



Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird: "If anything our foreign policy has moved back to what it historically was." Photo: Rick Roth

Q&A: A Conversation With John Baird

"We promote Canadian values"

In his Centre Block office last December 10, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird sat for an extended interview with Policy Editor L. Ian MacDonald on our foreign policy thematic "No More Honest Broker". For Baird, Canada's foreign policy is actually re-aligning to our historical origins of doing what's right, rather than going along to get along.

Policy: Mr. Baird, thanks for doing this. The thematic of this issue of *Policy Magazine* is "No More Honest Broker" and you said in your speech at the United Nations in September, "No more going along to get along". Tell us what that means in terms of a principled foreign policy and what it means in terms of Canada's traditional role as a middle power in the world.

Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird: I think if anything, our foreign policy has moved back to what it historically was. In two world wars, Canada didn't put its finger in the air to test where the rest of the world was. We didn't wait for our allies, all of our allies to make a decision. We stood and did what was right and I think too often, some people have a view that Canada is somehow a referee in the world or somehow, you know, the world's arbiter. No, we have interests. We promote Canadian values and that's tremendously important.

I know for some, it's deeply offensive, but I'm at meeting after meeting after meeting where it would just be so much easier to just go along with the crowd to be popular. I remember being at one of my first leaders' summits as foreign minister, at the Commonwealth meeting in Perth, Australia and this is the first meeting where Canada was bringing up the issue of early and forced marriage and you could see some in the room were deeply uncomfortable and it was suggested that for the good of the meeting, for the good of the Commonwealth that we just maybe scale back our interventions and I paused and thought for a moment. If Canada is not going to speak up for these young girls at the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth which is founded on values, who is going to do it and where are they going to do it?

I did the same on issues of religious freedom and gay rights and if we don't have a strong voice, who is going to? And we don't simply look at what our allies do and go with the crowd.

Policy: Let's look at some examples where there have been some conspicuously clear lines of policy that have been drawn by you and the present government. Israel, there's been no more staunch supporter of Israel, not even in the United States, than the Harper government. The prime minister has said that any threats to Israel are also threats to us, including any nuclear threat from Iran. Now he's received some political benefit in the sense that the Conservative Party won predominantly Jewish seats in the Greater Toronto Area in the 2011 and 2008 that you never won before. Ipsos recently released an exit poll in 2011 that gave you 52 per cent of the Jewish vote in Canada. But one doesn't get a sense that Mr. Harper has been doing this for votes, because in the beginning he didn't have those votes.

John Baird: It's a mistake to say that we were taking this position because of a diaspora or a community within Canada. I think anyone, anyone who knows me, whether they agree or disagree with me, knows that I passionately support the Jewish people, passionately support the state of Israel and the prime minister is exactly the same way. If you were to make a political calculus, will this get you more

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votes or less votes, if you look at my own constituency, we have 2,800 Jews. We also have 11,500 Muslims and Arabs—there's at least three times as many people from a different background in Canada. But that's not why we take the position. Do we welcome the support and we hope people agree with our policy? Absolutely, but that certainly was not the motive.

Policy: Do you feel that Canada has got out in front of the United States in terms of its support for Israel?

John Baird: I think our government is never hesitant to express our support for the only Jewish state. We feel strongly that Israel—the amount of attention that Israel gets in many international fora is over the top and is out of proportion with reality and we don't want to see the only Jewish state isolated.

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Some have disagreed with our position, but I think they respect that Canada takes a clear position. Our relationship with the Muslim world, our relationship with the Islamic world, with the Arab world, I think is excellent. I travel regularly, I've established a lot of good friendships. Whether it's—the foreign minister of Jordan, the foreign minister of the UAE are both good friends of mine, the foreign minister of Bahrain. We have a good relationship with Saudi Arabia. We have a good relationship, a very good rela-

tionship with Kuwait. Our relations in North Africa are pretty good.

People may take issue with—with one or two of our stands, but we're engaged in a big way. I am very present in the region. Canada is very present in the region. For the first time ever, we've appointed a representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We've had our first formal meeting with the Gulf Cooperation Council and we've been active in Libya and Tunisia. I've established a good relationship with the new foreign minister of Egypt. I think on many issues, we align ourselves with the Arab world, our concerns about Iran, our concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and our tough stance on Assad and his use of chemical weapons against his own people. So I think we have excellent relations in the Arab world.

Policy: I want to come to Syria. Last August, President Obama said the Assad regime had, quote, “crossed a red line” using chemical weapons in the slaughter of hundred of civilians. Then the US and France announced plans for missile strikes. Then Secretary of State John Kerry tossed off a casual comment about how if the Syrians would relinquish their chemical weapons within a week or so, the US would call off the attack. An hour later, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, was on the phone, took him up on it and the next thing you knew, they were in Geneva negotiating a deal. You said: “This is a man, Bashar Assad who up until a week ago denied that they had such weapons”. So what's your sense of the trust levels there?

John Baird: The prime minister and I strongly supported the president and his decision to follow through on the red line. But after the vote in the British Parliament, I think the president had to deal with the shadow of Iraq and a growing isolationist view, not just in Congress but in the country. All of us who are passionate about the Middle East and North Africa as I



Policy Editor L. Ian MacDonald and John Baird in the Foreign Affairs Minister's Centre Block on December 10, 2013. "We can't take a Kumbaya policy when it comes to Iran," Baird said during the wide-ranging 45-minute conversation. Photo: Rick Roth

am, we're still coming to terms with the shadow that Iraq places over the United States. So he made the decision to go down the path of trying to get an agreement in Geneva to destroy the chemical weapons. But we were prepared to strongly support him. The prime minister did at the G20 and I did publicly.

Policy: Not with missiles because we don't have any.

John Baird: No, we don't have cruise missiles and we don't have B-52 bombers. When we did have the resources, like in Libya, we were prepared to play a major role and did 10 per cent of the bombing, it didn't put up red flags and a Canadian led the mission, but we were prepared to give them open public and private support, private assurances at the G20 itself and open as far—in diplomatic calls of the world. Having said that, I think you've got to give John Kerry some credit. Getting rid of that stockpile of chemical weapons is a major accomplishment.

Policy: Is compliance the hard part in terms of enforcing this agreement?

John Baird: Yes, thus far, yes.

Policy: Getting Assad to turn over his chemical weapons?

John Baird: Thus far, you're talking about fully respecting the agreement, thus far, I think it's been positive.

Policy: Let me ask you about another arena where Canada has taken a stand that's conspicuously its own and that's the CHOGM, that Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka which Mr. Harper boycotted because of the local regime's human rights record and it ended up that he wasn't alone on that. You even tweeted that "almost half of all Commonwealth heads of government aren't attending the CHOGM, the lowest number in years."

John Baird: Well, there were 54, there were 54 heads of government in the Commonwealth and then 53 when Gambia withdrew. And only 27 showed up.

Policy: And India didn't show up either.

John Baird: India explicitly boycotted, the prime minister of Mauritius explicitly boycotted and I think the fact that you have—it's still a Commonwealth Summit, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit. What would people think at a G8 meeting only four leaders showed up. I think it's a wake-up call to an organization in big trouble.

Policy: Critics of this policy, those who are Canadian joiners of every club, would say Canada's place is at the table. Joe Clark, one of your predecessors, has said that. How would

you respond to that?

John Baird: Let me say two things. One is, we feel the Commonwealth is in need of reform. We were very pleased that the Eminent Persons Group did a lot of good work. A Canadian, a member of our caucus, Senator Hugh Segal was a member of that, I think it was a 10-person group and played a major role of shaping a pretty pragmatic reform. All leaders in Port of Spain agreed that there had to be a reform and to rejuvenate the Commonwealth, to make it relevant. We received their report and the run-up to Perth, at the meeting of Perth and with the secretary general and the secretariat and some forces in the Commonwealth did everything they can to water down the reform that all leaders agreed to. When there were problems in Pakistan, there were problems in Fiji, in Zimbabwe, the Commonwealth took action, but with respect to Sri Lanka, we couldn't even get this issue put on the agenda to discuss.

The issue of the Maldives was briefly on and then off the agenda and then finally—those are the two cases. And the Commonwealth is not there to accommodate evil, it's there to confront evil. It's a commonwealth of values.

I think frankly, because of Canada's stand, India joined us, Mauritius joined us. Mauritius was so disappointed in the Commonwealth that they

resigned their chairmanship and said they wouldn't host the next Commonwealth meeting and the ultimate indictment is that only half of the leaders showed up in a leaders' meeting. David Cameron went and the United Kingdom is a very difficult situation obviously with the Queen being the head of the Commonwealth. The fact that the prime minister has spoken up so loudly, probably encouraged David Cameron to take a more active and vocal approach, of visiting—visiting Jafna and speaking out. I do note that he was not in the chair for a majority of the leaders' portion as well.

Policy: Okay, let's look at Iran and the deal between the P5 plus one and the Iranian government, on relaxing economic sanctions in return for dialing down their nuclear program. Normally, critics at least would—had expected the government to—work with our allies as both opposition parties put it in the House. You said that you were “deeply skeptical”.

John Baird: Privately I don't know a single country in the Middle East that would disagree with Canada's position other than Syria and Iran. Obviously it's a first step.

Policy: Is, again, implementation the hard part?

John Baird: Implementation, well this is the first step. This is an interim six-month agreement. So the hard part will be getting a final agreement. Our view is 10,000 spinning centrifuges, enriching uranium, a nuclear state is a big issue for its Gulf neighbors. If Iran wants to have a civilian nuclear program, that's fine. You don't need to have an enrichment capacity. You can immediately sign on to the International Energy Agency. Canada was the chair of the IEA until a few months ago. We played a very active role as chairman. We were a big funder of the IEA. I visited their leadership in Vienna. Their leadership has visited me here in Canada. So we're very active. We're making sure the IEA has the capacity to be able to fulfill the agreement.

Certainly, this agreement was less a P5 plus one and more a bilateral agreement between the United States and Iran, but they've obviously been negotiating this since March. I congratulate John Kerry. He's put a significant

The United States is a friend and an ally and I chose my words very carefully because we want this agreement to work. I hope my skepticism is misplaced. But when it comes to trusting Iran, they haven't earned—they haven't earned trust from the international community and that's why it's not trust and verify, it's verify, verify, verify.

degree of effort into this. The United States is a friend and an ally and I chose my words very carefully because we want this agreement to work. I hope my skepticism is misplaced. But when it comes to trusting Iran, they haven't earned—they haven't earned trust from the international community and that's why it's not trust and verify, it's verify, verify, verify. We're already hearing reports that they're looking at alternative ways of enrichment. We're already hearing reports of the Iranian government taking a very different perspective on the agreement they signed than others and let's just hope that over the next six months, we can get a final agreement. We've fought too hard, the international community has fought too hard, Canada has fought too hard on nuclear non-proliferation going back 40, 50 years.

We can't take a Kumbaya policy when it comes to Iran. This is a government whose nuclear program is deeply disturbing. This is a government with an atrocious human rights record and getting worse under President Rouhani.

The last thing we need is another four or five countries in the world, many unstable, to get or look at getting nuclear weapons and that's what we're fighting for and that's the historic Canadian position. We can't take a Kumbaya policy when it comes to Iran. This is a government whose nuclear program is deeply disturbing. This is a government with an atrocious human rights record and getting worse under President Rouhani. The number of executions have gone up, not down and finally, a government who supports terrorism. It's a state sponsor of terrorism and you know, stone

women, hang gays and they're not going to get the benefit of the doubt from Canada and I'll tell you, in the Middle East, there's not many countries who disagree with me or disagree with Canada.

Policy: Let's look at Ukraine. Canada was the first country under Prime Minister Mulroney to recognize Ukraine in 1991. You've been there recently and in the House of Commons, just before Christmas, you were asked by the opposition foreign affairs critic, Paul Dewar: “What were you doing mixing it up down with the crowds?” He said that you should be trying to bridge Ukraine's “great divide” between the pro-Russian and the pro-European supporters there and you replied, “I'll tell you whose side this government stands on, we stand on the side of the Ukrainian people and their fight for democracy.” What was your sense?

John Baird: I'll put it in context. The government went into a small demonstration, to break things up under the guise that—to remove these protesters, beat protesters, beat journalists, a lot of violence because they, quote, “...had to put Christmas decorations in the square”. Obviously they were trying to clean up the street before the international community arrived and then they made the decision, just before the meetings in Vilnius to suspend their European association agreement talks and the decision on that.

A lot of leaders, a lot of foreign ministers didn't go. I did. The message that I delivered to—to my colleague, the foreign minister, we had a good professional meeting, was to be very mindful of how they conduct themselves, to avoid violence and to engage with the opposition. I also took the opportunity that I was there to meet with some of the opposition—I met with the government, I met with the three opposition leaders, heard their take. The Canadian embassy is two blocks from where this demon-

stration was going on. I don't know how I could not walk two blocks to hear and listen to the people protesting. Mr. Dewar said that I was taking sides. Well, I was listening and he was insinuating that I don't listen. I talk to the protesters on Sri Lanka in front of the Commonwealth meeting or in front of our Commonwealth meeting in London or in New York at the UN, you better believe I stop and talk to them. So I went and I listened and my colleague, the foreign minister of Germany did, the foreign minister of Poland did and the foreign minister of the Netherlands did and I suspect that if I hadn't, they would be the first saying why wouldn't Canada go and stand with them.

It is a real concern that you have some—some very real influences from one of Ukraine's neighbours and you know, obviously we want the best, we want peace and prosperity and freedom for the Ukrainian people and I think the best path for them to achieve all three is with the association agreement with the EU. I've engaged with my colleague in the past. I spoke to him 10 days before, on the decision that they made to suspend their discussions with the EU, to encourage him in this path, even though it may be difficult and we'll continue to engage.

Policy: You spoke earlier of actually returning to the principled origins of Canadian foreign policy. We're speaking on the day of Nelson Mandela's memorial service in South Africa and it occurred to me that one example of that was Mr. Mulroney's crusade against apartheid and to freeing Nelson Mandela. On this, he differed from Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

John Baird: Arguably his two closest friends in the circle of foreign leaders and he took on Thatcher and Reagan head on. He wasn't going to go along to get along with our major allies. He spoke with moral clarity. He spoke with a strong and powerful voice, frankly not just alone but putting together an international—an international effort, primarily first within the Commonwealth and then elsewhere. There was no moral relativism there and that was probably Mr. Mulroney's single biggest stand for what was right in the entire time that he was prime minister.

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He wasn't afraid to buck the trend, he wasn't afraid to take a bigger role and I'll tell you—when you stand on principles like that, it does matter. It can talk to Natan Sharansky who was in a Soviet gulag and when Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an “evil empire” that gave him hope and the fact that when Mr. Mandela was released, one of the very first calls he made was to Brian Mulroney and that is Canada at its best. Sometimes people don't agree with us, but I'll tell you, more agreed with Mr. Mulroney on South Africa when he left office than when he started.

Policy: On Arctic sovereignty and the North Pole, part of the policy that you announced before the holidays was a mapping of the Lomonsov Ridge to the North Pole. Is drawing a map going to get us what we want or what more do we need to do?

John Baird: What the prime minister has said, or what our government has said for the past eight years is that we will aggressively stand up for our sovereignty in the north. We support the convention on the continental shelf and the commission's work. Our officials have done a tremendous amount of good work.

What the government said is that we wanted to get all the facts before we make a decision, to get the mapping and then to analyzing before we made a final submission which I think is a good one. Canadians expect us to do our best and to—and to make an informed decision. We'll get the facts and then we'll submit.

Policy: Let's turn to trade and the economy and Canada-US relations. At the end of November, your colleague, Trade Minister Ed Fast, released the Global Markets Action Plan, or as it was immediately dubbed, “diplomacy for dollars” and I guess some of the traditionalists in your department thought we're leaving our traditional areas of interest. What are your thoughts on that and CETA, the Canada-Europe Trade Agreement or the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, is the TPP the next play? And what about the bilaterals with South Korea and Japan?

My job is about promoting Canadian values and promoting Canadian interests. Increasingly those interests are—have an economic dimension. What do we want for the world? Three things: peace, prosperity and freedom.

John Baird: I've always been very clear. My job is about promoting Canadian values and promoting Canadian interests. Increasingly those interests are—have an economic dimension. What do we want for the world? Three things: peace, prosperity and freedom and I'll tell you, there will be more peace in Israel and the Palestinian Authority when the Palestinian economy grows, when people have the capacity to provide for themselves and their family, can earn a decent pay cheque. For Haiti, what is our goal for Haiti? Peace and prosperity and freedom. That's why we're making investments in security so that they'll be peace. That's why we're making investments in humanitarian and development assistance.

What we also want—I mean the guild and—the guild and the clothier operations in Haiti, they're coming in. They're going to provide jobs for the people of Haiti. We don't want to give them development assistance. We want them to be able to provide for themselves and their families. So trade is a big part of that and promoting Canadian interests. Listen, when Barrick Gold does well, that's good for Canadians who own Barrick Gold.

The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan, the municipal pensioners in Ontario, when Barrick does well, in the Dominican Republic, in Chile, in Africa, Canada does well because there's so much Canadian investment there. That's good for Canadians' retirement. When we have—when Canadian companies do well, they pay—they pay more taxes and that's how we pay for health care and education.

We're not afraid to push for Canadian interests on the economic side, but it's never an either/or equation with Canadian values or Canadian trade interests.

It's not about a pipeline, it's not about the energy sector, this is about the future prosperity of our country. It matters, it's important and we want to see it approved and we're working aggressively at the political level and the diplomatic level, with the province of Alberta, with the private sector to get it approved.

Policy: On Canada-US, in a word, Keystone, is this a test of the relationship?

John Baird: It's not about a pipeline, it's not about the energy sector, this is about the future prosperity of our country. It matters, it's important and we want to see it approved and we're working aggressively at the political level and the diplomatic level, with the province of Alberta, with the private sector to get it approved.

Policy: What's your sense of where the White House is coming from on this, because usually in a negotiation, you say to the other guy, what do you need for your comfort level and to get you to where you need to be on this? You get conflicting messages coming out of Washington. President Obama gave an interview with the *New York Times* in July where he pointedly referred to the tar sands rather than the oil sands and he added that Keystone would create only 2,000 jobs during construction and after that, he said: "We're talking about somewhere between 50 to 100 jobs in an economy

of 150 million people". And interestingly the State Department had a number that they subsequently stuck to, that it would create 42,000 direct and indirect jobs and TransCanada's number is 16,000 direct jobs and they're very confident of it.

John Baird: This is a project that will be good for the Canadian economy, it will be good for the American economy. It will be phenomenal for American energy security. It will be good for America's national security, it will be good for the prosperity of Canada.

Policy: Are you confident that Secretary Kerry understands how important this is to us?

John Baird: I had a great relationship with Hillary Clinton who was a big supporter of Canada. I'm developing a really solid relationship with— with John. I have huge admiration for his leadership, particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian peace question. I have spoken to Ambassador Gary Doer in Washington. The embassy is working hard and the government is seized with it. We'll see—we'll see where it goes. It's important for Canada.

Policy: Two final questions. First on the treatment of gays in Russia. The Olympics are coming up in Sochi in February. How confident are you that the Olympic Village is going to be a place of tolerance?

John Baird: It would be a public relations disaster for the Russian Federation if they started to arrest people for walking around with a rainbow flag or if two athletes were holding hands. Obviously we're concerned and we'll have consular officials available, we always do in foreign countries to deal with any issues, but this is kind of—it's kind of selfish to sort of think of the human rights of a few thousand athletes for 16 days rather than the 140 million Russian, 150 million doing 365 days a year, year after year after year. I think it's patently clear what—what the motivation in this (Russian) law is and Canada was the first big country to speak up against it and I was pleased to see President Obama and Mr. Cameron in the UK to follow Canada's lead. And obviously we'll maintain our opposition. I had a long discussion with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister about it and we've agreed to disagree.

Policy: And finally, a subject that's close to your heart. You've made speeches about this cause that you've adopted as your own and that's young women and girls and forced marriages. What your sense of the progress on that dossier?

Maternal and early child health, women and peace and security, early and forced marriage, rape as a weapon of war, these are all issues that are important to Canada. These are not just some arcane human rights issues. This is all about development as well.

John Baird: This is the first time that this is front and centre on the international agenda. Someone has called it the effect that Hillary Clinton brought in 1995, that women's rights are human rights and then her leadership on this as secretary of state. Canada has been very active in that and Canada is doing a lot on putting the issue of early and forced marriages on the agenda. We're working with civil society. We had the first side event at the UN General Assembly on it. We're getting a lot of support.

We've got to change attitudes. This is not exclusively a government issue, but it's an attitude and we're putting a lot of programming dollars into, working a great organization, Girls, Not Brides, in London. It's an interesting issue for a conservative man to champion, but there is a theme in this. If you look at the prime minister's leadership on maternal and early child health, women and peace and security, early and forced marriage, rape as a weapon of war, these are all issues that are important to Canada. These are not just some arcane human rights issues. This is all about development as well. If country X in Africa wants to see itself grow and succeed, they need everyone in their country making it grow and if you're only using 49 per cent of your population's brain power, you're not going to get very far. **P**