



CANADA

# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## THE ROLE OF MIDDLE POWERS IN A CHANGING WORLD

An Address by the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at Carleton University, Ottawa, February 20, 1969.

There is a faintly old-fashioned ring about classifying countries as great, middle or small powers. In the nineteenth century, and more or less up to the beginning of the Second World War, nations were ranked by the size of their naval fleets and there were only five or six "great powers". They were the ones with battleships. Now the battleships have gone and so has the whole order that they symbolized. One of the really striking developments on the world scene in the past 25 years is the advent of vastly greater numbers of independent states. It is very much more difficult, if not impossible, to classify them as great, middle or small powers.

The conception of degrees of "power" in a sense remains. It is still true that nations have varying capacities to influence the course of events outside their own borders. It is also a fact that nations differ in their freedom and capacity to act within their own borders. None of us, of course, is completely independent. The actions of every nation impinge increasingly on the others and not even the greatest powers can entirely disregard the interplay of national decisions. But some of us have more ability than others to play an active rather than a passive role in the world.

This capacity of a state to pursue policies of its own choosing and to influence other states rests fundamentally on three factors: (a) economic capacity; (b) military strength; (c) diplomatic and political influence.

These functions are obviously interrelated and no nation can be considered a power of any consequence unless it has a measure of capacity in all three. Nevertheless, it is possible for a nation, by deliberate choice, to place great emphasis on one sphere of activity and much less on the others. It is also possible for a country to be compelled by circumstances to rely heavily on one source of national strength.

There are cases of nations which have considerable economic capacity but have chosen not to acquire or to employ military strength. Postwar Japan is an economic power of major proportions which has decided