

are now firmly in the grip of their own *idée fixe*. We can listen and we can accommodate, to some extent we can even manage certain contradictions, but we cannot avoid the overriding need for a policy which is a coherent synthesis of national interests and priorities. Tension with some single-interest groups is bound to continue.

In a democratic system, surely this is a sign of basic health, frustrating and contentious as the process of reconciliation may be. It is the challenge of foreign policy in a democracy to negotiate the alignment of national interest and public interest, and to build on consensus wherever it can be ascertained.

What is dangerous is the latent or apparent fragmentation of the public interest into competing and irreconcilable groups, whose common features are difficult to discern. Such fragmentation can paralyze policy, especially if it should be driven by a sensationalist media.

If there is an optimistic note to be struck, I think it lies in the remarkable continuity to which I have referred on several occasions. The gravity-defying nature of our country and its place in the world impose on us, as they imposed on your first conference, on the authors of the Gray Lecture or of *Foreign Policy for Canadians*, certain limitations and preoccupations which are remarkably constant.

We are improving the mixture and the balance in our foreign policy of political, economic and security elements. But we cannot, as some countries can, assign clear dominance to any one of them. Nor can we afford, for our own long-term interests, to abandon the tradition of Canadian activism and idealism.

I think governments generally prefer to act on the basis of a congenial, rather than a compliant, public opinion. In Canada, however, we have to come to terms with latent fragmentation. We must be diligent in measuring our version of the public interest against the views of disparate publics themselves. There will be times when government exercises its leadership somewhat ahead of public opinion. And times when public opinion veers off in advance of policy. What all of us must seek always to ensure is that the natural discord of democracy does not become the terrible clamour of a nation unable to act.

Let me conclude by paying tribute to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs on its Golden Anniversary Conference: for your long tradition of enlightenment in foreign policy; for your dedication to the search for a national perspective beyond the interests of one or another group or region; and for your contribution to shaping the contours of both foreign policy and the public interest.