

# Book Reviews

## Foreign policy is not domestic policy

by William Barton

*The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy* by Kim Richard Nossal. Scarborough (Ont.): Prentice-Hall Canada, 1985, 232 pages. \$14.95

Here is a book that has appeared on the scene at exactly the moment when its message can serve a valuable purpose in the interests of all Canadians. It should be required preparatory reading for the members of the Parliamentary committee set up to study the "Green Paper" on Competitiveness and Security, because it sets out with clarity and brevity the relationship between foreign and domestic policy, and the constraints that must be taken into account if the outcome is to be realistic and attainable.

Judged by the experience of one who was involved in the shaping and execution of Canadian foreign policy for over thirty years, this book describes the mold which determines the shape of that policy in both its internal and external dimensions as it really is, rather than the way some politicians and bureaucrats have sought to present it.

In the first paragraph of the introduction Nossal stakes out the argument that contrary to the persuasiveness of the image that foreign policy is little more than an external dimension of domestic policy, there are important differences. The exposition of these differences takes up Part I of the book, which he calls *The Parameters of Decision*, and which he divides into two sections, the "External Dimension," and "Society and Foreign Policy."

These parameters, in their external dimension, dictate that whereas governments have a substantial degree of control over their domestic policy agenda, foreign policy decision-makers, particularly those of a small state, are destined to be forever reactive, responding to the rivalries of the dominant powers, to the periodic pressures for a revision of the status quo, to the persistent threats to systemic peace. The "policy instruments" available to foreign policy makers make outcomes far less predictable than for domestic policy. In theory these instruments include force, non-violent sanctions, coercion, inducement and persua-

sion. In practice most states have to rely on persuasion — or diplomacy — to achieve their goals.

Because of its limited capacities, its vulnerabilities, and its dominant relationship with the USA, Canada's most potent technique in achieving objectives is to use its persuasive abilities — in the context of international politics, diplomacy. It is for this reason that for a state in Canada's position, a diplomatic corps with standing and reputation is not only essential, but potentially one of the state's most useful assets in its dealings with the rest of the world, as the record of Canadian diplomacy in the decade after the Second World War demonstrates. By contrast, many of the initiatives undertaken in the 1970s failed, not only because the objectives were often cast without regard to the constraints of power, but also because the craft of Canadian diplomacy had suffered since 1968.

The question of capabilities is critical for a state in Canada's position. The bulk of Canada's foreign policy is directed toward Washington for obvious reasons. There is a clear inequality of capabilities between Canada and the USA, but we are not thereby relegated inexorably to the rank of a weak state. Rather, it is a matter of showing "how wit with small means may accomplish wonders where great force availeth not."

Nossal concludes the discussion of parameters with an analysis of the position of the government in dealing with the domestic environment influencing foreign policy. His conclusion is that the government enjoys relative autonomy in this area. While interest groups are very active in the foreign policy process, they generally enjoy little influence over the behavior of the state. The important point is for policy makers to recognize the bounds set by civil society on acceptable foreign policy behavior.

Part II of the book deals with what Nossal calls "The Apparatus of State." He methodically examines the roles of the political executive, the bureaucracy, the legislature and the provincial governments. By its subject matter this section is more expository than analytical, but it is nonetheless incisive and perceptive.

In the concluding section Nossal recapitulates his thesis. As he sees it, the politics of Canadian foreign policy present a multifaceted image. The domestic policy preferences of the governmental apparatus are constrained and impelled only within the broadest parameters established by civil society, but the state has no such autonomy in international politics. The essentially anarchic external en-