

Separating Words from Action

The *International Policy Statement* and the Realities of Canadian Foreign Policy

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After much anticipation, speculation, and delay, the Government of Canada released the *International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World* with great ceremony on April 19th, 2005. Not since 1995 had the government formally defined its global priorities and principles of action, and never before had it taken a fully integrated, government-wide approach to international policy development. Formally launched the day Prime Minister Paul Martin took office, this extensive review continued from the 2002 *Dialogue on Foreign Policy* which engaged Canadians from across the country in a debate on our fundamental values and interests in the global arena. Expectations were raised in the foreign policy community that this time a review would bring about new ideas, new methods, and new focus to our international policy – that this time, things would be different.

The release of the IPS initially received little attention from both media and academics, because it was overshadowed by the votes of confidence in the House of Commons that the minority Martin government faced that same week. It is finally receiving serious attention from both critics and supporters. The IPS gives us a good idea of what the current government seeks to accomplish on the world stage. Yet, words and action seem to diverge when the priorities and proposals of the IPS are contrasted with current realities of our foreign policy.

Much attention has been focused on the contents of the IPS. However, it is time to look beyond the document itself and shift the debate towards how the IPS will affect the delivery of Canada's foreign policy, and to question whether the political will exists to carry out its goals. We can learn from the 1995 foreign policy review, *Canada in the World*, that regardless of what values or strategic interests we proclaim to the world, the dynamics of international relations will continue to fluctuate, and that government interests shift over time. Policy reviews act as snapshots of history – objects silent in time – serving as reference points by which we measure subsequent government action. The IPS has a

strong focus on contemporary issues, encapsulating the current debates and setting benchmarks for success in Canada's external relations. As such, it will be easy to measure words against action as the policies are put into practice, and it may soon be apparent that the IPS is a dated, inflexible document.

The IPS is the first national policy framework which, without hesitation, identifies the United States as our primary ally, economically, diplomatically, and militarily. This assertion may seem elementary to many observers, but in the context of policy statements, it is bold and unique to admit that our largest bilateral relationship should be a consideration in all we do beyond our borders. The IPS equates our national security to the security of the entire continent – thus, policy integration and interoperability of personnel and equipment with the United States and Mexico are paramount to our shared security and economic interests. The SMART Border declaration and the more recent Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America both advance these notions of the linkages between trade and security across the continent. Yet, these agreements, and the platitudes of cooperation espoused in the IPS, have failed to quell the growing disconnect between Canadian and American global interests. It cannot be said that Canada has been 'more aggressive'; rather it has been 'less submissive' in its recent dealings with US foreign policy. In many cases, Canada's action has been taking no action at all – but this has definitely signified greater assertiveness on our part.

The IPS pays great attention to 'revitalizing the North American partnership', yet much of its rhetoric ignores the realities of our relationship. The best example of this 'subdued assertiveness' is the case of the US-led war in Iraq, where our triumph was in non-involvement. Our decision to abstain from complete participation in the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) program reinforced the notion that we would not acquiesce to the political will of the Bush administration. Additionally, our participation in the Kyoto Accord on global climate change showed that Canada would pursue its own perceived interests, with or without the support of the US. On beef and softwood lumber, we've shown that the mouse is not afraid of the elephant, to extend Pierre Trudeau's oft-cited metaphor.

The IPS sets out an ambitious agenda to renew Canada's global influence. Unquestionably, our nation's capacity to influence world affairs is small – we are a middle power that has to pick its battles. However, when Canada does decide to act, other states take us seriously. For example, we were instrumental in the development of, and attracting signatories to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, to which

147 nations have ratified. With our limited yet credible influence, we must pick niche roles for ourselves, areas in which we can make the greatest impact. Among others, the IPS identifies two such niches: failed and failing states, and targeted international assistance.

It is perhaps ominous that failed states take such prominence in the IPS. With our less than positive experiences in Somalia, Zaire, and Yugoslavia, it seems odd that the government would pick this type of engagement as a niche role for itself. Yes, the IPS lays out a convincing argument for why we must act in failed states, but it fails to consider the level and longevity of commitment of human and financial resources necessary for success in failed states. Rather, it exalts the '3D approach' to humanitarian intervention – the coordination of Diplomacy, Defence and Development in our international operations. Today, the 3D approach is being put into practice in Afghanistan and Haiti, two failed states which present unique challenges. 3D is an admirable approach, in that it attempts to set out case-based goals and priorities to address real needs in sensitive situations. Yet, any Canadian initiative will be limited by the ever growing capability gap. For example, Canada has nearly two-thousand soldiers, a small handful of diplomats, and only one CIDA officer currently on the ground in Afghanistan. This small group of officials are charged with the task of influencing the course of democratization, security, and development of a troubled nation of thirty-million people. It is hypocritical to think that this small commitment of both human and physical resources will have the lasting effects we desire. Canada may be compelled to act in failed states, for both humanitarian and strategic motivations, but its ambitions remain far beyond our abilities.

This reality, however, has impacted the ways in which Canada will provide international development assistance (ODA). Presently, our limited resources are spread across more than one-hundred nations, most of which receive less than ten-million dollars per year (a good deal of which goes towards administrative costs). The IPS proposes a refocus our aid dollars towards 25 nations in need, while doubling overall ODA contributions by 2010, in the attempt to create niches of influence and prosperity in the developing world. This initiative would establish 'Development Partners' in which Canada would invest greater time, resources, and interest to increase our credibility as an effective international actor. Over the long-term, this initiative could also prove quite beneficial for Canada as an extension of our soft-power networks in the developing world. Ideally we could help everyone, but if that is not possible, then we must assist those whom we can, and we must do so to the best of our abilities.

Lastly, we are seeing a resurgence of grand ideas in our foreign policy – a glimpse of our long past ‘golden age’. Over the decade, Canada has championed the international campaign to ban land mines, the International Criminal Court, the G20-Finance summits, and the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect. Today, Canada is advancing another grand idea – that of a Leaders’ Twenty (L20) summit. The L20 idea is an attempt to expand the current G8 framework and bring the leaders of emerging global powers like China, India, and Brazil into the high-level decision-making process. Whether or not one agrees with the idea itself, the advancement of strong Canadian ideas in the international dialogue undeniably benefits our global standing. Perhaps this is another one of our niche roles, to be a think-tank for the world.

Canada’s greatest diplomat, Lester B. Pearson, challenged all Canadians to take ownership of our country’s foreign policy. He believed it was the responsibility of every citizen to project our nation’s culture and values to rest of the world. Canada’s foreign policy has never operated strictly within the confines of government policy initiatives – individuals have made an enormous impact on how Canada is perceived around the globe. Whether it be a student on exchange in Spain, or a family sponsoring a child in Malawi, or a firm importing goods from India, or a nurse volunteering in Sri Lanka, or an artist performing in Moscow, or a diplomat negotiating for peace in Kashmir, Canadians are more active in the world today than ever before.

Indeed the IPS did present new ideas, capture new energies, and offer new avenues for engagement. Yes, this review was different from other reviews, but it was not different enough. The IPS has only raised questions that the government has so far been unable to address, leaving our nation at a crossroads of interests and capacities. Canadians want to see action, while Ottawa remains content to ponder, review, and pontificate. Stating our values and objectives to the world is essentially, but eventually we must work towards those goals. The IPS sets a noble framework, but it is now time for Canada to put words into action, to be bold and to lead.

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