

Your Excellencies, members of the Institute and distinguished guests -- and I'm not sure when I use the expression "distinguished guests" whether that's a more appropriate definition than "members of the Institute" when I see such distinguished authorities in the field of foreign relations as Mr. Ignatieff, Mr. Holmes and others here at this head table tonight, and others throughout the audience who have had very wide experience and who in addition, I may say, have served Canada extremely well over the years, and whom I'm honoured to have at this table tonight, not only because of their achievements, but also, Your Excellency, because it also illustrates the importance and, I think, the very valuable role which the Institute can play.

The mere fact that it can attract so many people who have not just a casual interest in international affairs but who have had vast experience, such as that of the Ambassador, is really, I am sure, of immense value to you all in the useful work that you're doing -- and I can assure you that it is work for which we, in the Department, have a very high regard. So much so, I suppose, that when it came to two invitations arriving at the same time, one for the Empire Club and one for the Institute and a choice was necessary, I looked at the two and said: This is my first diplomatic choice, and I can't win all the way around; I'll probably do better coming to the Institute than going to the Empire. Those of you who are members of both organizations I hope will understand why I was, in the parlance of the diplomatic state, "tilting" slightly in this direction, probably because I felt that it would be a sympathetic audience, but also, and I may say this in all sincerity, because, of course, for someone like myself it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to turn down an invitation from such a distinguished and outstanding Canadian as His Excellency, Roland Michener.

My problem this evening, apart altogether from being somewhat cowed by the amount of expertise that's present in the room and the number of years of experience when it's related to my few months of experience directly as Foreign Minister, or Secretary of State for External Affairs, is that it is always a problem on occasions such as this to select from among the innumerable number of topics on which I might talk to you this evening those few that perhaps are most relevant and most immediate.

I could, for instance, take all of the time that we have together just simply talking about my recent visit to the Soviet Union and the general reaction that I have and the assessment that I have been able to make, as tentative as it is, of the prospects for détente in the next few months and years as a new administration takes over in the United States. This is going to be a most fascinating experience for all of us, in the international field, to see what now will emerge as a new administration takes over and as a new Secretary of State in the United States, named just this day -- Mr. Vance -- makes his initial impression on the international community.