

I prefer “peace, order and good government” to “governance” as an organizing frame for Canadian activities simply because it articulates a specifically Canadian expression of what governance ought to be about: democratic institutions, federalism, minority rights guarantees, linguistic pluralism, aboriginal self-government and a positive, enabling role for government in economic and social development.

In democratic societies that are stable and capable of development, Canadian policy can assist with improving

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the institutional design and operation of governance. Where societies, in political theorist John Rawls’ phrase, are “burdened” with ethnic conflict, religious hatred or a bitter memory of civil war, we need to perfect a tool kit of preventive intervention: conflict resolution at the village and community level, political dialogue at the national level, constitutional change in the form of devolution to empower disenfranchised regions or groups, and minority rights guarantees to end discrimination and injustice. No country has managed to put all of these elements of prevention—conflict resolution, political dialogue, constitutional change, together with economic assistance—into a coherent stand-by capability, bringing together non-governmental organization, government and professional capacities. That is a challenge we should seize as

a country, since, as I have argued, we have comparative advantage in the politics of managing divided societies.

This is muscular multilateralism. Developing these capabilities would help the UN raise its own capacity to deploy to prevent conflict before it starts and rebuild after it is over. Such a program would demonstrate that Canada is prepared to make a serious investment in sustaining and developing the capacity of states to shoulder the burdens that globalization has placed upon them. “Global governance” and “international community” are empty slogans as long as the states that compose our global order lack the capacity to protect their citizens and enhance their lives. If Canada fails to help solve the growing global crisis of state order—in the 20 to 30 states that are burdened, failing or failed—our commitment to “global governance” will be hollow, for global governance means nothing unless states have the capacity to take part in global solutions to our common problems.

A focus upon peace, order and good government helps us meet a vital national interest. Just as we want to maintain our own national independence, to safeguard the land we care about, so we want to help others to do the same. If we love our own land, we have good reasons to help others create political orders that deserve the same fierce attachment.

Finally, we need to shed the Canadian sense of immunity and impunity, that deeply rooted belief that we are safe from history’s dangers. Our sense of national interest could use a certain sober measure of fear. A global order in which states are no longer able to protect their own people and their own territory presents Canada with real and growing danger. But we have the resources—and most of all, the political memory—that gives us a unique ability to turn danger into opportunity. 🍁

The Lecture

The O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture encourages a scholarly examination of topics related to Canada’s international relations. Inaugurated in December 1991, it honours O.D. Skelton, a prime architect of the Department of External Affairs (now Foreign Affairs Canada) and of Canadian foreign policy.

Skelton, a prolific scholar and the author of several major books, was appointed by Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King in 1925 to succeed Sir Joseph Pope as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. Until his death in January 1941, Skelton served as the principal adviser to the Prime Minister, sometimes called the “deputy prime minister.” Mackenzie King described Skelton’s death as “the most serious loss thus far sustained in my public



O.D. Skelton

life!” One Canadian historian has called him simply the most powerful civil servant in Canadian history.

As head of the Department of External Affairs, Skelton helped to define a distinct Canadian foreign policy. He also was responsible for the recruitment of a remarkably able group of officers, highlighted by two governors general (Georges Vanier and Jules Léger) and one prime minister (Lester B. Pearson), as well as numerous senior mandarins.

For more information about O.D. Skelton and the lecture series, as well texts of this and past lectures, see www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/skelton/lectures.