

## INTRODUCTION

In 1956, Lester B. Pearson, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, was at the height of his international influence. He had served continuously as foreign minister from 1948, charting a Canadian course through the Cold War's first, most dangerous, phase. He was a principal architect of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the new multi-racial Commonwealth, and had helped shape the norms and procedures that defined the United Nations (UN) in the 1950s. By the middle of that decade, this popular Canadian had developed an unrivalled network of friends and contacts that spanned Western Europe and the North Atlantic, and encircled the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. His affability and liberal idealism, however, often hid his keen grasp of the hard realities of international politics. Though well aware of diplomacy's limits, Pearson shied away from confrontation, almost intuitively responding to conflict by seeking common ground and compromise. Negotiation was his genius, and in the words of one friendly reporter, he excelled in "finding out how one side felt, then playing it back to the other, and vice versa."<sup>1</sup>

As this volume clearly demonstrates, Pearson's advice on international developments was sought and heeded. The Israeli foreign minister passed along copies of his correspondence with the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, determined to keep Pearson in the loop. (Document 1) Similarly, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden visited Ottawa in February 1956 anxious for Pearson's views on the situation in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. (Document 696) And in the spring of 1956, as NATO drifted aimlessly in the face of the receding Soviet threat, Dulles turned to Pearson to stop the rot. (Document 519) It was perhaps inevitable then that when Israeli troops invaded Egypt on October 29, 1956, "Mike" Pearson was immediately at the heart of the crisis.

The unsettled Middle East and the Suez Crisis naturally dominate Volume 22. Ottawa maintained a lively interest in Arab-Israeli relations in early 1956, though its attention waxed and waned with each passing emergency. Consequently, the documentary record is fragmentary and the opening section of the first chapter contains material that offers only incomplete snapshots of Canadian policy and attitudes. Some reflect Canada's traditional interest in confidence-building measures like the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) (Document 5) or American efforts to encourage Arab-Israeli cooperation in the development of the region's waterways. (Document 8) Others reveal a practical and realist appreciation of the evolving balance of power in the Middle East. John W. Holmes, an Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, argued cogently that the West should invite the Soviet Union into the region, prophetically warning that "the alternative to non-cooperation with the Russians is proving bankrupt and just possibly leading to disaster." (Document 3) Pearson agreed, but Dulles did not (Document 38), and when the Suez Crisis finally erupted, the Under-Secretary, Jules Léger, could not refrain from privately expressing his department's sense of vindication. (Document 87)

Canada's direct interest in the Middle East during the first part of 1956 was largely confined to the export of Canadian arms to this volatile region. As the documentation in the first chapter suggests, Canada worked hard to keep its military exports to Israel

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Norman Hillmer, "Pearson and the Sense of Paradox," in his edited collection, *Pearson: The Unlikely Gladiator* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 5.