

# Focus on Military Capabilities First

## It's time for the public administration of defence to return to the role of public servant and cease being its master.



Howard Marsh

Canadians who follow foreign and defence affairs were recently delighted with the long-awaited and much anticipated release of the International Policy Statement (IPS). The Government is to be congratulated for this pioneer attempt at bringing coherency to this country's foreign, defence, diplomatic and commercial interests. Some may argue that the IPS should have included, at the outset and throughout the text, a clear articulation of national interests. On the other hand, it can be said that there is wisdom in not listing these, and in allowing the reader to decide. Regardless, both the value-based and interest-based proponents of international policy should be satisfied. The national security and commercial objectives are grounded in self-evident interests. The desire to relieve misery through regional stability flows from humanitarian values.

The ISP, and the many speeches that heralded its release, convince me that the Government understands the link that must exist between national security and well-being on the one hand, and international engagement and domestic preparedness on the other. At the risk of over-simplifying what in reality is an extremely complex document, the ISP appears to be built on three self-evident truths: Canada is a treasure; north-south integration is vital to our well-being; and it is better to solve a problem 'over there' before it comes 'here.'

The Defence component of the ISP is an interesting compendium of the lessons learned by the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), General Hillier, at this point in his

career. The Ice Storm of 1998 taught him that it is perilous to command and coordinate a national disaster by ad hoc protocols and borrowed means. Establishing CanadaCOM, a national unified command, consisting of unified regional and functional components is his approach to national security in an age of increasing natural and man-made disasters.

Additionally, General Hillier's overseas experience taught him that the existing approach to sustaining overseas commitments is abusive to Canada's dedicated CF personnel. His solution: A continuous tempo of peace and stability operations requires a continuous flow of trained units, serviceable equipment, and long-range command and support elements. There is much agreement on this point.

Pundits further agree that: Canada's approach to international commitments needs greater integration of national assets; that the Canadian Forces must prepare for prolonged deployments; and that many facets of national security require immediate attention.

Policy analysts, while predictably not supportive of all statements made in the ISP, should nevertheless be heartened by those aimed at restoring Canada's place in the world.

Promises have been made to increase strategic air and sea lift, enhance force generation, and reconstitute tactical units. These promises, however, require both continuing government leadership, and a parliament committed to restoring the elements of national power. The policy

could be considered adequate for the times, but the leadership and commitment are tenuous at this stage of Canadian political history

These are early days. A bold start has been made, but policies are either successful or found wanting during the execution phase. Obstacles to this process will now attract the attention of analysts. The first of these is the need to rebalance the demands of continuous operations against a culture of public administration of defence that has become accustomed to being served first and is acclimatized to non-military objectives having primacy.

Resistance to the demands of an operationally dominant military culture may prove to be the greatest challenge in achieving a relevant, responsive and effective military force. Today, operational military imperatives demand a return to command and administrative practices that focus on military capability first.

Another challenge is persuading Cabinet to stop using the Department of National Defence for the furtherance of non-military objectives. The department has long suffered from funding various regional development projects. Cabinet will need to be restrained from using major transformation objectives as the means to rebuild or assist ailing regional economies.

The Chief of the Defence Staff has outlined his plan for achieving the Minister's policy to transform the Canadian Forces. General Hillier's blueprint not only reflects his extensive military experience, it is also an excellent basis from which, with existing and forecast personnel and material resources, today's and tomorrow's threats can best be countered – at home, in North America, and offshore through Canada's contributions to global peace and security. The cooperation of many government departments and agencies is essential if this plan is to succeed. Time will tell whether that cooperation becomes reality, or whether we will again witness resistance to change.

I am anticipating a lot of screaming as the defence patient undergoes surgery. **FL**

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