

The power to destroy — to wreck, to frustrate, to sabotage — is, in contrast, easy to come by, effortless to exercise. Little is required to smash some cherished project, to bring things tumbling down — only a rifle with a telescopic sight, an assassin hired by the hour. "I'm as important as the start of World War One," bragged Arthur Bremer to his diary when in Ottawa to try to kill his President. "I just need the little opening and a second of time."

The power exerted by these demolition experts — the Tepermans, so to speak, of the global village — can be very great. But it is the kind of power a blackmailer exerts over a wealthy victim — potent while it lasts, but of short duration and likely to end unpleasantly for both of them. It is the power wielded by a pyromaniac in a fireworks factory. It is the power displayed by the President of Libya, threatening retaliation unless the UN Security Council voted to his liking — "Otherwise we shall see what we shall see. We shall do what Samson did: destroy the temple with everyone inside it, including ourselves. Europe should look out for the catastrophe which is lying in wait for it."

Such are the properties of power. Were they fixed clearly in the minds of those who coined the expression "middle power" to describe Canada's place among the nations? I cannot prove it, but I doubt it.

Obscurity preferred

For all that has been written about "Canada's role as a middle power" (and much has been written about it), its meaning remains obscure. Obscurity has, indeed, seemed preferable to clarity, Canadians resisting definition as an earlier generation resisted defining "Dominion status" for fear (as Lloyd George put it) of limiting their constitution "by too many finalities". "It is hard to say now precisely what a middle power is," John Holmes confessed in 1965; but that does not bother him. On the contrary: "I am all for accepting this ambiguity rather than insisting on a logical clarification." And again: "The more one tries to define [middle power], the more difficult and perhaps pretentious it appears to do so at all. Often it seems like describing the obvious. Definition spoils the special quality."

The origins of the term are as obscure as its meaning. If it was not used first in 1943, it was used first in 1944, for by 1945 "middle power" had come into widespread circulation. The year 1943 is when Canadians both in and out of government first gave thought to what their place in the

postwar world might and ought to be. From the beginning, the prospect of divergence between that "might" and "ought" was both ominous and real. In 1943 Canada stood in the shadow of the United States and Britain. So long as a war remained to be won, such a position was intolerable, might be construed as part of the Canadian war effort — unpleasant, but something to be put up with for the duration. But as a permanent stance for the postwar future it was out of the question, and Canadians began to say so.

Articulation of discontent was aroused by the threat of exclusion from the ruling circles of the first of the postwar international organizations. Word that Canada, of all countries — was to be left off the governing body of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency sent shocks of anger around the foreign policy community. "We are still trying to run a democracy" (so, with notable asperity, the Government, as quoted in the Pearson memoirs, instructed its agent in Washington charged with arguing his country's case) "and there is some historical evidence to support the thesis that democracies cannot be taxed without representation. We have tried to lead our people in a full-out effort for the war, and we had hoped that we could continue to lead them in such a way as to get their support behind the provision of relief and maintenance for battle-scarred Europe in the postwar years. We will not be able to secure their support for such a programme if it, as well as the economic affairs of the world generally, are to be run as a monopoly by the four Great Powers."

United States crucial

Of the four great powers, the United States was crucial for the Canadian case. If Washington would not offer sympathy and support for the aspirations of its friendly neighbour, who else could? But Washington's response left much to be desired. Out status was but dimly recognized, our stature underrated.

In 1925, an eminent American professor of international politics had placed Canada in the category of "other states, of subordinate or doubtful rank". In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt bound to telephone the Prime Minister to ascertain whether Canada was bound by a British declaration of war. In 1943, wags in Washington were saying that Canada was in the British Commonwealth Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, an ally of the United States Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and only on Sundays a sovereign

Accept ambiguity rather than insist on clarification