



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 72/12

THE CANADIAN FOREIGN SERVICE

Comments by Mr. Marcel Cadieux, Ambassador
of Canada to the United States, at Fletcher
School, Boston, on March 14, 1972.

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The foreign service is the instrument through which a government represents itself abroad. I propose to interpret "foreign service" broadly to encompass all civilian government activities abroad, although I shall focus on the function of the career foreign service within such activities. A government's strategy or broad policy framework is represented in national aims or goals as postulated from time to time. In the years ahead, the foreign service will, I suspect, concern itself more with the broad area of tactics than with the formulation of policy. Long gone are the days when diplomats created policy on their own -- the memoirs of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diplomats, while interesting and often entertaining, are largely irrelevant as guides for action today. The ease of foreign travel and the speed and security of communications have changed the role of the foreign emissary, but I should emphasize that it has not diminished his importance. The key word is change.

Diplomacy has been called both an art and a science -- among other things. It purports to come in a variety of forms -- new, old, active, quiet, dollar, open, nuclear, -- and no doubt we shall hear of additional types in the years ahead. In essence, it is negotiation, and the objective of any one serving his country abroad is the protection of his country's interests -- ensuring that actions taken by other countries will be, it is hoped, beneficial to but at least not injurious to those interests.

The present, to those living through it, always seems to be either a "period of transition", which may be a euphemism for not having any clear idea where we are headed, or a "watershed" consisting of one or more historic decisions or events. In retrospect, historians have little difficulty in distinguishing periods of transition from watersheds, although no one would deny their capacity for argument about the significance of one or the other. In dealing with the present, the problem is complicated not only by the lack of perspective and the involvement in current events but by the fog of rhetoric that surrounds virtually all policy statements. On basic goals most countries -- at least those with democratically-elected governments -- are in broad agreement.