

Embassy, May 4th, 2005  
NEWS STORY  
By Mark Entwistle

### **The IPS: Lowered Expectations**

Reaction to the government's recent International Policy Statement (IPS) is dictated partly by the expectation of what had been promised.

The PMO declared a year ago that we should expect "a comprehensive international policy review, the first such review in a decade," and that its curious mission was "to determine whether or not Canada's objectives and capabilities match foreign policy goals." The prime minister said: "This review will help us clearly define our interests...."

The policy review then morphed illuminatingly into a "statement."

A review requires clear-eyed analysis of what to do with our foreign policy, how we should do it, but, more importantly, what we could or should no longer do. A review would have provided definition of our core national interests and a blueprint to guide budget decisions and priority setting. A statement is a declaratory text.

To give credit where due, the diplomacy portion of the IPS is a fulsome description of the breadth of Canadian foreign policy at work. A reader comes away with a renewed respect for the outstanding work that our professional foreign service does in being everywhere and involved in everything. How do they do it? And, for the first time, there is a crack, albeit tempered, in official political denial and recognition that Canada's diplomatic asset has been seriously depleted. On page 2: "...there has been an erosion in our foreign policy assets within the broader context of restoring financial health to the Government...." But, after waiting a year and a half in expectation of a real review, I come away with reservations for three principle reasons.

First, there is little that is really new in the 30-odd pages. For those who follow how Foreign Affairs has already been adapting to a changing world, it rather describes a status quo. I just cannot see the "new diplomacy."

There are no hard choices with rationale. No suggestion that Canadian foreign policy will not do something that it is already doing. No evidence of any serious consideration of the "niche" argument that perhaps Canada should take its limited resources and put them into specialized areas where we can really make a difference.

The only truly substantive and exciting new elements can be counted on several fingers: the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, the Global Peace and Security Fund (announced beforehand in the budget) and Canadian efforts to get rid of the pathetic United Nations Human Rights Commission. Frankly, there is nothing innovative on the United States, our primordial relationship, beyond incantation about the need to talk with Americans more.

The term "initiative" in each section is, in the manner of political communications, rather an exaggeration. With the exception of the folks in the human rights protection division, most

initiatives were vague and immeasurable processes. Perhaps the best example is the commitment to "further explore the comparative advantages of various multilateral forums...." Such memo-speak defines the tone, despite some excellent descriptive analysis of the global landscape.

Second, I can see no political fingerprints on the document. It feels like a public service committee draft, where each Foreign Affairs bureau was asked to contribute a section with two or three priorities. I see no trace of the choices and direction that only political leadership can provide. So I cannot understand why the statement was so long delayed with the prime minister.

In the section on the United States, for example, there is an assumption of equivalency between having more consulates and the priority political engagement of the prime minister and ministers with fellow American politicians in the Administration and on Capitol Hill. The fact that the statement is missing the political voice is certainly no fault of the authors.

The prime minister was not able through threat or suasion to get the principal departments to cooperate to produce a single integrated review, which is not surprising given the history. So the rhetoric of the statement about the renewed central role of Foreign Affairs in a "whole-of-government" concept is approaching moot because that would require a degree of sustained personal political intervention from the prime minister with various cabinet ministers, for which there is no evidence. There is no suggestion that the political class sees anything long-term in this statement.

But the proof of political leadership missing in action - the disconnect between resources and promise - is also my most serious and third reservation. The statement returns us to the point where the country is still doing everything - and with virtually no additional resources to do it. The \$42 million for new overseas personnel is over five years, and will be eaten up very quickly at probably several hundred thousand dollars per officer to keep him or her overseas for a year. There is no discussion of conditions in the

Foreign Service, which is contributing to the devastating drain of younger talent.

And it presents a general misunderstanding, I think, of the morale challenge. On the one hand, there is welcome recognition that Canadian ambassadors are now to be genuinely in charge of integrated missions, rather than being the senior Foreign Affairs officer who must negotiate internally with representatives of other government departments. But then, in the next paragraph, heads of mission assignments will be open to the entire public service. The message to the young diplomats we are trying to nurture to revitalize the diplomatic asset - leave now.

*-- Mark Entwistle is a Fellow of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, and is a former ambassador and foreign service officer*