

GLOBAL CURRENTS

Winter 2009

A newsletter on Canada and world by Bob Rae
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Liberal

► CONGO—A FORGOTTEN COUNTRY

BY IRWIN COTLER

It may surprise – and should shock even the most complacent among us – to learn that the Democratic Republic of Congo has been enduring the most deadly war ever documented in Africa, and suffered the highest death toll documented anywhere in the world since World War II. Six million people have died in the Congo since 1996 – half of them children five years or younger – in this most ignored of tragedies.

Indeed, until recently there has been little media attention paid to this devastated country. Moreover, the United Nations largest mission in the world – with 17,000 peacekeepers – has been unable to protect the vulnerable of the Congo, recalling the chilling tragedy of the Rwandan genocide.

The United Nations itself has acknowledged that **'war crimes' had been committed** in the Eastern Congo – where renewed fighting has displaced more than 250,000 people – adding to the roughly 1.2 million already driven from **their homes by previous violence**. IDP's (Internally Displaced People) remain inaccessible to aid and numerous operations have been suspended due to the fragile security situation.

Simply put, the people of this country have endured years of killing fields, war, poverty, disease and displacement – as I documented in my report on the Congo six years ago – even before the most recent escalation began. Now, the vulnerable in the Congo are not only suffering, yet again, mass displacement, widespread starvation and murder, but also what one Africa correspondent has called **'without doubt the most horrific and persistent abuse of women in the world': an 'epidemic of rape' that includes sexual enslavement, public gang rape and brutalized assault.**

As Stephen Lewis – now engaged in the evidence gathering of rape as a war

crime – **has put it, this 'hallucinatory' use of rape is being used not only to assault and mutilate individuals, but to 'murderously spread the deadly HIV virus and tear apart the society as a whole.'**

Rape is currently being used not only as a consequential act of war but as the very instrument for the waging of war itself, and where up to 70% of women in targeted villages have been the victims of indiscriminate sexual violence.

If Canada's leadership in the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine, affirmed by the UN Security Council, is to find expression it is imperative that Canada address and act upon the worst ongoing humanitarian catastrophe of our time.

Regrettably, Canada, together with the international community, continues to ignore the compelling lessons of history – in the Congo as well as in Darfur – that genocide occurs not only because of the machinery of death but also because of crimes of indifference, because of conspiracies of silence.

Indeed, what made the genocide in Rwanda so unspeakable was not only the horror of the genocide itself, but that this genocide was preventable. No one can say that we did not know. We knew, but did not act. Just as no one can say today that we do not know what is happening in the Congo. We know but we are not acting.

What is so necessary now is to articulate – and implement – an action plan including:

First, the UN Security Council must expedite the effective deployment of the reinforced UN peacekeeping force.

Second, the UN, EU and the African Union must join to bring the perpetrators of these war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice, lest the culture of impunity continue.



Hon. Irwin Cotler

Third, the UN Human Rights Council must ensure that the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, focuses on human rights considerations in addition to diplomatic initiatives; In particular, taking into account the need for justice and responsibility to end the cycle of human rights violations.

Canada – in addition to joining in these international efforts – should institute its own initiatives, including enhancing our humanitarian assistance; helping to activate the Goma Peace Process, while calling on all armed groups to abide by the cease-fire agreement; ensuring corporate accountability in our mining operations in the DRC; revisiting and revising our decision not to include the Congo in the Global Peace and Security Fund priority countries list; supporting the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) Joint Initiative Against Sexual Violence; and implementing the recommendations made by the 2002 Report of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development (which I chaired) by sounding the alarm on these horrors – and galvanizing the international community to act.

Irwin Cotler is a Canadian MP and former Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada. He is Professor of Law (on leave) from McGill University. He was the chair of the Save Darfur Parliamentary Coalition in the last Parliament.

► THE NEXT CHAPTER IN CANADA-US RELATIONS

It has been a historic year for American politics and for the world as a whole. We have seen an entire country demand changes in its governance, with rates of voting and participation far higher for **the first time than Canada's**. The incoming administration is defined by new, young and exciting talent in Washington – all of which could mean great things for the world, and particularly, for Canada.

Yet despite the excitement and enthusiasm, the threats we face during this global financial crisis are daunting. The foreign policy challenges will be many. We need serious and open discussions with our neighbours and their new President, in order to face these challenges head on.

administration that they are willing to listen and work with Canada to ensure a smooth transition from a primarily military presence to a more balance mission. With President Obama at the helm, we are more likely to find a co-operative relationship, one that is based on mutual respect and appreciation; but we must not be so foolish to believe that this relationship is one that will simply happen. It must be a relationship based on our mutual sovereign interests while balancing our position and responsibilities in the global community.

Canada has long prided itself on the fact that we are a nation whose approach to foreign policy is dictated by our values and by our interests. The seemingly intractable Israel – Palestine issue is one where the **world, and particularly Obama's new administration**, can benefit from our



Khadr's charges to be dropped and for him to simply be shipped home under the

Transfer Act without adequate supervision would be incredibly short sighted on our part. If we refuse to act, there will be no Canadian legal recourse. As a nation, we should **negotiate for Mr. Khadr's return now, so that** Canada can determine a responsible rehabilitation plan that serves the best interest of Canada and Mr. Khadr, and not only the interests of the United States.

“IT MUST BE A RELATIONSHIP BASED ON OUR MUTUAL SOVEREIGN INTERESTS WHILE BALANCING OUR POSITION AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY.”

The “Buy American” clause in President Obama's recent economic stimulus package raised a number concerns amongst Canadian union and business leaders and Parliamentarians. That the U.S. flirted with closing its doors to Canadian trade was a troubling sign of how recessions can change politics. Protectionist urges in difficult economic times are to be expected but the fact that the Harper government was caught off guard by these developments in Congress was deeply troubling. Canada needs to engage, Canada must influence – Canada should not simply react in the eleventh hour.

Afghanistan is another area where Canada can benefit from President Obama's **commitment to collaboration**. There are clear signals from the Obama

commitment and leadership. Obama's new policy of collaboration and open dialogue **reflects Canada's ideals of peace**, reconstruction and reconciliation in the area; as well an ongoing dedication to a two state solution.

Obama's administration has outlined a renewed approach to multilateralism in foreign policy. President Obama has signed the executive order; Guantanamo Bay will close before the end of the year. Canada has an opportunity to show its commitment to working with Obama to bring Omar Khadr home. It is in our political interest to help President Obama by dealing with our own citizen as the President struggles to repatriate the Guantanamo inmates. More importantly, it is an opportunity for Canada to make sure our best interests are represented - simply allowing to Mr.

We need to ensure that Canadian interests are being protected in Washington, on all matters. The United States of America will remain our chief ally, our closest friend, and our largest trading partner, but only if take the time to nurture this relationship and actively engage with them on the issues that matter most to us. Canada can find hope in the reality that President Obama is enforcing a stronger commitment to listening, to engaging with other nations and to a renewed approach to multilateralism.

▶ RE-ASSESSING OUR FOREIGN POLICY: THE SECURITY AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

BY BRYON WILFERT

We live in an era that can no longer ignore the climate change crisis. Traditionally, security and economic interests have dominated Canada's foreign policy, but the potential impact of climate change on states is proving to be enormous and should be calculated into **Canada's foreign policy equation.**

Last year, the United Nations (UN) estimated that all but one of its emergency appeals for humanitarian aid in 2007 was climate related. The effects of climate change such as famines, rising sea levels, the reduction of arable land, shortages of fresh water have and will continue to displace millions. According to the UN, millions of "environmental" migrants could appear by 2020. Europe, for example, will expect a substantial increase in migratory pressure.

The waterways and international trade routes that have opened up as a result of rapidly melting ice caps raise serious concerns about the geo-strategic dynamics of the region, with potential consequences for international stability and security interests.

Climate-related events threaten to overburden governments, especially those already fragile. As resources become scarcer in some regions, the potential for conflict between competing communities and governments could increase. With a potential rise of environmentally induced conflicts, and the associated security risks, what role

should the UN, regional actors and national governments play in managing these issues?

As a start, the relevant organizations and programs under the UN should be better coordinated and significantly enhanced in the interests of prevention. This could be done by upgrading the UN Environment Program, strengthening UN development capabilities and finally developing the role and task of the UN Security Council to tackle climate change.

Governments should strive harder to cooperate with each other and work towards developing international agreements that address the security risks related to climate change. The solution must be political with an international commitment.

The need for an international climate change strategy was reaffirmed during my recent visit to London, where I had the opportunity to participate on a joint dialogue between GLOBE and the Club of Rome to frame the challenges of climate change, energy and ecosystems in the context of the economic crisis. It was clear from all the experts and parliamentarians that there is a sense of urgency for an International strategy that reconciles national economies while protecting our environment.

President Barack Obama has announced **his intention to introduce a 'green**



Bryon Wilfert

recovery plan' which is a great step and Canada's government must also put forth a

climate change strategy that will be in line with our economic and security interests.

This year is a critical one with the scheduled conclusion of the United Nations negotiations on climate change in Copenhagen and we have the opportunity to be a leader and change our foreign policies to meet the current global demands.

Climate change, national security and energy dependence are a related set of **global challenges that is shifting Canada's** foreign policy and must be on the agenda of all countries as we move forward to tackle these global challenges.

Honourable Bryon Wilfert, Member of Parliament of Richmond Hill is currently the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee of National Defence and is the Vice-President of GLOBE Canada

▶ 60 YEARS LATER—THE ISRAELI PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

This year marks Canada's 60th year of engagement in the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. While the recent violence in Gaza has meant little for the advancement of peace, over the past 60 years there has been undeniable progress. Throughout these 60 years, we have seen a calming of tensions, a massive reduction in casualties, significant

progress on key final status issues as well as broad acceptance of a two-state solution. During this same time however, we have witnessed a series of failed peace plans, repeated outbreaks of violence, three regional wars, and too much suffering and death. Our challenge today is not to point fingers, but rather to find a comprehensive solution.

Apart from the foremost final status issues which remain unresolved, namely: the status of Jerusalem, the right of return and clear national borders, there are a number of overarching themes and challenges that will continue to test the mission of peace in the Middle East. One of these challenges is the developmental divide between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. As the

West Bank struggles to improve economic conditions under tight restrictions, the Gaza Strip remains one of the poorest, overpopulated and economically weak regions in the world. Gaza continues to be dependent on external aid and assistance, hampered by Israeli border restrictions, and ruled by a Hamas dictatorship that is repressive and ideologically extreme. These features will obviously hinder the pursuit of peace. Until a viable and competitive Palestinian state emerges; one that can engage honestly and confidently with the international community, obstacles to peace will remain considerable and daunting.

At the same time, it is essential that the international community recognize these internal challenges and refrain from further punishing the people of Gaza for their institutional shortcomings. We should be supporting the formation of a Palestinian state and showing more leadership in expressing what it will take to get there. All of our friends, including the United States,

have shown a willingness to do so. Canada has not.



In Israel with map expert Ret'd Col. Danny Tirzi

Another major challenge facing the peace effort in the Middle East is the internal division within both the Palestinian and Israeli political communities. As we all know, Gaza and the West Bank continue to be governed by rival political groups. While some argue that Hamas' ability to survive an Israeli military campaign has served to bolster their support, the recent violence has been seen by some to have shaken Hamas' authority.

Meanwhile, Fatah continues to govern in the West Bank, and faces its own challenges. Ad-

ditionally, the political instability which has emerged as a result of the recent Israeli election indicates that a more hard-line approach to peace negotiations could take centre stage. Diplomatic and humanitarian efforts are made exponentially more complicated as a result of such fragmented leadership. But we must persevere.

President Obama's fresh perspective, renewed emphasis on diplomacy and willingness to listen provides us with hope that a fresh face will help both parties come closer to peace.

While these challenges persist, Canada must remain committed to finding a lasting two-state solution while promoting and encouraging the viability of a Palestinian state. While it may seem unattainable at times, history shows us that breakthroughs can happen, and deep cultural divides can be bridged. Until that time comes when both Israelis and Palestinians recognize that the overwhelming advantages of peace outweigh the heavy costs of conflict, Canada and the rest of the world must remain committed.

▶ WE CAN'T AFFORD PROTECTIONISM

BY SCOTT BRISON



Hon. Scott Brison

There is no Canadian trade issue or policy area as important or complex as Canada's relationship with the United States. The level of integration between our economies requires that we constantly build and strengthen that relationship, especially during this economic crisis.

The Canada-U.S. bond transcends economics and politics. We are friends, neighbours and family. We share common values. We believe in equality, democracy and the rule of law. We face common challenges, whether in security, the environment or economic policy.

We trade \$1.5-billion worth of goods and services every day across the Canada-U.S. border, and since 1989, Canada-U.S. trade has more than tripled to over \$700-billion this year. We are each other's biggest trading partners and the relationship is responsible directly and indirectly for seven million U.S. jobs. Canada is the largest supplier of energy products to the United States, which imports more petroleum from Canada than from any other country.

Canada and the United States do more than simply trade. We build things together. The average North American car

crosses the Canada-U.S. border the equivalent of four times before it is completed.

Each province in Canada now trades more with the United States than with other provinces. Our economies are so intertwined that if we were ever to try to separate them, it would be like trying to unscramble an omelette.

Canada is also the largest purchaser of U.S. exports. These facts are important because they illustrate why protectionism, whether in Canada or the United States, is bad for both countries' economies. During a time of economic crisis, protectionism can turn a downturn into a depression.

The response from the Harper government to the U.S. protectionist threat was late, demonstrating a lack of foresight. And, the response from the NDP has been to support U.S. protectionism and suggest that Canada itself should introduce protectionist meas-

ures. If New Democrats fail to appreciate the importance of trade and the dangers of knee-jerk protectionism in the current recession, they will hurt Canadian jobs and Canadian interests.

There is a strong vein of protectionist sentiment in the U.S. Congress. When American congressmen move forward with protectionist measures, Canada must respond immediately through established relationships. The Conservatives were so focused over the last three years on building relationships with neo-con Republicans that they neglected to build relationships with Democrats. Now that there has been a sea change in the American political landscape, Canada is disadvantaged.

Bipartisan relations that are strong during the good times help protect our joint interests during the tough times. Fixing those relationships now, during an economic crisis, is like trying to fix the roof during a rain storm.

Many business people and organizations across Canada recognize that any thickening of the Canada-U.S. border is bad for business. The Smart Borders initiative introduced by the Chrétien and Martin governments has not moved forward effectively under the Conservative government. On Jan. 23, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano issued an action directive on the northern border strategy calling for increased security attention to the Canadian border.

Canada must make the case that a thickening of the border will not enhance U.S. security, and in fact, will do everything to undermine Canada-U.S. economic prosperity.

Also, Canadian companies are subject to International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) restrictions by the Americans, which in many cases prevent Canadian companies from competing for U.S. defence and aerospace contracts. Australia

and the U.K. have successfully negotiated exemptions from ITAR, but we have not.

In recent months, the negotiation on the bailout of Detroit's Big Three automakers has been another major issue. Canada's position was that once the deal

was done we could provide a commensurate amount of money to reflect the Canadian auto sector's percentage of the North American operation. But during the negotiation we sat back while American legislators, congressmen and senators were demanding commitments from the auto sector companies to invest in jobs and good product mandates.

These are just some areas where the Conservative government, long before the current issue around protectionist policies in the U.S. Congress emerged, had already failed to defend Canada's national interests in Washington.

Scott Brison, MP and Liberal International Trade Critic

► CONFLICT PREVENTION: CANADA AND THE WORLD

The past few years have seen a steady and marked diminishment of Canada's relevance on the international stage. Money has been cut from our embassies overseas, we have scaled back our multilateral efforts, and we have walked away wholesale from important pan-global initiatives on climate change and aboriginal rights. The damage to Canada's reputation has been significant, but the consequences of our actions have also impacted people living all over the world, especially when it comes to Canada's efforts as an active and productive partner in conflict prevention.

Canada of course has not been alone in this trend. Under President Bush, the United States embarked on a unilateral trajectory that led to the war in Iraq and a sharp increase in anti-American sentiment across the world.

Thankfully, President Obama's election provides a moment of opportunity to turn

the corner on this period in international affairs. Obama's nomination of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State sends a clear signal that the United States is intent on constructive reengagement with the international community. This echoes a similar trend in the United Kingdom where David Milliband's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs has led to renewed emphasis on diplomacy and multilateralism. In this emerging paradigm, important doctrines such as conflict prevention and the responsibility to protect once again have a chance of being at the fore of international foreign policy.

The current Canadian government, however, seems intent on insulating itself from these encouraging winds of change.

The concept of conflict prevention in particular continues to be virtually absent from the Conservative's political discourse. When the recent escalation in violence in Sri Lanka broke out, the Conservatives needed to be

poked and prodded into joining the international chorus asking for an immediate ceasefire. They were also slow in offering any kind of aid to the civilians being affected by the conflict. Our government's lack of sustained effort in putting pressure on the government of Sudan to end the conflict in Darfur or to take a bigger role in responding to the crisis in Eastern Congo are further examples of our current government's minimalist approach to international affairs.

Canada does not need to be a superhero to the world. Nor should it necessarily bear a disproportionate burden in helping prevent international conflict. But in a post 9/11 world, and with our commitments in Afghanistan in particular weighing heavily on our minds, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that being an active and effective force in preventing the outbreak of violence does not always entail large scale deployment of troops and

resources. A few well-placed officers in a multi-nation peacekeeping force, a specialized response team of Canadian experts, or even logistical support to individual Canadians or Canadian organizations already on the ground in some of these countries can make an incredible difference.

As the work of Canada's own CANADEM or the work of Canadian international election monitors shows, the simple fact of having an international presence on the ground is often enough to prevent violence and foster stability. Elsewhere, a team of technical advisors in a country recovering from decades of civil war can make the difference between an army needing a few years or an entire

generation to professionalize itself. This is not to trivialize the enormity of the challenges we face in finding solutions to some of the world's most difficult conflicts, but rather underscore the immense contribution even a scant amount of resources can make in helping overcome them.

What is remarkable is how many Canadians are so far ahead of their government in this regard. It is at times a bittersweet experience to meet the hundreds of Canadians who are living and working in some of the most war torn and conflict-ridden areas of the world. It is heartening to see individual Canadians rising to these global challenges and sharing Canadian values and know-how. But at the same time, it

is frustrating to see how often these Canadians must do so without adequate support from our government.

As I've argued before, Canada's long-standing commitments to multilateralism, conflict prevention and reconstruction are not quaint, quixotic ideals of Canadian foreign policy. They are the basis of a tried and effective framework that has helped prevent violence and bring peace to conflict areas around the world. Our current government's failure to realize this prevents Canada from realizing its full potential to be a positive force for change in the world. This is what I am hoping to change.



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