

INTRODUCTION

“Most of the major events of recent years,” Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green wrote in the foreword to his department’s annual report for 1960, “have perforce had to be viewed against the background of East-West relations, and it has become customary to assess the international climate in any given period in terms of the relative degree of harmony existing between the Communist and non-Communist worlds.”¹ By this standard, Green noted, 1960 was a year of high hopes raised only to be disappointed in a dramatic fashion. The Paris summit meeting, agreed to by US President Dwight Eisenhower and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in December 1959, was scheduled to take place in May. Though Canada was not represented at the meeting, Canadian politicians and diplomats took a keen interest in the preparations made by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Early in the year, prospects for the success of the new Ten Nation Disarmament Committee also seemed highly favourable. Canada was a member of this body, established in September 1959. In March 1960, the Committee met in Geneva for an unexpectedly arduous and frustrating first session. Then it adjourned while the summit meeting took place. Canadians watched with dismay as the summit collapsed amid revelations of espionage by American planes over the Soviet Union. The Canadian ambassador in Moscow, David Johnson, was present at Khrushchev’s speech announcing the capture of American pilot Francis Gary Powers. “[W]e expected a sensation,” Johnson wryly reported, “and unfortunately were not disappointed. [I]t was a great occasion for Khrushchev but not for the West” (Document 180).

The Ten Nation Committee resumed its work in June, only to collapse in its turn when the representatives of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Roumania walked out. Throughout the summer, Canadian diplomats, led by a determined Green, pressed for an early meeting of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, but to no avail. At the same time, the year’s early promise of greater international harmony was further shattered by developments in the Congo, Laos and Cuba. Each of these Cold War conflicts had important repercussions for the Canadian government.

The Congo crisis began early in July with a revolt against Belgian rule in the province of Katanga. Disagreements in the United Nations Security Council between the Western powers and the Soviet Union soon made it clear that Cold War struggles would do much to shape the course of events. Canada gave its full support to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld’s attempts “to remove the Congo situation and indeed all political problems in Africa from the context of the cold war” (Document 10). The government approved a contribution of \$1 million in aid; Canadian technical personnel joined the United Nations force in the Congo; and Canada also shared in the cost of airlifting troops and supplies. The presence of Canadian troops in the Congo was decried by the Soviet Union, and Canadian personnel were subject

¹ *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1960* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1961), p. v.