

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1951, the Cold War entered its chilliest and most dangerous phase yet. The prospects of war were immediate and frightening. The Soviet Union's apparent willingness to support China's intervention in Korea convinced Canadian observers that Moscow was willing to risk a "third world war" to achieve its territorial and strategic objectives. The North Atlantic alliance, despite its efforts to rearm, remained dangerously weak. The Red Army, Canadian officials estimated, could "occupy Western Europe to the Pyrenees in three months." A Communist advance against the whole of Southeast Asia — sweeping through Indo-China, Burma, Malaya and Indonesia all the way to India and Pakistan — was considered "an early possibility." Persia (Iran) and the Middle East were also threatened. "In short," warned a December 1950 memorandum to Cabinet, "recent Communist successes disclose the stark possibility that, either in the course of a general war or as a result of piece-meal attrition, the whole of Asia and Europe, apart from the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal, might fall rapidly under Soviet domination."¹ Inevitably, these circumstances had a profound impact on Canadian foreign policy in 1951. They reinforced Ottawa's desire to moderate American behaviour in Asia, while simultaneously spurring Canada to greater efforts to deter war in Western Europe and the North Atlantic.

As the new year began, Ottawa's attention was firmly fixed on the crisis in Korea, where Washington's growing determination to have the United Nations declare China an aggressor threatened to transform a limited police action into a full-scale war. Lester B. Pearson, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, returned to New York in early January and redoubled his earlier efforts to broker a cease-fire between China and the United Nations (Documents 19 to 78). At the same time, the Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent, who was meeting in London with his Commonwealth colleagues, tried hard to ensure that India and its non-aligned friends would continue to support the West should a truce prove impossible to arrange (Documents 525 to 540). These documents, which reflect the urgency and concern that gripped Canadian policy-makers during the first few months of the year, provide a rare and fascinating glimpse of St. Laurent and Pearson pursuing similar diplomatic objectives from different sides of the Atlantic.

Their efforts, however, were ultimately in vain. The United Nations General Assembly approved an American-sponsored resolution in early February 1951 that branded China an aggressor. This action, which effectively excluded China from the international organization for two decades, would tax the ingenuity of successive generations of Canadian policy-makers as they searched for evermore subtle ways to break down China's isolation (Document 949). Although Canada supported the United States' resolution, it did so only reluctantly. "Emotionalism has become the basis of [American] policy,"² complained Pearson, who turned to Hume Wrong, his friend and Canada's long-serving Ambassador to Washington, for assurance about American foreign policy (Document 81). Unsatisfied with Wrong's

¹ Cited in Greg Donaghy (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 16 (Ottawa: 1996), p. 1160.

² Cited in John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson, Volume II: 1942-1972* (Toronto: 1992), p. 56.