

# Russia, We Hardly Knew Ye

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## Introduction

I will talk today about Canada and Russia primarily in the context of the last decade of Canadian foreign policy under Prime Minister Harper. That context is timely. We are weeks away from an election - and days now away from the leaders' debate on foreign policy, which I hope will lead voters to reflect more broadly upon the role Stephen Harper has had Canada play in the world this last decade - and to take it into account when they vote.

Upon reflection, my own view is that Stephen Harper's foreign policy record is a train wreck – bilaterally, multilaterally and internationally. I see it as a decade of neo-con nihilism. Relations with Russia have been among the many casualties.

Essential background important to remember is that Stephen Harper was always comfortable, at ease, with the neo-cons who came to power with George W Bush at the turn of this century - just when, note, Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia.

That triumphalist American neo-con crew - Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, our own David Frum - had explicit plans to run the whole world in what they called the New American Century.

Before 9/11, note, they prepared to start the ball rolling - with democracy in Iraq. Well, it proved to be a wrecking ball, starting with the "shock and awe" invasion Stephen Harper urged Prime Minister Chrétien – in vain, happily - to have Canada join.

John Bolton, who dissed the UN Charter, was named Ambassador to the UN. As Director General of international organizations in DFAIT, I had earlier encountered Bolton on US delegations at the UN, where he was taking the place down. A worse servant of American multilateral interests would be hard to imagine. Today, beware, John Bolton is one of Jeb Bush's principal foreign policy advisers.

Eventually, after they'd done enormous damage, above all in Iraq - but in Afghanistan too, with sanctioned torture and rendition - Bush threw out the worst of the neo-cons. And then, in 2008, so did Americans, the whole crew.

The point is, we never threw our neo-cons out. We still haven't. We elected them in 2006 and have had them lead us since.

American neo-cons led the U.S. to do great damage in the world. Ours have led Canada to shrill irrelevance. We are "proud to be the loudest" and the "most certain." We never "go along to get along" and we talk a very tough game, but as Professor Denis Stairs points out, "We shout loudly ... and carry a little twig."

It doesn't do us much good. Try naming one thing we've led anyone to do in the world this last decade.

**Let's look briefly at the Harper record bilaterally and multilaterally, across the international spectrum.**

### **Canada – US Relations**

In the United States, to cite our most important bilateral link, Stephen Harper seemed not to notice that Barack Obama had replaced George Bush. Harper helped Obama with nothing - not nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, not Israel, not Iran, not climate change - and Harper, Canada, got helped with nothing in return, not even the "no-brainer" Keystone pipeline, that key part of Harper's Energy Superpower kit.

U.S. Secretaries of State have been uncharacteristically uncharitable. Hillary Clinton, who's just said she'd kill Keystone too, called Harper out on the access to abortion denied women in the Prime Minister's flagship aid programs for maternal and child health - access not denied to Canadian women at home.

Last month, Secretary of State John Kerry took another swipe - at our lack of ministerial representation at the climate change conference he hosted in Alaska. If Rob Nicholson was too busy, I ask you, how did John Kerry find time?

I thought it telling that, at the NATO Summit in Wales this spring, when President Obama gathered a huddle on Ukraine, he simply left our Prime Minister out. That omission of Ukraine's "best friend," the self-proclaimed leader of Western support for Ukraine, spoke volumes about the Harper government's real influence in the world.

It has long been true that a significant part of our international clout was based on our perceived ability to influence Washington. For years now, Stephen Harper has clearly had none.

I'll not run through any other bilateral links in detail, there's not time, but many relations have been poorly managed - or simply cut off - with countries which are important, whether we like them or not: the Europeans (with whom, after all these years, we've still not completed a trade deal), China (with which we've run so counter-productively hot and cold), Mexico (an amigo no more; we cancelled our Three Amigos meeting) ... and Brazil and South Africa, the entire African continent, and Iran and Russia - to which I'll return. The list is long.

Stephen Harper is a hit with Likud in Israel, with nationalists in Ukraine, with monarchists in Britain and with Tony Abbott, his buddy with abs, who's just been turfed in Australia.

I think it incontestable, though, that in the corridors of power of most G-20 capitals, we have far less standing and influence than we did ten years ago.

### **Multilateral Foreign Policy Record**

Prime Minister Harper's multilateral record is if anything worse.

**At the UN**, our reputation is in tatters. Until Harper came to power, Canada was among the most active multilateral players in the world, our delegations reliably among the best-informed, energetic and constructive in the room. We played to our strengths - and they added to our multilateral standing and influence, our ability to lead.

Under Harper, it's been nothing at all like that. Our reputation has been stood on its head. Our delegations are now known for their shrill talking points and their otherwise muzzled diplomats. They take no initiatives. They lead no one anywhere. Privately, I'm told, our closest friends plead with us not to attend key meetings.

Remember, our leader proudly - pointedly, for the day's photo-op - chose the opening of a Tim Horton's shop over the opening of the UN General Assembly.

In environmental circles, we're laughingstock, regularly ridiculed - and it matters. Canada matters, for better or worse. Our share of the planet's environment is immense, after all, second only to Russia's. Our dead-in-the-water relationship with Russia happens to be the largest bilateral relationship in the world. Together, we command two-thirds of the northern latitudes of the earth. For anyone interested in the protection of the natural world, in its conservation - as one might think Conservatives normally are, it being in their name - that relationship matters.

**Multilaterally, though, in brief: we've dissed the UN; stiffed the Commonwealth; ignored La Francophonie; quit Kyoto; abandoned arms control; deserted the Desertification Commission; politicized the Arctic Council, recently insisting, against the pleas of other members, that Ukraine be tabled for discussion; and confounded the OAS, where members are asking where the Canada they knew has gone.**

It was no wonder we got our clock cleaned - by Portugal - in that race for a seat on the Security Council five years ago. We'd get it cleaned again today. Canada's multilateral standing is at its lowest ebb ever.

Then there's the matter of **our international reputation**.

What gets my goat most is that under Harper, we've become far and away the most ... bellicose Western nation in the world, our rhetoric the most belligerent. Where has the Canada we knew gone?

In the **Middle East**, ours is the only leader who has parroted Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's lines justifying an attack on Iran - this at a time when Washington and our allies were negotiating a deal with Tehran (in which capital, note, we're deaf, dumb and blind, our Embassy empty, our ambassador withdrawn).

In **Eurasia**, Stephen Harper's is the only foreign minister to have called Russia "evil," Harper the only leader to have insulted Putin openly, with the taunt he'd have to "guess" whether he'd shake his hand - the extended hand of the President of Russia, note, at a G20 Summit to which he'd been invited. Manners do make the man. They didn't make much of our man that day.

None of all this plays to our strengths. It plays instead to our weakness. We behave like a pit-bull in a china shop, but bellicosity becomes us not at all. Canadians fight well indeed when need be; the courage of our forces is legendary - but we are by no stretch the warrior nation of Tory tough-guy fantasies.

For starters, we're not powerful or scary enough. We spend 1% of our GDP on defence, 40% of the **NATO** average. One NATO soldier in 50 is a Canadian. Our once proud navy has one modernized frigate - one, HMCS Frederickton - and we took it off ostensibly vital duty in a NATO Baltic exercise this summer for two days of photo-ops with Stephen Harper and his wife. NATO was not amused. The Kremlin was not frightened.

Canada stretches, famously, from sea to sea to sea – yet the principal weapon system of our surface fleet consists of clapped-out Sea King helicopters made 52 years ago, long before most of you and most Canadians were born.

Our **military procurement** remains unconscionably incompetent, proof in itself that our government doesn't take security nearly so seriously as its talking points would have us believe. What's more, these days, the modest sums that do get budgeted for defence – or for aid – often, intentionally, don't get spent. They lapse - conveniently; it helps balance the budget.

Stephen Harper's governments haven't taken **diplomacy** seriously, either. Our Department of Foreign Affairs has been eviscerated, figuratively and literally, our diplomats muzzled, blinkered and repressed, their budgets nickel-and-dimed to death. CIDA was simply disappeared.

Consider too the quality of our top players on the world stage.

Just as I doubt history will judge Prime Minister Harper a very worthy heir to Mulroney, Chrétien, Trudeau or Pearson in the world, I don't think Foreign Ministers of his like Peter McKay, Maxime Bernier, Lawrence Cannon or John Baird – who've led no one anywhere - have been very worthy heirs to the likes of Lester Pearson, Joe Clark or Lloyd Axworthy – all of whom did.

We don't punch above our weight, but we sure do strut and promise above it. What's worse, we make promises with other people's money and institutions, like when we press for Europe's integration of Ukraine, and promises with other people's arms, like when we press, as we do to this day, for NATO membership not only for Ukraine, but for Georgia as well, in the Caucasus - knowing full well that our allies won't let that happen, that our empty promises won't ever have to be kept.

### **Relations with Russia**

The overview I've just described of Stephen Harper's record in the world provides a useful background for a look at his government's record in relations with Russia, to which I now turn, because in them so much of what is wrong with our foreign policy is reflected - its simplistic certitudes, all things black or white, bad or good, for us or against us; its open disdain for diplomacy (we "lecture and leave," in Joe Clark's phrase); its dumbed-down analysis; its ramped-up rhetoric, puffed-up posturing; its blatant hypocrisy, double standards and cynicism - they're all there, in spades.

Though the history of Canada's relations with Russia is long - the first Canadians having migrated from Siberia – it is not elaborate - because there just haven't been that many.

In brief, we were against the Revolution a hundred years ago, sending 4000 troops to fight for the White Russians. Through the last century, notably, we welcomed wave after wave of immigrants fleeing the cruel hand of the Kremlin, mad at Moscow and inclined to stay that way. Good relations with Russia have never been very good domestic Canadian politics. It has always taken leadership - by Prime

Ministers and Foreign Ministers - to look beyond the outlooks of ethnic diasporas in the service of national Canadian interests and goals.

Canada and Russia were allies in World War Two, but we were never as grateful for the staggering Russian sacrifice which had broken the German army as we might have been had Stalin not been a monster, had he not promptly imprisoned and oppressed Eastern Europe, and had the Cold War not broken out so soon - with Igor Gouzenko's defection here in Ottawa the year I was born.

But do let us remember the price Russians paid. When the Canadian Third Division landed at Juno Beach on D-Day just over seventy years ago, we Allies were opposed by four German Divisions. Another four came quickly to the scene and another fifty were rushed, too late and in vain, to throw us back into the Channel. In June, 1944, there were 150 German Divisions on the Eastern front in a desperate struggle with Russia. We had a bloody, awful time getting off those beaches and on into the heart of Europe. I don't like to imagine what might have happened had we been opposed, as the Russians were, by three or four times as many battle-hardened Wehrmacht troops.

Through the decades of the Cold War, we Canadians were never hawks, but relations with Moscow were never very warm. There were high points - hockey, wheat sales, Glenn Gould's triumphant 1957 tour, Trudeau's 1971 visit, ear-shattering tours of Red Army choruses, breath-taking ballet - but we kept our distance.

Then, as the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia teetered on the brink, Prime Ministers Mulroney and Chrétien supported Presidents Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin both internationally and bilaterally. We welcomed Russia to the G8. We launched and sustained a ten million dollar a year program of technical cooperation. We contributed a hundred million dollars a year - for ten years, a billion dollars - to the Global Partnership launched at Kananaskis in 2001 to help Russia with nuclear security.

I arrived in Russia in September, 2003. Though I didn't realize it at the time, the high point in the history of our relations was reached three weeks later, with Governor General Adrienne Clarkson's 10-day state visit accompanied by a whole plane-load of high officials and Canadian cultural, political and scientific stars.

Clarkson dazzled the Russians. Putin treated her royally. There were glittering state dinners, grand concerts, a private tour of the Hermitage - and a sobering visit to Gulag Camp 501 in the far north. Clarkson and Putin had long, animated talks and made many ambitious plans.

There was - and there remains, after all - much scope for cooperation between us. The differences in our histories, identities, world views and aspirations are obvious, but we face many common challenges: Arctic stewardship, vast distances, daunting climates, multiculturalism, demographic diversity (precluding ethnicity as a base of national identity), federalism, and the assertion of east-west sovereignty against strong north-south economic forces, as in western Canada in our history and in the Russian Far East today - where the 7million ethnic Russians east of the Urals confront hundreds of millions of Chinese nearby, hungry for their energy and natural resources - and where, note, as in Central Asia, Russia's strategic posture is necessarily defensive.

The Governor General's visit was stressful indeed so early in my assignment, but it was a great way to get started. I met lots of senior figures - and had a rich diplomatic agenda to fulfill.

Before my time was done, though, Stephen Harper was elected, and everything changed. We'd made plans for a close relationship, a "privileged partnership" we called it, but it never came to pass. Our relations are anything but "privileged" today. In retrospect, Russia, we hardly knew ye.

I turn now, briefly, to a few other prominent memories of my time in Russia.

First, a few of Putin up close at that time, early in his Presidency - his best years, I'd say - when he was saving the Russian Federation from the chaos which threatened after the Soviet collapse and the near-anarchy of the 1990's, when, under Yeltsin's unsteady hand, Russia flirted with disintegration (a fate which should not, earnestly, ever be visited upon the Russians - or their neighbours).

Over three years, upon many hours of close observation, I found Vladimir Putin engaging, courteous, articulate, highly intelligent, very well briefed, with a prodigious memory - a patriot and a realist, pragmatic above all. His avowed aspirations for democracy in Russia seemed genuine, as did his hopes for partnership and cooperation with the West.

In the decade since, I think some of Putin's enormous power has gone to his head. I cringe at those faked hockey games he stages, for example. And all the Kremlin's fantastical propaganda - like that about how Malaysian Airlines flight 270 got shot down - is unseemly, on a par with North Korea's, say.

But that said, the notion that President Putin is unhinged, irrational, strikes me as dangerous nonsense.

In Putin's mind and in the opinions of most Russians - however propagandized they might be, whatever respect western democratic evangelists might afford them - Putin is above all a Russian patriot and patriarch, Tsar Lite, strong and necessarily ruthless enough to keep the whole vast contraption of the federation together and to protect its strategic security - as ruthlessly as necessary and, note, with as much deception as circumstances require, deception being an essential part of espionage and Putin being, among many other things, a proud and accomplished spy. (That's no crime, by the way: the first President George Bush, recall, served as the head of the CIA.)

In my view, the demonization of Vladimir Putin, the insults and the shunning, are a big part of the problem - the big problem: the posturing, the war games and all the tough talk on both sides ... the clear, present danger of new Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia.

It needs remembering for one thing that blatant allusions to Hitler and Nazi aggression are deeply offensive, particularly to Russians, who lost tens of millions in the fight with Nazi Germany. Dangerous, gratuitous provocations, such allusions are as well insults to victims, to history and to intelligence.

President Putin will project Russia's security interests in its "near abroad," no doubt, but the notion that he is intent on the recreation of the Soviet Union, on the subjugation anew of Eastern Europe, just doesn't bear scrutiny. Russia doesn't have the means, for a start - and, if domination is Putin's plan, he's awfully late getting started. He's been in power for fifteen years now.

I think Putin spoke the truth last year when he said Russian forces could take Kyiv in three days. But he had no intention of having them do so - and he has none now. The taking would be the easy part (all

things relative) – the keeping wouldn't be easy at all. No, Kyiv can run its own affairs. What it can't do is pose a threat to Russian security.

Enough about Putin for now, though. Back to memories. I remember Beslan, vividly, when 385 were killed, mostly children at school. It was the culmination of waves of terror in Russia - the "Nord-Ost" Theatre Siege, with 850 taken hostage, 130 of whom died, and all the bombings in apartments, subways, airplanes and hospitals.

At Beslan, security forces had failed. Bribed border guards had turned blind eyes to terrorists' smuggled bombs. There was deep dread in the land. Everyone feared for the future of the federation. Putin cracked down, suspending regional elections of governors - and then did a deal with the local strongman, Kadyrov, pouring billions into Chechnya to rebuild Grozny and the devastated countryside. Some see Beslan as the beginning of renewed authoritarianism in Russia.

I won't rehearse the grisly details of that terror at Beslan, but I will recall the diplomatic aftermath. The next day, speaking for the EU, its Lithuania President, far from expressing much sympathy and solidarity, opined that Moscow had a lot to answer for at Beslan, implying that Russians were reaping what they'd sown in Chechnya, that all those kids had had it coming. (It was years after 9/11, recall, before any such harsh comment was made about America.)

The Russians were outraged. Putin had been the first to call George Bush after 9/11. The Russians had immediately helped the U.S. in Afghanistan. Yet the West's reaction to terror in Russia was quick to blame Moscow. There was little sense of solidarity. As when Christian Britain fought with Muslim Ottomans against Christian Russia in the Crimean War long before, the Russians felt betrayed.

I remember as well the Russians' reaction to Katrina, when the levees broke at New Orleans. Russians were astonished by Washington's gross incompetence, if not by its racism. These were the folks who'd been lecturing them about how they ought to run their affairs. The psychological impact was quite profound. The city on the hill wasn't shining anymore.

I remember too of course the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, seen from Moscow, when, in a fix of a fix, President Yanukovich's election was over-turned - and Vladimir Putin personally humiliated. It felt as if the earth had moved. Ukraine was independent.

I think Russians, painfully, have accepted as much – except, of course, for Crimea. What Russians and their leaders did not and will not accept, though, is that Kyiv should ever pose a threat to Moscow's security. The one thing Kyiv really shouldn't ever do - which is just what it did 18 months ago - is pick fights with Russia.

Reality is intrusive. In the real world, Kyiv has about as much freedom to undermine the Kremlin's security as we Canadians have to undermine the Pentagon's. Like them or not, theory aside, spheres of influence are real.

In that context, I remember a visit one day in Moscow from Yegor Gaidar, Boris Yeltsin's lead reform Prime Minister, who'd called me to seek an early appointment about an "urgent matter" - the expansion of NATO and the prospect that it might grow further, might take in Ukraine.

Gaidar was impassioned. Ukraine was orders of magnitude more important for Russia than the others who'd joined NATO: Kievan Rus was Russia's cradle; Ukraine was family; it was intertwined with Russia culturally, economically, institutionally, infra-structurally - every which way. It was also vital strategic territory, including as it did Crimea, with Sevastopol the historic base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Now, Russians know, NATO's not a knitting club. It is a nuclear-armed, congenitally Russo-phobic military alliance, led by the Pentagon. Those who think NATO is purely defensive, a pussy-cat Moscow shouldn't mind on the doorstep, should ask the Serbs or the Libyans.

Moreover, NATO had been expanding eastward, by hundreds of thousands of square miles, by vast new populations and vast new resources - despite Russia's repeated objections and its obvious eternal security interest in the geostrategic orientation of eastern Europe.

Gaidar said the very prospect of further NATO expansion, including Ukraine, would stir the worst xenophobic nationalism in Russia. He implored me to urge Ottawa to oppose any such further growth.

I think Gaidar was right. Western advocacy, like ours to this day, of further NATO growth, has been even more provocative for the Kremlin than was the West's unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty. For Russian strategists, these moves were strategic offence, requiring response. For Russian nationalists, above all the extremists Gaidar feared, they were rich fodder.

Fast forward now to February 21<sup>st</sup> last year, when Ukrainian nationalists, whom we'd done much to encourage, trashed an EU-brokered peace deal which Canada and the West had officially welcomed - one which would have seen President Yanukovich, whom they'd elected, continue in office for ten months leading to fresh national elections; made their President flee for his life overnight; and the next morning went right off the rails, appointing known ultra-nationalists to key security posts, down-grading the official status of the Russian language and announcing that they would seek to join NATO. That fateful day, a crowd in Kyiv picked a fight with the Kremlin, one that's been raging since.

Put yourself in Putin's place. Briefed that his democratically elected ally Yanukovich had been ousted and that Ukraine was about to lurch west and Russia about to have to rent the base of its Black Sea fleet from a NATO member, Putin was bound to react. Any sensible Russian leader would have been as bound. By any strategic reckoning, Russia's real, natural and keenly perceived national security circumstances and interests were threatened, calamitously.

There is nothing more offensive, it's been said, than Russia on the defensive. At great cost, Putin has since made his point: Russia will not be ignored in the world - and certainly not in its own neighbourhood: Ukraine will not threaten Russia. If Kyiv will not declare neutrality willingly, as a sober concession to reality, then it will have neutrality imposed upon it, as it is being imposed now, ruthlessly, through chronic enfeeblement. If Kyiv will not respect the culture, the rights and the language of the large Russian community in the Donbass and Crimea it inherited at independence, fully a fifth of its people at the time, then Russia will fuel that community's revolt, as, dissembling all the while, it's been doing.

It would have been much easier for independent Ukraine had it inherited a much smaller but more homogenous ethnic Ukrainian state. It didn't. Kyiv's challenge was much more complicated than that. It was a test, familiar to Canadians, of bilingualism, of biculturalism, of accommodation and of life beside a giant - a test independent Ukraine failed. It will not be put back together again. Ukraine as it was is no more.

There was an invasion of course, which few Ukrainians deny - but there was also a civil war, which very many do. Crucially, Kyiv had lost the loyalty of Crimea and the Donbass. For a Kremlin provoked, they were easy pickings.

When push came to shove, the consequences of independent Ukraine's failure could not be escaped. The country was in no shape to quarrel with the Kremlin, which promptly helped catalyze and then intervened in Ukraine's civil war - in Crimea and the Donbass, where the historic Don reaches the Sea of Azov, and where everything was utterly integrated with Russia.

It does not take long to describe Stephen Harper's and his governments' relations with Russia, because they've been whittled to the bone; there's no flesh left.

From day one, our leader has been certain that Putin is a demon and Russia bound for hell - and has treated both accordingly through all the decade since. The shunning started right away. There were no visits, no invitations. No advantage was taken of countless multilateral opportunities to hold bilateral meetings so as to develop, if not cooperation, then at least comprehension. But there was none.

We immediately closed our consulate in St Petersburg. We then terminated our \$10million annual program of technical cooperation. All manner of cooperation - in many fields - was cut off, even in the Arctic.

Our relations are now a wasteland. At the height of the Ukraine crisis, another time you'd think an Ambassador on the ground might be useful, we were the only country - other than Ukraine - to withdraw our ambassador from Moscow. We have meanwhile entirely ignored their estimable Ambassadors here - Georgi Mamedov until a year ago and Alexander Darchiev today.

You know the rest of the story. Our leader is now proudly Putin's harshest critic, the lone hawk of the West, a Churchill soaring over all those Chamberlains, Canada now Russia's most distant neighbour.

And it's getting us nowhere. Whatever one thinks of our role in the region's problems, it's clear we'll have little role in their solutions - because, as in the Middle East, we have no credibility with essential players. In Ukraine, the best we might now do - but don't hold your breath - is to use what influence we do have to try to calm extremists down and get them to accept that Russophile Ukrainians are patriots too, that NATO membership is not on, and that Ukrainian prospects at home and abroad depend on Russian-Ukrainian reconciliation, depend on an end to this tragic Slavic civil war.

I have the distinction, unsought, of having been the only Canadian ambassador to both Ukraine and Russia. Sometimes, I think that experience has left me one of the very few Canadians who believe that no country in the world has more interest in good Western relations with Russia than does Ukraine, one of the very few wed to the notion that reconciliation is vital between those two fraternal peoples. My

experience in both countries has also left me ever more suspicious and fearful of extreme, exclusive nationalism – in Russia, in Ukraine, wherever.

The fact is we've been a significant part of the problem, above all by encouraging Ukraine's nationalists, with a blind eye to the dangerous extremists, some openly neo-Nazi, in their ranks - like the ones who seized control of the Maidan 18 months ago and picked a fight with Russia; or the ones who threw the grenades at the Rada last month, protesting President Poroshenko's act to decentralize power to the Donbass, to fulfill the Minsk II peace deal; or the ones Chris Alexander feted in an incendiary speech - "Let's join that fight!" - he gave at a Ukrainian Canadian Congress dinner this summer in honour of Andriy Parubiy, a notably extreme nationalist; or the ones Stephen Harper egged on in Lviv in 2010, when in a speech he tripled the estimated number of Holodomor victims, as if four million were not enough.

Our leader has been Ukraine's self-declared "most certain" friend. John Baird thought that Canadians should be "proud that our Prime Minister had been the loudest" at the Wales NATO Summit where, as I've mentioned, he was left out of the adults' meeting and where, talking tough all the while, he led the opposition to US/UK proposals for increased NATO defence budgets. Loudest and most certain; that's Canada these days ... except when the bill comes.

There has been no sense in our policy of any larger vision; no comprehension of Russia as an old proud civilization unto itself, for example – one of the few in the world, by the way, that never succumbed to European power, and one that is not going away; no comprehension of the need for a mending wall, in Robert Frost's phrase, a good fence to make good - or at least better - neighbours of Russia and NATO; no sense of the larger geo-strategic games in play in Syria, say, or with China; nor any appreciation of the multilateral ubiquity, skill and endurance of Russia, whose foreign minister and service are among the most able in the world.

There is instead the spectacle of Canada shunning, isolating Russia. It's as though we imagine Russia is going to go away if we ignore it, as though we think Putin will feel and yield to the pain of Harper's absence. He won't.

And there is instead constant hypocrisy, double standards. We told diplomats here in Ottawa the other day to butt out of our politics, for example - yet our Minister of Foreign Affairs joined protestors against the elected government of Ukraine on Kyiv's Maidan last year.

On a larger scale, we in the West accuse Putin of "aggression" in Georgia and Ukraine - we who have driven NATO up Russia's nose, abrogated the ABM Treaty, bombed Belgrade, Russia's ancient southern (Yugo) Slav ally, invaded Iraq (handing it to Iran), left Afghanistan in ruin, sown chaos in the Middle East and destroyed Libya – unleashing a flood of arms upon the most vulnerable countries in the world. If we accuse Russia of "aggression," I ask you, with what would we charge ourselves?

All things are relative. There is no meaning without context. Putin is a demon - compared to whom? Russia is aggressive - compared to what?

Despite all the troubles I have at some length rehearsed, let me conclude with hope.

### **What needs to be done?**

Fear needs to be stared down for a start. On both sides, hotheads need cold showers. Russia and NATO have no need to fight. The West has no designs on Russia – and should quit provoking it. The EU has clearly reached its limits – and then some. NATO will not grow more. And as to Western fears, it needs understanding that Russians, who aren't ten feet tall, have many other much better, urgent things to do, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, in the Far East – and, with oil so cheap, far less to do it all with - than get into fights on its western flank. There is too much other vulnerability to worry about, across eleven time zones.

In brief, a big new deal needs to be done, a Eurasian security deal, a better fence agreed, a mending wall. NATO and Russia - Berlin and Moscow - need to make safe space for Ukraine, letting it trade well with both sides – and pose no security risk to either. Such a deal had better not be beyond the diplomatic grasp of Moscow, Berlin, Brussels and Washington. We're all in big trouble if it is - especially Ukrainians.

My money's on the diplomats, though. I think peace can now be negotiated in and for Ukraine, that NATO and Russia can get along, and that the West and Russia can cooperate in the vital fight with vicious mid-East fanatics, with ISIS.

We need to be on the same side as Russia in that larger battle. Ottawa may not yet think so, but Washington would appear to, what with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defence Secretary Ash Carter now in active talks about Syria with their Russian counterparts. (A sixth of Russians, note, are Muslim; Moscow has a lot at stake.)

There is necessarily a limit to how much in worldwide relations with Russia can be held hostage to the fate of the Donbass. In the end, that's going to have to be worked out by the people who live there.

What pains me most, because I left part of my heart in Ukraine, is that we Canadians helped mislead Ukrainians. The conclusion seems inescapable to me that we led them to underestimate the risks of a fight with Russia and to overestimate the help they'd get from us and the rest of the West if they had one.

Thousands have died, millions have been displaced. The Donbass has been decimated. Prospects for essential Ukrainian-Russian reconciliation seem distant indeed. Vladimir Putin has made his point, but there are no winners. However many Minsk it takes, the urgent job is peace – peace and a new deal.

As to prospects for Canada-Russia reconciliation, I see no chance that our relations will improve under Stephen Harper. And as to his world view, I'm no more hopeful. I think Wayne Gretzky put it well: Stephen Harper's "been an unreal Prime Minister." Exactly.

To end on a bright note, though, I think we'll be getting out from under Stephen Harper soon.

Here's hoping you all vote next month – and here's hoping you vote for change. Here's hoping enough Canadians join you to make that happen. And here's hoping we might soon play to our strengths in the world again - and do more of our duty there.