**Canada's cold shoulder to the UN
Ibbitson, JohnThe Globe and Mail**

Baird's denunciation of international body as ineffectual comes on heels of PM's decision to forgo addressing General Assembly

Does John Baird's loss of patience with the United Nations, as revealed in the Foreign Minister's scathing address to the General Assembly Monday, estrange the Harper government from more than 60 years of Canadian commitment to multilateral diplomacy?

That speech, coming after Prime Minister Stephen Harper chose to receive an award and to deliver a foreign- policy speech in New York last week instead of addressing the General Assembly, "abandons any remaining pretense of Canada's support for the United Nations," said Roland Paris, director of the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa.

While there is no suggestion Canada would withdraw from its funding commitments, when it comes to investing time, effort or respect, the Conservatives and the UN appear to be reaching the end of the line.

Mr. Baird denounced the UN for "endless, fruitless inward-looking exercises," for "preoccupation with procedure and process" instead of "substance and results." He excoriated the UN over its failure to confront the civil war in Syria. "While the brutal and repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad continues the slaughter of its own people, the United Nations continues to fail to impose binding sanctions that would stem the crimson tide of this bloody assault," he declared.

In vowing "to work closely with the United States and other allies to put pressure on Iran to comply with its international nuclear obligations," Mr. Baird implicitly dismissed any meaningful role for the Security Council in containing the regime. And in condemning "the early and forced marriage of young girls ... the criminalization of sexuality" and "suppressing - sometimes suppressing with brutal force - the rights to worship freely" he was indicting many UN member states for failing to honour the principles on which the organization was founded.

In his own foreign- policy speech last week, at a ceremony honouring him as an international statesman, Mr. Harper similarly dismissed "trying to court every dictator with a vote at the United Nations or just going along with every emerging international consensus, no matter how self-evidently wrong-headed."

Henceforth, he vowed, Canadian foreign policy would take three approaches: to make common cause with democratic allies - "our true friends" - to deal "openly and fairly" with other nations, though "we will not deceive ourselves about those relationships," and finally "to recognize clear and unequivocal threats" to global security and to speak out against them.

For Mr. Paris, the Tory rhetoric shuts off the flow of the first of two traditional streams of Canadian diplomacy: multilateral engagement combined with close co-operation with allies.

"This reliance on high-minded principle," while preferring to talk to allies rather than potential antagonists, "is a way of dealing with complexity by simplifying it down to something that's more comfortable and less confusing," Mr. Paris observed.

But it ignores, he said, the reality that the United Nations is dysfunctional because the world is dysfunctional and that the best hope for incremental progress lies in multilateral engagement rather than simply throwing in one's lot with one's friends.

Fen Hampson agrees that "the Harper government is turning its back on the UN." The director of Global Security at the Centre for International Governance Innovation made that point in an article he co-wrote with Derek Burney, former Canadian ambassador to the United States, Monday in iPolitics. While "the Prime Minister's UN bypass last week seemed snubby and small ... the message was clear - the UN is far removed from Canada's international affections."

But Mr. Hampson is less convinced than Mr. Paris that the words and actions of the Harper government reflect a fundamental break with Canadian commitment to multilateralism. In an interview, he noted that Mr. Baird's call for international action in defence of citizens persecuted by their own government reflected the long-standing Canadian commitment to "Responsibility to Protect," which was first promoted by the Liberals in the 1990s. And Canadian efforts to become more engaged in Pacific trade and diplomatic forums represent what might be called a multilateralism of convenience.

Tone may be as important as substance, whenever Mr. Baird speaks on behalf of Canada. While previous Canadian foreign ministers used the language of diplomacy to discuss diplomacy, the Conservatives have only one language, that used during election campaigns.

Foreign leaders taken aback by the harshness of the government's rhetoric may not know that, publicly at least, this is just how Canadian Conservatives talk.Canada's cold shoulder to the UN

Byline: Ibbitson, John
ISSN: 03190714
Publication Date: 10-02-2012
Page: A.3
Section: National News
Type: Newspaper
Language: English

Copyright (c) 2012 Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. All rights reserved.

**Citation for your reference:**

**MLA :**Ibbitson, John. "Canada's cold shoulder to the UN." *Globe and Mail*. 02 Oct. 2012: A3. *eLibrary*. Web. 11 Dec. 2012.

**APA :**Ibbitson, John "Canada's cold shoulder to the UN." *Globe and Mail*. 2012, October 02: A3.