

I commend the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and the Canadian Study of Parliament Group for joining forces to stage the Conference. You have identified an area which deserves more attention from scholars and practitioners.

There is a saying that where you stand on issues depends on where you sit. As a young MP I first ventured into the realm of foreign affairs as a parliamentary observer on the Canadian delegation to the U.N. General Assembly in 1955. The following year I experienced the charm of Geneva as a member of the Canadian delegation to the U.N. Economic and Social Council. I showed such promise then that it took me only eighteen years to become Secretary of State for External Affairs. Now, another ten years later, I'm back at the job after a variety of challenges, including a brief but chastening stint as external affairs critic in Opposition. Some jobs have been more fulfilling than others.

Parliament, Government, and Public

As Secretary of State for External Affairs and because of my work in the House of Commons I am naturally drawn inevitably toward the debate over the relationship between the Government and Parliament. Should Parliament and parliamentarians have a larger role in the making of foreign policy? Should the Government be held more closely accountable? My basic thought is that in Canada we are not faced with what the theorist would call a zero-sum game -- a situation in which an enlarged role for Parliament can come only at the expense of the Government's control of and ultimate responsibility for the conduct of foreign relations. Parliament and parliamentarians should play an enlarged role; and the Government should encourage this for the benefit of all concerned.

As a parliamentarian, I attach importance to a realistic assessment of the pressure on the time and attention of Members of Parliament. All of us are politicians and as Members of Parliament we take most of our cues from the public. If international questions are not near the top of the public's preoccupations we cannot expect large amounts of parliamentary time and energy to be directed toward foreign affairs. I may feel and some of you may feel that the level of attention does not adequately reflect the economic, security, and other interests at stake. And we may seek to lead not simply follow opinion. But it would be unrealistic to believe that parliamentary concerns are likely to differ greatly from those of the public and the media.