

2 Sleeping beside the Elephant: The United States in Canada's Middle East Policy¹

FARZAN SABET

This chapter looks at American influence on Canada's Middle East policy since 2006. It synthesizes the literature on US-Canada relations and Canada's Middle East foreign policy to conceptualize how the United States influences Canadian policy in the region using two case studies: the campaign against the so-called Islamic State (IS) and the Iran nuclear deal. The chapter finds that the United States often shapes the context of Canadian regional policy as a driver of diplomatic initiatives and military interventions in the region. Canada can support, remain neutral, or oppose US policy. However, the United States is seldom the decisive factor in Canadian decisions on the Middle East, partly because it chooses not to apply strong pressure on Canada. Because Canada has few strong economic and security interests in the region, at least four other factors usually play a larger or equal role in shaping its decision-making: maintenance of a rules-based international order; alliance management; bilateral relations with regional states; and the ruling party's electoral coalition and political ideology. Once a decision is made, US pressure can nudge Canada but rarely change its course entirely. US influence on Canada's Middle East policy is explored here through interviews with a half-dozen current and former Canadian government officials and experts, as well as content analysis of documents, media articles, and the academic and policy literature.

Most scholars of Canadian foreign policy agree that it was highly consistent during the Cold War.² The Canadian government under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1935–48) embraced a “functional principle,” whereby Canada could maximize its global impact by engaging on issues in which it already possessed the greatest expertise and was an active participant.³ Canada helped to create a number of international institutions during this period, including the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Bretton Woods system.

Canada's global engagements, almost always conducted multilaterally and spanning a wide range of issues, included the establishment of the first UN peacekeeping force in the military arena; helping defuse the Suez Crisis in the diplomatic domain; pursuing open global trade and investment regimes in the economic realm; and accepting large numbers of immigrants and refugees, promoting rights, and providing aid to impoverished nations in the humanitarian, human rights, and development spheres.

Comparing Liberal and Conservative Policies in the Middle East

The Canadian foreign policy consensus, implemented by successive Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments, began to decay with the end of the Cold War. This led to a transformation of Canadian foreign policy that started becoming apparent under Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin (2003–6) and culminated with the paradigm shift that accompanied the election of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006–15).

Scholars have assigned several attributes to Harper's foreign policy: a more selective approach to international organizations and multilateralism; a larger focus on economic diplomacy and the linkage of foreign aid to this diplomacy; a greater willingness to deploy Canadian troops abroad in combat missions as a symbol of Canadian martial prowess and national pride; and a move away from a neutral "honest broker" diplomacy towards a more explicitly ideological "megaphone diplomacy."⁴ Marcin Gabrys and Tomasz Soroka frame this as Canada's move away from a "middle power" towards a "selective power," defined as an issue-structured, highly selective and result-oriented approach to international relations based on the primacy of effectiveness and an economic cost-benefit calculation. This has entailed, among other things, a departure from traditional multilateralism and placed more weight on unilateralism and autonomous actions in specific states and regions.⁵

While this framework allows little variation based on the characteristics of the ruling party, I argue that there are important distinctions between Liberal and Conservative foreign policies, especially related to the Middle East. The gap between the two parties is one of both substance and tone. The Trudeau Liberals' 2015 slogan, "Canada is back," was meant to create a contrast with the Harper Conservatives by signalling Canada's return to its supposed traditional role as a multilateralist "honest broker" willing to engage like-minded Western allies as well as less compatible non-Western adversaries.⁶ But the idea, sometimes raised by critics, that the Harper Conservatives had abandoned multilateral diplomacy is

misplaced. It is more accurate to say that their foreign policy engaged in a selective multilateralism that prioritized cooperation on Canada's economic interests and collaboration with like-minded Western allies. However, this meant a stance, ranging from neglect to hostility, towards certain international organizations. On the other hand, the Harper Conservatives did largely abandon "honest broker" diplomacy. They instead promoted what some call "megaphone diplomacy," emphasizing a foreign policy said to centre on the values of "freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law."⁷ Nowhere has this been more marked than in the Middle East, where the Harper Conservatives further embraced Israel and cut ties with Iran.

But even this embrace of Israel was not unreserved. Canada remained steadfast to much of the Western consensus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, like opposition to Israeli settlement policies in the West Bank. And in places where Canada has more economic and security interests, the Harper Conservatives' early boldness was tempered by experience, such as ties with China.⁸ Any change to Canada's post-1991 foreign policy thus also reflects broader transformations of the international system and American power, and Liberal and Conservative policies remain constrained by Canada's economic and security interests (see the Musu and Boily chapters in this volume). This still leaves room for each party's idiosyncrasies to express themselves in foreign policy. For example, John Ibbitson has focused on the unique nature of the Harper Conservatives' electoral coalition. This points to each party's diverging economic, geographic, and demographic constituencies, and the way their respective material interests and ideology differ on foreign policy.⁹ Therefore, where Canada's hard interests are limited, idiosyncrasies of a ruling party, linked to its coalition and ideology, can exercise more pull in foreign policy, with the Middle East being a prime example.

Canadian Foreign and Defence Policy under the Shadow of the United States

Before diving into Canadian Middle East policy, it is worth understanding how the United States factors into Canadian foreign policy more generally. Brian Bow and Adam Chapnick organize the literature on this topic around three main debates. First, should Canada and the United States be considered together as paired components of a distinctive North American continental relationship, or as complementary but still individual contributors to a wider global community? Second, should the US-Canada relationship be defined as a partnership between independent equals, mutually constrained interdependence, or a strict hierarchy?

Finally, to what degree has the relationship been characterized by cooperation versus conflict?¹⁰

Scholars emphasize three events that shaped current US-Canada relations. Denis Stairs has argued that Canadian territory lessened in significance for US strategic defence against the Soviet Union after the early 1960s and fell further with the end of the Cold War. This was not unique to Canada, but part of a pattern of decreased importance of allies for the United States after it was left standing as the world's sole superpower.¹¹ The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the resulting US-led global war on terrorism may have renewed the old strategic interdependence of the early Cold War, but the bilateral tensions of the 2000s suggest the effects were limited. The end of the Cold War therefore inaugurated strategic divergence, while 9/11 facilitated re-convergence where there is transatlantic consensus on common threats like militant political Islam as well as challenges posed by traditional adversaries like Russia and new ones like China. The third event, the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, brought Canada and the United States even closer.

With this basic history in mind, the United States and Canada can be viewed as being in a relationship of "asymmetrical interdependence," with deep economic and social ties, that establishes the basic power dynamic between them. The leverage each side wields in bilateral bargaining differs widely, depending on the issue. Moreover, the relationship is characterized by a pattern of conflict and cooperation that moves between crisis and correction, and neither side has shown much interest in reciprocal concessions that would unlock the intensive cooperation seen during the early Cold War.¹² Each has its own leverage, deriving from a range of factors such as economic interdependence and legal and institutional constraints.¹³ Thus, in studying the US factor in Canadian Middle East policy, we must tease out just how Canada exercises its limited autonomy in this asymmetrical interdependence.

Canada has no strong economic and security interests in the Middle East, nor a high capacity to exert influence there. For these and other reasons, the United States seldom applies strong direct pressure on Canada over Middle East policy. Yet it still exerts enormous clout, mainly through two mechanisms. First, the United States can shape Canadian Middle East policy through its role as the historically main extra-regional actor driving diplomatic initiatives and military interventions in the region. Other states must often choose to support, remain neutral, or oppose American policies in the region. Canada usually accedes to US initiatives and interventions. In some cases, such as the decision by the Chrétien Liberals not to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it appears to

remain neutral. Canada rarely strongly publicly opposes American policies. As this study reveals, however, while the United States shapes the environment for Canadian Middle East policy, it is rarely the primary factor behind the decision the Canadian government makes. As noted above, and explored in greater depth in the next section, usually a combination of other factors play the primary role, and US factor is secondary.

Second, the deeply intertwined geographies, societies, economies, security, and culture(s) of North America in the context of this asymmetrical interdependence allow the United States to exert other forms of indirect influence on Canadian Middle East policy. Strong pressure on Canada in priority areas can spill over into regional policy. For example, after 9/11 the United States pressed Canada to adopt more forceful measures on counterterrorism, intelligence-sharing, border security, and customs and immigration, in line with new American standards and expectations, with some consequences for its approach to the Middle East and its peoples.¹⁴ One senior Canadian official closely involved in immigration and refugee policy in the late 2000s noted that while he and his colleagues avoided using the term “harmonization,” they did engage in close “cooperation” with the United States at the bureaucratic, if not political, level.¹⁵ US secondary and extraterritorial sanctions also limit the Canadian government’s ability to deepen economic ties with sanctioned jurisdictions. While Canadian governments are theoretically free to set their own bilateral economic relations, American sanctions affect the risk calculation of Canadian private companies by presenting them with the choice of doing business with the massive US economy or smaller sanctioned jurisdictions. This can scare away Canadian companies from doing business with sanctioned jurisdictions such as Iran and Syria, denying the government a key tool of economic statecraft. A final example of this indirect mechanism of US influence on Canadian Middle East policy is the diffusion of laws, policies, and concepts through transnational policy and lobbying networks.

This last example hints at broader US-Canada political and cultural ties and cross-national policy convergence. Put simply, like-minded governments in the United States and Canada are more likely to agree and cooperate on policies than non-like-minded governments. Although party politics in the United States and Canada cannot be precisely equated, broad analogies between the left-liberalism and right-conservatism can be drawn. The left and right in Canada, based on their electoral coalitions and political ideologies, fall on different sides of the spectrum on a wide range of policy and stylistic issues. Two prominent examples of this divide in foreign policy in Canada are multilateralism and diplomatic style. On the former, Liberals prefer broad multilateralism versus Conservatives’ selective multilateralism. On diplomatic style, while Liberals

generally prefer “honest broker” diplomacy versus Conservatives’ megaphone diplomacy, the parties can selectively apply the opposite style, depending on the issue. The distinction between their respective foreign and defence policy paradigms are not always stark and can often be one of degree or tone. The debate over the Kyoto Protocol provides a good example. The Chrétien and Martin Liberals supported the protocol but did relatively little to implement it. The Harper Conservatives withdrew from it with great fanfare. While this represented a symbolically significant divergence between the parties, the substantive difference is debatable.¹⁶ Such left-right divides can, again generally speaking, be projected onto American politics. The Democratic and Liberal parties have shown comparable preferences for multilateralism and “honest broker” diplomacy. In contrast, the Republican and Conservative parties have shown a proclivity towards more selective multilateralism and megaphone diplomacy that, in the case of the Middle East, villainizes anti-Western authoritarian regimes and militant political Islam. It therefore stands to reason that when like-minded governments are in power in the United States and Canada, they are more likely to agree and cooperate on Middle East policy. We can expect the following pattern in US-Canada relations based on this framework: Chrétien-Martin Liberal / Bush Republican divergence (2000–6); Harper Conservative / Bush Republican convergence (2006–9); Harper Conservative/Obama Democratic divergence (2009–15); Trudeau Liberal / Obama Democratic convergence (2015–17); and Trudeau Liberal / Trump Republican divergence (2017–21). The limited but interesting evidence to support this notion is explored in the final section. In the next section, we first incorporate insights from the academic and policy literature on Canadian Middle East policy into our framework.

Canadian Foreign and Defence Policy in the Middle East

The post-Cold War Canadian foreign policy consensus decay and partisan polarization has spilled over into Middle East policy. Since Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1968–79 and 1980–4), successive governments have sought to advance Canadian interests in the region through the expansion of diplomatic representation and trade relations.¹⁷ In more recent years, the events of 9/11, and the US military interventionism that followed, the election of the Harper Conservatives, and Arab uprisings and civil wars since 2010 have been critical junctures that heralded changes to Canadian Middle East policy. Yet Canadian interests in the region remain limited. According to Thomas Juneau, despite numerous conflicts, Canadian security is not directly affected by regional developments.¹⁸ Bessma Momani and Agata Antkiewicz have argued that

while Canadian business activity in the Middle East has produced worthwhile economic benefits, “Canada–Middle East economic relations have clearly not been a top priority for Canada and are never going to be under any reasonable scenario.”¹⁹ Canada does not import significant amounts of oil, nor has it been the beneficiary of large arms and investment deals to the same degree as other Western states.

One former senior Canadian official with extensive experience in the region went so far as to say that no Canadian government had ever declared the Middle East a foreign policy priority. However, he also noted that while major disruptions to regional energy exports might not affect Canada directly, they would affect Canadian partners in Western Europe and East Asia, which in turn could have important economic and security knock-on effects for Canada.²⁰ Costanza Musu has also highlighted how the region can be of importance to Canada: “The region matters because of its potential impact on political and social instability, the uncontrolled migration flows generated by the scarcity of jobs and by economic underdevelopment, the presence of vast energy resources, the possibility that countries in the area might prove to be a fertile breeding ground for terrorism, and the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict, which is a constant source of tension and instability.”²¹

This absence of direct threats from the Middle East and of major economic interests means that poor decisions are unlikely to impose major costs on Canada. And while the United States can shape Canadian choices in the region,²² it rarely chooses to impose strong and direct pressure over Canada’s Middle East policy, meaning that the US factor plays a limited role in Canadian decision-making on specific issues. This gives Canadian governments a considerable margin of manoeuvre in regional policy and increases the importance of other factors in determining the course of Canadian Middle East policy: maintenance of a rules-based international order; alliance management; bilateral relations with regional states, particularly the special relationship with Israel; and the ruling party’s electoral coalition and political ideology.

While the first three factors are self-explanatory, the last requires elaboration. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a good example of how a party’s electoral coalitions and political ideology can shape policy (see also the chapters by Boily and Musu). Canada has historically had a strong relationship with Israel, nourished by Canadians’ sympathy for the Jewish people’s tragedy in the Holocaust, and by the perception of Israel as an outpost of Western civilization surrounded by hostile non-Western and illiberal actors. This close relationship has been tempered by disagreements, particularly surrounding Palestine. For example, Canada has consistently opposed Israeli settlement construction in Palestine

and supported a two-state solution to the conflict. Until the 2000s, Canada's voting record on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process at the United Nations was guided by a desire to have a fair and balanced approach, highlighting the legitimacy of Israel's security needs, while supporting Palestinian aspirations for national self-determination. However, a shift away from Canada's prior UN voting pattern towards more open support for Israel was already underway by 2004 under the Martin Liberals (2003–6). Under the Harper Conservatives, support for Israel surged to include more diplomatic initiatives and stronger public rhetoric. Scholars' explanations emphasize Conservatives' desire to woo historically liberal Canadian Jews and conservative Evangelicals.²³ These communities constitute better organized voting blocs, in contrast to, for example, Canadian Arabs, who are far less organized around the Palestinian cause. The political ideology of the Harper Conservatives, in part a function of Stephen Harper's strong personal support for Israel, was also a key driver of Canadian foreign policy becoming more pro-Israel.²⁴ With this background in mind, how the US factor operates in practice is illustrated with two case studies in the next section. Beyond shaping the context of Canadian policy, the United States rarely plays a primary role in the choices Canadian decision-makers make on Middle East policy, often because Washington chooses not to exert strong direct pressure on Canada. However, in combination with other, more important factors, the US–Canada relationship can nudge Canadian regional policy in one direction or another.

The US Factor in Canadian Middle East Policy

Canadian Participation in US Military Interventions in the Middle East since 9/11

Since 9/11, Canada has faced the choice to join at least four US-led military interventions in the greater Middle East and North Africa, including the Afghanistan War (2001–21); the Iraq War (2003–11); the campaign against the regime of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya (2011); and the campaign against the Islamic State (2014–present). Canada has overtly participated in all these interventions except the Iraq War. The instances in which Canada chose to participate, and those in which it did not, reveal Canada's calculus and how the United States factors in.²⁵ When Canada joined a US-led intervention, there was a NATO, UN, or international mandate. Canada's participation in the Afghanistan War and Libya intervention were under NATO, while the intervention in Iraq and Syria against the Islamic State is centred on a US-led Global Coalition against

the Islamic State, which includes an even broader grouping of states (see the chapter by Massie and Munier). Although these conflicts only indirectly implicate Canadian security, there were a range of reasons for Liberal and Conservative governments to join. The two interrelated reasons that consistently arose across all three conflicts in interviews and secondary sources was the desire of Canadian governments to uphold a rules-based international order and to be perceived as a member in good standing by like-minded allies.²⁶ To the extent the United States is at the centre of the contemporary international order, NATO, and the Global Coalition, it certainly shaped the context for Canadian interventions. But upholding international order and managing alliances was framed as providing a range of indirect security and non-security benefits for Canada, not simply placating the United States. Bilateral relations with regional states and their stability were also a factor in these interventions, but not a primary one.

Beyond these commonalities, the motivation for participation differs somewhat between Conservatives and Liberals. Electoral coalitions did not appear to be a strong factor, but party ideology may have been. The Harper Conservatives seemed more motivated by a desire to demonstrate Canadian martial prowess and fight militant political Islam and anti-Western authoritarian regimes,²⁷ while Trudeau Liberals have been less motivated by these factors. Canada's participation in the Coalition against the Islamic State since 2014 is a good example of the difference that ideology can make, but also how American influence makes itself felt. The Harper Conservatives eagerly joined the Coalition against the Islamic State. The centrepiece of the Canadian contribution was six CF-18 Hornet fighter aircraft deployed in a combat role, as well as support aircraft and a train, advise, and assist mission. Justin Trudeau in his 2015 Canadian electoral platform promised to end Canada's air combat role and did so once in power.²⁸ As mentioned above, Canada's security interests were only indirectly implicated in the campaign against the Islamic State, and its contribution was not make-or-break for the coalition. There also does not appear to have been great pressure on Canada to join from regional states, or groundswell during the election campaign for Canada to end its combat role in Iraq and Syria. The decision by the Trudeau Liberals to end the air combat mission seems to have been influenced instead by ideology, specifically the desire to cast themselves in the supposedly traditional mantle of Canadian diplomacy and peace-keeping, rather than war fighting, to differentiate themselves from the Harper Conservatives.

However, as noted in the previous section, the difference that ideology makes in Canadian policy can often be one of degree. While the

Trudeau Liberals ended the air combat role in Iraq and Syria, they maintained or expanded Canada's military presence in other ways. Canada increased its contribution of military personnel, including the deployment of troops along the front lines to mark targets and call in airstrikes; continued the presence of support aircraft for surveillance and refuelling allied planes; furnished a more robust train, advise, and assist mission to local partners (see the chapter by Fleet and Mohamad); bolstered the presence of medical personnel to support Canadian troops and their allies and to advise Iraqi security forces; and boosted the provision of military supplies to Kurdish Peshmerga in northern Iraq. This increased military effort was combined with a more vigorous diplomatic presence in the region and over \$1.1 billion in humanitarian and development aid over three years. This included funds for water, food, shelter, health care, hygiene and sanitation, protection and education, and financial and capacity-building support to refugee-hosting countries in the region and Europe to address refugees' basic needs, maintain and repair infrastructure, promote employment and economic growth, and foster good governance.²⁹ The Trudeau Liberals' approach to the campaign against the Islamic State has thus been different from their predecessors' but continues to have a strong military component. One interviewee indicated that American displeasure likely pushed Canada to maintain a military role in the campaign. Concerns may have been that Canadian "defection" would reduce its perceived reliability as an international security partner and lead other smaller actors to leave the coalition.³⁰ The Trudeau Liberals thus kept their election promise by ending the air combat mission but adapted to US displeasure through a compensatory strategy that increased counterterrorism cooperation, training, and relief aid. The United States thus shaped the context of the Canadian intervention, but US pressure was not the primary factor inducing Canada to join the campaign against the Islamic State or end its air combat role. However, once the Trudeau Liberals made their decision, US pressure nudged them to adopt a compensatory strategy.

Another important case of possible Liberal-Conservative divergence over military intervention in the region is the decision by the Chrétien Liberals not to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, despite strong American pressure. The official reason given by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien focused on the lack of a UN mandate for the invasion.³¹ Stephen Harper, leader of the Opposition and of the Canadian Alliance party at the time, called for Canada to join the invasion to advance freedom and non-proliferation of WMD. This divergence could be explained by ideology taking precedence over the US factor; but this interpretation has shortcomings. For example, in 1998 the Chrétien Liberals supported an

Anglo-American bombing campaign against Iraq without explicit backing from the UN Security Council. A more recent study suggests that electoral politics may have also been at play: the Chrétien Liberals did not want to antagonize the historically anti-war Québécois in the lead-up to the provincial elections there in April 2003. The Québécois, a key Liberal constituency, were the most opposed to war, while Albertans, a key Alliance/Conservative base, were most in favour.³² Finally, a former senior Canadian official with knowledge of these matters indicated there was a lack of consensus on the veracity of US claims in the internal debates of the Chrétien government, and thus on whether there were grounds for military action.³³ It thus appears that the decision by the Chrétien Liberals not to publicly support the Iraq War was motivated by a mix of uncertainty about the validity of American justifications for the war, ideology, and the Liberal party's electoral coalition.

However, three caveats should be kept in mind. First, while the Liberals did not want to be publicly associated with the war for lack of political cover, it was later revealed that they offered covert and token support for the invasion and occupation.³⁴ One former senior Canadian official well versed on this issue even claimed that Canada ended up having one of the largest unofficial contingents of troops in the coalition through secondments.³⁵ Second, we must consider that had the Harper-led Alliance party been in power in 2003 and forced to hold together a broader coalition, it may have taken a similar position to the Liberals. Finally, we should not completely dismiss the US factor. Months before the war, Canada committed a relatively large military contingent to the Afghanistan War. This may have been calculated as a show of support for the United States and to tie down military assets in the hope of dampening American displeasure with Canada's absence from Iraq.

The US Factor in Canada-Iran Relations since 2006

Canada-Iran relations since 2006 have had their own dynamics, at once distinct but also invariably tied up with the US context. One factor shaping Canada's Iran policy has been the perceived challenge posed by the Islamic Republic to Middle East peace and security through nuclear proliferation and support for militant non-state actors against local and extra-regional states. This may pose little direct threat to Canada but occupies government bandwidth as a result of domestic lobbying by interest groups, and diplomatic pressure from friendly regional states like Israel and the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf. A second factor shaping Canada's Iran policy is the Iranian diaspora in Canada. The Islamic Republic's treatment of Iranian-Canadians, including their arrest, torture,

and killing on Iranian soil, as well as the Iranian government's actions inside Canada, have been irritants in Canada-Iran relations since the 2000s. Iranian-Canadians' views of their former homeland have been another factor, particularly the divide between those who support and those who oppose engagement with the Islamic Republic. Iranian-Canadians have not been a force uniformly in favour or against improvement of ties with the Islamic Republic but can be part of Liberal or Conservative electoral coalitions.³⁶ In this context, the United States plays a similar role in Canada-Iran relations, as in the first case study above. Similar dynamics are also at play in the Harper Conservatives' decision to cut diplomatic relations with Iran in 2012 and the Canadian government's subsequent stance towards the Iran nuclear negotiations and the deal that followed in 2015.

The decision by the Harper Conservatives to cut ties with the Islamic Republic in 2012, the subsequent campaign pledge by the Trudeau Liberals to restore ties, and their failure to do so have been well covered in the secondary literature and news media. The Harper Conservatives' decision to cut relations was timed to coincide with the coming into force of the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act (JVTA). This law, along with changes to the State Immunity Act, allows victims of terrorism to sue perpetrators and their listed state backers for loss or damage caused by a terrorist act committed anywhere in the world since 1985. The immediate official reason for severing ties was a fear of the state-sponsored takeover of the Canadian embassy in Tehran due to tensions over the JVTA. It was a reasonable concern, given the violent takeover of the British embassy in Tehran a year earlier, and a longer history of threats to diplomatic facilities in Iran going back to 1979. However, this action also came against the backdrop of fluctuating Canada-Iran bilateral relations since the mid-1990s, the Harper Conservatives' animus towards militant political Islam and anti-Western authoritarian regimes, the special relationship with Israel, and budding ties with the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies.

Interestingly, according to at least one senior Canadian government official working on Canada-Iran relations at the time, the Obama administration expressed its concerns to the Canadian government. The embassy in Tehran was an important conduit of information for the US government during the Iran nuclear negotiations, because there was no American diplomatic presence on the ground.³⁷ But whatever US pressure the Canadian government may have felt, it does not appear to have changed its chosen course of action. Instead, embassy security, bilateral relations with Iran and regional states, as well as their election coalition and party ideology appear to have been more important factors.

The US factor also seems not to have been a major one in the Trudeau Liberals' campaign pledge to restore ties with Iran. Instead, party ideology – in this case the notion of returning to so-called traditional Canadian foreign policy values – and intra-party electoral competition with the Harper Conservatives appear to have been larger considerations. By 2018, however, complications created by the JVTAs, continuing bilateral tensions over consular issues, lack of prioritization of this issue by both sides, and a split in the Liberal Party over the issue convinced the Trudeau government to suspend its efforts to restore ties.³⁸ Iran's shooting down of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 in January 2020, with 138 passengers headed to Canada and 63 Canadians onboard, has created a new layer of complication in bilateral ties.³⁹

Similarly, while the United States, as a leading party in the Iran nuclear negotiations, shaped the context of Canadian policy towards the talks and subsequent Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), agreed to in 2015, it did not determine the Canadian position. According to a senior Canadian official with direct knowledge of the issue, the efficacy of the JCPOA, and its implications for Israeli and regional security, were larger considerations for Harper Conservatives and Trudeau Liberals. The official said that when the JCPOA was signed, Canadian officials expressed concerns about parts of the deal that would expire and that the Obama administration was exaggerating its non-nuclear benefits. However, the official said the Canadian government was satisfied with the deal because it generally upheld a rules-based international order and was beneficial for regional security. President Donald Trump's later withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 was therefore viewed with alarm in Ottawa. Nevertheless, the Trudeau Liberals continue to support the deal, and Canada is a leading sponsor of International Atomic Energy Agency inspections of Iranian facilities, which allow for greater transparency and verification of its nuclear program.⁴⁰ The interviewee expressed concern that this access would be lost. When asked whether the Canadian government might have responded differently to the Trump withdrawal if Conservatives were in power, the official said this could have created a "different calculus."⁴¹

The United States has shaped the context of Canada-Iran relations in at least two other important ways. First, Canadian legislation like the JVTAs, which some view as a poison pill against the restoration of Canada-Iran relations deliberately inserted by the Harper Conservatives, is often inspired by similar legislation in the United States or imported into Canada by transnational policy and lobbying networks.⁴² Second, American extraterritorial economic sanctions – given the high level of US-Canada economic integration and that sanctions deter business with

Iran globally – also decrease economic incentives for Canadian business and government to re-engage with Iran.⁴³ A former senior Canadian official emphasized that the downturn in bilateral ties, combined with sanctions, had taken Iran from being one of Canada's top regional trading partners to among the bottom.

Conclusion

This chapter has yielded several insights on the US factor in Canadian Middle East policy. American diplomatic initiatives, such as the Iran nuclear negotiations, and military interventions, such as the campaign against the Islamic State, often create the policy environment to which Canada responds. Canada usually supports these initiatives and interventions, even if its material contribution is limited, and only sometimes does not, as with the 2003 Iraq War. The United States can also influence Canadian legislation by its example and through transnational networks. Moreover, the high level of US-Canada economic integration and the long arm of US extraterritorial sanctions limit opportunities for Canada to deepen relations with US-sanctioned jurisdictions in the Middle East such as Iran and Syria, should it want to. However, once it has shaped the context, the United States is seldom the primary factor shaping Canadian Middle East policy, nor does it typically exercise strong pressure on Canadian governments to fall into line, because it often does not care to do so. Furthermore, Canada lacks strong economic and security interests in the region. This gives it relative autonomy and raises the importance of other factors in policymaking, including upholding a rules-based international order; alliance management; bilateral relations with regional states; and the ruling party's coalition and ideology.

That said, US pressure can nudge Canadian governments once a decision is made. In the Iraq War context, pressure from the Bush administration may have pushed Canada to offer discrete and token support for the war and to boost its involvement in the Afghanistan War. In the campaign against the Islamic State, the displeasure of the Obama administration may have been a factor that led the Canadian government to increase its military role and provision of relief aid, even as the Trudeau Liberals kept their campaign pledge of withdrawing Canada's fighter aircraft. Finally, cross-national ideological congruence may indicate an increased likelihood of Canadian governments supporting American policies. That is, Liberal governments are more likely to support Democratic policies, and Conservative governments Republican ones. Several examples, including two counterfactual scenarios, provide limited evidence for this. First, indicators suggest that had the Harper Conservatives been in

power at the outset of the Iraq War, they may have publicly supported the Bush administration and sent military forces. Second, the Conservatives did not prioritize the Obama administration's concerns about Canada cutting ties with Iran over their own security concerns and ideological proclivity to do so. Third, the Trudeau Liberals have not ceased support for the JCPOA since the Trump administration withdrew from the deal in May 2018. However, had the Conservatives been in power when Trump withdrew, at least one well-placed interviewee suggests Canadian policy may have differed. These findings open avenues for further research into Canadian Middle East policy, the US-Canada asymmetrical interdependence, and how Canada's exercise of power on the global stage continues to evolve under a range of new and old conditions.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is directly based on a project headed by Grégoire Mallard that received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement PROSANCT, "Bombs, Banks and Sanctions" Project 716216). The author thanks all the interviewees who participated in the research.
- 2 John Ibbitson, *The Big Break: The Conservative Transformation of Canada's Foreign Policy* (Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance and Innovation, 2014), 6, www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/cigi_paper_29.pdf.
- 3 Duane Bratt, "Stephen Harper and the Transformation of Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Europa World Online* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), s. 490.
- 4 Bratt, "Stephen Harper," 488–9.
- 5 Marcin Gabryś and Tomasz Soroka, *Canada as a Selective Power: Canada's Role and International Position after 1989* (Kraków: Archeobooks, 2017), 14.
- 6 Daryl Copeland, "'Canada's Back': Can the Trudeau Government Resuscitate Canadian Diplomacy?," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 24, no. 2 (2018): 243–52.
- 7 Gabryś and Soroka, *Canada as a Selective Power*, 149.
- 8 Ibbitson, *Big Break*.
- 9 Ibbitson, *Big Break*, 7–8.
- 10 Brian Bow and Adam Chapnick, "Teaching Canada-US Relations: Three Great Debates," *International Journal* 71, no. 2 (2016): 293.
- 11 Denis Stairs, "Myths, Morals and Reality in Canadian Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 58, no. 2 (2003): 239–56.
- 12 Bow and Chapnick, "Teaching Canada-US Relations," 308.
- 13 Bow and Chapnick, "Teaching Canada-US Relations," 304–5.
- 14 Costanza Musu, "Canada and the MENA Region: The Foreign Policy of a Middle Power," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 18, no. 1 (2012): 71.

- 15 Senior Canadian official 02, interviewed by Farzan Sabet on Skype, 20 August 2019.
- 16 Ibbitson, *Big Break*, 12; Bratt, "Stephen Harper," 489.
- 17 Musu, "Canada and the MENA Region," 70.
- 18 Thomas Juneau, *Canada and the Middle East* (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2016), 1–5, https://www.cgai.ca/canada_and_the_middle_east.
- 19 Bessma Momani and Agata Antkiewicz, "Canada's Economic Interests in the Middle East," in *Canada and the Middle East: In Theory and Practice*, ed. Paul Heinbecker and Bessma Momani, 161–84 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).
- 20 Ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01, interviewed by Farzan Sabet in Toronto, Canada, 20 June 2019.
- 21 Musu, "Canada and the MENA Region," 65.
- 22 Musu, "Canada and the MENA Region," 70; Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Talking One Talk, Walking Another: Norm Entrepreneurship and Canada's Foreign Policy in the Middle East," in *Canada and the Middle East: In Theory and Practice*, ed. Paul Heinbecker and Bessma Momani, 45–72 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).
- 23 Musu, "Canada and the MENA Region": Donald Barry, "Canada and the Middle East Today: Electoral Politics and Foreign Policy," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2010): 191–217; Jonathan Malloy, "Bush/Harper? Canadian and American Evangelical Politics Compared," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 39, no. 4 (2009): 352–63.
- 24 Jordan Michael Smith, "Reinventing Canada: Stephen Harper's Conservative Revolution," *World Affairs* 174, no. 6 (2012): 21–8.
- 25 This part of the analysis is based on interviews with three current and former senior Canadian officials with direct knowledge of and involvement in government decision-making in one or more of these interventions, as well as other primary and secondary sources.
- 26 Ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01; and senior Canadian official 02.
- 27 Ibbitson, *Big Break*, 10; Roland Paris, "Are Canadians Still Liberal Internationalists? Foreign Policy and Public Opinion in the Harper Era," *International Journal* 69, no. 3 (2014): 274–307.
- 28 The Current, "Trudeau Pulls Jets Out from Coalition against ISIS to Mixed reviews," CBC, 12 November 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-october-23-2015-1.3285264/trudeau-pulls-jets-out-from-coalition-against-isis-to-mixed-reviews-1.3285292>.
- 29 Daniel Leblanc, Michelle Zilio, and Laura Stone, "Canada's Changing Role in the Fight against the Islamic State," *Globe and Mail*, 12 November 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/canadas-changing-role-in-the-fight-against-islamicstate/article28659664/>.

- 30 Senior Canadian official 02.
- 31 Srdjan Vucetic, "Why Did Canada Sit Out of the Iraq War? One Constructivist Analysis," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 13, no. 1 (2006): 133–53.
- 32 Joseph Fiorino, "Why Canada Really Didn't Go to Iraq in 2003," NATO Association of Canada, 9 June 2015, natoassociation.ca/why-canada-really-didnt-go-to-iraq-in-2003/.
- 33 Ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01.
- 34 Greg Weston, "Canada Offered to Aid Iraq Invasion: WikiLeaks," CBC News, 16 May 2011, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/weston-canada-offered-to-aid-iraq-invasion-wikileaks-1.1062501.
- 35 Ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01.
- 36 Thomas Juneau, "A Story of Failed Re-engagement: Canada and Iran, 2015–18," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 25, no. 1 (2019): 39–53.
- 37 Ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01.
- 38 Juneau, "Story of Failed Re-engagement."
- 39 Staff, "Timeline: Canada's Diplomatic Relationship with Iran," Canadian Press, 9 January 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6389129/timeline-canada-iran-relationship/>; Justin Trudeau, "Canadian Report Blames Iranian Recklessness for Shoot-Down of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752," 24 June 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/06/24/canadian-report-blames-iranian-recklessness-shoot-down-ukraine>.
- 40 Adam Austen, "Canada Supports Diplomatic Efforts Established for Iran to Return to Full Implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," Global Affairs Canada, 14 January 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/01/canada-supports-diplomatic-efforts-established-for-iran-to-return-to-full-implementation-of-joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action.html>.
- 41 Senior Canadian official 04, interviewed by Farzan Sabet in Brussels, Belgium, 6 November 2019.
- 42 Ex-Canadian parliamentary staffer 03, interviewed by Farzan Sabet on Skype, 19 June 2019.
- 43 Grégoire Mallard, Farzan Sabet, and Jin Sun, "The Humanitarian Gap in the Global Sanctions Regime: Assessing Causes, Effects, and Solutions," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 121–53; ex-senior Canadian foreign policy official 01.