

*Comparisons
odious
but unavoidable*

"Canada is achieving, I think, a very considerable position as a leader, among a group of States which are important enough to be necessary to the Big Four but not important enough to be accepted as one of that quartet. As a matter of fact, the position of a 'little Big Power' or 'big little Power' is a very difficult one, especially if the 'little Big Power' is also a 'Big Dominion'. The big fellows have power and responsibility, but they also have control. We 'in-between States' sometimes get, it seems, the worst of both worlds. We are necessary but not necessary enough. I think this is being felt by countries like the Netherlands and Belgium as well as by ourselves. That is why these countries are not only looking towards the Big Powers, but are looking toward each other for support. There is, I think, an opportunity for Canada, if we desire to take it, to become the leader of this group."

Comparisons may be odious but, as time ran out on Canadian efforts to secure a position on the proposed United Nations Security Council, they became unavoidable. "Just as we are prepared to recognize the great difference in power and responsibility between Canada and the Soviet Union," Mackenzie King told the meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers on May 11, 1944, "[so] we should expect some recognition of the considerable difference between Canada and Panama." Reaffirming, against continued British opposition, its belief that powers other than the great powers should be represented on the Council, the Canadian Government repeated its conviction that their selection "should in some way be related to a dispassionate appraisal of their probable effective contribution to the maintenance of security." "You will, I am sure" — Mackenzie King thought it well to add for Churchill's benefit — "appreciate how difficult it would be for Canada, after enlisting nearly one million persons in her armed forces and trebling her national debt in order to assist in restoring peace, to accept a position of parity in this respect with the Dominican Republic or El Salvador."

Such perceptions were widely shared throughout the country. For some Canadians, indeed, their Government's disclaimer of topmost status — "Canada certainly makes no claim to be regarded as a great power" — seemed to be too bashful, too reserved. "A great world power standing beside Great Britain in the British Empire" was Howard Green's vision of our postwar future. "A country large enough to have world interests," was the assessment of the *Windsor Star*. And a

leading Canadian publicist, pondering "Greater Canada among the Nations", saw our role like this:

"Under the impact of war, Canada has moved up from her old status to a new stature. With her smaller population and lack of colonial possessions, she is not a major or world power like Britain, the United States or Russia. But with her natural wealth and human capacity she is not a minor one like Mexico or Sweden. She stands between as a British Power of medium rank."

In short, a middle power. The term was officially employed for the first time in a despatch from the Department of External Affairs to heads of mission in the five capitals of the countries to which, on January 12, 1945, the Canadian Government made a final (and unavailing) appeal for representation on the Security Council; the exact phrase used was "a so-called middle power". The term was officially defined for the first time in a speech by R. G. Riddell in 1947: "The Middle Powers are those which by reason of their size, their material resources, their willingness and ability to accept responsibility, their influence and stability are close to being great powers."

Promotion sought

The term "middle power" came into the vocabulary of diplomacy as part of a Canadian campaign to gain promotion from the status of a small power. But that is not the only purpose for which it may be used. It can also be an instrument of demotion. It lends itself not only to aggrandizement but to disparagement as well — as in the expression "merely a middle power".

An instance of how "middle power" may be used for the purpose of demotion and disparagement was reported from Moscow in 1955 on the occasion of Pearson's visit to the Soviet Union. At a reception at the Canadian Embassy for the diplomatic corps, the Canadian and Soviet foreign ministers exchanged some significant banter. "Mr. Molotov and I ought to understand each other," said Pearson joshingly. "We belong to the same trade union but he is a much more important member than I am." "Mr. Pearson is too modest," Molotov responded, "Canada is among the great powers." When Pearson jocularly compared Canada's position between the United States and the Soviet Union to that of the ham in a sandwich, Lazar Kaganovich chimed in to suggest that "a good bridge" was a better comparison. Nor was that the end of it. At a reception some days later, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs