

THE HARPER ERA IN CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

PARLIAMENT, POLITICS, AND
CANADA'S GLOBAL POSTURE

Edited by Adam Chapnick
and Christopher J. Kukucha



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Contents

Acknowledgments / ix

Introduction: Conservative Foreign Policy in the Harper Era / 3

ADAM CHAPNICK AND CHRISTOPHER J. KUKUCHA

Part 1 Setting the Context

- 1 Debating the Proper Role of Parliament in the Making and Conduct of Canada's International Policies / 25

DENIS STAIRS

- 2 Foreign Policy and Minority Government: The Cases of Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau / 41

JOHN ENGLISH

- 3 The Constitutional Politics of Parliament's Role in International Policy / 56

PHILIPPE LAGASSÉ

Part 2 Key Issues

- 4 Did Minority Government Matter? Thinking Counterfactually about the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan / 73

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE BOUCHER AND KIM RICHARD NOSSAL

- 5 The Evolution of the Harper Government's Defence Policy: Minority versus Majority or Surplus versus Deficit? / 89

DAVID PERRY

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- 6 Stephen Harper's Israel Policy / 105
ADAM CHAPNICK
- 7 Explaining Canada's Foreign Environmental Policies during
the Harper Era / 121
MICHAEL W. MANULAK
- 8 Canada and the United States in the Harper Years: Still "Special,"
but Not Especially Important / 135
GREG ANDERSON
- 9 The Harper Government's Approach to Energy: Shooting Itself
in the Foot / 151
MONICA GATTINGER
- 10 Canadian Aid Policy during the Harper Years / 167
STEPHEN BROWN
- 11 The Shaping of a Conservative Human Rights Policy in the
Harper Era / 181
DAVID PETRASEK AND REBECCA TIESSEN
- 12 Canada's Incremental Foreign Trade Policy / 195
CHRISTOPHER J. KUKUCHA
- 13 Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy: The World in
Canada? / 210
DAVID CARMENT AND JOSEPH LANDRY

Part 3 Additional Perspectives

- 14 Minority Report: Covering Canadian Foreign Policy in a
Minority and Majority Government / 231
LEE BERTHIAUME
- 15 Foreign Policy and the Senate: Microscope and Telescope
in Turbulent Times / 244
HUGH SEGAL
- 16 Concluding Thoughts: The Prime Minister of the Few / 258
NORMAN HILLMER

Contributors / 269

Index / 271

Introduction

Conservative Foreign Policy in the Harper Era

ADAM CHAPNICK AND CHRISTOPHER J. KUKUCHA

Barely three months after he was sworn in as Canada's twenty-second prime minister, on 17 May 2006, Stephen Harper introduced a motion in the House of Commons that could have ultimately ended his political career. The issue was Canada's commitment to Afghanistan, and at stake was the slender minority Conservative government's credibility as a defender of the Canadian national interest.¹ At the time, the opposition Liberals, led by an acting leader with only limited control over his caucus, were divided on extending the mission. The New Democrats and Bloc Québécois wanted to bring the troops home. The Conservatives had only won 124 out of 308 seats in the January 2006 Canadian federal election, and with 294 members present in the House of Commons for a late night emergency debate that lasted for over six hours, they needed 148 votes to extend the mission for two years. Losing the vote would have embarrassed the prime minister; undermined his, and Canada's, credibility as a Western ally; and put into question the competence of the government as a whole. When the votes were tallied, 149 members of Parliament (including thirty Liberals) had supported the motion, and the first potential crisis of the Harper era was narrowly averted.

The close call seemed to indicate that the Conservatives' minority standing in the House of Commons would be critical to how Prime Minister Harper approached world affairs. Indeed, it was one of the only plausible indicators of how the Harper era in Canadian foreign policy was set to play

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out. The Conservative campaign platform, *Stand Up for Canada*, had hardly acknowledged the country's role abroad, and the prime minister himself had limited international experience. Since Prime Minister Harper led a new political party and a minority government, looking back to the Brian Mulroney *Progressive* Conservative era could hardly have been instructive, and the previous minority (and still *Progressive*) Conservative regimes – Joe Clark in 1979 and John Diefenbaker in 1957 and 1962 – governed in decidedly different times.

By the end of the year, and in the aftermath of the Afghanistan debate, two comprehensive academic publications had attempted to make sense of the worldly outlook of what Conservative ministers referred to as “Canada’s new government.”² Editors Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands named the 2006 volume of the annual *Canada Among Nations* series *Minorities and Priorities*, and they included in it three essays that speculate on the broad contours of the Harper government’s foreign policy future. Each chapter contemplates the potential impact of the government’s minority standing in the House of Commons on how the Conservatives would conceive of, develop, and implement Canadian positions on the world stage. Senator Hugh Segal, who reflects in the present volume on his experience as a foreign policy practitioner in the Upper House during the Harper era, argues that, so long as the Conservatives held a mere plurality of seats in the House of Commons, they had to “put forward sensible proposals that [could] withstand the scrutiny and gain the acceptance of parliamentarians from more than one political party.” The government’s indeterminate term in office, subject to end at virtually any moment through a vote of non-confidence by the opposition parties, would likely act as a constraint. “Concessions will be required,” he notes, “to balance Conservative goals and objectives with the parliamentary prerequisite of consensus.”³ In contrast, the political scientist John Kirton was impressed by the boldness of the new prime minister’s actions on Afghanistan, discussed in more detail in this volume by Jean-Christophe Boucher and Kim Richard Nossal, and by how he secured a resolution to a long-standing softwood lumber dispute with the United States, mentioned here by Greg Anderson. Kirton also concludes, however, that the government’s minority standing would “hamper its ability to create favourable conditions at home for genuine global leadership abroad.”⁴ Finally, Adam Chapnick analyzes the situation facing the Conservatives from a historical perspective. He advocates “a modest, disciplined – and indeed – conservative approach to world affairs” as the best way for a new, minority government to navigate the challenges of Canadian international policy.⁵

A fourth view of the future is provided by a past and future political adviser to Stephen Harper, Roy Rempel. In *Dreamland: How Canada's Pretend Foreign Policy Has Undermined Sovereignty*, Rempel offers a scathing critique of contemporary Canadian foreign policy as it had been practised by the Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. He notes that, in at least one instance, rather than promoting and preserving Canada's national interests, the latter's minority government had been "driven by a desire for domestic political gain." Canadian international policy, Rempel laments, had "become disconnected from the reality of the country's international position and from real national needs." Values had come to serve as the basis of popular and political conceptions of Canada's national interests. "But values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (all central to government policy statements) are continuously engaged everywhere," he notes. "They offer few bases on which to make choices."⁶

Rempel advocates a divorce between international policy and domestic politics, a reinvigoration of the Canada-US relationship through a return "to the tradition of 'quiet diplomacy' that served Canada well in the 1950s and into the 1960s," and a reinvestment in the "capabilities" that Ottawa was able to bring to the foreign policy table.⁷ Whether he believes that such changes are possible in the minority context is unclear, but Rempel's commitment to a foreign policy grounded in the national interest appears to be absolute.

Nearly ten years, two minorities, and one majority Conservative electoral victory later, some – albeit not all⁸ – analysts have come to refer to the Harper government's approach to international policy as a "Big Break," or even as a "diplomatic counter-revolution" – one in which the longest-serving Canadian foreign minister of the era took explicit, if not also ironic, pride in "promoting Canadian values."⁹ None of them, however, emphasizes the political stability provided to the government by its majority electoral victory of 2011 as the primary driver of that change.¹⁰ As teachers of Canadian foreign policy who believe that Parliament's voice in international affairs has been regularly discounted by analysts of Canada's global posture, we were surprised by this incongruence. In light of the Harper government's defeat in the October 2015 election, we therefore set out to test it more comprehensively. It follows that *The Harper Era in Canadian Foreign Policy*, which presents the first comprehensive review of the international policy of the Harper era, is also prompted by a specific question: Did the shift from minority to majority government have a significant impact on the way that the Conservatives conceived of, developed, and implemented international policy on Canada's behalf? The answer, our contributors suggest, is sometimes –

but not nearly as often as that initial Afghanistan experience might have suggested nor as often as it had during previous minority government eras.

As Denis Stairs notes, measuring the impact of any individual Canadian government in world affairs is difficult even at the best of times.¹¹ When one seeks to analyze international policy as it happens (or immediately afterwards), without access to confidential government memoranda that will only later be made available to historians, the task is that much more complicated.¹² Moreover, there are times when even the most insightful analysts will struggle to isolate a single variable in the policy process. Consider, for example, the then Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development's aggressive embrace of Twitter in 2014. Under the leadership of Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird, the department opened over 290 new social media accounts.¹³ How the Harper government's majority standing in the House of Commons did or did not affect this decision is difficult to discern. At the most basic of levels, the Conservatives embraced digital diplomacy during the majority era, having ignored it completely as a minority government. But correlation does not necessarily imply causation. Note that they also embraced it under one particular minister, suggesting that the personality and power of the individual in charge of the file – perhaps regardless of the government's standing in the House – could have played a role. (Indeed, a number of the contributors to *The Harper Era* indicate that Minister Baird was pivotal to the 2011–15 period.) The embrace of the digital world also took place not long after the University of Ottawa political scientist Roland Paris published a widely read and scathing report on Canada's diplomatic backwardness in June 2013. And his essay did not even mention the minority/majority issue.¹⁴ So Canada's about-face could have represented a response to public pressure or an indirect acknowledgment that Paris was right. There cannot be, at this point, a definitive explanation.

Consider also two widely documented and exceedingly rare instances of Conservative non-partisanship in discussions of international affairs in the House of Commons: (1) the appointment of an independent panel to examine the future of Canada in Afghanistan (the Manley Commission) in 2007 and (2) Prime Minister Harper's September 2014 call on members of Parliament to "put aside partisanship" and work collectively to support the international campaign against Islamic State militants.¹⁵ If, as Senator Segal suggested in 2006, minorities force governments to reach across the aisle, then it makes sense to view the Manley Commission as a minority government outcome. But what about the 2014 threat of the Islamic State? The Conservatives held a clear majority at that time. Could both actions simply

reflect the view of a government that believed that there were times and places for non-partisanship, regardless of any party's standing in the House of Commons?

These are not easy questions, but they are important ones considering the history of Canadian politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (not to mention the pledge of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party to introduce some measure of electoral reform in the post-2015 period). Canada's federal elections have resulted in minority governments nine times since John Diefenbaker ended twenty-two years of uninterrupted Liberal rule in 1957. Three of those governments were Progressive Conservative, two more were Conservative, and four were Liberal. No government lasted fewer than nine months (Joe Clark, 1979), and none survived longer than two years and eight months (Lester Pearson, 1965–68). While Diefenbaker's successful transition from minority to majority seems to have had little to do with international affairs, most analysts suggest that his government's reversion to minority standing in 1962 had a significant impact on how Ottawa dealt with plans to acquire nuclear weapons. The nuclear issue, along with the prime minister's outspoken opposition to Britain's entry into the European Common Market, is also thought to have contributed directly to the Liberal Party's election victory in 1963.¹⁶ John English, the official biographer of both Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, demonstrates in Chapter 2 (this volume) that the minority government context played a significant role in how both Pearson (1963–65 and 1965–68) and Trudeau (1972–74) made strategic decisions in international affairs. Joe Clark's minority tenure was perhaps too brief, and his government too inexperienced, for serious analysis of the impact of his party's standing in the House of Commons on his approach to foreign policy, but, as Stephen Brown suggests in Chapter 10 (this volume), it appears that the minority standing of Paul Martin's Liberal government (2004–06) played a role in its conduct on the world stage.

In spite of the significant impact of minority standing on international policy throughout Canada's history, there is a surprisingly limited amount of scholarship available to help us understand it. Philippe Lagassé's examination of Parliament's constitutional role in Canadian international affairs in Chapter 3 (this volume) is not the first such analysis, but it is the most comprehensive summary since James Eayrs's classic *The Art of the Possible: Government and Foreign Policy in Canada*, published in 1961. In it, Eayrs points out how the Liberal prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's condemnation of the secretive Allied diplomacy of the First World War

helped him find common cause with the opposition Progressive Party and stabilize his minority government in the early 1920s.¹⁷ In contrast, articles published by Denis Stairs and Kim Richard Nossal in the 1970s emphasize the limitations facing Canadian international practitioners, suggesting implicitly that party standing in the House of Commons would rarely ever be a primary foreign policy concern.¹⁸ Four decades later, Professors Stairs and Nossal find similar dynamics at play, and not at play, in their contributions to *The Harper Era*.

As John English implies towards the end of his chapter, the challenge of understanding the minority Harper government is made greater by the possibility that Liberal and Conservative parties might manage their respective positions in the House of Commons in a minority context differently. With such thinking in mind, in 1980, George Perlin published the seminal guide to understanding (Progressive) Conservative behaviour in federal politics. He called his book *The Tory Syndrome*, and in it he tries to explain why the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada had found it so difficult to overcome what was, from the first victory of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1896 on, nearly a century of Liberal hegemony at the federal level. When John Diefenbaker formed his first (minority) government in 1957, his party had only been in power for five of the last thirty-six years. When his second minority fell in 1963, the Liberals ruled again, virtually uninterrupted, until 1984.

Perlin's "tory syndrome" refers specifically to "characteristics acquired by minority parties which tend to re-enforce their weakness."¹⁹ Politicians in the pursuit of power, Perlin hypothesizes, "will generally be more favourably disposed to accommodation and compromise and more willing to conform to party discipline."²⁰ Such individuals typically avoid the opposition, leaving the latter rife with more principled, activist, and ideologically rigid Canadians. These traits, it is worth noting, lend themselves quite easily to values-based rhetoric, if not policy, on the world stage. More generally, minority party members tend to adopt what Perlin calls an "opposition mentality," characterized by "an attacking, destructive style,"²¹ one that would play out both internally and, in the particular case of Canada's Progressive Conservatives, also against Canadian intellectuals (who, they believed, were inclined to favour the Liberal Party). Inevitably, even when such parties did gain power, either as majorities or minorities, they would quickly implode, leaving the so-called natural governing party to take over. How could one break the spell? Perlin concludes: "The party's ability to ... survive in office long enough to change its competitive position would appear to require exceptionally adroit leadership and some considerable luck."²²

Some of the themes touched on by Perlin – an activist government driven by an ideological view of world affairs, an opposition mentality – were evident in the thinking of Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservatives when they took power in 1984. In their analysis of the international policy of the Mulroney era, Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal note that the Tories’ initial “approach to foreign policy was indeed marked by simplicity.” The government had embraced a “Manichean perspective” on the Cold War.²³ Moreover, as Mulroney’s former secretary of state for external affairs Barbara McDougall reflects in the preface to the Michaud-Nossal book, her government was particularly proud of its “activism,” as well as “the leadership role [it] played in the promotion of democracy and pluralism.”²⁴ Perlin’s themes, this time including the disdain for intellectuals and non-governmental organizations, also resonate with a number of the contributing authors to this volume. Many also point to Stephen Harper’s leadership skills as the reason that his party was able to break yet another Liberal monopoly in 2006 and increase its standing in the House in the following two elections.

During the Harper era, a small group of scholars examined – some directly, others tangentially – the role of the Conservative Party’s standing in the House of Commons on the government’s international policy decisions. In *Two Cheers for Minority Government*, Peter Russell argues, as we imply here, that the Harper government’s willingness to involve Parliament in discussions of the mission in Afghanistan during its first mandate was indeed shaped by its lack of a majority. Similarly, Prime Minister Harper’s decision to assign John Baird, one of his strongest Cabinet members, to the environmental portfolio in 2007 at a time when the party was being criticized aggressively for its attitude towards the Kyoto Protocol in the House of Commons, a topic covered here by Michael Manulak, also appeared to Russell to reflect the impact of minority government on international policy.²⁵ In their 2011 textbook, *International Policy and Politics in Canada*, Kim Richard Nossal, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin identify a relationship between the seemingly constant rotation of Canadian foreign ministers between 2002 and 2009 (seven in total) and minority governments.²⁶ “The main consequence of a minority government,” however, they conclude, is its “short life expectancy.”²⁷ Even if a government were to attempt to effect strategic change, the constant reorganization of the political executive would act as a significant constraint. Political scientists Duane Bratt and Christopher Kukucha later echo and expand on this. They, too, recognize that – as Philippe Lagassé makes clear in this volume – regardless

of its strength in the House of Commons, the governing party controls “the apparatus of government” responsible for international affairs.²⁸ Nonetheless, they also note the more frequent rotation of foreign ministers during the minority era and highlight – as does Lee Berthiaume in Chapter 14 (this volume) – the increased involvement of Parliament in foreign policy debates and the more active behaviour of parliamentary committees responsible for international affairs when governments lack the control that comes with a legislative majority.

The few preliminary assessments of the Harper era that benefited from having observed the Conservative government in both minority and (early) majority contexts did not provide definitive answers to our question. John Ibbitson differentiates between a period of “incoherence in foreign affairs,” from 2006 through to early 2011, to one of “coherence and competence” during the early majority years.²⁹ He attributes much of that competence to “the security of a majority government,” but his essay also leaves open the possibility, echoed by David Carment, Joseph Landry, and others in this volume, that the earlier incoherence could have been as much a reflection of a new government trying to find its way as it was of a minority regime.³⁰ In a memoir that is, admittedly, significantly less focused on international relations, a former policy adviser in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), Bruce Carson, suggests – not unlike Stephen Brown does in his contribution to this book – that the Conservative government’s minority standing had a significant impact on policy development and implementation in the 2006–08 period but that, once the party won its second minority mandate, “the Conservatives decided to govern as if they had a majority,” and they continued to do so when that majority was confirmed.³¹ By contrast, in his analysis of the Harper government’s unwillingness to involve the broader Canadian public in international policy deliberations, Gerald Schmitz finds no difference at all between the minority and majority years.³² *The Harper Era*, which benefits from having been completed after Justin Trudeau led a revitalized Liberal Party to a majority election victory in October 2015, offers a more nuanced view. Some of our contributors, like Jean-Christophe Boucher and Kim Richard Nossal, find that Parliament’s role in shaping foreign policy in Afghanistan during the Harper era was limited to non-existent. Others, like David Petrusek and Rebecca Tiessen, correlate an intensification of what had been a more tentative Conservative human rights policy between 2006 and 2011 with the Harper team’s majority victory. Still more, like Adam Chapnick, find the shift from minority to majority critical

to some elements of the government's policy but largely irrelevant to others. Taken altogether, this book suggests that Parliament's role in shaping foreign policy in the Harper era was likely more limited than it had been during previous minority governments but that, as Norman Hillmer suggests in his conclusion, its role still cannot be entirely ignored.

The Structure of Our Analysis

The Harper Era takes as its inspiration the 2001 overview of the previous "Conservative era in Canadian foreign policy," which lasted from 1984 to 1993. In their book, editors Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal ask a collection of Canadian international policy scholars whether the shift from the Liberal governments of Pierre Trudeau and Lester Pearson to the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney represented a significant "departure" from Canada's diplomatic traditions.³³ Were the Progressive Conservatives, in the words of Denis Stairs, who penned an introductory chapter that framed the case studies that followed, "architects or engineers"?³⁴

Like *Diplomatic Departures*, *The Harper Era* begins with an introductory section designed to establish the context for the analysis that follows. We, too, ask Denis Stairs to begin, this time by providing readers with a normative perspective on our central question: *Should* the government's standing in the House of Commons affect its conception, development, and implementation of international policy? In Chapter 1, Stairs argues that, even though Parliament lacks the constitutional authority to be actively engaged in world affairs, the House of Commons should nonetheless play an important role in the public education of Canadian citizens in matters of global importance. He advocates the foreign policy review process as a worthwhile if not necessary method of advancing popular and professional thinking, regardless of whether the government conducting the review has captured a clear majority of the seats in the House of Commons. In Chapter 2, John English offers a detailed analysis of the political and policy machinations of the minority Pearson and Trudeau governments. English was asked to assess whether the Liberal governments' minority standing *did* affect international policy, and his answer is a clear "yes." In Chapter 3, Philippe Lagassé then analyzes the same issue from a constitutional perspective: based on Canadian laws and constitutional precedents, *can* a government's minority standing affect its international policy? He concludes that, legally, the number of seats that a government holds in the House of Commons should

make no difference. The executive is responsible for Canadian international policy decisions; nonetheless, politics always affects policy, and minority parliaments are inevitably political.

Lagassé's conclusion, focused as it is on the political side of policy making, is an excellent introduction to some of the main themes of the case studies that follow. Those cases are hardly comprehensive³⁵ – indeed, we doubt it's possible to cover every international policy decision of the Harper era in a single text – but we hope that they are sufficiently diverse to be indicative of the most significant issues facing the Conservatives, and Canadians more generally, between 2006 and 2015. The first case is Afghanistan, largely because it represented Prime Minister Harper's first major international policy decision in 2006. In Chapter 4, Jean-Christophe Boucher and Kim Richard Nossal use counterfactual analysis to assess whether Canada's role in Afghanistan would have been significantly different had the Liberals, under Paul Martin, won a majority government in 2004 or if there had been a Harper majority in 2008. In both instances, they find that the Conservatives' standing in the House of Commons had virtually no impact on Canada's Afghanistan policy. In fact, the issue of Afghanistan was largely absent from the 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections and had no observable influence on the electoral process. The authors also conclude that Martin and Harper majority governments would have made similar decisions regarding the deployment of a battle group in Kandahar for one year in 2005, the extension of that mission for another two years in 2006, a further deployment until 2011, and the decision to participate in NATO's training mission until 2014.

In Chapter 5, David Perry reaches a similar conclusion in his broader discussion of defence policy. Certainly, he notes, the Conservatives' pledge to increase defence spending was a cornerstone of their 2006 election campaign platform. Moreover, as prime minister, Stephen Harper trumpeted his government's exceptional commitment to defending Canada through a narrative that made reference to policy in the Arctic, Afghanistan, Libya, and the Middle East. Nevertheless, in reality, much of the 2006–15 period saw the Harper government cut the defence budget and delay or cancel procurement projects. In most cases, the cost-saving measures were tied to fiscal pressures within the federal budget, bureaucratic resistance to increased military expenditures, the 2008 global economic crisis and its aftermath, and the government's own decision to prioritize the domestic economic benefits of procurement purchases. In sum, to Perry, the

minority/majority question was not irrelevant to Conservative defence policy, but it was largely secondary to these other considerations.

From the day he took office, Stephen Harper also made relations with Israel a significant international policy priority. As Adam Chapnick makes clear in Chapter 6, Harper had felt a strong personal connection to Israel since long before he was first elected to public office. Prioritizing Israel was therefore all but inevitable, regardless of the Conservatives' strength in the House. A few months after he returned from his first international trip to Afghanistan, in the aftermath of the July 2006 evacuation of thirteen thousand Canadians from Lebanon – in the midst of a conflict between Israel and Hezbollah – the prime minister informed his caucus that Canada would always “take a stand” against the destruction of Israel. Nonetheless, Chapnick also finds that the Conservatives' majority victory in 2011 enabled Cabinet ministers to travel more freely than they had done during the minority years and, thereby, contributed to the acceleration of Canada-Israel bilateral ties during that time.

It was also in the first year of its initial minority that the Conservatives staked out a clear position on environmental policy by refusing to participate in the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period. In Chapter 7, Michael Manulak argues that popular explanations for Canada's position – namely, the personal and ideological views of the prime minister and the importance of the energy sector to the Canadian economy – were in fact secondary considerations in Ottawa's decision-making process; rather, the Harper government consistently attempted to align its greenhouse gas policies with those of the United States and to ensure that any Canadian multi-lateral commitments also included all of the world's most significant carbon emitters. To Manulak, then, the question of minority versus majority government was largely irrelevant to Canadian environmental policy.

In Chapter 8, Greg Anderson focuses on Canada-US relations, another early challenge for the first Harper minority. During their first year in office, the Conservatives concluded the 2006 Canada-US Softwood Lumber Agreement, an achievement that had been sought unsuccessfully by the Martin Liberals. The government also renewed the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) agreement in perpetuity and even added maritime security to its list of responsibilities. Other issues that appeared prominently between 2006 and 2008 include unsuccessful Canadian efforts to secure US support for an extension of the Keystone XL pipeline and the publication of the *Canada First Defence Strategy*, with its emphasis

on continental security, coastal defence, and northern sovereignty. Like Manulak, Anderson posits that the Conservative government's approach to North American economic and security challenges was driven largely by international considerations. Once more, then, the minority/majority question appears to have been inconsequential.

In Chapter 9, Monica Gattinger focuses on energy, one of many defining issues of Canada-US relations in the Harper era. Gattinger is critical of the Harper government's failure to follow through on its commitment to transform Canada into an "energy superpower." She notes a long list of political disappointments, if not failures, during both the minority and majority years, including repeated delays in the negotiations to extend the Keystone XL pipeline; an inability to create a tidewater project for international exports; and struggles to contain fierce foreign and domestic opposition to a variety of energy-related projects. To Gattinger, these problems were the outcome of the government's "non-consultative, unilateral, and at times even combative" approach to dealing with Canada's provincial governments, environmental non-governmental organizations, Indigenous communities, and even opposition from within the general public. This confrontational attitude was adopted with remarkable consistency between 2006 and 2015, suggests Gattinger, leading her to conclude that the government's standing in the House of Commons was unimportant to Canadian energy policy.

Subsequent chapters focus on foreign policy issues that only gradually emerged as Conservative priorities. In Chapter 10, Stephen Brown notes that the new government's preliminary thinking on official development assistance was not revealed until 2007 at the G8 Heligendamm Conference, when Prime Minister Harper pledged to place greater emphasis on aid to the Americas. The *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act*, legislation that was supported more strongly by the opposition than it was by the government, followed in 2008. Not surprisingly, then, Brown characterizes this early period (2006–08) as marked by Conservative inertia. A more proactive phase followed (2009–11), and the majority era represented a final "intensification" of existing policies. Brown ties neither the heightened activity of the second minority period nor the stronger emphasis on development as an element of the Conservatives' post-2011 international agenda to the government's standing in the House of Commons; rather, development policy evolved to reflect the gradual decline of security considerations in thinking about Canadian aid, most notably in Afghanistan, and their replacement by a new emphasis on commercialization and the private sector.

In Chapter 11, David Petrasek and Rebecca Tiessen acknowledge early Conservative announcements of Canada's intent to pursue a "principled" foreign policy, but they argue that human rights priorities were not clear until 2009–10 when the Harper government introduced its signature maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) initiative. Petrasek and Tiessen are fairly critical of the program and how it was promoted. They suggest that both Prime Minister Harper and his first post-majority foreign minister, John Baird, were overly influenced by neoconservative social policy goals and too focused on capturing the political support of specific domestic constituencies, most notably those holding "traditional" attitudes towards women and young girls. Conservative human rights policy was also profoundly partisan and selective: the government condemned the human rights abuses of some regimes but deliberately ignored obvious problems and violations in others. Unlike Brown and others, Petrasek and Tiessen are more willing to speculate on the importance of the shift from minority to majority in 2011. Like Brown, they sense an intensification of Conservative policy, but they suspect that the new intensity was produced at least in part as a result of the political freedom granted to the government by the more stable parliamentary environment.

While the Conservatives pursued an aggressive international trade agenda as early as 2007 when they opened free trade negotiations with Colombia and Peru, Christopher Kukucha argues in Chapter 12 that a coherent trade policy that went beyond the standard neoconservative mantra extolling the virtues of reducing barriers to trade and investment did not emerge until 2009 with the release of the government's first major trade policy white paper: *Seizing Global Advantage*. The report called for greater engagement in global value chains, more secure access to international markets, and support for increased foreign direct investment. Negotiations to establish the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) also officially opened that year. With its 2011 majority, the Harper government announced a new focus on "economic diplomacy," and the Conservatives released a more comprehensive *Global Markets Action Plan* in 2013. Ultimately, however, Kukucha argues that Canadian foreign trade policy is not tied to the standing of any governing party in the House of Commons; rather, it evolves incrementally.

In Chapter 13, our final case study, David Carment and Joseph Landry examine the relevance of diaspora politics to Canadian foreign policy. The authors condemn the Harper government for the favouritism that it

demonstrated towards specific ethnic groups and for its politicized approach to diaspora-driven initiatives. Its actions, they declare, often risked compromising Canada's international standing in the crass pursuit of domestic political support. The political success of this approach ultimately helped secure a Conservative majority, but Carment and Landry suggest that the government's policies post-2011 did not change and therefore appear to have had little to do with the Conservative Party's standing in the House of Commons; rather, diaspora agendas were pursued consistently from the first minority era on, further eroding the vitality of civil society in Canada by giving Canadians the incentive to organize and vote along ethnic lines.

We complement the case studies with personal observations from Ottawa foreign policy journalist Lee Berthiaume, Senator Hugh Segal, and the acclaimed historian of Canadian international policy Norman Hillmer. In Chapter 14, in his reflections on the Conservatives' relationship with the media, Berthiaume concludes that, although the Conservatives' relationship with the media became increasingly worse over the Harper decade, it is difficult to judge whether the shift from minority to majority government was the catalyst. International policy is rarely critical to electoral outcomes in Canada, and it is therefore less likely that the standing of any party in the House of Commons will affect media relations. The Conservatives also adopted an exceptionally restrictive media strategy throughout, making it difficult to provide in-depth reporting. In Chapter 15, Segal's analysis focuses on the Senate's institutional role and, especially, on its committees. He emphasizes the professionalism and experience of Senate appointees and their ability to prioritize the substance of international policy ahead of the partisan stances of their House of Commons colleagues. Segal did not personally experience any difference in Senate processes after the Conservatives' 2011 election victory. Hillmer concludes, in Chapter 16, by focusing on Stephen Harper himself. Perhaps, he suggests, it was the force of Harper's personality – and indeed the certainty of his beliefs – that appears to have caused his party's standing in the House of Commons to mean so much less than it did to previous minority regimes.

Lessons to Be Learned: Reflections on the Harper Era

We end this introduction with four observations about the 2006–15 period that influenced, however indirectly, our editorial process. First, minority governments are inevitably shaped by the unpredictable and unstable environment in which they operate. John English describes the time-honoured

Liberal tradition of “tilting to the left” during minority government eras to secure the support of the NDP. When we started this project, we therefore expected the Harper government to behave similarly. Unlike the Pearson, Trudeau, and Martin Liberals, all of whom regularly courted the support of the NDP to maintain the confidence of the House of Commons, the Conservatives took a different approach. As Adam Chapnick’s chapter on Israel and David Carment and Joseph Landry’s contribution on diaspora politics indicate, the Harper regime targeted specific domestic constituencies, often at the individual riding level – and not always successfully, as Monica Gattinger demonstrates in her analysis of Canada’s failure to fully access the global energy market. We were also surprised by the Conservatives’ curious antipathy towards Quebec, at least on international policy issues – most notably climate change.

Second, we anticipated that Conservative international policy would be characterized by a consistency and decisiveness that would differentiate the Harper government from its immediate predecessor. Between 2003 and 2005, the Paul Martin Liberals were regularly condemned for their failure – real or perceived – to make definitive global commitments. Our authors add nuance to this hypothesis. Stephen Harper certainly prioritized the Canada-US relationship when he took office, for example. But he soon allowed that bilateral relationship to deteriorate. Select examples that span the minority and majority eras include Canada’s explicit and outspoken opposition to US-led negotiations with Iran; comments that Ottawa would not “take no for an answer” on negotiations to extend the Keystone XL pipeline; and an unwillingness to provide political cover for President Obama’s climate change efforts. As Greg Anderson suggests in his chapter, however, much of this policy was mere rhetoric that masked a relationship driven by much more than just executive posturing. David Petrusek and Rebecca Tiessen also observe the selective and often inconsistent application of the Harper government’s “principled” human rights policy, especially as it related to China and maternal health, in similar terms. In all of these cases, although the Conservatives attempted to construct a “firm” and “principled” international policy narrative, the reality did not always match the rhetoric, irrespective of the party’s standing in the House of Commons.

Next we assumed that Conservative international policy, particularly in the early years, would be dedicated in part to eradicating any memory of the previous Liberal eras. Consider, for example, the approach to Israel, the withdrawal from the Liberals’ environmental commitments, and even efforts to eliminate government use of so-called Liberal language such as

“gender equality” and “human security.” In some cases, this policy of “erasure” does indeed appear to have been tied to broader political efforts at the domestic level or to attempts to build a uniquely Conservative narrative,³⁶ as David Perry notes with reference to defence policy, where the alleged abandonment of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) by the Liberals was decried regularly, even though Paul Martin proposed a \$12 billion increase to the defence budget in 2005. At other times, however, the Conservatives seemed willing to subtly maintain, or even extend, existing Liberal policy initiatives until they had developed fresh ideas. As Stephen Brown points out, for over two years the Harper government hardly altered the official development assistance policies that it inherited from the Liberals. The government’s relationship with non-governmental organizations also (d)evolved over time.

Finally, we wondered how regularly the Conservatives would draw lessons from Canada’s history of minority regimes. Lester Pearson, for example, was a weak parliamentarian, and he did not fully understand the procedural powers of the institution. As prime minister, Stephen Harper was clearly the opposite. He leveraged his mastery of Westminster politics on matters of international policy repeatedly, perhaps most notably through his handling of the parliamentary committee on Afghan detainees. Party discipline was also weak under Pearson, who took a hands-off approach to most policy areas. Again, Harper was profoundly different, especially in his management of caucus dissent and media relations.

Like Prime Minister Harper, Pierre Trudeau came into office with few firm ideas related to foreign policy (except, perhaps, that it was too tightly controlled by the diplomats). While the 2006 Conservatives might have agreed on this latter point, they appear to have viewed the lack of strategic-level clarity as a mistake. In fact, there is evidence, as noted throughout this volume, that Prime Minister Harper was guided by clear social and economic neoconservative principles in many of his international policy decisions. Those decisions were not simply ideologically driven; they were also constructed to gain domestic electoral support and, as some have suggested, to advance a gendered narrative aimed at specific constituencies. Again, these trends did not appear to have been distinctly tied to the Conservatives’ minority or majority standing.

In sum, the chapters that follow confound the thinking of the 2006 prognosticators as well as our own. And that, we think, is a good thing.