

U.S. pokes fun at Harper's Arctic pledges: WikiLeaks

CTV News Staff (feat. COLIN ROBERTSON)

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The United States thinks Prime Minister Stephen Harper's tough talk on Canadian Arctic sovereignty is little more than chest-thumping meant to attract votes, according to a new WikiLeaks cable.

The diplomatic cable from the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa was posted today by the online whistleblower.

The cable said the Harper government has done little on its Arctic promises but has made domestic political gains regardless.

"Conservatives make concern for 'The North' part of their political brand . . . and it works," says the note, entitled "Canada's Conservative Government and its Arctic Focus."

"The message seemed to resonate with the electorate; the Conservatives formed the new government in 2006."

The cable, which is dated January 2010 and bears the signature of U.S. Ambassador David Jacobson, pokes fun at Harper's statements regarding the Arctic.

"The persistent high public profile which this government has accorded 'Northern Issues' and the Arctic is, however, unprecedented and reflects the PM's views that 'the North has never been more important to our country' -- although one could perhaps paraphrase to state 'the North has never been more important to our Party.'"

The cable notes some of Harper's promises have long been forgotten, such as building armed icebreakers and Arctic Ocean sensors.

"Once elected, Harper hit the ground running with frosty rhetoric," the notes says, referring to his 2006 election.

"Harper (who was still only Prime Minister-designate) used his first post-election press conference to respond to the United States Ambassador's restatement the prior day of the longstanding U.S. position on the Northwest passage."

The note says Harper once again brought out the Arctic issue for the 2008 campaign, but failed to bring it up even once during a January 2010 hours-long meeting with U.S. Ambassador Jacobson.

"That the PM's public stance on the Arctic may not reflect his private, perhaps more pragmatic, priorities, however, was evident in the fact that during several hours together with Ambassador Jacobson on January 7 and 8, which featured wide-ranging conversations, the PM did not once mention the Arctic."

NDP MP-elect Jack Harris said the U.S. complaints merely echo those of Harper's Canadian critics.

"It has to be embarrassing," he told CTV News. "Much of what gone on in terms of the Arctic sovereignty issue has been public relations."

The U.S. embassy did not comment on the matter, but the U.S. went into damage control earlier in the year, warning more of the embarrassing documents would be made public by WikiLeaks.

Former diplomat Colin Robertson said the fallout won't affect Canadian-American relations.

"This stuff is coming, some of this may be embarrassing, it's certainly embarrassing to us but it doesn't change how we want to do business with you," Robertson said of the U.S. position.