

(Document 685) In addition, the chapter documents a full-scale inter-departmental review of Canadian aid, which complacently concluded that “the assistance which has been provided has been directed towards the right type of project and that its form and content have been generally appropriate.” (Document 658)

The Department of External Affairs confronted the political and economic challenges of decolonization more directly with the advent of Ghana’s independence in 1956. A memorandum entitled “An Awakening Africa” forced officials to consider “how high should Africa rank on our list of priorities?” (Document 737) Canada’s interest in the new federation that was about to unite the British West Indies was even more direct. The British connection had traditionally protected Canada’s long-standing stake in the Caribbean, which remained an important market for Canadian banks and salt fish from the Maritimes. Independence threatened this tie, and Léger knew it: “In due course U.K. influence is bound to disappear; is it in our interest that it be replaced more or less *in toto* by the U.S.?” (Document 745) The answer was clear, and reluctant officials were told to devise an aid package for the new federation that would underline Canada’s continuing interest in the region.

Decolonization was at the heart of Ottawa’s preparations for the UN’s 11th General Assembly too. It was not enough, Léger argued, for Canada to maintain its “policy of general non-alignment concerning colonial problems.” It was time to pursue a “more active and positive” role, mediating between “‘the good colonials’ and the more ‘sophisticated’ anti-colonials.” (Document 303) Pearson agreed, but cautioned that this would not be easy. The challenges confronting Canadian diplomacy are apparent in the material on the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), disarmament and Algeria. There was no ready solution to the growing divergence between North and South at the UN, but Canada firmly rejected the idea of abandoning the international organization. In a compelling paper reflecting on the UN’s future, Holmes argued in March 1957 that there was no alternative, and that Canada should continue to “show a friendly interest in its workings, maintain the closest bilateral relations with all its members and make sure it remains pretty much what it is.” (Document 366)

Tired and easily irritated by the burdens of government, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent played a diminished role in the elaboration of foreign policy during the period covered in this volume. He was particularly active only during the initial stages of the Suez Crisis, when he was involved in responding to a series of communications from the British prime minister, Anthony Eden. For much of the Crisis, at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meetings, and at the Bermuda encounter with Eden’s successor, Harold Macmillan, St. Laurent left most of the talking and detailed diplomacy to Pearson.

When Pearson was unavailable, his department was normally represented at the Cabinet table by Paul Martin, the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Martin maintained his interest in arms control and headed Canada’s delegation to the UN Disarmament Commission in the spring of 1956. In the fall of that year, he led the Canadian delegation to the annual meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee for South-East Asia, an experience that would profoundly shape his attitude toward Asian Communism. Other Cabinet ministers with significant foreign policy responsibilities included Ralph Campney, the Minister of National Defence, Walter