**“Trudeau’s plan for regaining Canada’s global prominence: scold your friends, engage their enemies”.**

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The old Canada of Stephen Harper is gone and the new Canada of Stéphane Dion is ascendant. We no longer take sides on global affairs. We don’t pass judgment on right or wrong. We issue “tough messages” to our “friends” in Israel, while agreeing to let bygones be bygones with Iran. We signal our sympathy for Ukraine, but also our willingness to pursue “common interests” with Russia. We’re good guys. We’re on your side — whoever you are. However bad you may be, we want to get along. We mean no offence.

You knew it was coming. You could tell, back when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was leader of the third-place Liberals and — desperate for ways to differentiate his party from the Conservatives — pledged to end Canada’s involvement in the bombing campaign against The Islamic State of Iraq & the Levant. It was obvious during the campaign debates, when Trudeau invoked Canada’s mystical, and largely mythical, past as a stalwart of the UN’s peacekeeping forces. Appointing Dion as foreign affairs minister left no room for doubt: Canada was clambering back onto the fence of international affairs, where moral equivalency rules and every outrage is relative.

On Sunday, Dion issued a fairly pallid statement signalling that the Liberals had no intention of continuing the uncompromising support the Harper Conservatives had offered Israel.

“As a steadfast ally and friend to Israel, Canada calls for all efforts to be made to reduce violence and incitement and to help build the conditions for a return to the negotiating table,” it said. A spokesman explained that Dion wasn’t “retreating from any kind of support for Israel.” Then why issue the statement? Well, because “good friends can occasionally deliver tough messages.”

On Tuesday, Dion followed up by indicating that Ottawa would lift sanctions and normalize relations with Iran. Iran is the country that continues to declare its desire to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth, while supporting the brutal Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. The New York Times reported Wednesday that Iran’s Revolutionary Guards are training volunteer “advisers” to serve alongside Assad’s forces in crushing the opposition.

Isolating Iran, as the Conservatives had, “is not good for the people of Iran … for the promotion of human rights … for our strategic interests in the region … for Israel,” Dion maintained, which should come as news to Israel.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quick to sense the shift in direction. Denouncing Harper as “Russia-phobic,” he urged a rapprochement. Harper, who famously told Russian President Vladimir Putin to his face to “get out of Ukraine,” was not a pragmatic man, he complained. Canada had foolishly chained itself to the “blatant interests of the Ukrainian diaspora, ignoring Canada’s national interests.”

It’s true that the Conservatives took a much tougher line on Russia than Moscow would have liked. Ottawa argued that Putin had no right to unilaterally annex Crimea or supply separatist rebels in Ukraine with weapons, manpower and material support. As with most of the world, Ottawa expressed outrage at the death of 283 people when a Russian-made missile was used to shoot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. It blamed Moscow for the continued violence in Ukraine, which has taken 9,000 lives, noting that without Moscow’s support, the rebellion would almost certainly have been far less successful.

Lavrov continues to insist Russia has nothing to apologize for, but Dion says he’s willing to re-engage anyway. “The Americans speak with them and all the Europeans, the Japanese, everybody except Canada,” he said. That’s true, but Washington and much of Europe are also engaged in bombing Syria, a fact that seems to have made no difference to the Liberal’s determination to recall Canada’s CF-18s.

The operative term in Dion’s department appears to be Canada’s “interests.” Standing up to Russia does nothing for Canada’s “interests” in the Arctic, or “common interests” with Moscow. The Conservative position on Iran was “ideological and irrational,” because “surely it will affect business in Canada,” Dion said.

It’s intriguing that the party that enjoyed denouncing the Conservatives as cold-hearted slaves to the almighty dollar now justifies its renewed links to some of the world’s most nefarious regimes on the basis that it’s good for business. Trudeau has dismissed any suggestion that his government might cancel a contract for military vehicles with Saudi Arabia (after criticizing it before the election), is keen on pursuing free trade with China, sees no reason not to lift sanctions on Iran and feels the bloodshed in Ukraine shouldn’t get in the way of doing deals with Moscow.

Meanwhile, Dion warns Israel that Canada is keeping an eye on it, to ensure it plays fair with the Palestinians. Canada can live with Russia fomenting rebellion in Ukraine, but won’t stand for Israeli retaliation against rocket attacks by Hamas or Palestinian knife attacks on Israeli civilians. We have our limits, after all.

There’s a clear message here. It’s not a pleasant one. The Trudeau people appear to believe Canada can boost its place in the world by refusing to take sides. We might not like what we see, but we won’t let it get in the way. Our door is always open. Never mind who walks through it.

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