

## **GIVING GREATER WEIGHT TO CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

**A submission to the Dialogue on Foreign Policy by the  
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### **Summary**

We have entered a new era in international relations that will require a profound shift in Canadian foreign policy. In this new era, we will have both to engage more closely with the United States and be active beyond the continent if we do not wish to suffer an effective loss of sovereignty and a sense of our national identity. In the new circumstances, we need to give more weight to our foreign policy, by strengthening, not merely the Department of National Defence (DND), and CIDA, but also the Department of Foreign Affairs and International trade (DFAIT). In particular, we should:

- undertake at regular intervals a government-wide National Strategy Review,
- restore the policy development function in DFAIT, and
- build up our image abroad by giving substance to the Third Pillar.

### **Analysis**

#### **The Issue**

We have entered a new era in international relations, an era that is likely to raise, in an acute form, the issue that led Canada after the Second World War to develop an active and independent foreign policy. – Since we are inevitably destined to be involved in events of concern to our closest friends, it behoves us to become engaged in determining the policies to be adopted, so that the policies are acceptable to us and we can justify them to our citizens and the international community.

#### **The New Era**

This new era is characterized by:

- a growing gap between the developed and under-developed world, due to over-population, environmental degradation, increased economic disparities, and misgovernment, a gap that, because of closer contacts, has produced, in many cases, cultural tensions, political extremism and terrorism, and a growing migration of people.
- the growth of regionalism, with the move towards European, Western Hemisphere, and East Asian economic, and in, at least, the case of Europe, political blocs;
- a decline in multilateralism under the impact of regionalism and the growing gap between the north and the south of the world, while, at the same time, the continuing need for multilateral solutions, especially for environmental degradation and for the problems posed by globalization and the disparities between the developed and the

under-developed countries, such as terrorism, and the spread of infectious diseases ;

- a radical shift in United States policy, which the events of September 11 have served to strengthen, from the priority previously given to supporting international institutions, and multilateral solutions, to placing an emphasis on backing unilateral actions against the dangers the United States feels it faces. Moreover, these actions may be undertaken, if necessary, by sidelining international institutions and ignoring certain provisions of multilateral treaties and international law. The new US policy has notably contributed to weakening the UN and NATO. The US is now considering bypassing the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and other similar agreements by taking direct action against states in addition to Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction. The United States may give greater emphasis to military, rather than political solutions to the problems facing the under-developed world. It may also expect a greater degree of loyalty from its friends in support of its new goals.

### **The Consequences for Canadian Foreign Policy**

In these changed circumstances, Canada will likely face:

- the need, for both political and economic reasons, to engage more closely with the United States,
- a growing gap between many of the goals of Canadian and United States foreign policy,
- a decline in the multilateral instruments Canada has used in the past to increase its influence, and
- the continuing need for multilateral solutions for most of the problems facing the world.

In this situation, the choice between a continental, or an international, foreign policy for Canada is a false one: Canada has to be active on both fronts unless it wishes to:

- ignore its vital relations with the United States, or
- abandon some of its interests and values,
- damage its international reputation,
- suffer a loss of part of its self-esteem and sense of identity, and
- accept, in effect, a reduction in its sovereignty.

### **Increasing our Influence**

For Canada to be taken seriously in the new era as an interlocutor on international issues by the United States or Canada's other principal partners, Canadian foreign policy will have to develop a greater specific gravity than it now possesses. It is noteworthy to what an extent Canada is not part of the high-level circuit of consultations on many issues. An indication of our lack of involvement is the number of visits made to Ottawa by G8 senior ministers or heads of government or state from 1998 to 2002. If one does not consider the four EU representatives who

come each year as part of treaty obligations, the number of such bilateral visitors varies between two and five.

The planned growth in the CIDA budget and a substantial increase in the budget of the Department of National Defence would help give us more weight in international deliberations, for it would provide us with more to offer when our views are taken into account.

Such measures would not, however, be sufficient. It will avail us little to be able to offer contributions by CIDA or DND if we do not know our own mind on what we want to achieve, or if we do not have the means to engage more fully in a dialogue with the United States and other countries.

For such purposes, increased resources for DFAIT are required. The operating budget of DFAIT has been cut repeatedly. Most recently, it suffered, in real terms, a 36% reduction from 1993 to 2000. Furthermore, more recent federal budgets have made additional cuts in the Departmental budget, or provided inadequate resources for the additional responsibilities the Department has been required to assume.

### **Recovering Our Intellectual Punch**

New funds are required, in the first place, to enable the department to strengthen its policy development function. Lester Pearson once stated that the key to Canada carrying weight with its friends and allies was to be able to present bright ideas on matters of common concern. He built up the Department of External Affairs on this principle. The quality at that time of the Canadian intellectual contribution to finding solutions to international problems led Kennedy and others to remark that Canada had the best foreign ministry in the world.

For many reasons, including budget cuts, the policy development function of the department has been allowed to atrophy. Lloyd Axworthy revived it in the area of human security when he became foreign minister in 1996 in spite of having to overcome the effects of a reduction in operating revenues in real terms by one third since the beginning of that decade. Because of the shortage of resources, the effort undertaken by Lloyd Axworthy, however, required the Department to abandon any serious attempt to work out views on other subjects and left the Department exhausted. Since then, initiatives such as Paul Heinbecker's proposal for a compromise on Iraq at the United Nations General assembly have become far too rare.

Initiatives by the Department and the Government to give greater importance to the policy development function are to be congratulated, but they may not achieve their objective unless the central problem of human resources is solved. The Foreign Service officers that are primarily responsible for policy development, those in the Political-Economic stream, are stretched too thin: they have been forced by the successive cut-backs to take on semi-administrative tasks at the expense of their original responsibilities.

Furthermore, the terms of employment of Foreign Service officers have over the years suffered in comparison with other government professionals, resulting in a rate of attrition among new recruits that has reached 20 to 30% in recent years. While the latest recent wage settlement has brought the Foreign Service Officers to a low average with other professionals, their terms of employment, including career

expectations, are still behind the top groups, such as economists and lawyers, against which their counterparts in the United States are measured. As a result, the Department is no longer always attracting the brightest and the best. Because of its reduced ability to attract, and hold high-calibre individuals, for some time, the Department has been short of about 17% of its complement of Foreign Service Officers, and has had to make do with contract employees who lack the experience and sometimes the qualifications of the regulars.

### **Establishing a National Strategy**

The current efforts of the Department to set clearer priorities for its work may allow it to use its resources better. At the same time, this prioritization will not assist the Department much in co-ordinating better our foreign activities as a whole, which are now spread between a large number of departments and agencies, with the result that our foreign policy can amount to the poorly co-ordinated sum of the wish-lists of several departments and agencies, wish-lists that do not always take into account international realities. The Department may wish to consider following the British and American example by acting as the co-ordinating centre for a government-wide National Strategy Review that would be held every two to three years. The review would consist of:

- analysing the international environment from the point of view of political, economic, security, social, and other issues of importance to Canada,
- in light of this analysis, working out Canada's essential, vital and marginal interests and objectives,
- deciding on the instruments, political, diplomatic, economic, defence, or other, needed to support these interests and objectives,
- determining government policies in consequence, and
- monitoring and co-ordinating their implementation.

### **Building Our Reputation**

Making more effective contributions on international issues is only a partial solution to the need to give our foreign policy greater weight. We must also become better known. As John Ralston Saul remarked in 1994 in his submission to the parliamentary Joint Committee reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, "Countries are in large part the image they project abroad." Our present image is a mixed one that is, in many ways, harmful to our political and economic goals. A recent analysis of our reputation abroad made by a well known research and communications company has found, in addition to some positive factors, that:

- we suffer from a chronic lack of profile;
- we are regarded as a past player in world affairs;
- our products are considered as unspectacular, although solid;
- our tourist attractions are thought to be boring; and
- our investment potential does not often spring to mind.

Obviously we need to do more than pay lip service to the notion that culture constitutes the third pillar of our foreign policy. A presentation of our cultural creativity abroad is often the best antidote to the still strong notion that we remain

essentially producers of raw materials. We might also rediscover, what others have always known, that a strong scholarship programme is often the best way to have influential friends for life in countries of importance to us.

There are even things we can do without spending much money. DFAIT may be the only foreign ministry of the G8 that does not have a proper press spokesman. The reliance on the Minister's scrums to convey the Canadian position on various issues means that much that could be said, including material prepared for answering questions in the House, does not reach the public eye. Regularly scheduled press briefings, as a supplement to the Minister's scrums, could accustom, first Canadian journalists, and then the foreign press, to look to DFAIT for authoritative statements on a wide variety of international issues.

### **Recognizing Our Importance**

If we do not wish to have our foreign policy priorities, in effect, determined for us by others, we have to devote resources to the foreign policy sector that are appropriate to our present importance in the world. We are a country of over 30 million, almost twice what we had in the fifties, when many of the present generation of political leaders came of age. What is more, we have a GDP, at purchasing power parity, approximately equal to 60 % of that of Britain, France or Italy. We can and we must do better.

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