

Canada, the G8, and Africa: the rise and decline of a hegemonic project¹

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In 2001/2, the Canadian government led by then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien seized the opening towards Africa created at the 2001 Genoa G8 Summit, and through a sustained and sophisticated diplomatic effort ensured that Africa took centre stage at the 2002 Kananaskis Summit in Calgary. The resulting G8 Africa Action Plan, itself a response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) championed by several of the continent's then new leaders, effectively set this concert of the world's wealthiest capitalist countries onto a path of sustained engagement with the challenges of the world's poorest and least secure continent. Canada itself, having made "Africa" a G8 focus, appeared set to build on its lead through ongoing commitments in aid, security, and investment. Yet by the Gleneagles Summit in 2005 – an event that effectively overshadowed previous G8 initiatives toward Africa – there were indications that the ardour of the Canadian government was faltering, at least for the plans framed by Tony Blair's UK government. And by the Heiligendamm Summit in 2007, the new Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, was signaling a shift in priority from Africa to the

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Americas (Freeman, 8/6/2007). Much subsequent critique has targeted the Conservatives for their ostensible (though overstated) “abandonment” of Africa (see Ignatieff, 2009).

How are we to make sense of this trajectory, theoretically and historically? What does it reveal about the intra-hegemonic politics of Africa’s erstwhile “new partnership” with the G8, and the possibility of consistent, thoughtful engagement? What, more particularly, does it reveal about the nature and limits of Canada’s role as a “middle” or “secondary power” in the world’s wealthiest (though now increasingly marginalized) club?

I will argue that Canada’s extraordinary engagement with African issues in the early part of the new millennium can be understood as “hegemonic work” in two senses: attempting to foster a broadly supported consensus on how to more fully integrate the continent ‘globalization left behind’ into the dominant world order; and in so doing, reinforcing key legitimizing myths concerning the Canadian state domestically. However, the “success” and sustainability of this work has been compromised by the shallowness and inconstancy of Canadian interest(s) in Africa. While some limited resurgence of Canadian concern with the continent was evident in the run-up to the 2010 G8 (and G20) Summit hosted by Canada, it will be difficult to rebuild the credibility and connections that were disrupted in the second half of the decade, even if there is a will to do so. This point was underscored by the country’s historic failure to win election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in October 2010 – not least because of its diminished focus on Africa.

The paper begins with an elaboration of Africa policy as “hegemonic work.” It then focuses on what was, and was not, achieved at the 2002 Kananaskis Summit and its aftermath; Canada’s ambivalent role in the context of the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, anchoring “the year of Africa”; and the subsequent de-emphasis on the continent under the Harper Conservatives. Finally, it revisits policy developments surrounding the 2010 Summit of the now diminished G8, and considers the implications of this analysis for African governments and organizations.

Africa as Hegemonic Work²:

The G8’s sustained engagement with Africa over the course of the 2000s can be understood as an attempt to forge a hegemonic project, in the neo-gramscian sense popularized by Robert Cox, of fostering a relatively stable and widely accepted order based on an “inter-subjective sharing of behavioural expectations” (Cox, 1989: 829; see also see Cox with Sinclair, 1996). This is particularly challenging, if important, in the face of vast inequalities of wealth and power, such as those that had deepened between the members of the G8 and the governments and peoples of Africa during the previous two decades of neoliberal globalization. In short, a continent that had been relatively (and in some respects absolutely) diminished, in material and security terms, by its limited and frequently pathological encounter with globalization (see Ferguson, 2007: 25-49) posed a particularly acute challenge to the governments that had been the principal carriers and beneficiaries of that order. The need to be seen to respond to this challenge had been heightened at the start of

² The language of ‘hegemonic work’ is borrowed from Coulter, 2009: 201.

the new millennium by the increasing scale and intensity of the anti-globalization protests that had overshadowed G8 and related meetings, at Genoa, Seattle, Quebec City and beyond.³

In the face of this challenge, an attractive assemblage of Africa's most prominent leaders, including Presidents Mbeki of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria, and Wade of Senegal, brought forward a proposal for a "New Africa Initiative" at the Genoa G8 Summit in 2001 as the basis for a comprehensive new "partnership." G8 governments, led by Canada's Chretien, the UK's Blair, and France's Chirac, responded quickly and positively, agreeing to the appointment of African Personal Representatives to craft a concerted G8 response to what evolved on the African side into the NEPAD. The overture was attractive not only because of the considerations noted above, but because a central premise of the African plan was an acceptance by African governments of their primary responsibility for the challenges they faced, and the solutions to them. This suggested to G8 leaders the basis for a more attractive "bargain" than had been possible in the past, including implied absolution for their own historic role(s) in the continent's trials. The assessment of Sir Nicholas Bayne reflects this understanding: "This time, Mbeki, Obasanjo, Wade and their colleagues have accepted that Africans are themselves to blame for their problems and that they must take responsibility for their own recovery" (Bayne, 2003: 6). Whatever the historical and analytical shortcomings of this understanding, its political appeal for G8 leaders was clear.

³ The need to respond to these protests, not only in terms of logistics but substance, was clearly in the minds of Summit planners. See, for example, Fowler, 2003: 225.

Substantively, both the relatively spare Africa Action Plan (AAP, 2002) that emerged at Kananaskis, and the massive report of the Commission for Africa (2005) that controversially anchored the G8's next 'big push' on Africa at Gleneagles in 2005, reflected and reinforced a set of assumptions about the challenges facing the continent and the prescriptions to deal with them. These assumptions rested firmly within the dominant 'post-Washington Consensus' (see Brown, 2006; Williams, 2005; Sandbrook, 2005). They represented an elaboration beyond, and softening of, the draconian Market-oriented structural adjustment reforms that had been imposed across the continent since the early 1980s. They included a new emphasis on governance, security, social development, water, agriculture, and "aid effectiveness," without altering the marketizing and growth-oriented core of the earlier approach. In this sense, they represented the extension of "Third Way" logic to the global level, assuming a pragmatic, post-ideological consensus on the way forward that effectively denied, or at least obfuscated, the possibility of structural conflict or contradiction (see Coulter, 2009). The AAP explicitly took its lead from elements of the NEPAD, and in this way reinforced the sense that this was a new and genuine 'partnership'. It also sought to institutionalize positive reinforcement and create incentives for prescribed reforms, by rewarding governments that conformed to the "Nepad vision" through an emphasis on support for "Enhanced Partnership Countries" that could serve as "a beacon of 'best practices'" for other governments that "still do not understand or accept what must be done to help themselves" (Fowler, 2003: 236).

Taking up this project was compelling to the Canadian government for several reasons. First, the consensus that was being advocated reflected the dominant ideological and policy assumptions of the Chretien government – very much a Third Way government in practice if less self-consciously so in principle. Second, and of greater interest theoretically, is that this role fit firmly within what Cox, following the Canadian scholar-practitioner John Holmes, has characterized as internationalist “middlerpowermanship” (Cox, 1989: 823-836). This role, for which middle-ranking capabilities are a necessary but not sufficient condition, is one that seeks to foster, sustain, and expand the zones of world order. Since the polities that have played this role, in current and previous historical contexts, generally lack the ability to impose a coherent, order-building vision, their approach has tended to be more pragmatic and process-oriented rather than architectural (though a certain amount of “norm entrepreneurship” has often been involved). Cox follows Holmes in characterizing this role as “‘lapidary’ in the sense of building from the bottom up, stone upon stone, a structure that grows out of the landscape, not imposing from above some architectonic grand design” (Cox, 1989: 827).

This is a role which post-World War II Canadian governments had played with some, albeit uneven, regularity - or consistent inconsistency. It was attractive to a relatively wealthy but “secondary” state and its elites, insofar as it was understood to serve Canadian interests in a relatively secure, rules-based, and economically liberal order. In the specific context of a G8 response/overture to Africa, moreover, it can be argued that the Canadian government was uniquely well placed to orchestrate this effort. As a leading member of both the Commonwealth

and *la francophonie*, it had developed relatively long-standing and comfortable relationships with Africa's post-colonial governments, free from the direct imperial legacies and baggage of the UK and France. Despite Canada's status as a charter member of the NATO alliance, it was perceived as having little strategic interest in Africa, and few means to pursue them. This, combined with its limited trade and investment role on the continent,⁴ meant that it enjoyed a relatively benign image that enhanced its ability to serve as an interlocutor between G8 and African governments. Yet its relatively sophisticated and well-resourced diplomatic and aid resources⁵ gave it the necessary means to help lead and "sell" such an intensive diplomatic effort, at least in short bursts. The broader point is that, understood in neo-gramscian terms, efforts to foster relatively consensual hegemonic arrangements often involve, and may even require, the skills and characteristics of secondary or "middle" powers such as Canada.

This effort was also "hegemonic work" for the Canadian government in another, related sense. To be sure, an order-building role that aspired to "humanize" and stabilize globalization by seeking to incorporate Africa served elite interests, in a relatively diffuse sense at least. In addition however, it also helped reinscribe and stabilize a hegemonic order domestically, by reprising a couple of

⁴ A point that must be qualified in light of the large and growing role of Canadian extractive companies in the controversial mining and energy sectors of many African countries. Canadian firms have collectively become among the largest investors in these sectors, with more than CDN 23 billion currently invested. See Black and Savage, forthcoming 2010.

⁵ Another point that must be qualified given Canada's relatively limited and inconstant commitment to aid and diplomatic resources, as will be elaborated below.

favourite roles and self-images.⁶ On the one hand, a perceived leadership role in addressing African poverty, insecurity, and marginality strongly conformed with and reinforced a “humane internationalist” (or “liberal internationalist”) self-image that has enjoyed substantial and long-standing appeal amongst the Canadian public and Canadian elites (see Pratt, 1989; Munton, 2003). Even though – indeed because – this image has often been contradicted in practice, such apparently enlightened initiatives have enjoyed considerable popularity and even a measure of collective relief when they have been reprised, as if Canadian foreign policy was reverting to its “natural” or at least its better impulses.⁷

On the other hand, and reflective at least in part of a more “hard-nosed” or pragmatic variant of Canadian internationalism, Canada’s status and participation in the G7/G8 has also enjoyed considerable popularity (see Kirton, 2007). While the constraining effects of Summit membership on Canada’s international role have elicited some academic controversy, the desirability of this status has become both an article of faith and a source of anxiety among Canadian political and bureaucratic elites and attentive publics. Our status as the “smallest of the great” (with the world’s 11th-largest GDP in a club of 8; see Potter, 2009) simultaneously affirms our importance in the world, while prompting insecurity about the possibility of decline and “demotion.” Thus, an initiative such as that taken at Kananaskis, in which the Canadian government could be seen not only to have fully participated in, but in

⁶ For a Gramscian exploration of the interplay between transnational and domestic hegemonic work in Canadian “middle power (or Pearsonian) internationalism”, see Neufeld, 1995.

⁷ As reflected in the sub-title of Kananaskis Sherpa and African Personal Representative Robert Fowler’s reflection on the Kananaskis process: “Towards a Less Self-Centred Canadian Foreign Policy” (Fowler, 2003: 219).

some real sense *led* the G8 towards a more generous and enlightened engagement with Africa was doubly compelling. The fact that Prime Minister Chretien was in the final, 'legacy-minding' years of his long political career firmly reinforced this logic.

Leaving aside the question of the viability and desirability of the collective vision for African renewal developed in the AAP however, this case also illustrates some core problems and limitations of such hegemonic work. First, as we shall see, the potential for sustained concertation is undermined by the corrosive effects of intra-hegemonic differences of approach and 'one-upmanship'. Second, participants in such initiatives have extraordinary difficulty sustaining the focus, commitment, and resources necessary to see such initiatives through to their logical ends. In this case, as we shall see, a Canada that had apparently set great store in its G8 leadership on this issue had, within five years, signaled a retreat. How did this occur, and what are its implications for Canada's and the G8's erstwhile African "partners"?

The 'Conjunctural Moment' of Kananaskis

One conclusion regarding the Kananaskis conjuncture is undeniable: the various factors noted above combined to produce a focus on Africa without precedent in the nearly thirty years of Summit history. The long shadow cast by the Gleneagles Summit should not obscure the degree to which it emerged out of a process that was 'locked in' at the 2002 Summit.

The Canadian government, and particularly its Prime Minister, worked very hard to achieve this focus. As Robert Fowler, his chief “Sherpa” for the Summit and Personal Representative for Africa, has somewhat hyperbolically put it:

From Genoa, in July 2001, it was crystal clear that Prime Minister Chretien would insist that the Canadian Summit he would host in 2002 would feature an all-encompassing effort to end Africa’s exclusion from the rest of the world and reverse the downward-spiraling trend in the quality of life of the vast majority of Africans (Fowler 2003: 223).⁸

Chretien, whose previous political success had been far more the result of pragmatism and ‘street smarts’ than statesmanship, was strongly supported in this effort at global leadership by Tony Blair of Britain and Jacques Chirac of France.

What unfolded was a concerted, year-long diplomatic effort involving wide-ranging

⁸ Fowler was himself a periodic ‘Africa hand’, as reflected in his comment that “as I approached the end of my career I would have another – this time unique – opportunity to assist Africa, a continent and a people that have held my fascination and deep affection for all of my adult and professional life” (Fowler 2003: 221). He had already achieved considerable notoriety for his pivotal role, as Chair of the Angola Sanctions Committee while Canada’s UN Ambassador in 1999/2000, in instigating the Council’s creation of an unprecedented Panel of Experts to evaluate how sanctions against UNITA were being violated, and how they could be made more effective. The Panel’s report caused a furour by “naming names”, but also highlighted key features of the Angolan war economy and produced recommendations that helped choke off UNITA’s ability to sustain the conflict (see Mollander, 2009). Fowler’s close association with the continent, and his notoriety, were further reinforced by his abduction and incarceration by al Qaeda linked rebels in west Africa for 130 days in the first half of 2009, while on a UN mission in Niger.

consultations with G-7 governments, African leaders and NEPAD architects. The result was that a full day of the two-day Summit (shortened from the three-day format of previous years) was devoted to discussions concerning Africa, and that for the first time non-G-8 leaders, specifically from Africa, were direct participants in Summit deliberations. The Summit resulted in the adoption of the AAP, incorporating “more than 100 specific commitments” reflecting G-8 consensus on where and how they should “respond to NEPAD’s promise” (Fowler 2003: 228). These commitments spanned the areas of Resource Mobilization, Peace and Security, Governance, Trade and Investment, Health, Agriculture, Water and Human Resources. As noted above, the AAP placed particular emphasis on channeling support to “Enhanced Partnership Countries” that “demonstrate a political and financial commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people and pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty” (see Fowler 2003: 239).

How are we to assess the implications of these commitments? In part, this depends on whether one thinks that G8 Summits, and the documents they issue, have been more than talking shops and empty rhetoric (for contrasting views, see Kirton 2002, and Elliot 2003). In part, it depends on one’s interpretation of both the AAP and the NEPAD, which Fowler characterized as a “realistic” plan “aimed at making African nations full and equal partners in the global economic and trading system and, above all, at attracting significant levels of foreign investment to that continent” (Fowler 2003: 226; see also Taylor, 2005). Particularly when inflected by the new emphasis on rewards to “Enhanced Partnership Countries”, this is a scheme

which, whatever its specific provisions and strengths, strongly reflected Western hegemonic preferences concerning the political and economic organization of both African countries and world affairs.

For our purposes, however, the evaluation can perhaps be reduced to a triple bottom line. First, the governments of the richest countries of the world gave more, and more sympathetic, attention to the challenges and opportunities confronting Africa than ever before. For this, the determined efforts of Jean Chretien and his government deserve much of the credit. Second however the AAP, for all its “specific commitments”, produced virtually no new resources for Africa beyond those already announced at the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development several months previously. In sum, it produced a qualified commitment to devote half (roughly USD 6 billion) of the USD 12 billion in new development funding committed at Monterrey to Africa – far short of the USD 64 billion that the NEPAD document estimated the Program required. This explains the verdict of most NGO and editorial opinion, reflected in such phrases as, “they’re offering peanuts to Africa – and recycled peanuts at that”, and “Africa let down by the rich” (*Guardian Weekly* 4-10/7/2002). Thus, Canada’s best efforts could not bring its G-8 partners around to substantially ‘putting their money where their mouths were’. The net result indicates the ability of Canadian policy-makers to shape agendas concerning Africa, on the one hand, but their sharply limited ability to shape outcomes.

Nevertheless, the third bottom line is that Kananaskis initiated a process of G8 engagement with African issues that proved surprisingly durable. The process

leading up to, and following on from, the adoption of the AAP was firmly reinforced by the institutionalization of Personal Representatives of Heads of Government for Africa (APRs), which ensured a measure of follow up and accountability. At the Evian Summit in 2003, this dynamic was deepened by the creation of the African Partnership Forum (APF), including APRs of “G8 partners, 11 additional Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development donors heavily engaged in Africa, the members of the NEPAD Implementation Committee, and selected African and international organizations...”. The APF has subsequently met twice annually, with the stated objective of serving “as a catalyst for cooperation in support of NEPAD and as a forum for information sharing and mutual accountability...” (CIDA, 2004: 13). At Sea Island in 2004, the American hosts, who as usual had been relatively unwilling to engage in concerted efforts, nevertheless contributed significantly to the momentum of the G8 process by orchestrating a more precise and expansive commitment to African capacity building for peace and security, including the training and equipping of 75,000 peacekeepers, mostly African, by 2010 (see Williams, 2008: 316). Beyond Gleneagles (addressed below), there was widespread concern that with the St. Petersburg Summit in 2006, focus and momentum would be lost. Yet to the surprise of some in the German African Studies community (author interviews, May 2007), Chancellor Angela Merkel restored the focus on Africa at the Heiligendamm Summit, and the Japanese and Italian hosts retained it in 2008 and 2009. In short, a focus on Africa was institutionalized.

The impacts of this process are analytically complex. Counter-factually, it is reasonable to speculate that considerably *less* would have been done in response to NEPAD, and on shared policy priorities related to governance, aid, security, and trade for example, in the absence of this ongoing focus and the opportunities for accountability it has generated (see, for example, DATA Report, 2009). This is at one level a profoundly discouraging assessment, given that the main Summit “story line” since 2005 has typically been the looming failure of G8 governments to live up to their aid commitments, and that G8 activities on security and trade negotiations, for example, have been unsuccessful in moving prospects in these areas decisively forward.⁹ In another sense, however, the fact that African governments and organizations continue to invest this process, anchored by annual G8 Summits, with a degree of legitimacy and credibility, as if it will or at least *could* produce important improvements, suggests that it has had some success as a hegemonic project of fostering a plausible political consensus on the way forward for the continent.

For its part, in the years immediately following Kananaskis the Canadian government spent considerable time and effort both bringing its policies toward Africa into line with the G8 consensus, and reporting assiduously about its progress in doing so (see CIDA, 2004). On aid, following on from the Monterrey and Kananaskis commitments of 2002, the government’s 2005 International Policy Statement (IPS) confirmed its intent to double aid to Africa between 2003-4 and

⁹ As reflected, for example, in the collapse of the “Doha Development Round” of trade negotiations, and the ongoing challenges in pivotal African conflict areas – notably Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) - to which the G8 AAP formally committed its collective efforts.

2008-9 – slightly more quickly than the doubling of the aid programme as a whole by 2010. Moreover, in the context of Prime Minister Chretien’s pre-Kananaskis diplomacy, the government had previously announced a CDN 500 million “Canada Fund for Africa” in its December 2001 Budget, which the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) candidly described as “a showcase for Canadian leadership in pursuit of effective development through a series of large-scale, flagship initiatives in support of NEPAD and the G8 Africa Action Plan” (CIDA 2002: 26; see CIDA 2003 for details). In terms of aid practices and priorities, the government committed to bringing its programme into line with the emerging consensus on “Aid Effectiveness” in the international aid regime, involving harmonization with other donors, aligning with recipient country priorities, and respecting developing country “ownership” (see Lalonde, 2009; Black, 2006). Finally, and after at least one false start, it moved to focus on “Enhanced Partnership Countries” by announcing in the context of the 2005 IPS a decision to focus two-thirds of its bilateral aid in 25 priority ‘partners’, 14 of which were to be African.¹⁰

In terms of trade and investment, even as Canada’s presence in African extractive industries grew dramatically and often controversially (see Black and Savage, 2010), the government supplemented its regular trade and investment development windows, such as the Export Development Corporation, with a CDN 100 million contribution to a “Canada Investment Fund for Africa” (CIFA) drawn

¹⁰ The proposed African Development Partners were: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zambia.

from the Canada Fund for Africa, to be co-funded with and managed by private sector investors.¹¹ CIFA eventually invested in 15 African projects, although these were heavily concentrated in pockets of relative continental prosperity in South Africa (4), Nigeria (4), and North Africa (3) and were therefore of questionable developmental impact in nurturing ‘pro-poor growth’ where it is most urgently needed.

Finally, in terms of peace and security, the Canadian government made a modest contribution (CDN 19 million) through the Canada Fund for Africa to capacity building in West Africa (CDN 15 million) and at the African Union (CDN 4 million). Even more modest contributions have been sustained through the Military Training Cooperation Program (MTCP) of the Department of National Defence. A considerably larger contribution was eventually made, as international attention to the crisis in Darfur mounted, to the functionality of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS; see Black, 2010). Yet given the inadequacy of this force to the challenge it was faced with there is a sense in which the Canadian (along with other G8) contribution(s) did little more than sustain a veneer of respectability for an overmatched force, while diffusing and obfuscating responsibility for dealing with the crisis (see Black and Williams, 2008; Nossal, 2005).

In short, Canada’s follow up to its conspicuous role surrounding the Kananaskis Summit can be interpreted as a case of “good *enough* international citizenship” (Black and Williams, 2008)– good enough, that is, to retain credibility in

¹¹ Cordiant of Montreal and Actis of London.

the eyes of its G8 partners and their African interlocutors, but little more. In fact, the record since Gleneagles in 2005 has been one of relatively quiet retreat from the expectations generated in 2001/2.

Gleneagles and Beyond

Prior to the 2005 Summit at Gleneagles, the governments of Canada and the UK had been the two most consistent and concerted proponents of the G8's engagement with Africa. It is not surprising, therefore, that Canadian Finance Minister Ralph Goodale was asked to join Tony Blair's hand-picked, 17-member Commission for Africa (CFA), whose massive 461-page report, *Our Common Future*, was designed to give focus and urgency to Summit deliberations. Nevertheless, the CFA and Gleneagles processes revealed some significant differences between these two governments and, beyond them, other G8 members. These had ambiguous but corrosive implications for their collective approach.

As noted above, the "year of Africa" orchestrated by the British government of Tony Blair, highlighted by the Gleneagles Summit in July 2005, effectively overshadowed previous Summit efforts and was widely seen, notably by Western "civil societies", as the new benchmark for G8 efforts. Indeed, the broad sense periodically expressed by British officials that, in the words of Tony Blair, "I think the (Gleneagles) G8 last year was the first time Africa has come to centre stage for the G8 Summit" (cited in Vines and Cargill, 2006) was both symptomatic and a predictable irritant for other governments. Nevertheless, there is no gainsaying the

scale of the effort and the extraordinary political theatre it generated. The Gleneagles Declaration was preceded by the year-long effort of the British-sponsored CFA, whose report noted that Africa was falling badly behind on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including halving the number of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015, such that on current trends it would achieve the MDG's 135 years late. The Commission's analysis called for a doubling of aid to Africa by the end of the decade, entailing a \$25 billion increase, and the allocation of another \$25 billion by 2015 (Commission for Africa 2005). Prodded by the sustained efforts of British leaders Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, in effective alliance with the celebrity activists associated with the "Live8" concerts and the Make Poverty History campaign, the G8 did produce some relatively substantial and "firm" commitments at Gleneagles. These included commitments to double aid to the continent, write off debts of the poorest 18 African countries, and take new steps towards trade liberalization and support for peace and security and governance reforms¹² (see G8 2005; "What the G8 leaders" 2005).

Of course, as subsequent Summits have shown, there was good reason to be skeptical about the extent of delivery on these commitments. There were also concerns about the shallowness of the CFA's (and UK government's) analysis of African governance (e.g., Sandbrook, 2005, Williams, 2005; Brown 2006); whether the prescriptions would therefore deliver sustainable and equitable development; and how Africa and its people were portrayed, as passive and impoverished victims,

¹² Though as noted above, the trade liberalization commitments, in particular, proved illusory.

in the frenzied run-up to the Summit (see Bunting, 8-14/7/2005). Nevertheless, the British government was able to deliver a significantly more robust and ambitious package than the Canadian government had even mooted three years before. In contrast, Canada was widely portrayed as an also-ran or even a laggard on account of its refusal to join the European G8 members in committing to a firm timetable for reaching the long-standing aid objective, set by the Pearson Commission on International Development in 1969, of 0.7% of GDP (e.g., Elliott, 15-21/7/2005).

For its part, the Canadian government was almost certainly feeling put out by the implicit and explicit discounting of its own role in G8 efforts to date, but also revealed a difference of perspective on the importance of aid as a vehicle for promoting African development. In short, Canada's commitment to development assistance, despite the increases announced at Monterrey and Kananaskis, had become increasingly ambivalent as compared with many European governments, and the UK government in particular. It was also skeptical of what it perceived as commitments that were unlikely to be fulfilled. This was reflected in the comment of a former senior diplomat, noting the "voodoo arithmetic" required to arrive at "the \$50 billion quantum" of aid advocated in the CFA report and incorporated in the Gleneagles Declaration (confidential interview, March 2007). Finally, the Canadian government shared with some G8 counterparts (notably the Germans) a sense that the Blair government, in orchestrating its *own* process for framing the issue and the response, had ignored and undermined collective G8 processes and modalities set in motion at Kananaskis. One can be deeply skeptical about what was likely to be achieved through these processes and modalities, and still acknowledge that the

tensions, differences, and frustrations surrounding the Gleneagles process revealed the challenges of sustaining an effective hegemonic coalition. Paradoxically, the Gleneagles outcome weakened the G8 effort from a political and procedural standpoint, even as it successfully enhanced some of the G8's material commitments.

The Heiligendamm Watershed

If the Gleneagles Summit fractured the axis on Africa that had effectively linked the Canadian and British governments prior to that time, the 2007 Heiligendamm Summit marked a clear course change in Ottawa concerning the political effort and resources the government was willing to commit to the G8's "Africa project." This argument needs to be made carefully. In some respects, very little changed in terms of Canada's Africa policies; indeed at the l'Aquila Summit in 2009 the government was able to claim that it had become the first G8 government to meet the objective of doubling its aid to Africa between 2003/4 and 2008/9 (a claim that, while technically valid, requires some parsing, as discussed below). Yet from 2007 on, it became clear in a number of ways that Africa had been "demoted" as a political and foreign policy priority.

A key turning point occurred in January 2006 when the Liberal government of Paul Martin, who had succeeded fellow Liberal Jean Chretien as Prime Minister, was replaced by a Conservative Minority government led by Stephen Harper. The

new Prime Minister was not experienced in international affairs,¹³ and his inclinations were economically conservative and politically “realist” and pro-Western (see Flanagan, 2009; Black, 2009). His economic conservatism, rooted in his training as a neo-classical economist, made him deeply skeptical concerning the utility of foreign aid. He and his government were also intensely partisan – even by “normal” political standards – and he was suspicious of both non-governmental organizations and ‘celebrity diplomats’.

Initially, Harper’s government had little to say on foreign affairs beyond a strong commitment to the NATO operation in Afghanistan, combining a major combat role with a n extraordinary infusion of aid (a “whole of government” approach in the current parlance¹⁴), as well as other pointers such as a decidedly pro-Israel tilt in the Middle East and a cooling of relations with China. On Africa there was mostly silence, and policy drift. Thus, when the Heiligendamm Summit again shone a spotlight on G8 commitments to Africa, there was much uncertainty and speculation concerning the position Harper would take.

In the event, several noteworthy developments occurred. First, unlike his predecessor and other world leaders, Harper was “too busy” to meet celebrity diplomats Bono and Bob Geldof. Trivial in itself, this could also be seen as a signal that he was not interested in their agenda of expanded aid and debt relief for Africa. Both subsequently accused Harper of working to block specific wording in the

¹³ Harper’s first trip to Africa was for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala in November of 2007.

¹⁴ Canada’s combat role in Kandahar province has become the country’s costliest since the Korean War, in both human and material terms. Similarly, CIDA’s bilateral aid programme in Afghanistan has quickly become its largest ever. On the ‘integrated’ character of the mission, see Travers and Owen, 2008.

Communique on clear targets to meet G8 governments' Gleneagles commitments (see "Geldof calls", 2007) - a charge the Prime Minister denied. Then, a controversy erupted over the value of Canada's Gleneagles commitment to double aid to Africa between 2003/4 and 2008/9. Whereas the 2005 federal budget tabled by the Liberals had projected this increase to run from the estimated expenditures of CDN 1.38 billion in 2003/4 to CDN 2.76 billion in 2008/9, the new government argued that since the *actual* aid expenditures in Africa in 2003/4 turned out to be only CDN 1.05 billion, the doubling of aid would bring it to only CDN 2.1 billion. This accounting adjustment thus effectively reduced the value of Canada's commitment by some CDN 700 million. Finally, as the Summit concluded Harper signaled a new emphasis on the Americas, noting that while Canada will "remain engaged" and "will meet our targets" in Africa, "a focus of our new government is the Americas" ("Harper signals", 2007).

It was not until nearly two years later that some specific policy developments emerged to support this rhetorical shift. Nevertheless, some clear signals were sent – for example, the relative lack of high level Ministerial travel to Africa *versus* the Americas or Afghanistan (see Clark, 2007), and the appointment of a high profile former journalist (Peter Kent) as Minister of State for the Americas, with no analogous appointment for Africa or for Asia. Then, in February 2009, the Minister for International Cooperation announced (with minimal consultation) a new, streamlined list of 20 priority countries for bilateral aid. This list cut in half the number of African priority countries, to 7 from 14, while increasing the number of priority recipients in the Americas and Asia (Afghanistan had already emerged as

the largest bilateral aid programme in Canadian history, at CDN \$280 million in FY 2007/8, with Haiti becoming the second largest. See CCIC, 2009). Among those ‘dropped’ were long-standing Commonwealth and *francophonie* partner governments, including Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Rwanda, and Zambia. This was the clearest signal to date of a shift in priorities, and cast into doubt the trajectory for Canadian aid on the continent beyond the 2008/9 target date for doubling aid to Africa, and the end of expenditures associated with the Canada Fund for Africa. Indeed, while at l’Auquila in 2009 Canada was credited with being the first G8 government to meet its doubling target (as noted above), total aid spending remained very modest, and considerably below the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average, with a projected figure of no more than 0.31% of GNI by 2010 (Tomlinson, 2008: 279). These developments in aid programming were accompanied by the closing of several diplomatic missions on the continent, leaving Canada with fewer diplomatic missions in Africa than any G8 government other than Japan. Similarly, as a result of cuts to its trade-related presence on the continent, Canada was left with only 25 Trade Commissioners for Africa’s 47 countries by 2009, compared with 68 Trade Commissioners for Latin America’s 13 countries and fewer than half as many inhabitants (CCA, 2009).

The government’s diminished interest in Africa, and in initiatives of particular relevance to the continent, can be tracked in other ways as well. In the security domain, Canada’s “boots on the ground” in UN-led peace operations in Africa totaled less than 50 in 2008, compared with some 2500 in Afghanistan. Similarly, the “Responsibility to Protect”, which had been a hallmark of Canadian

foreign policy since 2001 and which has more – albeit controversial – relevance for Africa than any other continent (see Williams, 2009), was virtually dropped from the lexicon of Canadian foreign policy. And, notwithstanding ongoing investments in health through CIDA programming, the landmark 2003 legislation (“Canada’s Access to Medicines Regime”) which had been intended to greatly increase the availability of inexpensive generic AIDS medication for Africans has proven to be an almost completely dead letter, with the government showing no interest in amending it to make it more effective (Caplan, 2009).

In short, while it would be a mistake to overstate the degree of change in Canada’s approach to Africa as measured in *actual* resource allocations, there was considerable evidence of declining political interest in various ways, both tangible and intangible, by mid-2009. How can we account for this striking trend?

‘Regime Specific’ vs. Cyclical dynamics

A full explanation for the Harper government’s shift of focus away from Africa (and towards Latin America) is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁵ What needs to be highlighted in this context is the difficulty of sorting out the degree to which this trajectory represents a long-term shift, or merely the latest phase in an ongoing pattern of intensifying and then receding interest in the continent’s affairs and prospects.

There are ways in which the Harper government’s approach to Africa, and indeed its approach to foreign policy more broadly, appears to represent a

¹⁵ For an extended analysis, see Black, 2009.

qualitative departure from the dominant patterns of post-World War II Canadian foreign policy. Some of these are alluded to above. Beyond the government's relative inexperience in international affairs, the ideas and attitudes which have shaped its approach seem much closer than any of its predecessors, of any major party, to American conservative predilections concerning multilateralism and foreign aid on the one hand (i.e., relatively unsympathetic to both), and to a hard-nosed, realist view of the importance of military capabilities and alliances on the other. The latter is manifested, most obviously, in its enthusiastic commitment to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, contrasted with its minimalist approach to UN-led operations in Africa (Sudan partially excepted). Similarly, the Harper government has demonstrated little enthusiasm for those old manifestations of active internationalism and bicultural identity – the Commonwealth and *la francophonie* – both of which led previous Canadian governments to be much more engaged in African countries and issues than they would have otherwise been.

The logic of a “tilt” towards Latin America has been reinforced by similar, rational-utility maximizing and pro-American predispositions: towards the superior commercial opportunities of the Americas and a closer and more sympathetic engagement in a regional zone of particular, historic American interest (see Healy and Katz, 2008). Finally, the Harper Conservatives' unusually intense brand of partisanship has arguably impelled them towards a Latin American tilt as a means of “brand differentiation” from the ostensibly Africa-fixated Liberals (Owen and Eaves, 2007).

If one accepts that the seeds of a more durable shift have indeed been sown, it becomes important to consider the ramifications of the Harper Conservatives' recent (May 2011) electoral victory, in which they secured a majority government¹⁶ while the historic 'Natural Governing Party' – the Liberals – were relegated to less than 20 per cent of the popular vote and third-party status.¹⁷ Will a more unfettered Conservative government move decisively to reinforce the directions it has been taking vis-à-vis Africa and the developing world more broadly? Or will the imperatives of Canada's international role, encompassing both the expectations and legitimating myths of Canadians and in the external pressures and opportunities associated with its multilateral commitments, mitigate or even reverse such an emergent shift? This latter question will be revisited in the concluding reflections on the Harper government's performance as host of the 2010 G8 (and G20) Summit.

On the other hand, there is another way of reading the current recession of interest in Africa. For it is not only the current Conservatives who have periodically sought to "rebalance" Canadian foreign policy away from Africa. It was, after all, the Chretien Liberal government that, in the mid-1990s, presided over the deepest cuts to the Canadian aid programme in its history, with disproportionate damage done to Africa (see NSI, 2003: 78). More broadly, various government leaders and permanent officials, particularly in the Departments of National Defence and Foreign Affairs, have more or less continuously taken the view that given Africa's relatively marginality to Canada's "core" economic and strategic interests, prudence

¹⁶ Albeit with less than 40 per cent of the popular vote – a result made possible by Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system.

¹⁷ The historic third party – the social democratic New Democrats – became the official opposition with over 30% of the popular vote.

demands that resource commitments and political exposure be limited (see Matthews, 1976; Dawson, 2009). From this perspective, the latest shift in emphasis reflects something less permanent yet more persistent: the chronic ‘yin and yang’ of Canadian foreign policy between its more “liberal” or “humane internationalist” impulses, and a more pragmatic or “conservative internationalist” tendency (see Munton, 2003). Either way, the implications for Canada’s African “partners” are sobering – a point to which I will return.

Conclusion: Huntsville and Beyond

There was, in fact, some evidence of an effort to increase Canada’s visibility and refurbish the country’s image on the continent during the latter part of 2009 and 2010. Much of this was motivated by the tardy, and ultimately embarrassingly unsuccessful, bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2011/12. Whereas, as noted by Joe Clark (above), there was a striking paucity of ministerial visits to Africa for the first several years of the Harper era, the first four months of 2010 saw three visits in rapid succession – by Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon to the opening of the Summit of the African Union in Addis Ababa in January; by International Trade Minister Rick Van Loan to Kenya and South Africa in March; and by the Governor-General, Michaëlle Jean, to Senegal, the DRC, Rwanda and Cape Verde in April. These visits followed fence-mending representations to African missions in Canada undertaken following the abrupt announcement of new countries of concentration (and by implication, African deprioritization) in February 2009 (e.g. Oda, 2009).

The material foundation for the claim that “Canada’s history and friendship with Africa is strong and long-standing”, and that “we will make responsible, meaningful commitments and keep them” (Oda, 2009) rested heavily on two foundations. The first was the argument, noted above, that Canada was the first G8 government to meet its commitment to double aid to Africa, a year ahead of the target date of 2009/10. The fact that this resulted in a relatively modest total commitment of \$2.1 billion was not dwelt upon (see Johnston, 23/9/2010). However, the flagship initiative of the Harper government’s image makeover, as well a centerpiece of the Muskoka G8 Summit in June of 2010, was “The G8 Muskoka Initiative: Maternal, Newborn and Under-Five Child Health.” First articulated in Harper’s speech to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in January of 2010, the initiative was anchored by the \$1.1 billion commitment of new money by the Canadian government announced during the Muskoka Summit. Also at the Summit, the G8 committed to provide a total of \$5 billion in ‘catalytic’ funding over the 2010-15 period, with the aim of generating in excess of \$10 billion in new funding from all donors for this collective effort to accelerate progress on Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.¹⁸ By September 2010, the Initiative was said to have generated commitments of \$7.3 billion in new funding for maternal and child health (Toycen, 22/9/2010). By November, it was announced that 80% of Canada’s \$1.1 billion

¹⁸ Reducing under five mortality by two-thirds; and reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters and achieving universal access to reproductive health. For the text of the Muskoka Initiative, see “G8 Muskoka Declaration Recovery and New Beginnings,” 25/26 June 2010, <http://g8.gc.ca/g8-summit/summit-documents/g8-muskoka-declaration-recovery-and-new-beginnings/>.

contribution would go to seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as Canada's own implementation plans were finally articulated ("Funds earmarked", 1/11/2010).¹⁹

At the time of writing this Initiative is still taking shape and cannot be adequately analyzed here. Broadly speaking, it seems uncharitable to criticize an effort to address these self-evidently praiseworthy objectives. Indeed, the cynic might note that the Initiative was cleverly targeted to disarm potential critics: who, after all, could *oppose* its objectives? Nevertheless, setting this effort in fuller context suggests that it masks as many uncertainties and weaknesses as it addresses. First, and most importantly, the commitment was being formulated at the same time as the March 2010 budget announced that:

With the achievement of the \$5-billion aid target²⁰, future IAE (International Assistance Envelope) spending levels will be capped at 2010–11 levels and will be assessed alongside all other government priorities on a year-by-year basis in the budget. Relative to the planning track in the September 2009 Update of Economic and Fiscal Projections, which assumed automatic ongoing growth for international assistance spending of 8 per cent per annum, this results in savings of \$438 million in 2011–12, rising to \$1.8 billion in 2014–15.

¹⁹ These countries were Mozambique, Mali, Malawi, Nigeria, southern Sudan, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Other country foci for the initiative were Afghanistan, Haiti, and Bangladesh.

²⁰ The result of the commitment made at the Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005 to double total aid spending between 2001 and 2009/10.

In other words, the Canadian government was, at best, 'flatlining' aid, resulting in an anticipated decline in ODA as a percentage of GDP from 0.32% currently to 0.26% over the next several years. The problem here is not simply the decision, in the context of an austerity budget, to once more target aid for a disproportionate share of cuts, further eroding Canada's already desultory performance. It is that the 'targeted' and 'focused' effort to make progress on maternal and child health comes effectively *at the expense of* a broader commitment toward poverty alleviation, and thus the systemic underpinnings from which both maternal and child-health failures arise, and on which sustainable progress needs to be built. The Prime Minister's words in introducing this initiative at the WEF in Davos are telling:

... let us close with something where progress is possible, if we are willing. It concerns the link between poverty and the appalling mortality among mothers and small children in the Third World. Did you know that every year over half a million women die in pregnancy and nearly nine million children die before their fifth birthday?

In this phrase, the Prime Minister effectively articulates a choice to address the *effects of* poverty on maternal and child health, rather than the underlying conditions of poverty to which it is explicitly linked. It is to be hoped, of course, that this initiative will save many lives, notably in Africa. Yet the choice to overlook and, implicitly, accept the underlying condition raises doubts about sustainability, and where the effects of poverty will be deflected *to* if they are successfully tackled in the area of maternal and child health.

The second point to note is the relatively late and improvised character of this initiative. Here, it is instructive to compare the Muskoka Initiative with the Chretien government's efforts to animate the Africa Action Plan (AAP) at Kananaskis. First, as discussed above, the scope and ambition of the Chretien government's approach was far broader – coming as it did in response to African leaders' NEPAD initiative – while the diplomatic focus and effort behind it was far more protracted and sustained. In contrast to the year-long, carefully orchestrated efforts of Prime Minister Chretien and his Sherpa/African Personal Representative Robert Fowler, Prime Minister Harper's initiative on Maternal and Child Health was not mooted prior to his Davos speech, less than six months before the Summits, and does not seem to have been anticipated within CIDA, where staff were left scrambling to animate it, with minimal information or guidance (interviews, Feb. 2010; Pearson 3/2/2010). The lack of planning and reflection was soon exposed by controversial mixed messages over whether the government would or would not support contraception and abortion within this Initiative.²¹ The decision on how much money the government would allocate to the Initiative was announced just as the G8 Summit was beginning, attenuating any prospect of leading by example.²² The announced commitment of \$1.1 billion in new funding over five years was, on the one hand, substantially more than the Chretien government's \$500 million Canada Fund for Africa, but on the other roughly the same as the Harper government's outlay for the three days of the combined G8 and G20 Summits in

²¹ The final decision was contraception yes, but abortion no. See Gavai 2010.

²² This may explain in part why one year later, at the 2011 Deauville Summit in France, implementation of the Muskoka commitments by other G8 governments was so desultory. See Clark and Saunders, 26/5/2011.

Huntsville and Toronto, putting the relative level of the government's commitment into relief. Plans for how the money would be spent were announced several months later.²³

The point of this comparison is not to cast the Harper government in an unflattering light by highlighting the virtues of the Liberal initiative. After all, the Liberal initiative on the Africa Action Plan was characteristically long on ambition and modest on concrete resource commitments, while coming in the wake of the draconian cuts to aid spending in the 1990s under the same leadership. The comparison does however underscore some of the distinctive characteristics of Canadian policy toward Africa under the Harper Conservatives: a lack of sustained attention and consultation, leading to tardy and/or improvised initiatives; and an emphasis on tightly focused, readily 'branded' initiatives consistent with the Conservatives' distinctive interpretation of "results" and "accountability". In the meantime, the ability of Canadian policy makers to actively participate in the larger debates and dynamics of the international relations of Africa continues to decline.

More broadly, what the completed Summit cycle from 2002 to 2010 should teach us is that the Canadian government's interest in, and commitment to, Africa lacks depth and durability – a lesson that is reinforced by the inconstancy of Canadian support for Africa through the 1990s. This pattern of inconstancy, in turn, erodes the base of knowledge, resources, and credibility on which an effective Africa

²³ See CIDA, 1/11/2010. <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/eng/FRA-103117396-TE2>, Accessed 9/12/2010.

policy depends. It will take some time for these foundations to be rebuilt, even if the social and political basis for doing so can be mobilized.

Finally, it is worth reconsidering the hegemonic possibilities of the G8's African project, as understood in neo-gramscian terms and as discussed in the first part of this paper. What this case illustrates is that these possibilities are undermined not only by the policy limitations of the Summit's most powerful member states. They are also compromised by intra-hegemonic differences over tactics, strategy, and optics, as reflected in the politics surrounding the Gleneagles Summit; and by the political exigencies and course changes of "lesser" or "secondary" powers, such as Canada, that undermine the consistency and success of their hegemonic work. In this sense, the history of the AAP, and Canada's role in it, illustrates the instability and contingency of transnational efforts to build a new "common sense" on the way forward for Africa. It remains to be seen how the changing institutional contours and normative frames of a post-Financial Crisis (and post-G8?) world will tackle this challenge. On the other hand, as a means for refreshing the hegemonic status of the Canadian state vis-à-vis its own society by reiterating its 'humane internationalist' credentials, Canada's unsustained leadership within the G8 may have served its purpose. In this sense, Canada's Africa policy and similar moments of ethical initiative serve as a basis for sustaining a favourable self-image domestically, even as the ostensible subjects of these initiatives fade from view.

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