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No. 51/49 NORTH AMERICA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD OF TODAY

An address by the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Louis S. St. Laurent, to the Economic Club of New York, on November 19, 1951.

...I chose the subject, "North America's Place in the World of Today", full well knowing that many of your members would be more competent to treat it than I might be; but I did so because, being a Canadian, I necessarily look at it from a somewhat different point of view, and I thought that a view of North America's place in the world of today from the Canadian angle might help to make the position clearer from your point of view here in the United States.

It is, of course, only the blind ones among us in North America today who do not realize we are directly concerned about what is happening in the rest of the world. It is always true, in some degree, that North America is concerned with what is happening in the rest of the world, just as it has always been true-- since Columbus' time-- that North Americans have been affected by the really important changes in the world outside this hemisphere. But it seems to me that the degree of concern has changed.

Before 1914, most North Americans, whether they lived in the United States or whether they lived in Canada, did not feel the need of paying much attention to what was happening across the Atlantic or on the other side of the Pacific. And we had little sense of responsibility for international affairs outside this hemisphere. For that, there were historical as well as geographical reasons.

In the 18th century, when the thirteen English colonies on the Atlantic seaboard cut their political ties with England and established the United States, this nation practically turned its back on Europe and faced westward across an almost empty continent, and the vast energies of the early settlers in this country, and of the thousands and thousands who later joined them, were concentrated on the development of a free and expanding society in North America. All you asked from Europe was to be left alone -- to be left in peace -- to live your lives in your own way -- in what it has become the fashion to call "the American way."

In Canada, our development was somewhat different. At the time of your War of Independence, the Canadian population was still almost exclusively French-speaking. The St. Lawrence Valley had been ceded to the British Crown only a dozen years before, and the leaders of your revolution expected to find ready support among the French-speaking

Canadians for their revolt against the English. There were several reasons why they did not get that support. One was that the traditional enemy of the average French-speaking Canadian of the 18th century was not the remote English nation across the Atlantic, but the English-speaking people of Boston and New England, the English-speaking people of Albany and the Hudson valley, with whom they had been trading scalps for a century and a half.

In any event, Canada did not join in your revolution, and we Canadians retained our connection with the British Crown, and hundreds of refugees from your War of Independence moved northwards to lay the foundations of English-speaking Canada. In Canada, these immigrants were called Loyalists, and though they were loyal, though they were determined to maintain the political connection of their new home with old England, most of them were also determined to manage their own affairs.

The political freedom you achieved by the sudden stroke of revolution, we achieved more slowly, more gradually, but we did achieve it by evolution. Without breaking our tie with the British Crown, we transformed a disunited group of small colonies into a single nation, stretching, like yours, from one sea to another, and I venture to say just as free as the United States. But our continuing political tie with the British Crown did keep us somewhat closer in spirit to Europe than you were. When the first world war broke out in 1914, our status in international law made us an automatic belligerent, but that was all our status did. The decision to participate actively in the prosecution of the war was made in Ottawa in our own Parliament by the freely-elected representatives of our own people. For many, that decision was a matter of course because of our sentimental ties with the mother country, but many others did come to the conclusion somewhat earlier than the people of the United States that if the world was to be a decent place to live in, this military clique in Germany had to be shown that they could not win even at their own chosen game of war.

I suppose it will always remain a subject of debate whether, if the United States had not gone to war in 1917, and if the Germans had won the war -- two ifs and we in Canada are still apt to regard them as two separate ifs -- the independence and integrity of the United States and Canada would have been in immediate jeopardy. But there can be no argument that defeat of the Allies in 1917 or 1918 would have resulted in a much more uncomfortable world for North Americans to live in than the one we had been used to before 1914.

After that war, as many will recall, the initial wave of enthusiasm for the League of Nations was quickly followed by a reaction of disillusionment and isolation. In your country many felt it had been a mistake to go into the war, that the war had settled nothing, and that, for the future, the right course for the American people was to turn their backs resolutely on the Europeans and leave them to stew in their own juice. Canada became a member of the League of Nations, and though we never repudiated our membership, our enthusiasm certainly waned, and there was with us too a strong reflection of the sentiment for isolation which prevailed on your side of the border.

When war came again in 1939, Canada's status had become different. We were not automatically at war; we had to make our decision for ourselves in law as well as in fact. We did decide to go to war, but many of us made the decision with a heavy heart and some misgivings. A large number of our people asked themselves uneasily whether it was the fate of Canada in each generation to sacrifice the finest of its youth in the interminable quarrels of Europeans. On the other hand, we all shared your horror of the regime Hitler had fastened on Germany, and his brutal aggressions against Germany's neighbours. We could not believe that so long as the Nazi system lasted, any country would be safe. The danger to our North American society became even clearer when Japan by that attack on Pearl Harbor dragged you in and proclaimed to the world its confident expectation that with Germany and Italy they were going to overcome us all. We knew they could not do it, but nevertheless we were thus twice in one generation forced into wars which neither of us had had any share in starting, and which we did not want, and in which we did have to commit all our resources. Some felt that with more foresight those wars might have been prevented, but certainly we had not wanted them we had not started them, and yet we had not been able to keep out.

Speaking for Canada, I can say that, by 1945, our people were overwhelmingly convinced that the only way that they could keep out of world wars was to help establish the kind of world in which there would not be any war. I can speak with some assurance for Canada on this point because we debated the issues in our Parliament, and reached virtual unanimity on them, before sending to San Francisco a delegation representing our main political parties to share in founding the organization of the United Nations. The main reason we were unanimous in 1945 was precisely because we had not been able to keep out of war in 1914 and 1939 and because you had not been able to keep out of war. Our conviction was greatly strengthened because of the almost revolutionary change which had come over opinion in the United States between 1940 and 1945.

The conference at San Francisco had been called by your President. The proposal for a worldwide organization to maintain peace and security in the world was sponsored by your government, and was already receiving the support of the best elements in both your historic political parties.

It was reassuring to us in Canada to see that your conclusions were the same as ours; that you had become convinced the United States could not again turn its back on the rest of the world, and that this country must actually take the lead in international affairs.

There are many people who feel that the calling of the conference at San Francisco and the establishment of the United Nations, with the United States as its leading member, represents a revolution in your foreign policy. I venture to suggest to you that this is a superficial view; that, in fact, it represents a revolutionary change only in method, and that there has been no real change in the fundamental objective of the foreign policy of the United States.

I said at the beginning of these remarks that the real aim of your Founding Fathers was to have this country left in peace by the rest of the world to develop a free and expanding society on this continent. I believe that is still the real aim of the American people, and I know it is the

real aim of the Canadian people. We do not want to dominate anybody. We do not want to throw our weight around anywhere. But we do not want to let events take such a course that we will find ourselves a third time, as we did in 1914 and in 1939, with no real choice but to take part in a world war.

The change, I believe is not in aim but in method. Perhaps your hopes in the United States were a little stronger than ours ever were in Canada, but we all shared the hope -- that if we simply minded our own business and did not trespass on the rights of others, we might remain at peace. We now see that, if we are to have peace, the people and the governments of this continent have no choice but to take positive and sustained action to help prevent another war.

It might be said that we have already failed in that task because of what has happened in Korea. To those in that unhappy land there certainly has been no peace. But I think that our action there is designed to prevent aggression from spreading into a general world conflict.

Peace is still our aim, but we see that to have peace we must go about it differently. To the vast majority of North Americans on both sides of the border, keeping the peace is the most important business we have or we can have. It is the greatest national interest of the United States as it is the greatest national interest of Canada.

No doubt it is still true that, if a world war came in 1951, other countries in the old world would suffer more immediate destruction and devastation than this continent -- though we could certainly not expect to go untouched. But on the other hand, we on this North American continent are today the most privileged people on earth. Having the most to lose by the devastation and dislocation of a world war, we have the strongest incentive to prevent one. By taking positive steps to prevent war, we inevitably take the kind of action which might be regarded as provocative by the only possible major aggressor. This is the kind of calculated risk which every businessman and every economist understands. In any case there is no real choice. We know what did happen when we were not ready to take such risks.

In the first year or two after San Francisco, we continued to hope, against hope, that the great powers in the United Nations which had been charged with the main responsibility for maintaining peace and security in the world would in fact co-operate to that end. But the prospect of that co-operation grew dimmer and dimmer, because one of the great powers seemed bent on different ends and many of us in Canada, like many others in the United States and in Western Europe, decided that the only hope for immediate security and the only one likely prospect of preventing another world war lay in combining and in expanding the resources -- military and economic and moral -- of those nations which genuinely wanted peace, and which had potential strength either of population or resources to contribute to an effective combination for peace.

It was this growing centre of common interest which was the genesis of the North Atlantic alliance. The military aim of that partnership is to build up a force adequate to deter an aggressor from starting any D-day in the hope that D-day, like tomorrow, will never come. The United States

is inevitably the dominant factor in that partnership. There could have been no North Atlantic alliance worth while without the leadership of this country and I believe there could have been no North Atlantic alliance if American leadership had not been based upon a consistent and clear-sighted foreign policy which has been pursued steadily by the United States ever since the close of the war.

American participation in European affairs has been beneficial to the people of the world. American aid has been indispensable to the orderly survival of European society. We in America, on both sides of the border find it hard to understand why some Europeans have not shown proper gratitude and appreciation of what you have done for Europe, and sometimes we wonder whether the effort has been worth what it has cost. But when we begin to talk about gratitude and appreciation for what you have done for Europe I wonder if we North Americans are being realistic. Of course we are glad that the effect of our external policies is helpful to other nations, but I think we might be honest enough to admit that the fundamental aim of our policies is to serve our own interests as North American nations. I believe the administration in Washington and our government at Ottawa -- where we follow parallel lines -- have conceived in those interests the long and right view.

The real justification for asking the taxpayers of the United States to provide loans and gifts, Marshall Aid and military support has been that all these things are necessary if your own people are to have any reasonable ground for hoping that they will not have to provide the infinitely greater cost of another world war. What we have done in Canada is inspired by the same justification. We are not trying to build up the economies and the military strength of the nations of Western Europe out of disinterested love for Englishmen, or Frenchmen or Dutchmen or Belgians or Italians, or any other of our allies. We are doing it for the safety and the future of Americans and Canadians who inhabit this North American continent. We want to help build up the strength of our friends and allies in Europe because all of us are in the same boat. We need each other.

Speaking as a Canadian, I can assure you that the great majority of my fellow-citizens have admired the single-minded resolution with which the Government of the United States, under the leadership of President Truman and General Marshall and Mr. Acheson, has pursued objectives in foreign policy which we believe are essential to the security of the North American way of life. We have admired, too, the non-partisan way in which the administration of your country has been supported in pursuing these general objectives by such distinguished Republicans as the late Senator Vandenberg, Governor Dewey and Mr. John Foster Dulles. We all know what the leadership of that most civilian-minded of soldiers, General Eisenhower, has meant in rallying the spirits as well as in leading the forces of the North Atlantic nations. While we might sometimes differ about tactics, the rest of the free nations cannot quarrel with the strategy of American leadership.

The importance of North America in the world today is not something which is transitory. It seems to me that it represents something of a permanent shift in the real

balance of power in the world, something which may be expected to last for many generations, provided the leadership of North American statesmen and the resolution of our North American population is equal to the power which is now ours. Although I have said North American, and although we like and expect to be consulted, we Canadians are realistic and we know that there has to be a proper relationship between power and responsibility; and that the United States alone has the necessary power to support the required leadership.

The American people have certainly not striven for their present position of power and responsibility in the world. I am sure most of you, and indeed most North Americans on both sides of the border, look back often with longing to the days before 1914 when it seemed safe to ignore international affairs outside this hemisphere. But we in North America have no such choice. The only choice before you and before us is a choice between wise, patient and intelligent leadership of the free world by the United States or a rapid shrinkage of the circumference of the free world, with all the disastrous consequences that it would bring even if we were able to maintain some kind of independent existence in our western hemisphere.

In the kind of world we are now living in, there is no quick and easy way to peace or to anything we would like to think of as a normal existence. We have first of all to create, and after that to maintain, perhaps for generations, military strength which will be too substantial to be challenged by any potential aggressor with any hope of final victory.

We cannot count on any early collapse of the totalitarian system erected behind the Iron Curtain. We are faced with the problem of living in the same world with that system. I am not sure that one of the greatest dangers we shall have to face will not be the danger of aggression, but the danger of listening to those who think they have a quick way and easy solution to this dangerous problem.

There will be many who will say that since communism is bent on extinguishing our way of life, we should hit first that the best thing to do is to get the inevitable over with. The appeal of that kind of doctrine is likely to grow as the military strength of the free world grows. In the next few years, it may be that nothing will be so important as to remember that what we are doing is to try to prevent a third world war, not to win one.

One of your distinguished American diplomats has said that "the United States will fight, if necessary, to preserve freedom and justice, but it will not make war merely because the road to peace is inevitably long and hard and tiresome." I have not the slightest doubt and I am sure you have no doubt that, if a test of strength is forced upon us by an aggressor, we in the free world could win again. But the cost will be far greater than the cost of any previous war. Even victory will bring with it destruction, dislocation and desolation so great as to constitute a threat to civilization itself. That is why we must never forget that our real aim is to be strong in order to prevent war. Of course, we need the help of our European partners. Of course, we need to do everything we can to win the sympathy

and preserve the stability of the countless millions in the East.

But, if the free world is to be saved, and, if we and our children and our children's children are to enjoy a free and expanding society in this western hemisphere I feel that we in North America must now and for many years ahead accept and discharge, with wisdom and with patience, the heavy responsibilities which are inseparable from the position of power which North America has in the world of our generation.

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