



Statements and Speeches

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CANADIAN DIPLOMACY IN THE 1980s: LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

A Public Lecture by the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Allan Gotlieb, under the Joint Sponsorship of the Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, and the Canadian Institute for International Affairs, Toronto, February 15, 1979

People say many things about diplomacy, most of them negative. Of the three main traditional activities — reporting, negotiation and representation — all are said to have been overtaken by twentieth-century technology. Despatches from the field describing recent events, we are told, have been made redundant by the communications revolution. Why, people ask, do we need diplomats when we can just as easily, and much more cheaply, read press reports and watch television? Similarly, modern transportation systems are thought to have rendered the diplomat obsolete as international negotiator. After all, isn't it more efficient to fly teams of experts from Canada to speak for us in international negotiations? As for representation — the presence on the spot of our trusted and well-beloved ambassador — his role is reported to have been eroded by the speed with which his words and actions can be directed from the home office as well as by the ever-increasing contacts, both in person and by telephone, among world leaders and their senior spokesmen.

These assertions have some validity but they do not tell the whole story. A press item submitted by an anonymous and often non-Canadian correspondent may complement but cannot replace the thoughtful advice of an experienced foreign service officer who can size up a situation and bring a Canadian perspective to bear. Major negotiations do not take place in a vacuum; they must be prepared for and followed up by our representatives abroad who often have an important contribution to make to the negotiations themselves. And telegrams and telephone calls, while playing a vital role in knitting the world together, are no substitute for the continuity, knowledge and judgement which is expected of an ambassador.

All that being said, it is clear that the nature of diplomacy has changed, and that External Affairs, and other foreign service departments, must adjust with imagination to new and changing circumstances.

Tonight, I would like to talk about this and tell you how the foreign service is seeking to meet the high expectations of the Government for leadership and service.

Canadian diplomacy today is primarily concerned with the formulation and execution of government policy. I do not mean just "foreign" policy, at least in the sense in which that term is usually understood. The traditional distinction between foreign policy and domestic policy implies a hard and fast line which no longer exists, if it ever did. In fact, domestic and foreign policy are often the same, or closely welded parts of a single national policy, or integrated elements of a broad set of policies. It is
