

INTRODUCTION

Nineteen forty-seven found Canadian foreign policy in transition. The long premiership of William Lyon Mackenzie King was drawing to an end, and with it his singleminded, almost singlehanded, sway over Canadian external affairs. King had already surrendered the portfolio of Secretary of State for External Affairs to Louis St. Laurent, who in 1946 became the first minister to hold that post exclusively: the Prime Minister had long been his own foreign secretary, an arrangement that had a very considerable impact on the conduct of external policy and the development of the Department of External Affairs. St. Laurent's deputy, L.B. Pearson, had also taken up his duties near the end of 1946, and together they were a potent combination for the assertion of Canadian interests and responsibilities in the world. An immediate case in point was the demand early in 1947 for a real voice in the negotiation of the German peace settlement.

St. Laurent gave voice to the new activism in a major speech in January 1947 deploying the principles that would govern Canadian policies. The very idea of such an exercise would have been foreign to Mackenzie King, who believed that external questions were inevitably divisive. The less said about them the better. St. Laurent emphasized the need to maintain national unity above all else, a well worn Canadian theme, but the bulk of the address was an implicit rejection of the cautious King past, a call for Canadians to accept major international commitment.¹ It was in that spirit that later in the year the Canadian Government successfully pursued a seat on the Security Council of the United Nations (see Document 345). Under-Secretary Pearson seemed at times to take up permanent residence in New York, pursuing solutions to serious problems in Palestine and Korea, a long way from the areas of the world which had always preoccupied Canadians.² Diplomat-historian John Holmes saw Pearsonian diplomacy at the U.N. in 1947 as the beginning of Canada's role and reputation as a "moderate mediatory middle power."³

The United Nations, however, caused more frustration in Ottawa than it did self-congratulation. The Economic and Social Council and the specialized agencies were judged relatively successful, but the activities of the Security Council — the organ charged with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international security and peace — were crippled by the Soviet Union's liberal use of its veto power. The Canadian government did not take the decision to seek a seat on the Council lightly or easily; it had become, in the view of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, "a pretty futile body" (Document 344). St. Laurent complained to the General Assembly in September that the "veto privilege, attacked and defended with equal vigour, if it continues to be abused, may well destroy the United Nations . . ." The deadlock could not be allowed to continue

¹*The Foundations of Canadian Policy in World Affairs* (Duncan and John Gray Memorial Lecture; Toronto, 1947); Department of External Affairs, *Statements and Speeches*, 47/2.

²John English, *Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson*, Volume I: 1897-1948 (Toronto, 1989), pp. 324-7; Anne Trowell Hillmer, "'Here I am in the Middle': Lester Pearson and the Origins of Canada's Diplomatic Involvement in the Middle East," in David Taras and David H. Goldberg, eds., *The Domestic Battleground: Canada and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Kingston and Montreal, 1989), pp. 125-43.

³John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order* (2 vols.; Toronto, 1979 and 1982), Volume II, p. 69.