

But questions of collective security are only one side of the set of national interests which inspired us to work on international, multilateral, systems and institutions despite the national strengths which could have impelled us in a different direction. Pearson, although inaccurately identified exclusively with the internationalist and altruist stream in our policy culture, also said that foreign policy was no more than "domestic policy with its hat on".

Our domestic needs for markets, labour, capital and technology were very directly served by the international organizations and agreements established in the postwar period. And if our missionary spirit enhanced Canada's ability to contribute to world order, then so much the better.

Trudeau's nationalism

If Lester Pearson is identified with the internationalist strain, then Prime Minister Trudeau is often identified with the national-interest school — with a period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when people began to question what Canada was up to in the world; a period when so many new actors had entered the world stage that the Pearsonian premise — that international systems could be effective in their work — was being called into question on all sides.

The national-interest stream of our policy culture moved from recessive to dominant. The foreign policy review of 1970 said, and was widely criticized for it despite the similarity of the Pearson definition I just quoted, that foreign policy was the "extension abroad of national policies". The review cited public disenchantment with the role of "helpful fixer", suggested we concern ourselves less with being thought good fellows and more with the interests of our nation, and stressed the direct link between behaviour abroad and such issues as sovereignty and national unity.

Now this shift in emphasis is to be explained, to some extent, by those fluctuations in our policy culture which I have already discussed. And to be sure, there is a whiff of nationalism in our response to many of the pressures of the outside world. But there is also, occasionally, a form of bizarre and persistent Canadian modesty which presents itself as self-deprecation.

Robertson Davies has spotted this trait in relation to Canadian literature and once wrote: "Our national attitude towards literature is ambiguous. We ask gloomy questions about it: where is our great poet? when will our writers reveal our national identity? But when a book which is unmistakably about Canadians appears, it is greeted with some embarrassment. Our demand for a national literature is like an outcry for portrait painters in a country where nobody wants to be a sitter."

Somewhat the same syndrome is at work in relation to foreign policy. We may be proud that Lester Pearson wins the Nobel Peace Prize, but are just as likely to be found grumbling that peacekeeping is a drain on our resources, that foreign aid is a waste of money, or that the North-South dialogue is a feeble act of faith.