STATEMENT
DISCOURS

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.

SECRÉTAIRE D'ÉTAT AUX AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES.

SPEECH AS DELIVERED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, FLORA MACDONALD, TO THE EMPIRE CLUB, TORONTO, OCTOBER 4, 1979

Mr. President,

It is now exactly four months since the new government took office and I was sworn in as Secretary of State for External Affairs. And I'll tell you -- it's been quite some four months.

Anyone who hasn't been involved in a change of government, will find it hard to understand just what an intensive period we have been going through. There has been an enormous amount to do. First, we had to familiarize ourselves with the sheer mechanics of government. And since we have chosen to change the structure of decision-making at the centre, the whole process has been doubly difficult. For example, it has meant helping our senior civil servants adapt to new structures, and to work with the Ministers in a different way.

Second, we had to learn about the true state of affairs facing us. It wasn't until we were actually in office that we got access to the information we had asked for so often while in Opposition. The true state of affairs we found, particularly the government's financial affairs, was really quite different from what we had been led to expect. And believe me, it wasn't better.

In addition, of course, we have all of us been having a crash cram course on our individual portfolios. Speaking personally, this has been probably the most fascinating period of my life. I was truly lucky, in that I have had a long interest in international affairs, and, over the years, I have travelled to many different countries all around the world. But even so, the amount to learn has been tremendous.

As a Cabinet we have had to devote a great deal of time to the legislative programme we shall be introducing when the House opens next week. In parallel with this, we have been preparing our estimates, as part of that annual festival governments go through in the budgeting process. These exercises, of course, call for a drawing together of the information we have gathered, and the experience we have gained in our other activities -- and always keeping in mind the commitments we made while in Opposition.

So life in the past four months has been a relentless series of meetings, consultations, briefings and reading. And for me it has also meant attendance at five major international conferences on four continents -- the latest being the United Nations General Assembly in New York over the past ten days.

Now, I mention these things not to gain any sympathy for the hectic pace that all this has involved, nor am I trying to show what great value for money you as taxpayers are getting from the salary you pay me. I mention it rather to explain that until I started to think about what I should say to you, I really hadn't had many opportunities to reflect on the state of the world as it is today, of the kind of forces at play, and the impact all these things have on Canada.

That's why I particularly welcome the chance to speak at the Empire Club today. It has allowed me to pause in the galloping race of events and to formulate more specifically in my own mind some of the questions that have been bothering many of us for some time. In doing this, I certainly shall not pretend to have all the answers -- but it seems a good place to start.

First, I ask myself what kind of a world is it that we are living in. What are the political realities? The last time the Government of Canada asked this question out loud was a good ten years ago during its full scale foreign policy review. Well, things have sure changed since then.

Ten years ago it was still possible to believe in a broad system of international security based on the spheres of influence of the super-powers. Some effects of this broad system parallelled those of the colonial era of the last century. By the late sixties, of course, the process of decolonization was nearly complete -- the European empires had been pretty well disbanded. But though the empires had gone, they left behind a certain way of thinking about international affairs. No matter what you may think of the morality of imperialism, it did at least give a stabilizing frame of reference to world affairs. By and large, during the colonial period, conflict around the world was controlled by the European homelands, countries whose own ecnomic self-interest weighed heavily against spontaneous outbreaks of conflict between neighbouring countries or colonies. The Pax Britannica was, after all, an almost unprecedented period of stability in the history of human affairs. And so one legacy of the colonial period was an intellectual approach to international affairs based on the stability that it brought. A decade ago, then, there was still a view of the world, shared by many, that the two super-powers would guarantee between them some sort of stability in the global system.

And certainly there was some evidence to support this view. In the fifties and sixties the United States saw fit to intervene with troops when trouble broke out in Guatemala and in the Dominican Republic without outraging international public opinion. The U.S.S.R. brutally quashed political change in the satellite states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Of course the system of stability was both incomplete and imperfect, but in those days it was still possible to view the world in that way.

Today the view is quite different. The world is not split into two great blocs who have a definitive influence. We have seen the development of a nuclear strategic stalemate, with neither super-power having overwhelming force. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore at the Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka described this as a new Roman arch, built not of bricks but of nuclear missiles, under which it is possible for other countries to find room

to manoeuvre. That manoeuvrability is not entirely an unmixed blessing. In just the first nine months of this year, for example, Viet-Nam has invaded Cambodia, China has had a border war with Viet-Nam, South Yemen has attacked North Yemen, and Tanzanian soldiers have invaded Uganda. All this in nine months -- and without the direct intervention of either of the super-powers. Political instability now pervades many regions. Civil uprisings and internal conflicts are apparent in many regions.

The re-emergence of China onto the world stage adds an almost incalculably important new factor into the equation. Not only is China renewing its political interests in South East Asia -- interests that date back thousands of years -- but its intent to frustrate Russian ambitions on one hand, and its expressed interest in Western technology on the other, is leading to involvement in other parts of the world as well. The impact of this enormously important development is still difficult to evaluate. Not for over a thousand years has the world seen China, with its vast and energetic population, devote itself to a single set of international objectives under an effective central leadership. The coupling of such resources to modern western technology is bound to bring about enormous changes to the international scene, and a major shift in the balance of power.

Another factor that has emerged in the past decade is the increasing self-reliance of many of the newly emerged countries of Africa and Asia. In many cases, internal instabilities or external pressures have led to the build-up of substantial armed forces in areas where such were previously relatively unknown. This wide-spread increase in the capability to make war also introduces an unsettling element into the scene.

There have, of course, always been a number of areas of active armed conflict around the world. I am told that since the Second World War there have been no fewer than one hundred and fifty such outbreaks. It would be naive and unrealistic to think that human nature could change so completely that the recourse to war will be a forgotten and disused device. What is particularly worrying at the moment, however, is the duration of some of the conflicts, such as the thirty-year struggle in South East Asia. For conflict has its own dynamic, its own inexorable logic. Once a generation is born and raised to maturity in an unremitting atmosphere of war, the stoppage becomes enormously difficult. Peace and war are not two marks on a switch to be turned on and off at will, and the longer a state of war exists, the longer the period it will take to achieve a thorough peace. South East Asia is the prime example.

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I mention this particularly in connection with the points of conflict between some of the smaller states. The situations in the Middle East and Southern Africa, for example, though both at the moment showing some hopeful signs of settlement, are of such a duration as to cause considerable anxiety about the social and political stability of the areas, even if agreement is reached.

The room for manoeuvre under the Roman arch of nuclear stalemate has also allowed the countries of the third world an opportunity to use their influence in world forums in an increasingly forceful way. The Group of Seventy-seven, the term adopted by the third world countries acting as a bloc in international meetings -- now numbering well over a hundred -- has become a determining influence in international meetings. And one has to remember that that bloc includes such diverse countries as Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. No longer can the countries of the developed world reach agreement on the direction of world affairs without recourse to the governments of the third world bloc which represent such a large portion of the world's population.

But in the past decade the disparities between the developing countries have grown enormously. The fastest rates of economic growth in the world are to be found in some of these countries. Oil, of course, has accounted for much of this. The almost unimaginable wealth of some of the oil producing countries places them in a vastly different position from that of some of the other developing countries. And the impact of rising oil prices -- great though it has been in the industrialized world -- has been well nigh crippling to many countries in the Group of Seventy-seven.

But oil does not account for all the economic progress in the developing world. Singapore, for example, with nothing in the way of natural resources at all, has now achieved a per capita income equal to that of Ireland -- the country now chairman of the European Community, the Malaysian economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, and we all know what the South Koreans have been able to do.

At the other end of the scale, some of the third world countries seem to be making no noticeable progress at all in solving their economic problems. At the most basic level of sheer survival, some countries are falling behind in food production per capita, even while their populations continue to grow. Zambia, which I visited this summer, for example, used to be a substantial exporter of food. Today it can no longer meet its own requirements. These factors, to some extent foreseeable ten years ago, are stark realities today.

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While talking about food problems, I cannot help but digress to mention the absolutely desparate situation arising in Cambodia, now called Kampuchea. Formerly a major rice exporter, that country faces one of the most appalling food shortages in the history of the world. So disruptive have been the effects of its internal political upheavals, and the invasion by the Vietnamese, that only five per cent of the arable land in that country is now under cultivation. The projections of need are staggering. Worse still, however, is the complete disruption of the internal functioning of the country, the total break-down of its infrastructure. Even if food can be gotten to the country, there are no facilities left to distribute it. Seldom has the international community been faced with such a massive need, so difficult to fill.

As I mentioned, the third world countries have shown an increasing independence in their dealings with the developed world. What is not nearly so clear is whether they will be able to find enough community of interest and collective will to deal with some of their own problems.

Looking more narrowly at the world of our western allies and traditional trading partners, the scene here, too, is unlike that of a decade ago. I needn't recite for this audience the factors that have so changed the economic atlas. Who, ten years ago, could have foreseen the present state of the U.S. dollar, the readjustments called for by the energy situation, today's price of gold? Our current experience and future prospects for a combination of high unemployment, continuing inflation and slow economic growth have enormous implications not only for the western countries themselves, but also for the role they play in the international scene.

Well, Mr. President, these are a few of the things that I notice are different about the world today compared with ten years ago. And looking at these factors, I cannot help wondering whether the emphasis and priorities of Canadian foreign policy are really serving our best interests in this substantially different world. Let me give you just a few of the questions that come into my mind in this regard.

I look at the distribution of effort that our Department of External Affairs and our aid programmes have, and I wonder why we are so deeply committed in certain parts of the world. What are Canada's real interests in this involvement? It certainly doesn't have to do with trade; our commerce with most of those countries is minimal. We're not like the former colonial powers of Europe who have both ties and obligations dating from the previous century.

Even more generally, I wonder on what basis we have chosen to participate in individual aid programmes. Have we taken into account the economic returns Canada may expect in both the short and long term? How good are we at assessing projects from the point of view of actually helping real development in the recipient country, and of doing ourselves some good at the same time? Would we be more responsible international citizens if we concentrated our attention in fewer countries or in fewer fields, so that our impact could be greater?

Along the same lines, I wonder if Canada should be so deeply involved in peacekeeping operations. Does this constitute the best contribution we can make to peace and security in regional trouble spots? I know the costs we bear for these both in terms of national expenditure and in the very direct human terms it has on the soldiers themselves and their families. Why are we spending so much time involved in the contact group on Namibia? Do Canadians really care?

Ever since the Second World War Canada has been cultivating the image of an international nice-guy. We're friends to everyone, the honest brokers. We've spent billions on aid and untold man-hours of effort in being as upright and noble to the third world as we can be. And yet last month in Havana the non-aligned countries cheerfully branded us as imperialists. Pakistan is one of the very largest recipients of our aid programmes, but it led the attack. Not only that, but it is a country whose head of government -- before he was executed -- said that he would rather reduce his country to eating grass than give up the right to develop a nuclear bomb. Is it really the right thing to do to divorce aid policy entirely from the rest of our relations, both political and economic, with the country concerned?

I also wonder if we are paying enough attention to economic and trade relations. Why is it, for example, that Canada still has so little trade with such powerful and growing economies as Mexico and Brazil and Venezuela? Perhaps we've been far too slow in establishing really solid economic ties with the fast-growing countries of the Pacific rim.

I'm also not sure that we really have paid as much attention as we should to our nearest neighbour and closest partner, the United States. I say this without in any way compromising my stand as a staunch Canadian nationalist -- our relations with the U.S.A. are so enormously important that they just must be our first priority. Have we really been as attentive, as co-operative, and yes, as tough as we should be in this regard?

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And beyond all this, of course, is the question of our military alliances and comitments. There are just as many questions needing answers here as in foreign and aid policy.

As I said at the outset, Mr. President, I don't pretend to have the answers to all of these questions. It may be that the policies we are following are still appropriate for the 1980s. But given the substantial changes in the international scene, I feel it is my responsibility to make sure that we don't take the answers for granted.

That's why we have initiated the review of foreign policy. I think this review is absolutely essential if we are to have any confidence at all that we really know, and are able to serve Canada's genuine interests in an increasingly interdependent world. There are two characteristics I want this review to have. First, I want it to have input from Canadians outside the government. By involving a revitalized Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs and National Defence we shall provide a vehicle for participation by private groups and individual citizens. In this connection I want to invite anyone interested to make sure your views get inserted in the process.

The second characteristic I want it to have is that it be quick. I have no interest in a long - drawn-out process that will take years to complete. We have to make decisions every day -- therefore, the sooner we come to agreement on these fundamental issues which I've raised today, the better.

Foreign policy is no esoteric academic exercise reserved for ivory towers or diplomatic tête-ã-têtes. It has enormous implications for each and every Canadian -- for our security, for our economic well-being, for our contribution to the rest of the world. Given the international pressures which exist, we must realize that if we don't exert every possible effort to devise the kind of foreign policy most appropriate to Canada in the '80s, others may. And neither you nor I want to leave that job to others.

Thank you.