

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR**  
**PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY OBHRAI**  
**CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL**  
**AFFAIRS (CIIA) PARLIAMENTARY FORUM**  
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# **Theme: Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities in the Post 9/11 Era**

## **Introduction**

- I appreciate this opportunity to discuss Canada's international policies with such a distinguished audience. I would like to first thank the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, one of Canada's oldest and most respected international policy institutes, for convening this event. I also bring Minister MacKay's best wishes.
  
- I have been asked to address two rather fundamental foreign policy questions today:
  - “What should be our most important foreign policy objectives?”; and,

- “What should the government do to ensure that Canada can attain these objectives?”
- It is the old “en principe et en pratique” question.
- This is a tall order for a lunch conversation, but I am very pleased to have the opportunity to touch on these with you.

### **Canada’s international policy priorities**

- When it comes to foreign policy, Canadians are broadly concerned about security and prosperity. In fact, these same concerns represent national interests and define our foreign policy objectives.

- Within this framework, Canada's government has articulated a focused foreign policy that advances these enduring interests with vigour and fresh approaches, in an environment of ever increasing complexity.
- This government is clear about Canada's interests. Our foreign policy objectives and priorities are just as clear.
- We will advance core Canadian values and principles -- **freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law**. These values are at the

centre of our efforts internationally and, you will agree, at the heart of our national identity.

### *The United States*

- It is clear that our relationship with the United States of America is central to our foreign policy. I am sure many nations could say the same thing. But for Canada our very special focus on this relationship is integral to our efforts around the world.

- The United States is our strongest and most important ally, for domestic as well as international issues. It is imperative that Canada support an engagement with the U.S. on multiple fronts.
  - No other country deals with the United States on so many levels, from the most local issues to the great questions of global peace and security.
  - The Prime Minister has been instrumental in developing a more principled and sophisticated approach to our bilateral relationship; one that goes beyond the headline issues of the day.
- Canada and the U.S. do not always agree, but our

relationship is now based on a mature and constructive understanding of our respective interests.

- These two very internationally focused countries have considerable respect for each other and can now, when we do not see eye to eye, engage means and mechanisms to solve the previously unsolvable.
- In fact, this Prime Minister has significantly invested his time, effort and energy (and his Cabinet ministers and caucus) in building and maintaining that spirit of mutual respect. This is

critical, not just because it is well-mannered, not just but because we have domestic realities, but because we in many respects share common values such as the belief in freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

### *The Americas*

- We also recognize, as the Prime Minister said on February 5, that “our neighbourhood doesn’t end at the 49th parallel – and neither do our interests.” Geography, commerce and history link us to the Americas.

- We have long-standing historical ties in the region, and these ties remain strong today. To give one example, in 2004 Canadian companies held 35 percent of the larger-company mineral exploration market in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The Americas is our neighbourhood. We are concentrating on building our relationships in the Americas, with a real focus to promoting freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in all countries.

- For example, we are working with international partners and across key Government of Canada departments to ensure a coherent approach to Haiti and to reinforce our diplomatic efforts with a comprehensive aid program.
- Despite our efforts, there are influences in the Americas that continue to pose a challenge – indeed a threat – to democracy and stability in our neighbourhood.

- We will continue to work with critical partners such as the United States, Mexico, and Brazil, and through the Organization of American States to keep the issues of democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights on the regional agenda.

### *Afghanistan*

- Of course, I cannot go far in our priorities without raising our firm commitments in **Afghanistan**.

- Our mission is no doubt a real challenge, and a test of our resolve. Do we in the “West” have the collective will to assist a country and its people that are desperate for stability and peace?

Canada’s government says “yes”.

- Through Canada’s participation in the UN-backed mission to Afghanistan, our soldiers, diplomats and aid workers are playing a critical part in the battle against tyranny and the rule of the gun.

### *Emerging markets*

- At the same time, there are major changes in global power relations that we need to engage.

- Countries such as China and India are emerging as powers in global economics and diplomacy.
- India, the world's largest democracy, is a natural partner in the region and Canada is seeking to bolster our bilateral relationship and enhance our cooperation.
- China, with the world's largest population, also represents significant opportunities for Canada. Minister MacKay has just returned from a trip to China where he explored these opportunities, and engaged the Chinese

government on our fundamental values of human rights and the rule of law.

- Canada must be in a position to engage on both bilateral and global issues with key emerging powers if we are to make real progress in advancing Canada's international interests.

## **Achieving our objectives**

- I will now turn briefly to the second set of questions, about “how” the government can promote Canada's interests globally, how we can realize our vision for a better world.

- For one, we need to invest in our own capacity to make a difference.
- That's why the recent Budget 2007 put further resources toward enhancing our military capability, and why we continue to increase our investment in development assistance.
- These resources need to be focused on our foreign policy priorities, in countries that are important to us.
- We also need to be clear about our priorities. We are but one player on the global stage but our

voice is listened to, and respected. As the eighth largest economy in the world, Canada matters.

- Foreign Minister MacKay has made clear that he wants Canada to reassume its traditional leadership role on international policy issues.
- We have an obligation to play a role in tackling global challenges.
- We must use the multilateral institutions to forge cooperative approaches. But we cannot forget that they are products of governments, and governments must lead.

- Canada is one of the few countries with the resources and capacity to offer that leadership.
- That said, we will need to increase our diplomatic effectiveness, starting with our people.
- Our Government has supported a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars.
- Canada's Foreign Service has a proud tradition of serving Canada's interests and values abroad. We are committed to reversing the damage caused by a decade of neglect under the previous

government, and restoring this unique profession's reputation as one of the most effective diplomatic corps in the world.

- In a globally competitive marketplace for the skills, knowledge and mobility required by the Foreign Service, we will ensure that we attract and retain the best and brightest for Canada's Foreign Service.

- We are committed to ensuring a highly skilled, professional and dedicated workforce in our embassies, high commissions, consulates and trade offices.
- In sum, we will not shirk from our obligations. This government has the will, the focus and the principles to make sure that Canada fulfills its obligations to Canadians and to the global community.
- We continue to look for fresh ideas and opportunities for dialogue with distinguished Canadians and institutes such as the CIIA to

inform and shape our mechanisms for achieving  
Canadian foreign policy objectives.

- Thank you.

## **Closing Remarks**

- My thanks again to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs for hosting this useful and important discussion, and thanks to David Halton for his even handed moderating.
- This morning's discussion has highlighted the importance of non-partisan debate about matters of global importance, and of national interest to Canada.

- Canada will not shirk from its international obligations. Under Prime Minister Harper, Canada has a government with the will, the focus and the principles to make sure that Canada fulfills its obligations to Canadians and to the global community.

- Our foreign policy priorities will remain advancing prosperity and security with the United States, continuing leadership in Afghanistan, building our relationships in the Americas including helping to promote freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in all countries.
- We will continue to welcome debate and discussion: in Parliament, across Canada and in those important international forums such as the G8 and NATO where we will ensure that Canada's voice is heard.