

Clark's foreign-policy perspective: color it grey

Tories' paper lacks imagination and challenge

By CAROL GOAR
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OTTAWA — The Canada that emerges from the foreign-policy discussion paper issued by External Affairs Minister Joe Clark this week is a sombre, cautious kind of place. It looks outward and sees threats and obligations. It looks inward and sees difficult choices. It is a nation without vision.

"We can no longer take our prosperity for granted," the paper warns. "We can no longer take our security for granted either."

"After the optimism of detente, tensions have increased between East and West, contacts decreased and the arms race accelerated."

All this is undoubtedly true, but is hardly an inspiring way to launch the country's first full-fledged public debate on foreign policy.

The 43-page discussion paper dutifully sets out most of the right questions: What must Canada do to remain internationally competitive? What kind of relationship with the United States do Canadians want? Can the country's foreign-aid dollars be better used? What is the best way to defend a huge but sparsely populated country? How can Canada help revitalize the United Nations? And which of these priorities matter most?

But nowhere in the grey, carefully worded document is there any sense



Clark has almost admitted his foreign-policy paper is not a scintillating document.

of excitement about the role Canada could play abroad. Nowhere does the Mulroney government display any inclination to redefine boldly the role of a "middle power" in a tense, troubled world.

Canada once prided itself on being a peacekeeper, a bridge between rich and poor, a small but thoughtful player in world affairs. In the 1950s and 1960s, "the Pearsonian tradition" was as much a description of Canada's state of mind as it was a

tribute to Lester Pearson, Canada's 14th prime minister and best known diplomat. Now that heritage seems to be slipping away.

Clark's document espouses no ambitious international goals. It calls instead for "the careful setting of policy priorities" in an atmosphere of restraint and realism.

To be fair, Clark himself displays far more enthusiasm for new ideas than does his innocuous discussion paper. He is genuinely excited about

the prospect of sending a committee of senators and MPs across the country to collect the views of ordinary Canadians.

And he does intend to listen to them. "We don't want to establish our priorities blindly," he says. "We expect to receive advice that will cause us to change policy — that is the purpose of the process."

At one point, in fact, he almost admitted that the watered-down dis-

ussion paper he was tabling — which had undergone months of bureaucratic revisions and cabinet tussles — was not his idea of a scintillating document.

"There are a couple of graphic phrases in the text," a reporter noted. "I don't know how that happened," a grinning Clark replied.

In spite of its timid language, however, the document does provide a number of clues to the Mulroney government's view of itself on the world stage:

Economic self-interest

- Canada's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is non-negotiable. There is no prospect of becoming a neutral intermediary between East and West.

- Canada's special relationship with the United States is, likewise, not up for debate. The government's main concern is how best to "manage" the divergent interests of the two countries.

- In line with their pro-American stance, the Conservatives are much more outspokenly critical of the Soviet Union than were their Liberal predecessors. "We recognize that Soviet behavior has been inimical to our interests," the paper says bluntly.

- A powerful strain of economic self-interest runs through the discussion paper. The government is convinced that Canada's influence in international affairs hinges, to a large degree, on its ability to compete as a trading nation. But this is not new. In its 1979 foreign-policy review, the government of Pierre Trudeau singled out "economic prosperity" as one of its chief foreign-policy objectives.

- And finally, it looks as if foreign aid may, once again, fall victim to the federal cost-cutting. The section of the discussion paper dealing with aid is riddled with phrases such as

"Canadian funds for use abroad are limited." And: "Decisions will not be easy."

Along with these policy signals, the discussion paper provides an equally telling set of indicators: the missing priorities.

The section on Latin America does not even mention Nicaragua.

Virtually nothing is said about Canada's differences with the United States over the importance of global institutions such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund. The United States has begun pulling away from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and reducing its commitment to Third World debt-relief programs. Will Canada be dragged along?

Canada's cultural independence, a mainstay of Liberal foreign policy for years, is given only passing mention in Clark's discussion paper. This leaves many Canadians wondering whether their government's new openness to the United States will be accompanied by a barrage of American literature, television and art.

Lacks imagination

But what the discussion paper really lacks is imagination and a willingness to challenge Canadians.

And that is a grievous oversight. This is a nation that contributed \$60 million in cash and relief supplies to Ethiopian famine victims when 1.5 million of its own citizens were out of work. This is a people who — even when they were ready to vote Pierre Trudeau out of office — still applauded his peace initiative.

Clark has given Canadians a year to come up with a better approach to foreign policy than the take-no-chances doctrine that his bureaucrats have offered up. It should be easy.