

Canada and the World Order After the Wreckage

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The active imagining of an alternate global politics could hardly be more pressing. Mounting global inequalities, the turbulence of climate change, and recurring military interventions by Western powers have been the daily fare of the neoliberal world order. This world order was constructed over the last two decades under the hegemony of the U.S., in alliance with key European, Japanese and Canadian allies.

The American objective has been the reassertion of its primacy amongst states. The 'Washington consensus' of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, has helped re-establish the economic foundations of American power, while integrating its allies in a shared project of liberalising markets. New American security doctrines, American and NATO military and diplomatic interventions to initiate regime changes in wayward states, and the proliferation of American military bases around the world, have all redrawn geopolitical alliances. In line with U.S. 'grand strategy', American unilateralism now occupies the space left by the decline of the Cold War division.

The political period since the American 'coalition of the willing' intervention into the Middle and Far East, beginning in 2001, has also exposed cracks in American hegemony. The Doha trade round has stalled; the U.S. dollar overhang and current account deficit reveal unresolved economic problems; and the U.S. occupation of Iraq has become a quagmire both militarily and politically for the Bush Administration.

These events, however, have yet to displace U.S. primacy in the world order. Indeed, it is altogether fanciful to speak as if the arc of U.S. power is now in perpetual decline and that a splintered geopolitical order now governs world affairs. It is still the foremost task of the global social justice movement to turn the cracks in American hegemony into open fissures to allow the space for an alternate world order to emerge.

Canada and the Neoliberal World Order

Canada has proven to be a bulwark in support of American imperial objectives. Canada played a crucial role as a supportive imperial power in establishing the Washington institutions and the GATT, as well in building Western military alliances such as NATO and NORAD, over the postwar period. Canada undertook this role by ideologically stressing the role of 'middle powers' and diplomatically supporting multilateralism via the U.S. dominated United Nations Security Council and system. Since the 1980s, the Canadian state and ruling classes have pulled Canada closer into the U.S. sphere, symbolized initially by the spineless decision of the Trudeau government to allow cruise missile testing in Canada. Since then Canada has given consistent support, in the form of peacekeeping operations or military deployments, to U.S. military and diplomatic interventions, as in Somalia, Haiti, and others.

Canada has also played a pivotal role in the 'quartet' of countries setting the WTO trade agenda, and as the staunchest supporter of U.S. policies toward Latin America.

While the Jean Chretien Liberals kept Canada out of the Iraq war, he also contributed to making Canada the third largest participant in the American 'war on terror' since September 2001 (symbolically re-affirming the North Atlantic triangle partnership between the U.S., Britain and Canada, that dominated global politics across the 20th century). The subsequent joint Smart Borders Agreement and the tripartite North American Security and Prosperity Partnership further integrated Canada into American geopolitical strategies. Together, these measures have all but dissolved whatever independence Canadian foreign policy had exercised.

None of the Canadian political parties propose a fundamental departure from the neoliberal world order. The Conservatives under Stephen Harper, and the Liberals under Paul Martin and now Stephan Dion, actively define Canada's international position as support of American power. The NDP and the Greens depart from them in their emphasis on working through multilateral institutions. Or, over the form of Canadian imperial interventions, such as the NDP contentions on how Canadian troops and funds in Afghanistan might best be put to use. But it is an utter illusion to suggest that a 'Liberal-Green-NDP' alliance would break from the neoliberal world order and Canada's supine relation to the American empire.

An Alternative Agenda

The Left in Canada has long argued for an independent foreign policy for Canada. This dates back to the colonial relationship to Britain that existed into the 1930s. American geopolitical interests soon supplanted British ones, with the Canadian ruling classes merging – and sometimes subordinating – their own imperialist interests with the U.S. Indeed, Canada's 'middle-power' strategy of working through multilateral institutions to form the 'Western interest', or initiating independent relations with developing countries, such as Cuba and China, often proved useful to the U.S. The Liberals and the NDP point to the exercise of such 'soft power' as representing Canada's independent stance in world affairs.

There is, however, a far more critical perspective on Canada's role in world affairs. It begins from the perspective that Canadian foreign and military policies are firmly embedded in the economic imperatives and political agendas of Western, and particularly American, imperialism and militarism. The strength of the Canadian capitalist class has given it a capacity to advance its own interests in Western power structures, as well as to establish imperialist agendas of its own.

This view has been behind the calls for an active disarmament agenda, for international solidarity and the democratization of Canadian foreign policy. It has a social base in sections of the union, Aboriginal, and global social justice movements. It links an alternate world order to transformative political developments at the national and local levels. An alternate political agenda has been emerging from these political struggles.

1. Canada should immediately withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. The current NATO intervention in Afghanistan follows on a series of alignments with one group of warlords after another, as U.S. imperial interests in the region have altered. The NATO mission is in disarray, and increasingly at odds with Afghani 'national interests'. The surge in troops being called for by Canada will only prolong the chaos. Troop withdrawal needs to be

followed by a plan for war reparations paid by Western governments. This is the central agenda of the Canadian Peace Alliance. We need to further engage in an extended campaign of teach-ins with unions and on campuses. Direct solidarity links with Afghan labour and women's groups need to be explored.

2. Canada needs to develop a comprehensive framework for remaking its relations with Israel and Palestine, beginning by breaking economic, cultural and political ties with Israel. Israel has consistently and blatantly rejected international legal norms, notably UN resolutions on illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories, withdrawal to the 'green line' 1967 borders and the building of the illegal apartheid separation wall. Canadian actions should include: recognition of the democratically elected Hamas (now in alliance with Fatah) government and restoration of funding; the abrogation of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement; the ending of the special research and development programmes of the Canadian government with Israel; and the move of Canada's vote at the UN on Palestinian resolutions in line with the vast majority of the nations of the world condemning Israeli violations of basic international norms on occupation, imprisonment, return of refugees, legal rights of citizens, and nuclear weapons inspections.

3. Canada should play a central role in support of multi-polarity in the world order, national rights of self-determination, and the democratic sovereignty of states to choose alternate development paths. This agenda of international solidarity needs to begin with 'smashing' the present UN system, by fundamentally democratizing the assembly and abolishing the privileged position of the permanent members of the Security Council. This is part of reinforcing the agenda that has re-emerged in the Non-Aligned Movement, as stated in last year's Havana conference. Such demands are necessary to revitalize multilateral processes for disarmament, cultural and linguistic heritages, global environmental protections, population and housing, and addressing the horrific legacy of Western imperialism and racism. This would necessarily include address colonial legacies for the indigenous peoples of the world, including Canada's own shameful history and horrific present policies toward the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

4. Canada needs to withdraw from international military alliances, and redeploy Canadian resources and troops within Canadian borders. NORAD and NATO are legacies of the Cold War that had nothing to do with national defence and everything to do with protecting and advancing Western capitalism under American leadership and thwarting socialist and nationalist governments. With the end of the Cold War, this is still their agenda. NATO and NORAD operations are now directed at disciplining 'Third World' countries while building a parallel 'Fortress North America'. The alliances are also being used to ratchet up the 'arms race' and tactical deployments against China. Canada has the democratic right and obligation to revert to using Canadian troops exclusively for its own self-defence.

5. Canada must demand a review of international trade institutions and policies, and begin formulating a plan for trade regulation and controls on capital movements. Immediate steps are withdrawal from the Security and Prosperity Initiative, and review of all ongoing negotiations and inter-bureaucratic trade and security relations with the U.S. A moratorium should also take place in hydrocarbon energy and water development, until concerns over issues of sovereignty, greenhouse gas emissions, Aboriginal rights, trade obligations and commercialization are addressed. This should be followed by a notice of reopening of the NAFTA agreement, as its most pernicious provisions are examined. Similarly, Canada should withdraw from the Doha round of trade negotiations and join calls for a fundamental review of international trade regulation and the operations of the so-called Bretton Woods

institutions.

Left Internationalism After the Wreckage

This is a minimum internationalist platform for the Left in Canada. It reinforces the democratic inclinations of the Canadian people toward democratic sovereignty and against a liberalised trading order and foreign military interventions. The agenda has a potential foothold in the electoral and policy terrains.

It will depend upon social justice movements agitating and demonstrating tirelessly, and building organizational capacities that the 'multitudes' and 'organized chaos' of the anti-globalization surge of the recent past abjectly failed. But here a hard political barrier is reached. There is a need to rebuild, and then link up, coalitions of the social left, a socialist current in the union movement, and an organization of the radical left. The current disorganization of the Left is as much of the wreckage of the neoliberal world order as anything else and requires just as much re-imagining of what is possible.

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