George Ignatieff
What a Difference 20 Years Make!

When Canada was elected to the Security Council for two years starting in January 1967, its ambassador to the UN had the advantage of close acquaintance with that odd club. For George Ignatieff had been deputy to General Andrew McNaughton during Canada's first stint on the Council from 1948 to 1949. His family background also gave him unusual qualifications for this position. As he relates with humour in his memoirs, *The Making of a Peacemonger*, his father was the Tsar's last education minister; and his father's father, an adventurous soldier and diplomat, who settled a border dispute with China in 1860 and then rode on horseback from Peking to St. Petersburg—a two-month journey—to bring first word of it to the Tsar, and to stop the British and French from undermining the treaty!

Although communications have improved to an extent that would astonish the earlier Count Ignatieff, diplomacy has become increasingly more complicated. In the following excerpt from a conversation that took place in 1986, George Ignatieff describes how Security Council work changed in the 20 years separating the two periods during which he was involved with it and, particularly, how Canada's role changed. He also recounts episodes from the worst crisis during his time on "the hot seat"—the Six-Day War between the Arab states and Israel in June 1967—and he gives three reasons to explain why Pierre Trudeau "went sour" on the United Nations for a dozen years.

First, here is George Ignatieff on the changes he witnessed over those 20 years: "In 1948, the Americans had an assured majority in the Council and in the General Assembly. And therefore the game in each case was to isolate the Soviets and get through whatever vote it was. The Cold War had started from the beginning of the UN, and it had erupted particularly over the business of the U.S. proposal for an international agency to control the production and use of atomic energy. The dividing point was the fact that Bernard Baruch [the U.S. representative on the Atomic Energy Commission] insisted on the Council taking a position supporting, in principle, his plan for establishing a world monopoly for controlling all atomic activities. He insisted on a vote and insisted that the Western nations stand up and be counted, so that he could say, 'Well, the Soviets turned it down.' I said at the time that Canada should not break with the Americans on a matter of such importance. But I was wrong, as I admit in my book; for the opportunity was missed to explore the possibilities of arresting atomic proliferation and banning atomic weapons by some less far-reaching proposals which would have been acceptable to the U.S.S.R.

"Nevertheless, during McNaughton's time on the Council, Canada was seen [to have] importance as a mediator, independent of the Americans. In the Kashmir issue, the Indians looked to Canada [to play] a conciliatory role because of our Commonwealth connection. And in the case of Indonesia, the Dutch looked to us as mediators because of Canada's role in liberating Holland. The Indonesians didn't know us, but they felt that we were at least a non-colonial power and could be a mediator. They didn't trust the Americans, who were already showing signs of an imperialist policy in Asia; nor [did they trust] the British. So, right from the start, although we didn't look for business, we were forced by circumstances of being a non-colonial power with