheless, it remains puzzling that so few indications of change are visible in the three elements of liberal internationalism examined in this article: support for the UN, views of peacekeeping, and attitudes towards the role of the Canadian military.

The study of role theory in international relations may shed light on this puzzle. Kal Holsti and other scholars have argued that the foreign policy actions of states can be explained, in part, as an enactment of “national role conceptions” held by policymakers in these states—that is, assumptions about the particular functions or behaviours that the state is expected to perform in international affairs.<sup>85</sup> Japanese policymakers, for example, have tended to view their country since the end of the Second World War as a “peace-loving state” (*heiwa kokka*)—a reaction to the searing experience of the war, and a self-conception that helps both to explain

82. Don Munton and Tom Keating, “Internationalism and the Canadian public,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 3 (September 2001): 534. See also Don Munton, “Whither internationalism?” *International Journal* 58, no.1 (winter 2002–2003): 155–180.

83. Munton and Keating, “Internationalism and the Canadian public,” 545.

84. It is worth noting, however, that I do not attempt to reproduce Munton and Keating’s methodology in this article.

85. K.J. Holsti, “National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (September 1970): 233–309.

and to reinforce Japan's generally anti-militarist foreign policy.<sup>86</sup> Most of the literature on role theory focuses on what national leaders and foreign policy elites think about their country's function in international affairs, rather than investigating the understandings and beliefs of the mass public. However, in addition to leadership groups, mass populations also seem to hold conceptions of the role or roles they expect their state to play in the world; and these conceptions may be tenacious, particularly if they are intertwined with "powerful myths and institutions" within society.<sup>87</sup>

This framework offers a possible explanation for the rootedness of liberal internationalist thought in the Canadian public. While Canadians may agree or disagree on specific policies, there seems to be a broad agreement—or, more precisely, a broadly shared assumption—that Canada should perform certain general roles in international affairs. Consider, for example, the degree of attachment that Canadians continue to express for peacekeeping. From one perspective, the persistence of this attachment is surprising for all the reasons set out earlier: Canada has virtually withdrawn from UN peacekeeping over the last two decades; the most recent and visible deployment of the CAF was to a combat mission in Afghanistan; prominent commentators have repeatedly proclaimed the death of the Canadian peacekeeping "myth"; and the Harper government has been engaged in a nearly decade-long effort to promote the image of the CAF—and of Canada—as a valiant fighter, not as a peacekeeper. Writing in 1995, Pierre Martin and Michel Fortmann were also perplexed at public opinion data that showed peacekeeping to be, in their words, "surprisingly popular" given the setbacks that peacekeeping operations Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda had experienced in the early 1990s.<sup>88</sup> Today, nearly 20 years after Martin and Fortmann's article appeared, this question is even more perplexing.

Perhaps Canadians are simply ill informed about the role of their military and about Canada's virtual withdrawal from UN peacekeeping operations after the mid-1990s. The historian and commentator Jack Granatstein has argued as much on several occasions.<sup>89</sup> So has a younger military historian, Sean Maloney, who teaches at the Royal Military College of Canada and frequently criticizes the peacekeeping "myth."<sup>90</sup> There is likely some truth to their complaints: peacekeeping has undergone a profound transformation since the Cold War, when blue-helmeted Canadian troops famously patrolled a demilitarized zone between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, and it is now a considerably more complex and dangerous undertaking. It seems unlikely that most Canadians kept track of these changes.

86. Amy L. Catalinac, "Identity theory and foreign policy: Explaining Japan's responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq," *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 1 (2007): 58–100.

87. Chafetz, Spirtas, and Frankel, "Introduction," xii.

88. Pierre Martin and Michel Fortmann, "Canadian public opinion and peacekeeping in a turbulent world," *International Journal* 50, no. 2 (June 1995): 381.

89. For example, J.L. Granatstein, "Fatal distraction: Lester Pearson and the unwarranted primacy of peacekeeping," *Policy Options* (May 2004): 67–73.

90. Sean M. Maloney, "From myth to reality check: From peacekeeping to stabilization," *Policy Options* (September 2005): 40–46.

On the other hand, peacekeeping is a myth only if the Canadians who express a preference for peacekeeping are referring to Cypriot-style operations. Some may be doing so, but it is worth noting that many of the respondents to surveys cited in this article seemed to associate peacekeeping with a broader array of behaviours, all of which could be grouped under the heading of “diplomatic peace-maker.” This phrase may encapsulate a role that most Canadians believe that their country plays—and should play—in the world. Indeed, those who express exasperation at the public’s continued support for peacekeeping may be overlooking the degree to which “peacekeeping” serves as a metaphor or symbol of this larger role. Even if the image of Canada as a peacekeeper ultimately fades,<sup>91</sup> the underlying attitudes that peacekeeping has come symbolize—namely, those comprising liberal internationalism—will likely find new expressions and outlets.

Writing in French, Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel offer a similar analysis of myths and foreign policy.<sup>92</sup> Myths, they argue, can be interpreted in two ways: either as “persistent illusions” and mistruths that mask historical reality and call for correction, or as widely shared but simplified historical abstractions that often take the form of parables—the kind of stories Alan Dundes calls “sacred narratives.”<sup>93</sup> Historians who conceive of myths according to the former meaning correctly point out that the Canadian peacekeeping story has often been distorted in the retelling. Prime Minister Lester Pearson’s initiative in 1956, which helped to establish the instrument of UN peacekeeping, was not simply the act of a “helpful fixer” in the service of world peace. Pearson was, in part, attempting to maintain the integrity of the NATO alliance at a moment when key allies were at odds with each other over the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt, during a particularly tense period in the Cold War when alliance unity was viewed as critically important given fears of Soviet expansionism. Further, the primary mission of the CAF, like most militaries, has always been to prepare for possible combat. During the Cold War, for example, far more Canadian troops served on NATO bases in Western Europe, readying to defend against a Soviet invasion, than in UN peacekeeping operations around the world.

Importantly, however, none of these historical clarifications diminishes the value of peacekeeping as a metaphor for the international role that most Canadians continue to want their country to play. For some, such attitudes might represent a form of nostalgia for a past that no longer exists. According to this view, the world has become more competitive and crowded; Canada is relatively less

91. This image may or may not fade. There continues to be a demand in some quarters for Canada to re-engage with UN peacekeeping, including by providing certain specialized capabilities that some missions lack, such as airlift, field hospitals, and French-speaking experts. See, for example, the comments by UN assistant secretary general for peacekeeping, Edmond Mulet, quoted in Mélanie Loisel, “Missions de Paix: L’ONU en attend plus du Canada,” *Le Devoir*, 26 May 2014, <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/409234/missions-de-paix-l-onu-en-attend-plus-du-canada>.

92. Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel, “Au service de l’unité : Le rôle des mythes en politique étrangère canadienne” *Canadian Foreign Policy* 14, no. 2 (2008): 67–93.

93. Alan Dundes, ed., *Sacred Narratives: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

influential than it used to be, as new economic and military powers have risen in other parts of the globe; and multilateral structures created in the aftermath of the Second World War—including the UN, and its peacekeeping instruments—have become less useful and more marginal. It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that Canadians' enduring attachment to peacekeeping amounts to little more than a longing for the simpler days of a glorified Pearsonian past, or, for that matter, that liberal internationalism is outmoded. The role of Canada as a diplomatic peacemaker is arguably just as relevant today as it was 50 years ago—if not more so, given the mounting pressures that international institutions and norms are now facing. The fact that the world is changing, in other words, does not diminish Canada's stake in working toward a stable international environment based to the greatest extent possible on the rule of law, not the law of the jungle. The strategy of seeking to strengthen multilateral cooperation and norms has always made sense for a country in Canada's position. Nor does this imperative obviate the enduring importance of maintaining effective military forces that Canada can use with its allies, *in extremis*, to uphold international order if diplomacy fails. In short, the liberal internationalist approach represents an enduring foundation for Canadian foreign policy, one that continues to reflect the country's interests and values.

In any event, for better or for worse, liberal internationalism appears to be deeply embedded in the Canadian public imagination, including in the form of symbols, such as peacekeeping. "Part of the mythology of what it means to be Canadian," write Loleen Berdahl and Tracey Raney, "is bound to Canada's status as a peacekeeping, multilateral nation."<sup>94</sup> This might also explain why the Conservative government decided to target liberal internationalism: foreign policy "roles" exist as shared understandings of national history and identity, and they contain their own logics of legitimate and rightful action. They are politically powerful. The Harper government's apparent campaign to discredit liberal internationalism in the eyes of Canadians (including the symbol of Canada as a peacekeeper) seems to have been an attempt to change these foundational understandings and to substitute another in its place: that of a courageous, principled warrior. Both of these roles are myths—simplified allegories mixing historical fact and fiction. However, they differ in at least one important respect: After 8 years of Conservative government, Canadians continue to express an overwhelming preference for the liberal internationalist role over Prime Minister Harper's alternative.

This discrepancy between the government's conception of Canada's international role and the public's more liberal internationalist orientation has interesting implications for theory and policy. For students of role theory, it highlights the importance of examining not only leaders' but also mass publics' understandings of national roles, and their relationship to each other. Indeed, the Harper government's efforts may be interpreted as a "top-down" effort by a governing elite to

94. Loleen Berdahl and Tracey Raney, "Being Canadian in the world," *International Journal* 65, no. 4 (December 2010): 999.



bring foreign policy into alignment with its own conception of the national role *and* to effect a corresponding change in the public's understanding of that role. The ambitions of the Harper government in the field of foreign policy have thus been far-reaching, if not radical. Adam Chapnick does not exaggerate when talks about a "diplomatic counter-revolution."<sup>95</sup> Yet, the apparent tenacity of the Canadian public's attachment to liberal internationalist values and symbols suggests that the Conservatives—and students of role theory, too—have underestimated the capacity of populations to resist top-down change. This observation raises a broader question for scholars of international relations: Under what circumstances, if at all, can national leaders fundamentally change deeply held public conceptions of foreign policy roles?<sup>96</sup>

In Canada, we do not yet have an answer to this question because the story is still being written. Will Canadians embrace the Harper government's distaste for multilateral diplomacy? Will they come to view their country as more of a courageous warrior than diplomatic peacemaker? Will they change their view of the military and its role? Harper has reminded his supporters that societal change occurs slowly and incrementally. "One step at a time," he told the Conservative Party convention in 2011, "we are moving Canada in a conservative direction and Canadians are moving with us."<sup>97</sup> At some future point, Canadians may internalize the prime minister's foreign policy narrative as their own. For now, however, the evidence examined in this article suggests that there remains an important reservoir of public support for liberal internationalism.

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95. Adam Chapnick, "A diplomatic counter-revolution," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (March 2012): 137–154.

96. For a recent attempt to grapple with this question, see Jean Philippe Thérien and Gordon Mace, "Identity and foreign policy: Canada as a nation of the Americas," *Latin American Politics and Society* 55, no. 2 (summer 2013): 150–168.

97. Harper, "Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2011 convention speech."

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