



CDFAI

CANADIAN DEFENCE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

Why don't diplomats get the respect they've earned?

by Daryl Copeland
April, 2013



POLICY UPDATE

Why don't diplomats get the respect they've earned?

by Daryl Copeland

CDFAI Senior Fellow

April, 2013



Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8
www.cdfai.org

©2012 Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute
ISBN: 978-1-927573-00-6



Last month the membership of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO), Canada's working-level diplomats, voted overwhelmingly in favour of job action. The 1,350 members of this occupational group, who have been without a contract since June 2011, are now in a legal strike position.

While this situation has been getting **some coverage**, to date the actions undertaken by PAFSO members have been largely symbolic: working-to-rule, refusing overtime and ignoring their BlackBerries outside of office hours. An "electronic picket" affecting e-mail communications has been deployed to automatically alert Canadians and international officials to the possibility of delays in responding to correspondence.

There has been no wholesale withdrawal of service, and PAFSO has shown itself to be anything but rigid or uncompromising. When the Boston Marathon was bombed on April 15, all job actions at the Canadian Consulate-General in that city were **suspended** immediately.

So, what's causing all the discontent and why is it important?

Foreign Service Officers play a critical role at home and abroad in advancing the security, prosperity and well-being of all Canadians. Yet their work is largely unappreciated. Diplomacy remains a mystery to most Canadians, and diplomats are rarely accorded the respect enjoyed by soldiers or aid workers.

This may be attributed in part to PAFSO's relatively small size, to the lack of a vocal **national constituency** (unlike the case of the Canadian Forces) and to apathy on the part of journalists, academics and opinion leaders. The elimination of domestic outreach programs by DFAIT's senior management and the related **centralization and control** of all public communication in PMO/PCO has contributed as well.

Diplomacy also has a serious image problem. In the public mind, to the extent that they are thought of at all, diplomats tend to be seen as a pampered elite living high off the hog at taxpayer expense. Dithering dandies.

That negative stereotype is often invoked by diplomacy's detractors. Like most stereotypes, however, this one is far off the mark. Given the stakes at play, we're overdue for a reality check.

One of the less celebrated outcomes associated with the WikiLeaks '**Cablegate**' episode of 2010-11 was the window it opened into the inner workings of the world's second oldest profession. In some 257,000 U.S.-origin classified dispatches, diplomats were shown to be hard at work, pursuing interests, advocating policies, building relationships and projecting values, in major capitals and to the ends of the earth, 24/7. Innovative thinking, entrepreneurship, street-smarts and granular local knowledge permeate the entire **corpus**.



Had these been Canadian cables, the story would have been much the same. Readers would have encountered brokers, guides and cultural interpreters, including:

- Political officers developing networks, performing analysis, gathering intelligence and assessing policy;
- Trade commissioners promoting goods and services and soliciting inward investment;
- Consular officers assisting citizens by replacing passports, offering travel advice, arranging repatriations and medical care, visiting prisoners and organizing evacuations from disaster areas or conflict zones, and;
- Immigration officers interviewing and recruiting new Canadians, issuing student and visitor visas, and working with airline staff to identify illegal migrants and false documentation.

Essential and exciting pursuits, to be sure, but a far cry from easy street.

Even under the best of circumstances, it can be tough to balance family life against the requirements of the job. Foreign Service Officers are 'rotational', subject to regular assignments abroad. Spouses frequently are unable to work on overseas postings, and may have difficulty finding employment, or even collecting unemployment insurance, when they return home. This can lead both to lost income and career development problems.

Children have to change schools, leave their friends, make new ones and adjust to different educational systems and languages. Some thrive. Others fail.

Overseas moves may be exciting once, but over the course of a career they can be exhausting. In the face of relentless downward pressure on the terms and conditions of service abroad, allowances are tumbling, rent ceilings are being lowered, commutes are getting longer and incentives are disappearing. An increasing number of administrative and logistical tasks — moving arrangements, finding accommodation, providing furnishings — are no longer being provided by the employer and are falling upon families — that is, if families can come. More and more diplomats are going abroad unaccompanied, where they may face personal risks (Afghanistan), sleep in tents (post-earthquake Haiti) or come home to a pre-fab container jammed into a heavily guarded compound (Pakistan).

In short, this is challenging, complex, often difficult and — remembering **Glyn Berry**, **Chris Stevens** and **Anne Smedinghoff** — increasingly dangerous work. But it **must be done**. **Social media and digital technologies**, while useful tools, can never replace the value added by direct human contact and on-the-ground connectedness.



The Government of Canada should be doing everything in its power to support its employees on the front lines. Alas, this is not the case. Years of underinvestment, exacerbated by over \$300 million in **cumulative cuts** imposed on DFAIT by the 2012 federal budget, have severely degraded the work environment.

Add to that what amounts to bad faith bargaining and the lingering absence of a contract, and all elements are in place for a perfect storm of labour unrest.

Still, PAFSO is hardly the radical fringe. Its leadership recognizes that these are hard times everywhere and is not seeking an unreasonable settlement. Significant concessions have been offered on severance pay (agreement to its elimination) and across-the-board wage increases (acceptance of something in the range of 1.5 per cent per year).

PAFSO is firm, however, in its insistence that the matter of providing equal pay for equal work be addressed squarely in any settlement. Many Foreign Service Officers are today receiving substantially less in compensation than the members of other, non-rotational occupational groups (economists, commerce officers, lawyers) who are doing exactly the same or similar work, often in the same division. This differential varies from several thousand to tens of thousands of dollars per year, and the spread is growing. Morale and collegial co-habitation have suffered accordingly.

The government remains intransigent, if not hostile. Treasury Board has rejected the non-binding recommendations of the independent Public Interest Commission. It refuses even to discuss the issue of comparative compensation. The employer appears prepared to force PAFSO members into the embrace of increasingly serious and disruptive job action, in hope that that this will elicit widespread public and media condemnation of the “spoiled diplomats.”

Such tactics are most regrettable. Recall, for instance, the disastrous inefficiencies, administrative overhead and management confusion which attended the efforts first to remove, and then to restore the trade department within the foreign ministry in 2004-06. Based upon that experience, the recent **decision** to integrate CIDA into DFAIT would have been difficult at the best of times. The disaffection engendered by the contract dispute can only worsen the prospects for a successful merger.

At the end of the day, all of this is particularly unsettling because in an age of globalization, **diplomacy and development assistance** must be more intimately and seamlessly intertwined. We live on a small planet beset by a host of perils — climate change, environmental collapse, diminishing biodiversity, pandemic disease — none of which are amenable to military solutions. Our best hope lies in addressing these challenges through knowledge-based problem-solving and complex balancing, backed by dialogue, negotiation and compromise.

In other words, **security** is not a martial art. Diplomacy, not defence, is the best way forward. Yet unless and until our diplomatic capacity is unbound — not constrained or debilitated — the



foreign ministry will never perform anywhere near its **potential**. Canada's place in the world will **slide further**.

Diplomacy's decline has been in train for decades, but the current situation represents a new low. The continued battering of the Foreign Service is inimical to the national interest. To advance the prosperity, security and well-being of Canadians, the government should return immediately to the bargaining table with a mandate to reach a fair and equitable settlement.

The Foreign Service, and the country, deserve no less.

▲ About the Author

Daryl Copeland, Senior Fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, is an analyst, author, educator and consultant specializing in the relationship between science, technology, diplomacy, and international policy. His book, ***Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations***, was released in 2009 by Lynne Rienner Publishers and is cited as an essential reference by the editors of *Oxford Bibliographies Online*. A frequent public speaker, Mr. Copeland comments regularly for the national media on global issues and public management, and has written over 100 articles for the scholarly and popular press. His work has appeared in many anthologies, as well as in the *International Journal*, *World Politics Review*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Embassy*, *The Mark*, *iPolitics* and elsewhere. He was awarded the 2010 Molot Prize for best article published in *Canadian Foreign Policy* (“Virtuality, Diplomacy and the Foreign Ministry”, 15:2).

From 1981 to 2011 Mr. Copeland served as a Canadian diplomat with postings in Thailand, Ethiopia, New Zealand and Malaysia. During the 1980s and 1990s, he was elected a record five times to the Executive Committee of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers. From 1996-99 he was National Program Director of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs in Toronto and Editor of *Behind the Headlines*, Canada’s international affairs magazine. In 2000, he received the Canadian Foreign Service Officer Award for his “tireless dedication and unyielding commitment to advancing the interests of the diplomatic profession.”

Among his positions at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) in Ottawa, Mr. Copeland has worked as Senior Intelligence Analyst, South and Southeast Asia; Deputy Director for International Communications; Director for Southeast Asia; Senior Advisor, Public Diplomacy; Director of Strategic Communications Services; and, Senior Advisor, Strategic Policy and Planning. He was DFAIT representative to the Association of Professional Executives (APEX) 2001-06.

Mr. Copeland teaches at the University of Ottawa’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, and is Visiting Professor at the London Academy of Diplomacy (UK) and Otago University (NZ). He serves as a peer reviewer for University of Toronto Press, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, the *International Journal* and *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, and is a member of the Editorial Board of the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. From 2009-11 he was Adjunct Professor and Senior Fellow at the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs. In 2009 he was a Research Fellow at the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy.

Mr. Copeland grew up in downtown Toronto, and received his formal education at the University of Western Ontario (Gold Medal, Political Science; Chancellor’s Prize, Social Sciences) and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (Canada Council Special MA Scholarship). He has spent years backpacking on six continents, and enjoys travel, photography, arts and the outdoors.

▲ **Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute**

CDFAI is the only think tank focused on Canada's international engagement in all its forms - diplomacy, the military, aid and trade security. Established in 2001, CDFAI's vision is for Canada to have a respected, influential voice in the international arena based on a comprehensive foreign policy, which expresses our national interests, political and social values, military capabilities, economic strength and willingness to be engaged with action that is timely and credible.

CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

In all its activities CDFAI is a charitable, nonpartisan organization, supported financially by the contributions of foundations, corporations and individuals. Conclusions or opinions expressed in CDFAI publications and programs are those of the authors and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute staff, fellows, directors, advisors, or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to CDFAI.

