



# Cramped vision of Canada's role

"What kind of Canada do we want?" That was the spirited, energetic question about our role in the world that the Trudeau government put to us in 1970. The implication was that most, if not all, things were possible. Joe Clark's question, 15 years later, is grey with middle-age: "What kind of Canada can we afford?" It is a cramped vision, paralyzed by worry about the deficit and narrowly focused on Washington to the near-exclusion of the rest of the world.

*Competitiveness and Security: Directions for Canada's International Relations* is a foreign policy for accountants, not for a people who stormed onto the global scene in the 1939 war against totalitarianism and who for a half-century have been a leading voice for democracy, peaceful co-existence between East and West, and international development.

Gutted of its rhetoric, this thin 43-page document is little more than another special pleading for freer trade with the United States, for yet more foreign investment domination of our economy, and for a shrinking from our responsibilities to help shape Western defence, improve foreign aid and better East-West relations in a dark hour.

That is sad, because Canadians themselves aren't caught up with the notion of using our role in the world merely to advance our own narrow economic interests. The policy review acknowledges this. On page 3 the document notes that Canadians are concerned with these issues, in order: National unity, sovereignty and independence, justice and democracy, peace and security, economic prosperity, the integrity of our natural environment. Yet the report goes on to dwell almost exclusively on the economic aspect of our relations with other states, giving short shrift to popular concerns about issues like national sovereignty and peace.

Reading the foreign policy review, it is easy to forget that we do matter on the international scene, and not just because we're large traders. Since 1970 Canada has joined the league of the top seven Western industrial nations and shouldered the political burdens that membership entails; we've become one of the developing world's most consistent champions and aid donors; and we've spoken wisely and well about detente, human rights and the peaceful settlement of international

disputes. By any measure of political and economic accounting, we are a more influential country than we were 15 years ago. Yet this healthy perspective is utterly absent from the policy review. Instead, we are told that we are weak, except when teamed up with the U.S.

In 1970, the Trudeau foreign policy paper was criticized for all but ignoring Canada-U.S. relations in its bid to open us to a wider world. The Clark review makes up for that flaw, in spades. It is obsessed with our client relationship with the U.S. Indeed, it could have been scripted by the White House.

Freer trade with the U.S. is advocated to blunt the thrust of U.S. protectionism, as is more foreign investment in our economy. The Soviet Union is described, in stark and uncompromising terms, as a direct threat to our security, with no attempt made to acknowledge their own security concerns. The U.S. Star Wars research program is again described as "prudent," and its lucrative high-tech spin-offs are cited as potential vehicles for improving our own research and development. The United Nations is assessed in terms of how it "further Canada's current and prospective interests," instead of how it furthers the interests of a majority of its members. The date for living up to the commitment we made 10 years ago to boost foreign aid to 0.7 per cent of our gross national product is put off by another decade, to 1995.

The best that can be said for this dreary vision of Canada's shrinking global role is that it is not the last word on things.

There are more spirited and more progressive voices in the land. They contend that we can have a better trading relationship with the U.S. and a more competitive domestic economy without selling off our birthright. They believe that we do have a role in fostering detente, if we can find the courage to condemn foolishness and to advance commonsense. And they challenge the claim that we must wait another decade before boosting our aid, while Africa starves. Those voices are the voices of Canada that the world has been accustomed to hearing. They should speak up, fearlessly, as this government moves from the realm of policy papers, toward action.