and 1956. He was rewarded with the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly and the Nobel Peace Prize. But he could not have won these laurels without both his External Affairs team, of whom Holmes was one, and his Prime Minister, who stood behind hims and kept the Cabinet behind him, without second-guessing and without jealousy. "Pearson's tactic was simple but brilliantly played," says Holmes, writing of the Suez crisis and the tricky ground on which the Canadian government found itself when in total disagreement with Britain, France and Israel. "He had the mental as well as the physical power of an athlete. His role was that of quarterback, inventing plays and giving signals, shifting his ground to take advantage of openings and exploiting adversity *pour mieux sauter.* His vast experience and his nimble grasp of essentials gave him the necessary confidence, and his own assurance under pressure inspired the confidence of others — although even his own advisers were sometimes bewildered by the mobility of his tactics."

Peace needs friends

Canada's successes in the diplomacy of the Middle East perhaps owed something to the absence of direct interests there, as well as to the fact that the United States was not directly committed either. Our interest was in peace, as the interest of a helpful fixer should be. As Holmes puts it in a line that could be written for tomorrow's newspaper editorial: "It was hoped that forces would remain in balance long enough for the Israelis and Arabs to explore their way to a more disciplined hostility and then peaceful co-existence." For all the successes of Pearsonian diplomacy, that hope has not yet been fulfilled, but that does not tarnish the Canadian achievements of those years. To look at it in terms of 1956, there was a risk of a wider war created by the over-reaction (to put it mildly) of Britain and France to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The UN defused that risk, through the inventive diplomacy of Lester Pearson and Dag Hammarskjold.

To look at the same argument through the prism of 1982, another middle eastern war occurred which went on far too long, took far too many lives, introduced incalculable new elements of instability, largely because there was no credible intermediary to seek an urgent truce and a longer-term settlement. The Americans by this time were embroiled as major players on the scene, and the Philip Habib mission was not accepted as an impartial search for compromise. The UN was not the forum for mediation that it had been in 1956. There was no country prepared or able to make the kind of effort that Canada used to make on these occasions. Not that Canada — stern daughter of the voice of God, as Dean Acheson called us when irritated by do-goodism — is required by some law of history to leap into every breach; but who else will do it? Touring the flattened towns of southern Lebanon, watching the terrible bombardment of Beirut, a correspondent's inclination was to ask, "Why doesn't somebody do something?" The inclination of a Canadian, especially one who had been reading John Holmes, was to ask, "Why aren't we doing something?"

One bad experience

Peacekeeping and helpful fixing did not always win applause abroad and at home. Nor is just "doing something" for the sake of doing it necessarily effective. In the case of Indochina, a peace-keeping effort that began two years before Suez and UNEF, Canada was trapped into a long-running commitment that served us poorly and the world hardly at all. We were there for nearly twenty years, from the time of the French final disasters through the early years of American involvement, into Johnson's war and again after Nixon's final pullout. Our accomplishment was small, probably even negative overall, because we were typecast from the beginning. Chou En-lai proposed that the truce commissions for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos should be composed of India, Canada and Poland — a neutral nation then congenial to China, a pro-American western country and an important member of the Soviet bloc. Canada heard about it first from the *New York Times*. We were pressured into an unwelcome role although "there was every practical reason against accepting this invitation." Inevitably we became the advocate of the US position in the interminable squabbles of the commissions. As the US became the principal protagonist against the communist nationalist armies that ultimately won the war, our position became humiliating and finally indefensible. If this experience had warned Canadian policy-makers to be more careful in the commitments they undertook, it would have been salutary. If it convinced them that they should never again undertake peace-keeping missions in distant lands, they drew an illogical conclusion from a special case.

Around the end of the recent unlamented decade a sardonic commentator remarked that the history of the 1970s showed that there were only two superpowers in the world — Israel and North Vietnam. Vietnam has subsided into its own problems, and the West pays little attention to it now that French and Americans and other western people are no longer dying there. Nothing is as boring as a fallen domino. Israel continues to bestride its narrow world like a colossus, dominating the consciousness of Washington, challenging the world to find a way to accommodate the conflicting aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East. There was a time when a small country — not as small as Israel or North Vietnam — played a large role for peace in the world through its energy, imagination, goodwill and willingness to see that there are at least two sides, and usually more, to the kind of issue that blooms into a great world crisis. But the leaders of this favored country or its people — who can say which was chicken and which was egg — decided they would be better engaged in solving their own problems, maximizing their own trade, looking after their own national interests. Perhaps they forgot that the greatest of all national interests in this age is the preservation of international peace.

These are thoughts provoked by Holmes's book, not those of Holmes himself. Many of them are implicit in the book, though the author rarely indulges himself in carrying forward the logic of his period (1943-1957) to check it against developments in the twenty-five years since. But the reader who troubles to look up some of the notes at the back of the book soon discovers that John Holmes has almost as many disguises as his uncle Sherlock, appearing beside various antiseptic numbers as author of the most penetrating comments anonymously quoted in the text. He does use some peculiar words, such as "enfuriate" (several times), "defendable" and a "ringing of hands." Still, a lucid and jargon-free writing style allows him to thread his way