



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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"THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE POWERS
IN THE UNITED NATIONS"

An address by Mr. R. G. Riddell,
Department of External Affairs, to
the Mount Holyoke College Institute
on the United Nations, June 22, 1948.

From your programme of studies and from your list of speakers, I take it you intend to consider international affairs in a spirit of sober realism. This I think is particularly important in regard to problems of world organization. The undertaking which is embodied in the United Nations is so vast and complicated, and the stakes are so high, that public support must be generated by something more tightly coiled and highly geared than aspirations towards brotherly love. Not that I wish to discount the importance of idealism in the forward march of political organization. I know very well that none of the great liberating movements of history could have taken place had there not been men who saw visions of a better world, and persevered in the faith that their dreams would materialize. But at the moment I think we should be concerned to make our programme as demonstrably practicable as possible. The human brotherhood is in a cantankerous frame of mind, and if its unruly members are to be persuaded not to shake the house down, it will be only because it is clear that it can be kept standing and there is some advantage in doing so.

I hope that we may be equally realistic about the place of the middle powers in the structure of world organization. The effort to define middle powers and to claim for them special attributes and privileges is of fairly recent origin. Unless, however, the conception of the middle power has substance I do not think we should take it seriously. Would it do any harm to the welfare of the international community if we gave up the effort to find a place for the Middle Powers? Have they anything to offer, if their claims to special consideration are not ignored? I come from a country that is generally regarded as a middle power. I think that its claims - and the claims that are made for it - for informal recognition as a middle power should be judged in the most practical and unsentimental terms.

No one has offered an adequate definition of a middle power, but there are certain well marked attributes which, taken singly or in various combinations, produce an identifiable result. It is probably equally difficult to define a great power, but the term has nevertheless been applied to five of them in the Charter, and it is no great task to identify them - they are the five permanent members of the Security Council. The middle powers are those which, by reason of their size, their material resources, their willingness and ability to accept responsibility, their influence and their stability are close to being great powers. The great upheavals of the past decade have given one indication of some criteria that might be applied. The heavy responsibilities of waging war and the equally heavy responsibilities of