**MLA :**Stevens, Geoffrey.. "Pushing trade at expense of human rights." *Guelph Mercury*. 03 Dec. 2012: A9. *eLibrary*. Web. 11 Dec. 2012.

There was a time, not so long ago, when this country punched above its weight in the world. Canada was only a middle power in a world dominated by Cold War superpowers. Yet Canadian leaders and diplomats moved in the same league as the big hitters. Our friendship was valued, our support solicited and our advice considered (if not always heeded).

Canada's contributions in two world wars commanded respect. Lester Pearson's vision and perseverance in negotiating the creation of an international police force to resolve the 1956 Suez crisis, for which he was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize, ushered in an era when Ottawa was the first capital to be called when peacekeeping was needed somewhere in the world.
We were seen as honest brokers under both Liberal and Conservative governments. We served with India and Poland on the International Control Commission, trying to maintain peace in Vietnam. We did far more than our share in accepting and resettling tens of thousands of Southeast Asian boat people following the Vietnam War. We took a leadership role politically and diplomatically in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts of Stephen Lewis, Canada helped make the elimination of HIV/AIDS in Africa an international priority. We made important commitments to actually do something about global warming.

It was a legacy of which all Canadians could be proud. Unfortunately, since the arrival in power of the Harper Conservatives, the proud legacy has been discarded. Gone is the role of peacemaker, honest broker, humanitarian, seeker of international consensus.

The Harper foreign policy can be stated in these words: "We can't worry about the whole world. We will do whatever we decide is best for Canada - provided it does not upset the United States."

Doing whatever is best for Canada (without discombobulating the U.S.) means promoting trade at the expense of human rights and humanitarian causes. It means abandoning any pretence to an even- handed approach to the Middle East - a hallmark of Canadian policy since Pearson's day.

With one eye to the Jewish vote at home and one to the wishes of Washington, the Canadian government took an embarrassing drubbing at the United Nations last week on the bid to upgrade the Palestinian Authority's observer status. Canada stood with the U.S., Israel and just six other countries in opposition to the resolution. The other 179 states (138 in favour; 41 abstentions) thought Canada's position was wrong-headed, even reckless.

On the environment, Canada's me-too policy is in lock-step with Washington's. The United States never did sign the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions. Under the Liberals, Canada did sign, but the Harper Conservatives withdrew that approval. Their position is rigid: economic growth, oil exports to the U.S. and job creation in Harper's Alberta take precedence over global warming, which barely registers on the Richter scale of Tory concerns.

I almost feel sympathy for poor Peter Kent, the environment minister, who had to go to an international conference in Qatar this week as spokesperson for a privileged nation that chooses to be a global outlier, a nation that could do so much but chooses to do so little.

Finally, there was the absurd - and disturbing - spectacle last week of the Tories using their majority to squash a previously approved NDP private member's bill to make cheaper generic drugs available to sick people, particularly AIDS sufferers, in impoverished developing countries.

Why do the Conservatives want to deny life-saving drugs to poor people? They probably don't want to deny them. They just don't care enough about the issue to let the NDP take credit for an enlightened piece of legislation. In Ottawa these days, what's good for the Harper Conservatives (and Washington) is synonymous with what's good for Canada.

Memories of an independent Canadian foreign policy - sensible, intelligent and useful - are fading, just like memories of the days when Canada made a positive difference and a great Canadian won the Nobel Prize.

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