



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 70/15

CANADA REVIEWS ITS FOREIGN POLICY

A Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on External Affairs and National Defence, October 27, 1970.

The foreign policy papers record decisions made by the Government and give notice of action it intends to take. To this extent they state Government policy. To a much greater extent the papers, and particularly the general paper, present the Government's views -- about Canada's place in the world, about national aims and interests and about how these can best be fostered....

In the sixties the world situation had evolved rapidly and Canada itself was passing through a period of profound change. Policies which served Canada well in the past required review. A growing body of Canadian opinion was questioning Canada's position on specific foreign policy issues. The Government was concerned about the focus of the criticism being expressed, with its concentration on issues primarily involving other powers and their policies and interests, and its preoccupation with Canada's role than with the furtherance of national aims and interests. The Government embarked upon the review with these concerns in mind, but above all with a determination to ensure that Canada's foreign policy would continue to meet Canadian needs in a changing world. Canadians needed to know that the things we were doing abroad were worth the good people and good money that we were putting into them.

The review involved identifying and testing the assumptions on which Canadian foreign policy has been based. One assumption, however, had to be accepted -- that for most Canadians their political well-being could only be assured if Canada continued in being as an independent, democratic and sovereign state. Unless Canada is independent and sovereign, we can have no foreign policy. Unless Canada is democratic, there is no point in public discussion.

Foreign policy for Canada, as for all other nations, is not made in a vacuum; the world does not stand still while Canada shapes and sets in motion its foreign policy. Canada's policy objectives may complement or compete with those of other nations. The aims and interests of other nations impinge upon Canada's freedom of action in the international sphere. We live in a world

of dynamic change. Events thousands of miles away or next door can alter international relations. Domestic developments can affect external relations. Forecasting is perhaps more difficult in this field than in any other. To quote the report:

"The problem is to produce a clear, complete picture from circumstances which are dynamic and ever-changing. It must be held in focus long enough to judge what is really essential to the issue under consideration, to enable the Government to act on it decisively and effectively. That picture gets its shape from information gathered from a variety of sources -- public or official -- and sifted and analyzed systematically. The correct focus can only be achieved if all the elements of a particular policy question can be looked at in a conceptual framework which represents the main lines of national policy at home and abroad."

The framework could be constructed in a number of different ways, but it must have at its core the basic national aims. These aims will necessarily be pursued in both a domestic and an international context which, however distinct, are closely related. These environmental factors present themselves as a kaleidoscope of challenges, threats, opportunities and constraints. And it is a kaleidoscope. No one could have foreseen the untimely death of President Nasser; no one can yet say what the effects will be. A change of leadership in the Soviet Union could profoundly alter the international climate.

However described, the national aims embrace three essential ideas:

- (1) That Canada will continue secure as an independent political entity;
- (2) that Canada and all Canadians will enjoy enlarging prosperity in the widest possible sense;
- (3) that all Canadians will see in the life they have and in the contribution they make to humanity something worthwhile preserving in identity and purpose.

These ideas encompass the main preoccupation of Canada and Canadians, today or at any other time. Foremost among these are national unity, personal freedom, national identity, economic and social progress and humanitarian aspirations.

The supporting framework for this core is made up of the means whereby these aims can be achieved. The Government has presented these as themes of national policy. They are:

Economic Growth

Sovereignty and Independence

Peace and Security

Social Justice

Quality of Life

Harmonious Natural Environment.

There has been a tendency on the part of some observers at home and abroad to identify these themes as national objectives and to lose sight of the fact that they are the means of achieving national aims. Economic growth, for example, is not an end in itself, but it is fundamental to achievement of the national aims -- unity, independence, prosperity, distinct identity.

Other observers have suggested that these themes amount to an arbitrary segmentation of policy. They see a framework that permits little flexibility. The divisions may be arbitrary but the policy themes do overlap. There is overlapping between "Peace and Security" and "Sovereignty and Independence". The three themes "Social Justice", "Quality of Life" and "Harmonious Natural Environment" obviously overlap.

The framework I am discussing does not exist for its own sake; it is an instrument for thinking about policy and shaping it. There is no particular magic to the number six or to the terminology used. However defined, the themes cover the whole field of policy, domestic and foreign; one is an extension of the other. The difficulty with a listing of any kind, particularly in a printed document, is that people see an expression of priority in the order of presentation. No such priority is intended and it would make no sense. All these themes are essential ingredients of national policy and all engage the Government's attention at all times.

They apply both to domestic policy and to foreign policy. For a great trading country like Canada, economic growth cannot be fostered at home without working to improve the health of the world economy. Safeguarding sovereignty and independence requires international recognition as well as domestic action. Peace and security are world-wide problems. Social justice cannot be compartmentalized; one cannot oppose discrimination abroad and practise it at home. The quality of life is enhanced by contacts with other peoples. Canadians, with their vast coastline and long frontier with the United States, are aware that pollution of the environment knows no political boundaries.

These six policy themes gave us the framework. To use it effectively and to give a sense of direction to our future policy we had to decide upon some pattern of emphasis among them.

Any pattern of emphasis is open to misinterpretation and to deliberate distortion and to the exigencies of changing circumstances.

Looking at the world today, Canada's current needs and the resources we have available, the Government decided that more emphasis than in the past should be placed upon "Economic Growth", "Social Justice" and "Quality of Life". This does not and cannot suggest that the Government is any less concerned with other policy themes, above all, "Peace and Security".

On the other hand, the survival of Canada as a nation is being challenged internally by divisive forces. This underlines further the need

for new emphasis on policies, domestic and external, that promote economic growth, social justice and an enhanced quality of life for all Canadians.

I think it is true to say that Canada exports more per head of population than any other country -- certainly we are well in the forefront. Fostering economic growth for Canada means working for the good health of the international trading community -- our own economic well-being and that of all countries depends upon a buoyant world market.

The existence of two super-powers makes the ranking of nations as great powers, middle powers and small powers irrelevant. Canada makes no pretensions to "power" in the absolute sense but it does intend to have an effective voice in world affairs. To act constructively in the community of nations one must have a power-base of some kind. In this limited sense, Canada must be seen as an economic rather than a military power. Emphasis on economic growth enhances Canada's capacity to play its full part in the councils of the nations.

I have dealt with economic growth at some length since the emphasis upon it has been widely misunderstood. What is often forgotten is that the Government places within the same pattern of emphasis the themes "Social Justice", within which fall the great problems of the developing world, relics of colonialism, racial discrimination and the need for development assistance, and "Quality of Life", which is concerned as much with problems in the developing world as with problems in Canada and necessarily overlaps the theme "Harmonious Natural Environment".

The policy themes can and do come into conflict and require the Government to make hard choices. An obvious and timely example is the possible conflict between "Economic Growth" and "Harmonious Natural Environment". I do not need to labour this. The spread of industry brings jobs and wealth. It also can pollute the air, the ground and the water. Canada and every other technologically-advanced nation is facing hard choices in this area today. So, as their economies grow, are the developing countries. I hope we are ready to face the challenge and make the hard decisions.

One of the more controversial statements in the general paper is on role and influence:

"It is a risky business to postulate or predict any specific role for Canada in a rapidly evolving world situation. It is even riskier -- certainly misleading -- to base foreign policy on an assumption that Canada can be cast as the 'helpful fixer' in international affairs.

"There is no natural, immutable or permanent role for Canada in today's world, no constant weight of influence. Roles and influence may result from pursuing certain policy objectives -- and these 'spin-offs' can be of solid value to international relations -- but they should not be made the aims of policy. To be liked and to be regarded as good fellows are not ends in themselves; they are a reflection of but not a substitute for policy."

This part of the paper has been commonly misquoted and taken to mean that Canada is trying to dodge international responsibility and to repudiate the invaluable work it has done in the mediation of disputes and in peace-keeping operations -- in which we are still involved in Cyprus, the Middle East and Kashmir. Nothing could be further from the truth. Canada is ready to act as mediator or to provide peacekeeping forces when called upon to do so, but there must be some real hope that the operation will be effective.

The review has brought home to us many things we already knew but to which we had not given due weight. In the late forties and early fifties, Canada, emerging from the war with its economy strengthened when the economies of most countries had been weakened, enjoyed a brief spell of unusual prominence upon the international stage. Since then, friends and former enemies have rebuilt their economies, the Soviet Union has emerged as a super-power, China has come to have the potential to be a world power. All this is true, but what is even more true is that Canada has grown in strength and independence since those days to an extent not generally realized or accepted, at least by some Canadians. The prominence we enjoyed in a world devastated by war could not last. As a nation stronger and more important than we were then, we are taking our place and playing our part in the world as it is today....

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