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Canada's foreign policy alignment with liberal values: case study of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2011.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to determine whether Canada's foreign policy in Afghanistan, specifically in Kandahar province between 2008 and 2011, is aligned with liberal values in international relations. For the theoretical framework, neoliberalism has been used, and its main characteristics have been explained through its most important authors. To analyze the case, fourteen reports presented to the Canadian parliament during this period were studied, where the progress of the intervention was explained through six priorities designated by the Canadian government. The analysis was based on determining which decisions, facts or intentions could be explained by the most important characteristics of liberalism. A comparative table was drawn up to present the results. Finally, it is concluded that Canada followed a liberal logic during this period in its intervention in Afghanistan as part of its foreign policy.

SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

More than 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members served in Afghanistan as part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) between 2001 and 2014, making it the largest Canadian military deployment since World War II (Gouvernement du Canada, 2023). In 2008, Canada was in Afghanistan, in accordance with UN resolutions authorizing a NATO-led multinational security force with the goal of helping to rebuild the region after Soviet occupation, civil war, drought, and Taliban rule. The NATO-led security mission initially focused on stabilizing Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, and its surrounding region; however, it was expanded to the rest of the country in 2006, with Canada taking the lead in the southern province of Kandahar. In 2008, a mission consisting of diplomatic, development and security operations was established for the 2008-2011 period , which will be this paper's object of study (Government of Canada, 2008c).

The House of Commons asked the Government to submit quarterly reports to Parliament on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. As a result, fourteen quarterly reports were presented between 2008 and 2012. These reports presented the Government's policy priorities, set out explicit objectives and included benchmarks and indicators to assess and measure the evolution of objectives over the years (Government of Canada, 2008c, 2012).

The government identified six priorities that defined Canada's commitment to its mission in Afghanistan. The first four priorities focused primarily on the Kandahar region:

1. *Enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order.*
2. *Strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver core services and promote economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government.*
3. *Provide humanitarian assistance for extremely vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons.*
4. *Enhance border security, with facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani authorities.*

These Kandahar-focused priorities were to be reinforced by two national-level priorities:

5. *Help advance Afghanistan's capacity for democratic governance by contributing to effective, accountable public institutions and electoral processes.*
6. *Facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.*

To achieve measurable progress in 2011, Canada wanted to focus on specific priorities that were mutually reinforcing and consistent. They wanted to continue to support the Afghan government domestically, but at the same time expand their concentration of resources and efforts in Kandahar, where Canadian soldiers, diplomats, police officers, development specialists and others needed to work together in the interest of the Afghan population. It was also considered crucial to choose activities based on a realistic expectation of visibility and practical impact, benefitting Afghans in ways that would improve their lives and strengthen their confidence in the future of their country. The logic behind this strategy was that as key districts of Kandahar became more secure and better governed, and as Afghan institutions provided more services and administered justice more reliably, Afghans would have more confidence in their government and move forward with their own development (Government of Canada, 2008c).

Canada has traditionally been a country associated with liberal domestic policies (Mckay, 2000). However, a military intervention in another country could deviate from this logic. This paper aims to study the alignment of Canadian foreign policy in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2011 with the liberal values of international relations. Our hypothesis in this case is that Canada followed a liberal logic in its foreign action. To demonstrate this hypothesis, this article is based on a literature review of the fourteen reports presented to the Canadian parliament during the period studied. In the first part of the paper, the main characteristics of liberalism in International Relations will be presented, and from this contextualization, the variables used in the analysis will be extracted. In the second part, the analysis will be developed through a comparative table, with the intent of finding out, through the analyzed texts, which facts, decisions, or intentions can be explained by the

main characteristics of liberalism. In the final section, conclusions are drawn in order to answer the analysis question.

2. __THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK__

This work falls within the field of study of foreign policy analysis. We will use a liberal normative framework, to determine Canada's alignment with it in international politics. We will focus on neoliberalism; therefore, the works of authors such as R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye will be indispensable for understanding the key concepts of liberalism used in this paper. Firstly, we must consider one of liberalism's most central ideas: interdependence. This is a concept with various manifestations, meaning it can refer to economic interdependence, but also social interdependence among societies of different states. This concept suggests that societies are linked in a multitude of dimensions (economic, human, scientific, and intellectual) due to a flow of shared goods, services, capital, ideas, and people (Rosecrance & Stein, 1973). These connections are expected to have political consequences, as they alter the interests, preferences, and perceptions of more or less relevant parts of different countries (Barbé Izuel, 2020). The idea of interdependence also implies the dimension of conflicts. That is, in a globalized world, conflicts are considered international and extend beyond state borders. Consequently, the response also has to go beyond states, which prompts a greater need for cooperation and an increased state capacity to overcome the obstacles associated with cooperating under conditions of anarchy (Barbé Izuel, 2020).

Beyond interdependence, liberalism revolves around seven key arguments that will serve us in this paper: the objectives for cooperation, the plurality of actors and the importance of international organizations, diversity in the international agenda, possibility of change and historical progress, the dynamics of transnationality, and importance of international organizations.

As explained above, according to liberals, cooperation is necessary to enable states to overcome the threats posed by anarchy in the international system. In a global world, problems are global and must be addressed globally through cooperation (Barbé Izuel, 2020). Therefore, cooperation with other states may be desired and part of a state's foreign policy.

Regarding the plurality of actors, interdependence implies that not only states participate in the international sphere. When interdependence connects sectors of societies from different states, it breaks with the unitary logic of states (the classic image of the black box). In this line, these connections between societies can create transnational dynamics involving non-state actors, such as social movements or terrorist groups, but which are essential for understanding international relations in a globalized world. Therefore, states are not the only important actors in international relations; other actors such as NGOs, businesses, and even individuals, can also be relevant. By opening the black box of states, liberalism also relativizes the premises of unity and rationality of states, opening the possibility that within the same state there may be different opinions and ways of doing things. Even within the same government, different ministries can act separately in international affairs (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

About the diversity in the international agenda, the loss of state centrality in international relations also signifies the emergence of new concerns beyond national security. For many transnational actors that have become relevant, interstate relations are not the primary concern; therefore, transnational and transgovernmental relations become part of the agenda (Barbé Izuel, 2020).

The possibility of change and historical progress is also a fundamental characteristic of liberalism (Jørgensen, 2010). In a context of interdependence, "states, and the rest of the international actors, may develop interests, preferences, and perceptions tending to move relations away from conflict, making war less likely" (Barbé Izuel, 2020). The concept of "democratic peace", goes even further, assuming that democratic states do not declare war on each other. Thus, the global proliferation of democracy could generate conditions for a more stable and lasting peace (Doyle, 2005). Interdependence is expected to generate both the need to cooperate and the capacity to do so. On the one hand, common problems will increase the need for cooperative solutions; on the other hand, shared interests may provide conditions for meeting those needs (Barbé Izuel, 2020).

Lastly, institutions and international organizations, as well as international norms, can be seen as the institutional expression of interdependence, created because of

its existence or in order to promote it. This interdependence needs to be managed, and in the absence of supranational authorities, this task primarily falls back on agreements between states. Thus, if we understand international institutions as a "persistent and interconnected set of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe roles of behavior, constrain activity, and shape expectations" (Keohane, 1988), it seems clear that they must play a key role in managing interdependence. Consequently, institutions and international organizations are seen by liberals as a factor that facilitates more cooperative foreign policies among states, as they disable uncertainty and fear for their security, which lead to power competition, replacing it instead with trust and the mobilization of actors favorable to cooperation. Thus, the international society is anarchic, and cooperation is paramount, because it is through said cooperation, that change can come (Barbé Izuel, 2020).

3. <u>ANALYSIS</u>

The aim of this paper is analyzing if the Canadian foreign policy follows the neoliberal perspective previously explained, during the studied period. To analyze the political perspective, we will use the case of the cooperation and security policy that Canada have applied in Afghanistan, specifically in the Kandahar's province between 2008 and 2011. We will use the fourteen reports presented to the parliament detailing the progress of Canadian priorities during this period, and we will compare it to the following seven variables of neoliberalism that represent the main characteristics of this school of thought: the objectives of cooperation, the relevance of international organizations, the importance of non-state actors, the diversity of the policy agenda, the possibility of historical progress, the dynamics of transnationality, and the existence of international norms.

The reports are based on the progress of each priority. In our analysis, we will use six priorities as the object of study, and we will look for factors, decisions or intentions that can be explained through the seven variables of liberalism to form a comparative table that you will find below. The six priorities present in the reports are:

1. *Enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order.*
2. *Strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver core services and promote economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government.*
3. *Provide humanitarian assistance for extremely vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons.*
4. *Enhance border security, with facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani authorities.*
5. *Help advance Afghanistan's capacity for democratic governance by contributing to effective, accountable public institutions and electoral processes.*
6. *Facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.*

PRIORITIES	1	2	3	4	5	6
Objectives of cooperation	Training the Afghan security forces	Teacher training	Improve Afghan government capacity of giving public services	Overcome traditional conflicts	Improve Afghan government capacity to deliver services	Afghan-led process of political reconciliation High Council for Peace and Joint Peace Commission
Relevance of International Organizations	United Nations Development Program's Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan and NATO Training Mission	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, Canadian International Development Agency, Peace Dividend Trust	World Food Program, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, and the UN Refugee Agency	G8 Afghanistan-Pakistan Peace Jirga process London conference	UN Development Program London and Kabul Conferences on Afghanistan	London and Kabul Conferences on Afghanistan conference
Relevance of non-state actors	Civil actors to ensure human security	Implementation on provincial level	Tribal leaders as security providers Cooperation with the Community Development Councils and community shuras to implement policies	Cooperation on multiple levels (importance of national actors)	National institutions (at local level) to implement policies Priority of organizing the civil society	Insurgency and communal divisions destabilize Local implementation level of reconciliation policies Afghanistan Government Media Centre
Diversity of the agenda	Strength institutional capacity (effectiveness of the judiciary and economic stability) to ensure population's needs	Ensure basic services to ensure security	Interrelation of human development and security Canadian values establishing interventions	Necessity of an effectively managed border for the stability of both countries	Improve governance to achieve other priorities Importance of legitimacy and anti-corruption measures	Development goals cannot be achieved solely through military efforts Importance of government's communication capacity to improve population trust.

Possibility of historical progress	Spread of liberal ideas (women's rights, human rights, international standards of justice) Economic stability aspirations	Possibility for economic growth and food security Introduction of liberal ideas (women's rights, importance of education) Transition to a legal agricultural system	Improvements on health and polio eradication Liberal idea of equality Economic growth through mine clearing	Possibility of better relations that promote stability and economic development Possibility of emancipation	Possibility of democratization and development Spread of liberal ideas (women's rights, human rights)	Possibility of political and social reconciliation Possibility of reintegration of former insurgents Introduction of liberal values (women and human rights)
Transnationalism	Population's cooperation on insurgency struggle	Necessity of population's cooperation on insurgency struggle Internationalization of the economy	Insurgency as a barrier to implement measures Cross-border relations between societies that impede polio eradication	Insurgents and drogues flow are barriers to development goals	Insurgents represent a threat to security during election process	Insurgents as a threat to security and political reconciliation
International norms	Civilian policing conference in Kabul on best practices in civilian policing within conflict, post-conflict and developing nations (November 2010)	Creation in 2009 of the Education Development Board to improve coordination between Afghanistan's Ministry of Education, the international donor community and Afghan non-governmental organizations	Humanitarian aid as an international right	Dubai process action plan (now called the Afghanistan Pakistan Cooperation Process (APCP) Afghanistan Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative	Idea of democratization as a goal to achieve Human Rights London Conference on Afghanistan Kabul conference	Jirga resolution

Table 1: Own elaboration based on the information presented in the reports (Government of Canada, 2008c, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2011a, 2011b, 2012)

In order to comprehensively analyze this table, we will examine its rows, as some dynamics are shared between priorities.

Regarding the objectives of cooperation variable, we observe that the common point between priorities is the improvement of the Afghan government's capacity to deliver services to its population. A variety of public services are included, ranging from security forces training to efforts to improve the democratic governance, but the main objective is to improve them through international cooperation. In some reports, it is explained that "Canada remains fully committed to addressing humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and works closely with a number of international partners to deliver desperately needed goods to Afghans across the country" (Government of Canada, 2010b). With that in mind, we can discern the moment where cooperation with the international community becomes crucial in order for Canada to achieve its objectives. Particularly in the fourth priority, concerning the dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani authorities, the importance of the Canadian mediation between the two countries is highlighted, and therefore, so is the role of the international community in facilitating meeting points (Government of Canada, 2008a, 2009b). Moreover, a reconciliation process guided by Afghan leadership and bolstered by international support has been seen as the instrument to diminish the insurgency, mend communal rifts, and nurture a sustainable peace (Government of Canada, 2008c).

With regard to the relevance of international organizations, we have to highlight the intense cooperation with a wide range of United Nations Agencies. For instance, the UN development program has received $20 million from Canada for the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan to work on security forces training (Government of Canada, 2009b). In addition, other agencies like the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the UN Refugee Agency as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, have received financial support from Canada to develop their work in Afghanistan (Government of Canada, 2008c, 2008a, 2009b, 2010c). This prompts us to conclude that Canada has used international organizations as a mean to implement mesures such as the polio erradication campaign conducted through the World Health Organization (Government of Canada, 2009b). Other international organizations such as the G8 or the Canadian

International Development Agency have also been used as a instruments to implement the development policies (Government of Canada, 2010c, 2010b). Additionnally, we have to highlight the London and Kabul conferences on Afghanistan as forums to achieve agreements to move towards a more peaceful Afghanistan without insurgency. This includes the creation of the High Council for Peace, an institution deigned to improve communication between the countries of the region, and consequently promote regional stability (Government of Canada, 2010c, 2010b, 2011a).

Concerning the important role of non-state actors, understood as all the actors that break with the realistic logic of state primacy, we observe that Canada has broadly included them in its cooperation politics. The importance given to the civil society in orther to implement politics is remarkable. One clear example of this is the creation of the Community Development Councils, in which Afghans, supported by Canadians, have successfully taken charge of economic and social initiatives in their own communities, and have also played a key role in formalizing the role of women in the decision-making process (Government of Canada, 2008c, 2011b). Also, in all priorities but particularly in the second, fourth and fifth ones, the importance of implementing policies throught sub-nacional institutions (provincial or local) is highlighted, recognizing the challenge that trying to deploy a policy at a national level represents, taking into account the Afghan situation (Government of Canada, 2009b). Besides, internal actors such as insurgents groups or tribal leaders are also considered key players in developping Canada's plans. In fact, tribal leaders are considered a source of security for local population. For instance, to implement the polio erradication policies that included vaccination campaigns, a pact with them was necessary in order to ensure the security of medical devices (Government of Canada, 2009b). Moreover, insurgent groups and communal divisions destabilize Afghanistan and hinder the reconciliation process. So, for Canadians, the recognition of these actors as relevant is crucial to achieve a political and social reconciliation process (Government of Canada, 2008a).

Regarding the diversity of the agenda beyond military fields, throughout the different priorities, importance is given to ensuring human security through institutional capacity building. The security required for good governance and

sustained development demands that both be strengthened into effective forces (Government of Canada, 2009c). In multiple parts of the texts, reinforcing democracy, as well asimproving legitimacy and public trust of the government are described as priorities. Because, according to the policy's promoters, "democratic governance and protection of human rights constitute the cornerstone of sustainable progress in Afghanistan" (Government of Canada, 2008c). Furthermore, the fifth priority emphasizes the importance of government legitimacy, especially the legitimacy of elections and anti-corruption measures for the 2009 presidential elections and the 2010 lower house elections, both strongly supported by the Canadian authorities (Government of Canada, 2009b, 2009d, 2010d). In the same vein, the sixth priority gives importance to the government's communication capacity to build trust with the population. With this goal in mind, Canada supports the Afghanistan Government Media and Information Centre, a centre aimed at enabling the government to better communicate with Afghans on reconciliation and other issues (Government of Canada, 2009b).

The possibility of historical progress is another main characteristic of liberalism studied in Table 1. Throughout the analysis of this variable, we find a common point: the dissemination of liberal ideas and values as part of the policies promoted by Canada. We find, for instance, that much importance is given to women's rights and efforts are made to improve their situation. Some examples include the creation of a teacher training school for women, the introduction of women in the security forces or measures to ensure women's political participation. These projects are largely focused on improving the political participation of women as voters, candidates or election workers (Government of Canada, 2009c, 2009b, 2009a, 2009d, 2010a, 2010c, 2012). The respect for human rights is also seen as fundamental. In this sense, measures to improve living conditions in prisons, or vaccination campaigns to eradicate polio and improve children's health are promoted (Government of Canada, 2008b, 2010c, 2010a). Moreover, the possibility of historical progress is also reflected in the aspirations for stability and economic growth. Importance is given to the fact that through political and social reconciliation, as well as strong institutions and good cross-border relations, economic prosperity can be achieved (Government of Canada, 2008c, 2008b).

Other measures to achieve economic growth are proposed, such as the transition to legal agriculture to ensure the country's food security and the abandonment of poppy crops (Government of Canada, 2009d, 2011b). An anti-personnel landmine clearance campaign is also created through local communities, which allows for their economic growth (Government of Canada, 2011b). All these measures are aimed at improving the economic and social situation of Afghans to enable their historical progress. As well, the reports attach importance to social reconciliation as an objective because "any sustainable peace will require political reconciliation, an imperative all the more difficult in a society divided over many years by violent conflict" (Government of Canada, 2008b).

Concerning the dynamics of transnationalism, we observe that the role of insurgency is the phenomenon that is found across all priorities. In fact, insurgents pose a threat to development objectives (Government of Canada, 2008c). This ranges from posing a danger during the electoral process, to impeding political reconciliation or allowing the flow of drugs across the Pakistan border (Government of Canada, 2008a, 2010c, 2012). The insurgency also prevents interventions from taking place, as humanitarian aid workers have often been victims of insurgency and organized criminal violence (Government of Canada, 2008a). At multiple points, the fact that ending the insurgency requires the cooperation of the civilian population is emphasized, making local involvement a central element of the Canadian Forces' work in Afghanistan (Government of Canada, 2012). In addition, two more transnational dynamics can be found in the texts. The first is the internationalization of the Afghan economy through the awarding of reconstruction projects to international companies, as in the case of the Dahla Dam, which was built by Canadian companies (Government of Canada, 2008a). The second is the contacts of children across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which pose a risk to the polio eradication campaign, since vaccination strategies are not equal in the two countries (Government of Canada, 2011a).

Finally, regarding the introduction of international norms, the main elements would be the London and Kabul conferences. The Government of Afghanistan held a National Consultative Peace Jirga in Kabul in June 2010 to discuss a unified approach towards lasting peace in the country. The Jirga resolution made a number

of recommendations, including the establishment of a High Level Peace Council (Government of Canada, 2010a). In 2009, the Dubai process, later renamed the Afghanistan Pakistan Cooperation Process (APCP), was held. The APCP established a framework for cooperation until 2013 with a sustainable mechanism for regular and substantive discussions on a wide range of border issues (Government of Canada, 2009c, 2012). Through both of these examples, we can see that international norms also play an important role in Canadian-driven policies, especially in the promotion of human rights and international standards.

4. <u>**CONCLUSIONS**</u>

Having thoroughly examined the analysis done in this paper, we can draw several conclusions that help us confirm our hypothesis that Canada follows a liberal logic in its foreign policy during the 2008-2011 period.

First, we note that although the policy studied was aimed at ensuring the security of Afghanistan and especially of Kandahar province, it was also aimed at promoting the development of the region. This clearly implies a possibility of historical progress to improve Afghanistan's living conditions and economy. To implement this policy, actors beyond purely state actors, such as local or provincial entities, are taken into account. In fact, Canada actively supports the creation of Community Development Councils, with the aim of organizing civil society Furthermore, throughout the analysis we have seen that international norms and institutions are important factors in determining Canada's external action. We observed an intense cooperation with UN agencies, but also an alignment with NATO decisions and an active participation in international conferences on Afghanistan. Moreover, we also see how Canada is a strong supporter of liberal values (such as human rights or women's rights). Therefore, its foreign policies are also aligned with these values. In this sense, the policies applied in Afghanistan aim to improve the situation of women in many areas, as well as improving the general human rights, through intense humanitarian aid and development cooperation work.

With all these factors in mind, we can safely establish that Canada's foreign policy between 2008 and 2011 does follows a liberal logic in international relations. Despite this conclusion, we must remember that we are studying a specific historical period with a specific case study. In fact, the foreign action studied consists of the plan for the period 2008 to 2011, but because many objectives were not achieved during that period, a new policy was subsequently proposed for the period 2011-2014 (Government of Canada, 2012). Thus, despite being able to state that Canada follows a liberal logic in its foreign action between 2008 and 2011, further analysis should follow to determine this alignment over time.

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