

Government Must Have a Clear End-state Vision

By Peter Avis

When *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* was promulgated in April 2004, the authors billed it as a "strategic framework and action plan." It is not a national security strategy. In fact, it would seem that the Canadian government did not feel an urgent need for a national security strategy. Rather, they often seemed to leave this sort of thinking to the U.S. government in the context of North American security strategy.

Nevertheless, the National Security Policy (NSP) directed the federal interdepartmental community to develop a number of formal strategies pertaining to the "key strategic areas" which underpinned the chapters of the NSP. This resulted in a Critical Infrastructure Protection Strategy, a National Cyber-security Strategy, and a National Immunization Strategy. Moreover, the NSP has prompted the perceived need for an overarching Transportation Security Strategy that is currently being formulated.

So the Canadian government is beginning to develop national-level strategy. This is very encouraging. It is important at this juncture to step back and examine what strategy really means in the context of modern, integrated government activity.

Strategy Defined

The U.S. government has done very valuable work in progressing the theory of modern strategy. The U.S. Army War College is an excellent place to start when grappling with the ideas involved in grand or national-level strategy in the post-modern era. In his paper *Towards a Theory of Strategy*, Richard Yarger breaks down this high-falutin' term into simple building blocks for the use of aspiring strategists. According to Yarger, "Strategy is the employment of the instruments (elements) of power (political/diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve the political objectives of the state in cooperation or in competition with other actors pursuing their own objectives."

He goes on to say that the term strategy is often misapplied in that there is a general tendency to use it as a term to describe a plan, concept, course of action, or "idea" of a direction in which to move forward. Strategy is none of these things. "Strategy is fundamentally a choice; it reflects a preference for a future state or condition." It finds itself on a vision of the end state to be achieved. It is comprehensive, proactive, hierarchical, provides direction, and reflects a political purpose based on national interests:

Interests are desired end states such as survival, economic well-being, and enduring national values. The national elements of power are the resources used to promote or advance national interests. Strategy is the pursuit, protection, or advancement of these interests through the application of the instruments of power.

If all of this sounds too military in nature, Brian Jenkins, of RAND Corporation in the U.S., gave a somewhat more functional (and perhaps bureaucratic) definition of strategy at Transport Canada's Workshop for the Transportation Security Strategy in April 2005:

Strategy is the art of managing how to allocate finite government resources according to national interests.

Jenkins explained the importance of strategy by insisting that it sets priorities and, in so doing, sets a continual engagement of government towards allocation of resources. Long-term procurement plans are thus linked to strategy in this definition.

In the context of Canadian strategy development, national-level strategy that lies below the strategic framework provided by the NSP must, first and foremost, be comprehensive. In order to allocate finite government resources wisely, the Canadian government must have a clear vision of a preferred end-state based on national interests. Moreover, a balance between the oft-competing requirements of the national instruments of power should be sought before determining national objectives.

Policy Development Prisms

The pillars of society in Canada (which correspond roughly to the current main Cabinet Committees) represent our instruments of power: Social, Economic, Environmental, Security, International, and Defence. When developing national strategy, the competing visions of these pillars must be debated and reconciled in order to achieve a unified basis for clear strategic direction.

An example of strategy development can demonstrate the value of this approach.

Before the promulgation of the NSP, government departments in Canada developed security policy in the absence of unified strategic direction. Consequently, the government functions that evolved during the Cold War years – organizational stovepipes – formed the foundation for security policy development. Departments formed a culture of departmentally-mandated prisms from which they viewed the world. The advent of globalization (particularly global health and weather concerns) and strategic terrorism has caused a re-evaluation of how government departments should interact. This is the modern starting point for the NSP's integrated government.

A fine example of post-9/11 policy development is found in the transportation sector under maritime security. A gaping vulnerability gap in Canada's maritime security sector was perceived after 9/11. To address this, an Interdepartmental Marine Security Working Group (IMSWG) was formed under the Minister of Transport to cope with policy development in that sector. After several months of culture comparison and debate, the IMSWG set to work – in integrated-government fashion – to analyze the maritime environment in the context of strategic terrorism. Although this group was working through a transportation security prism, they were able to achieve comprehensive policy development at the strategic level. The hallmark of their success was a risk-management

matrix that compares maritime security activities to circles of vulnerability. The four key activities are domain awareness, collaboration, safeguarding, and responsiveness. When one superimposes the activities across all the geographic circles of vulnerability, it is evident that security requirements are increasingly information-based the farther one is from one's own country; however, the requirements tend to become more physical and response-oriented as one draws near home.

This risk-management matrix has served the maritime security community well through the passage of several Memoranda to Cabinet that sought resources to improve maritime security by carrying out key activities across the circles of vulnerability. Its conclusions reach into the strategic sphere, prioritizing national activity as: security of the maritime perimeter; security of internal waters and infrastructure, and security of the arctic waterways.

However, based on the understanding of strategic development described in the paragraphs above, this excellent policy development is not strategy. While the conclusions are valid and extremely valuable, and the process is comprehensive inside the maritime transportation prism, this policy lacks the national strategy perspective which requires the reconciliation of competing visions of the pillars of Canadian society.

Developing National Strategy

To continue our example of national maritime security strategy development, let us consider the policy-writers' challenge for a Transportation Security Strategy for Canada. To achieve national-level strategy in the maritime security sector of transportation, the product of earlier policy development must now be the source of interaction and debate with the communities that represent the other pillars of society. For the existing maritime policy to approximate strategy, a matrix of the six pillars of society must be superimposed over the existing matrix of risk-management from the maritime transportation policy. Only through such comprehensiveness, based on thorough knowledge of the overarching strategic environment, will strategy be formulated.

Let us test this idea for an indication of strategic value. It is not beyond imagining that a future political idea would seek to direct national resources towards securing the Northwest Passage for Canadian sovereignty control (indeed both major parties have recently dabbled here). Given the lengthening season for navigational passage due to climate change, this is a strategic consideration that will continue to present itself.

The interdepartmental nature of IMSWG would cause some debate at the departmental official level – but not debate with a comprehensive view (or the power) to reconcile issues at the strategic level. The various issues that exist in each strategic pillar of society would have to be considered in relation to those from other pillars and all weighed against the vision of national interest.

It is possible that holders of the Economic perspective would support sovereignty control in the Northwest Passage. From a regional and fiscal stand-point, this could complement

the government's economic strategic outlook for the north. However, the Environmental perspective may have serious problems with potential for pollution, depletion of fish and wildlife stocks, as well as destabilization of the fragile arctic natural balance.

The Social perspective would have to weigh the effects on native communities and culture according to their strategic outlook. Defence and Security would have concerns about resources and manpower and would likely endorse accurate geographic information as integral to planning, policy formulation and administration for a long-term management strategy. And finally, an in-depth analysis from the International diplomatic perspective would be crucial to understand the impacts of Law of the Sea and international treaties that exist. Canada is currently facing six actual or potential international disputes over various aspects of control of its Arctic region where such a process would be useful.

It may well be that the first stage of such a strategy would be to influence international legislation in such a way as to set the conditions for the security initiative over the long term. The key here is that strategic development that splices these perspectives together would ideally come from a permanent government body deliberating at top levels of the public service. These officials would engage, debate and resolve these broad-scoped considerations. Academia and the private sector should play a part in these deliberations as a rule.

A Dutch Example

An example of this sort of strategic machinery can be found in the form of a collaborative experiment in the Netherlands. The complexity of access and usage of the Netherlands North Sea has generated an impressive strategic governance and management structure that interlocks international, national, and regional debate and policy development. Many issues such as boundaries, fishing quotas, and shipping routes are determined by international organizations and are beyond the Dutch government's control. However, over the last 25 years, a strategically wide-scoped institution named IDON (International Deliberations over North Sea Governance) has debated, coordinated, and formulated policies, directives, and legislation between ministries at the national level. It is this sort of organization that houses the national expertise requisite for composing national strategy and legislation. When juggling conflicting strategic and political issues such as environment, economy, security, defence, and society, and there is a requirement for a maritime focus, the Dutch government is well served by a body that can achieve an integrated system of cooperative governance.

The Netherlands has succeeded in this collaborative effort at the strategic level by ensuring an organization of great breadth, that is not a cabinet committee, has the tools to find compromise in national policy-making, and has the linkages to assert Dutch strategic interests in wider forums. Free from the rigours of Cabinet time constraints, this permanent committee combines decision-makers from across all departments to debate maritime-related laws and policies in a decidedly complex environment in which political issues of the six pillars of society overlap. For 25 years this group has ensured that a

unified and prepared Dutch voice is heard in national, European Community, and international forums. The ongoing success in winning Dutch interpretations of water boundaries and traffic routing is an indicator of this committee's value.

By employing the elements of national power and splicing their perspectives together into a unified whole which achieves the rational allocation of finite government resources according to national interests, the Dutch have succeeded in creating a truly strategic body to formulate their maritime security strategy. A Canadian version of IDON would ensure a unified Canadian voice to work on governance issues between nations, particularly in the changing Arctic region of Canada.

Conclusions

The promulgation of the National Security Policy has caused the development of national-level strategy across the various sectors of the Canadian federal government. The ongoing formulation of the Transportation Security Strategy is an example. To achieve the comprehensive perspective required for strategic thought, the traditional prisms or stovepipes of bureaucratic government must be broken down by the institution of permanent, high-level, interdepartmental strategic think-tanks that set government priorities in such a way as to ensure continual engagement of government in the allocation of resources over the long term. The Netherlands' strategic institution called IDON is a fine example that may fit the Canadian requirement.

At the heart of the matter is the necessity to open up our singular focus on departmental concerns and embrace the multi-pillar perspective from which strategy is necessarily formed. As we create these multi-perspective deliberation groups, we must ensure that academic specialists and professionals from the private sector are invited to participate. Only through weighing and balancing national interests vis a vis the pillars of society will Canada's strategic staffs be able to optimize policy development and create useful and lasting national strategy to assist our politicians in guiding Canada's way forward in a complex post-modern world.

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