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THE ROLE OF MIDDLE POWERS IN A CHANGING WORLD

An Address by the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at Carleton University, Ottawa, February 20, 1969.

There is a faintly old-fashioned ring about classifying countries as great, middle or small powers. In the nineteenth century, and more or less up to the beginning of the Second World War, nations were ranked by the size of their naval fleets and there were only five or six "great powers". They were the ones with battleships. Now the battleships have gone and so has the whole order that they symbolized. One of the really striking developments on the world scene in the past 25 years is the advent of vastly greater numbers of independent states. It is very much more difficult, if not impossible, to classify them as great, middle or small powers.

The conception of degrees of "power" in a sense remains. It is still true that nations have varying capacities to influence the course of events outside their own borders. It is also a fact that nations differ in their freedom and capacity to act within their own borders. None of us, of course, is completely independent. The actions of every nation impinge increasingly on the others and not even the greatest powers can entirely disregard the interplay of national decisions. But some of us have more ability than others to play an active rather than a passive role in the world.

This capacity of a state to pursue policies of its own choosing and to influence other states rests fundamentally on three factors: (a) economic capacity; (b) military strength; (c) diplomatic and political influence.

These functions are obviously interrelated and no nation can be considered a power of any consequence unless it has a measure of capacity in all three. Nevertheless, it is possible for a nation, by deliberate choice, to place great emphasis on one sphere of activity and much less on the others. It is also possible for a country to be compelled by circumstances to rely heavily on one source of national strength.

There are cases of nations which have considerable economic capacity but have chosen not to acquire or to employ military strength. Postwar Japan is an economic power of major proportions which has decided

to maintain only modest military forces and to rely on the United States for its security requirements, Britain, on the other hand, is a nation whose economic and military strength has undergone a relative decline. But British political influence is still very significant in large parts of the world where British military force is no longer dominant. We have other states militarily very strong in relation to their economic capacity and their political influence. Israel is an interesting example. The circumstances of that country's recent history have compelled it to devote an extremely high proportion of its resources to military purposes in order to survive.

In Israel we also have an example of another dimension to the whole question of the "power" of modern states- the geographical dimension. A nation may play an important part in some region of the world because of its capacity in one or more of the three factors I mentioned a moment ago, but its effective influence may not extend much beyond the region. Israel's military capacity relative to its neighbours is obviously very high and for this, as well as for other reasons, Israel is a key country in the Middle East. On the other hand, in terms of its size and population Israel must be considered as a small country, measured on the world scale.

There is one more dimension we must keep in mind if we would place the nations of the world in some order of rank. It is the dimension of time. A country may be apparently strong and vigorous in one decade but mired in political dissension or plagued by economic crises in the next. The international scene is constantly shifting and the relative strengths of nations are rising or falling. We can never take for granted that the present order will remain unchanged for any great length of time.

Looking at the world today in the light of the variables I have referred to, it appears that there are really only two great powers - the United States and the U.S.S.R. They are the only countries which are at the same time immensely strong in economic, military and political terms and have the capacity to exert their strength not just regionally but all over the world. They have, of course, the supreme ability to exchange intercontinental nuclear annihilation. No other nation is anywhere within reach of that dreadful capacity. It is probably more accurate to refer to the United States and the Soviet Union as "super-powers".

I doubt that there is much point in attempting to classify those nations which are not super-powers. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of countries have the capacity to exert some influence on the international scene, either in their own geographical area or in the world in general, or in one functional field or another, and therefore they fall into an indeterminate classification. We are nearly all middle powers. Apart from the two giants at the one end and, at the other, a certain number of very small states which are not capable of independent action to any significant degree.

If, then, the world is full of middle powers and their national capacities are of great variety, it is difficult to define a role in international affairs for middle powers as such. It is true of middle powers, as it is of all nations, that their role is largely predetermined by the

resources they possess and their historical and geographical circumstances, The effectiveness with which they play that role is another matter. It is dependent upon an accurate and realistic assessment of their capabilities and a sensible choice of policies,

The capacity of the super-powers to affect the destiny of other nations is so enormous that middle powers must clearly be vitally concerned about the policies of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Middle powers have a right and a duty to seek to influence the actions of the super-powers. This influence is likely to be more effective if middle powers act collectively. Indeed, it might be taken as a general rule for middle and small powers that they can be most effective in almost every field of international activity if they act together.

The scale and form of collective action by middle powers depends on the purpose. It may be a functional purpose, as in an economic organization, or a geographical one, as in a regional organization, or it may be a universal objective pursued through the United Nations. The principle is the same. Collective action is likely to be more effective.

Sometimes a middle power may be able to play a special role in a situation where the super-powers, locked in contest for world-wide influence, dare not make a move. Such cases are rare, however, and their importance should not be exaggerated. Canada's initiative over the Suez affair in 1956 is sometimes cited as an example of this role for a middle power, but let us remind ourselves that there were very special circumstances at that time.

I have arrived by this somewhat circuitous route at the acknowledgment that Canada is probably a "middle power" however we define that term. It is plain that we have become a nation with significant economic weight. We have a population of 21 million and a gross national product of more than \$60 billion, and our economy is growing at a steady rate. We offer a market of considerable proportions for the products of other countries. In a number of products we are one of the leading producers and exporters. We have resources that are attractive to capital from outside our own country. We have a sufficiently high standard of living that we can well afford to contribute substantial resources to international activities without in any way weakening our own economy. In short, we are an economic power.

We also have an appreciable military capacity. It is not great in terms of the super-powers, nor is the approximately 100,000 men in our armed forces a very significant number by comparison with many countries whose population is smaller than ours. But our forces are well-trained professionals; they are volunteers, not conscripts, equipped with modern weapons and capable of very effective employment in selective situations.

Canada also has a considerable capacity for political and diplomatic influence. We are a respected country in most parts of the world and in the United Nations and other international organizations. This is in part because we have no history of domination over other lands and no historic grievances to trouble our relations with other peoples. We maintain a corps of skilled professional diplomats, competitively selected

from the best products of our universities. We have produced some outstanding political figures whose personal abilities have enhanced the influence of our country abroad, notably the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson. Our people generally have shown a sympathetic understanding of the problems of other countries.

But what about the regional dimension? The peculiar situation of Canada is that we are a nation with adequate capacity to play a very considerable role in a regional setting but, for all practical purposes, our immediate region consists only of ourselves and the United States, which is one of the super-powers. It has been shrewdly observed that we are a regional power without a region. Therefore, we must look further afield.

A realistic assessment of the national capacity of Canada in the various fields I have enumerated, combined with our situation next to the United States, leads inevitably to the conclusion that, if we are to advance our national interests and exercise real influence on the course of world affairs, we should do so in conjunction with other nations. Every Government in recent Canadian history has come to this conclusion. Whatever functional area one examines, it is impossible to envisage Canada making its weight felt with maximum effectiveness unless we get the co-operation of a number of like-minded nations.

In the economic field, Canada has for a long time pursued the so-called "multilateral approach" to world trading problems. We have recognized that, in the face of our overwhelming economic involvement with the United States, it is in our interests, and those of the international community as a whole, to encourage the development of a liberalized multilateral world-trading system, rather than an autarkic or bloc trading system. So, we have been strong supporters of GATT and the IMF. When trading blocs like the European Economic Community have developed, we have tried to ensure, by acting in concert with other countries that face similar problems, that the new economic groupings follow the principles of GATT and are not inward-looking and exclusive.

In the military field, a feature of the Canadian answer to the problem of effectively ensuring our own security for the past 20 years has been to work with other middle powers in NATO. Since Europe is the place where a conflict, if not contained, could lead to a nuclear holocaust which would inevitably engulf Canada, we have supported and contributed military forces to the security arrangements in which the countries of Western Europe have joined with the United States under NATO.

NATO, of course, is not just a military organization. Its members have been increasingly preoccupied with such problems as accommodation between East and West and with disarmament. For Canada, the opportunities our NATO membership has presented for close consultation with other middle powers have been of particular value in balancing up our rather unequal North American partnership with the United States. NATO is a unique form of close association with a group of other nations whose collaboration is important to the United States.

We are now reviewing our membership in and commitments to NATO in the light of the situation that has evolved since the alliance was formed in 1949. I have yet to hear any convincing argument that, if Canada wants to play a part in ensuring its own security, in the resolution of the security problems of Europe that directly affect our own fate, and in mitigating the confrontation between the super-powers, we could do so as effectively as within some such collective effort as NATO. We could opt out, of course. That is an alternative. We could decide not to participate with our NATO partners in the search for collective security and a settlement in Europe. But the problems of a divided Europe will not disappear if we opt out. In or out of NATO, Canada cannot isolate itself from the consequences of failure to establish a stable order in Europe.

There are problems of peace-keeping outside Europe and here, too, Canada has attempted to make sure that our contribution is most effective by combining it with the contributions of other nations. Canada has been among the foremost supporters of peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations. We have participated in every peacekeeping operation undertaken by the UN since 1948. Unfortunately, because of the stubborn opposition of some important members of the United Nations, the prospects for permanent peacekeeping arrangements or further United Nations ad hoc peacekeeping forces are not good. I see no reason, however, not to go on patiently trying to find a way round the road-blocks that have been thrown up in the United Nations. There are a good many other middle powers in the United Nations that share our views, and that are willing to join with us in maintaining pressure for the development of the peacekeeping conception.

There are numerous other instances of Canada fitting itself into groupings of nations organized to achieve some common purpose. One of the most interesting, and perhaps the most peculiar, of such institutions is the Commonwealth. It is, as you know, a very loose association of independent nations, with a modest secretariat. All are graduates of the British Empire school of nationhood.

The Commonwealth has achieved notable success over the past 20 years in easing the transition from colonial dependence to national independence for many members of the world community. It has still a significant role to play in bridging the gulf between the rich and the poor nations and in easing the racial tensions which, unfortunately, very often coincide with disparities of wealth and poverty. For Canada, the Commonwealth has continuing value as an instrument through which we may exert some influence upon the course of events in a large and important part of the world.

The supreme example of Canada joining with other nations to seek international objectives is our membership in the United Nations. In the UN and its associated international agencies we have the opportunity to play a part in every aspect of the struggle to build a stable and just world order - peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights, liberalization of international trade, aid to developing countries, codification of international law. In most cases we find it advantageous to work closely in the UN with other middle powers, but not exclusively. Sometimes the cause of world order is advanced most effectively by supporting the initiative of a super-power. Sometimes a very small state puts forward a valuable and important proposal, as Malta did on the exploitation of the resources of the

ocean-floor. Canada has long supported the principle of universality of membership of the UN, in the belief that every nation has something to contribute.

I have touched briefly upon some of the things that Canada has been doing in the world and the reasons for some of the policies we have pursued in the past. I should now like to pose some questions about these policies and to suggest some directions which we might take in adapting them to changes in the world scene and in our own country.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the most dramatic changes that has occurred in the world scene in the past 25 years is the proliferation of middle powers. We live in a time of the dissolution of empires. The empires of the Western European powers are largely gone and only a few small remnants remain. The ideological empires seem also to be loosening. They are certainly not nearly so monolithic as they were 20 years ago. Moscow and Peking now vie for ideological leadership of the Communist world. Yugoslavia is Communist but non-aligned and Romania and Czechoslovakia are restless under the Soviet yoke.

The result of a situation in which there are vastly greater numbers of independent states, or states with a greater degree of independence, is that the pattern of political relations throughout the world is constantly shifting, unstable and unpredictable. It is immensely encouraging that so many peoples have acquired far more personal and national freedom than they ever had before, but this very freedom may lead initially to dangerous tensions or violent outbreaks. In various corners of the world, peoples who have been under the dominance of an imperial power are struggling to establish a new equilibrium. Such is the case in Vietnam, Nigeria and Czechoslovakia.

Another aspect of the world situation which has come increasingly to the fore in the past 25 years is the crisis of underdevelopment. The problem has been there for a long time. In its present form it has existed at least since the industrialized nations of the West began their take-off into relative affluence in the nineteenth century. But the disparity has become vastly more acute in our time and both we and the inhabitants of the underdeveloped countries are far more aware of the problem through the efficiency of world-wide communications. The poverty-burdened majority of the people of the earth are increasingly conscious that we of the rich nations are still outstripping them in economic progress as every year goes by.

As I see it, two of the most important foreign policy questions facing Canada today are what we do about the issues of peace and war in parts of the world with which we formerly hardly concerned ourselves, and what we do about the enormous disparity between rich and poor all over the world. We have long been closely concerned about events in Europe, and rightly so. We are an offshoot of European civilization; that is where the bulk of our population traces its origins, where we have very large economic interests and where the most immediate threat to our security lies. We cannot turn our backs on Europe but we are compelled to add new dimensions to our thinking about other parts of the world.

Canada has been drawn, partly by the accident of membership in the Commonwealth, into assisting in the struggle for economic viability of, first, India, Pakistan and Ceylon and, later, other Commonwealth nations in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. We have found ourselves grappling at the United Nations with the complexities of such issues as the Korean War, the Congo rebellion, Cyprus and the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. We were called to play a part in the International Control Commissions set up so hopefully in 1954 to supervise the settlement in Vietnam after France's withdrawal. We now have to decide whether we are to continue all or some of these involvements, to broaden out our interests abroad, or to concentrate on certain international functions and certain areas of the world.

Canada's contribution to international development assistance now amounts to more than \$300 million annually and we are pledged to increase it to 1 per cent of national income. Our programme is a respectable one in size and effectiveness. But we have a lot of urgent questions to answer about our aid. Should we concentrate more of it in certain countries or in certain sectors of development? What should be the relative emphasis on grants and loans of various kinds and on trade concessions? As a middle power, are there special things Canada can do better than other countries? To what extent should we pool our efforts with those of other contributors? As development assistance becomes an increasingly important part of our international activities, questions like these become much more critical.

One new dimension that has been added to Canadian activities in the world in recent years is that of the active projection abroad of the bilingual and bicultural aspects of our nationhood. French-speaking Canadians now urgently seek to play a role in national and international affairs more in keeping with their weight in the Canadian population. The signing of the France-Canada Cultural Agreement in 1965 marked a major step in a conscious effort to represent the "French fact" in Canada more adequately in our external relations. As I have mentioned, for historical reasons we found ourselves fairly closely associated with the newly-independent members of the Commonwealth in Africa and Asia. We were slower to develop comparable ties with the newly-independent francophone countries, but we are now rapidly expanding these relations. A proper reflection in foreign policy of our bicultural character is vitally important in strengthening the unity of our Canadian nation. It is also an opportunity for Canada to play a greater role in the world.

An area in which our foreign policy has been unbalanced in the past is in the American hemisphere. Beyond the United States, we have been somewhat tardy in developing an active collaboration with the countries of the Caribbean, and even slower to seek out closer relations with the nations of Latin America. We should frankly admit that there has been a neglect of that part of the world in the thinking of most Canadians and seek to rectify that omission.

So, too, in our relations with the nations that border the Pacific Ocean. The imbalance in that respect, however, is not exactly a case of neglect. On the contrary, the western part of Canada, and especially British Columbia, has long had active trading and other relations with Eastern Asia and the South

Pacific. In recent years, there has been a particularly great increase in our commercial exchanges with Japan. But this has been largely the reflection of a regional interest on the part of those areas of Canada which naturally look outward to the Pacific rather than to the Atlantic. What is now required is that we pay continuous attention to the Pacific, as well as to the Atlantic, as an area of national interest to all Canadians.

One important step that Canada could take in the Pacific is to exchange diplomatic representatives with the authorities in Peking. We and the rest of the world need to open all possible channels of communication with the government which is in effective control of China. That is why we have recently made the initial contact with representatives of the People's Republic of China to explore the matter of recognition and exchange of embassies.

Going beyond all of Canada's regional or functional interests is our concern to see the United Nations become a more effective instrument for international co-operation and for the achievement of the Charter goals of peace and security, economic and social justice and individual human rights. The UN is an imperfect organization because it reflects an imperfect world. But it is man's most ambitious effort to reconcile differences in the human condition and harmonize the actions of nations. We must look again at our national goals in the United Nations context and identify the changing circumstances of international life as they affect the functioning of the UN. Then we must decide what changes in Canadian policies or techniques may be required as we make common cause with other countries in the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies.

The task for Canadians, as we review our foreign policies, is, first, to determine our own weaknesses. As a middle power, what economic, military and political resources do we have at our disposal and how can we best employ them in the interests of our own people and of the world community? We must also examine realistically the world around us and the changes that are taking place in it. In the light of those changes, should we concentrate more on one function and less on others, or more on one region and less on another?

I expect that the answers to these questions will result in some shift of emphasis in our international activities and some alteration in the methods by which we carry out those activities.

Because foreign policy is never static, we have already begun to bring about some changes. But I doubt very much that we shall abandon completely any functional or regional activity, and I see no need to do so. We don't need to pull out of Europe in order to develop better relations with Latin America or the Pacific. Participating in collective security arrangements is not incompatible with assistance to developing countries or an active part in disarmament negotiations. We may be only a middle power, but we are a nation with the capacity to undertake a good many varied roles in the world if it is in our national interest to do so. The aim of Canadian foreign policy must be to strike the right balance of effort among those roles that are appropriate to our circumstances as a middle power and to the imperatives of the international situation.