

What does the academic have to contribute to policymaking?

By Geoffrey Pearson

There are signs of change on both sides of the divide between political scientists interested in world politics and diplomats and politicians who practice the "art" of diplomacy. The gap has been widened over the last 25 years by problems of language. Before that, the policymakers could at least understand what the professors were saying, even if they disregarded it; now they can only with difficulty understand the language, to say nothing of the conclusions, of research. This is an ironic state of affairs, as a principal object of the new methods of analysis is to clarify meaning by finding and measuring comparable units of behaviour. Nor is the policymaking community blameless for the divide.

For too long officials have resisted the new approaches, partly because they are unfamiliar but also because diplomacy, of all the arts of government, is probably the one that most relies on traditional wisdom and intuition (it can hardly be claimed that the record justifies the tradition). Nevertheless, there are pressures for change. If the academics are unsure that a Kepler of the "science" of world politics lurks in the wings of history, the policymakers are more doubtful that the skills of a Metternich are enough to keep the ship of state on course.

There have always been and always will be "trouble-makers", persons outside government who hold strong views on what is right or wrong about the world and who urge policymakers to grasp this or that means of salvation. They argue, of course, that the real trouble is to be found in the minds of officials, or in the machinations of governments, or in the state system itself. This is not the issue here. Some academics hold these kinds of view, just as any citizen may do. Whether they do or not, however, many (not all) political scientists share the assumption that relations between the "actors" in world politics (individuals, corporations, churches, states, international organizations) are susceptible of systematic analysis capable of generating hypotheses that can, in turn,

explain international behaviour and provide a basis for prediction of the effects of such behaviour.

This view is by no means unchallenged in the community. Indeed, the literature of the "discipline" (again an ambiguous notion) is characterized by much argument about tradition *versus* science. But, on the whole, those who teach international relations in departments of political science (not in departments of history) in North America, and increasingly elsewhere, take pride in the concepts and methods of science. Their text-books dominate the undergraduate reading lists. Their journals explore the frontiers of research on "event-interaction", "international stratification" and "decision-making". Not all employ statistics and graphs, but most try to draw broad conclusions from data and to conceptualize the results. If there is little theory, strictly speaking, there is much speculation.

No agreement

Despite the relative dominance of new approaches in the study of international relations, there is no agreement about what to study or even how to study it. Let us take a hypothetical example of an action to be explained: the recent decision of the Canadian Government to recognize the Government of the People's Republic of China. If one were primarily interested in "systems" of world politics, one might concentrate on the processes that lead to transformation of the system from bipolarity to multipolarity and infer the Canadian action as a by-product of this change. If one were primarily interested in decision-

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