

A further problem area is the distinction, real or perceived, between what governments may call the national interest, and what others may appeal to as the public interest. Authoritarian regimes allow no daylight between national interest and public interest. Harmonious societies show considerable overlap between these two terms. Tension invariably arises when such slippery concepts are seen as moving off in different directions. But who is empowered to speak for the public interest beyond those elected to do so? Can national positions be fully grounded in public consensus at all times? How much complexity — or how much secrecy — can even the most literate public be expected to tolerate?

I raise these problems and questions not so much to answer them directly, but by way of defining an approach to our own Canadian experience of foreign policy and the public interest. Because there is no doubt that we are a peculiar country — always at odds with geography, frequently at odds with our environment, and often at odds with ourselves.

Your own Institute provides a good benchmark for the evolution of the public interest. The trauma of the First World War created a profound resolve to impose, on politicians and generals, the checks and balances of public opinion. There was in the postwar period a revolution of rising consciousness about international affairs, drawing on the new power of radio and the press, and focused on the Versailles Peace Conference.

There was a clear determination to promote an internationalist spirit of enlightenment among populations, as well as among governments. The CIIA was, and remains, in the forefront of that movement. Of all the forces unleashed by the First World War, the concept of a public interest — which the public would itself express — must rank among the most formidable.

By contrast to your pioneering work 50 and more years ago, the landscape of the Canadian public interest is today a highly developed and sophisticated scene. In Parliament, standing committees of House and Senate have made considerable impact in defining issues and exploring alternatives, assisted by the Parliamentary Centre for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. Universities and their inhabitants tend increasingly to speak a language comprehensible to policy-makers. Trade, travel or residence abroad have educated a generation in the realities of international affairs.

Today we face an imposing array of churches, unions, municipalities, service groups, fishermen, environmentalists, hawks, doves, nationalists, continentalists and globalists. We must be alert to those advocating the rights of our own and other species; the needs of the wheat trade and of outer space; the interests of regions, languages and provinces; the competing priorities of development, the environment, technology and our quality of life. And many of these advocates, of course, are so strongly committed to their own particular interest that their expectations can be met only at the cost of someone else's, equally cherished, special interest or concern.

How is national policy made in the midst of this bedlam of advocacy and contention? How does a democratic and pluralist society produce a united and coherent foreign policy? Let me explore a few case studies which strike me as pertinent to that question.