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AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

Speech by the Honourable Paul Martin to
the Canadian Club, Toronto, January 31, 1966.

Today I wish to speak about the independence of our foreign policy and its relationship to the interests of other nations in the world community.

The word independence has a powerful appeal to most people in the world, and to no people more than the Canadians. It is not so very long ago that we attained the final stages of full sovereignty by taking over complete control of our external relations. With the approach of the centenary, we are thinking of the contribution to that development of some of the great architects of our independence.

Sir Wilfred Laurier was asked at the Jubilee celebration of Queen Victoria in 1897 whether Canada would one day become a nation. He answered: "Canada is a nation. Canada is free and freedom is its nationality". In insisting that the first and indisputable mark of our identity was the independence which Canadians of diverse origins sought and cherished in common, this great Prime Minister proclaimed a confidence in our destiny which has sustained us since then.

Another great Canadian leader, Sir Robert Borden, made the following comment in 1918 at the end of an exhausting war in which the protection of Canadian interests in relation with more powerful allies had been no easy matter: "I am beginning to feel that, in the end, and perhaps sooner than later, Canada must assume full sovereignty. She can give better service to Great Britain and the United States and to the world in that way".

In speaking simultaneously of full sovereignty and of service to the world, Sir Robert Borden pointed to the full meaning of independence which I should like to discuss. I might almost entitle my talk "The Uses and Abuses of Independence".

It is not easy for us in the contemporary world to maintain the cherished independence of thought and decision obtained in the past 100 years. There are two reasons for this.

In the first place, no nation can enjoy the degree of independence in decision which existed in earlier times. Every major decision has become immensely more complicated by the considerations which new military technology, science, economics and humanitarian obligations present to the governments concerned. The great powers have more complex considerations to weigh but the lesser powers cannot expect to have much freedom of choice either. Independence in foreign affairs cannot have quite the same meaning as in other fields.

In the second place, Canada has its own unique problems in maintaining independence. We are a nation of relatively limited population in an immense territory, with our only neighbour the most powerful nation in the world. We are a new nation which has strong cultural links with many countries but particularly with the United States, Britain and France. We have had to develop an identity in the midst of these influences in a century in which two world wars and the military and economic pressures leading to collective action have set a high premium on conformity in views.

The problem remains, and I have, therefore, chosen to speak about the fact of our independence and about the means of preserving it. I believe that correct public understanding of the formulation of our foreign policy is of the greatest importance today.

There are two directions from which we must approach this subject. Both are essential to a full understanding.

In the first place, I should like to establish the basic fact of our independence in relation to some of the world problems of the moment, because there are people who doubt it.

In the second place, I should like to explain why we can take an independent and useful role in world affairs and what are the means chosen by the Government to ensure that we can continue to do this. A nation which does not understand the conditions on which its strength and independence rest will not be able to preserve them effectively.

There are persons who ask whether we have a foreign policy centred on Canadian interests and viewpoints. I do not think they realize the extent and intensity of the work which is done to produce exactly that kind of policy. Every week hundreds of telegrams and despatches arrive from Canadian missions abroad. Every week scores of memoranda are prepared within my Department or in other departments in Ottawa recommending courses of action which best seem to meet Canadian external interests.

When our national interests and our judgment of a particular situation coincide with those of other nations, then we are quite happy to be identified with others in a common policy. Canada is a mature and responsible nation. It sees no value in difference for the sake of difference, for the simple purpose of attracting attention.

Where there are good reasons to take a stand different from that of allies or friends, we do so. This is the point which tends to be overlooked and which I accordingly stress.

The record of such independence of viewpoint is abundantly clear. In a number of situations we have taken action or urged viewpoints clearly different from those of nations with which, otherwise, we had a close identity of viewpoint. I should refer, by way of example, to trade relations with Communist nations generally, the Suez crisis of 1956, relations with Cuba, the admission of new members to the United Nations, relations with China, the situation in Indochina, some aspects of peace keeping and the implications of common membership in NATO. Individual Canadians may agree or disagree with the decisions of the Government of the day, but they cannot justifiably deny that the decisions were Canadian ones. Our policies emerge from our own combination of interests, convictions and traditions -- they are not borrowed from or imposed by others.

It is impossible for me to describe Canadian policies in all the areas mentioned above. I should like, however, to say something about the situation in Vietnam. This is one problem concerning which there is a good deal of misunderstanding.

It is sometimes alleged that Canadian policies can be independent only where United States interests are not significantly involved. Conversely it is said that, where a major United States interest is engaged, as it undoubtedly is in Vietnam, Canadian policy can operate only within strictly defined limitations.

To put the issue more bluntly: has Canada maintained a mind of its own on the course of developments in Vietnam?

For more than 11 years we have maintained a substantial Canadian presence there as observers. Almost one-quarter of our foreign service officers -- not to mention an even greater number of members of the Canadian armed services -- have done tours of duty there with the International Control Commission. As a result of this continuing and very substantial presence, we have been able to form an accurate assessment of the issues at stake. We have not shut our eyes to violations of the Geneva Agreement which have helped to bring about the present dangerous situation in that country.

We recognize that South Vietnam has violated the Agreement by seeking and receiving military assistance principally from the United States. We also know that, long before this assistance

reached its present level and long before the onset of open hostilities, North Vietnam had been deliberately violating the Agreement by organizing, assisting and encouraging activities in the South directed at the overthrow of the Government of South Vietnam.

We have not only recognized this situation; we have a public and official statement about it. In June 1962, Canada and India, in a special report to the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva conference, concluded that the situation in Vietnam had "shown signs of rapid deterioration". Part of the responsibility for this situation, the report goes on to say, was South Vietnam's for entering into a de facto military alliance with the United States and for allowing the entry into its territory of armed personnel and equipment beyond approved levels. These measures of military assistance, the South Vietnamese Government had said, were necessitated by the growing interference by the North in the internal affairs of the South. The report also concluded that there was evidence to show that North Vietnam had sent armed and unarmed personnel, equipment and supplies into the South for aggressive purposes and that the North was allowing its territory to be used for hostile actions against the South.

This, in our view, was a balanced and accurate presentation. In agreeing to it, we and the Indians attempted to place before world opinion our assessment that a difficult situation was developing in Vietnam because of the increasing violations of the cease-fire by both sides.

I think that this report can be characterized not as neutral about truth and falsehood but as impartial and objective with respect to all the facts and evidence we had before us.

In February 1965, with the beginning of air strikes against the North, it was decided that the Commission should send another special message to the Co-Chairmen. We made repeated attempts to convince our colleagues that this too should be a balanced and objective report in relation to all the facts, and not just a partial selection of them. Nevertheless it was decided, with Canada dissenting, that the message would deal only with the air strikes.

In dissenting, we had no doubt that these strikes had been carried out and that violations of the Agreement had taken place. We were not attempting to cover up these serious developments -- the Commission could scarcely hide something which was front-page news all over the world. Our concern, and our decision to submit a minority statement, were dictated not by an attempt to whitewash our friends but by the danger of misleading world opinion about what had been going on in Vietnam. Our minority statement was accordingly cast in terms of violations on the other side of the ledger in an attempt to restore an essential balance to the Commission's judgments.

Does this demonstrate that we have departed from the standards of impartiality in this particular sphere of our foreign policy? I think not. On the contrary, I think it demonstrates just the reverse. As I suggested earlier, the exercise of impartial judgment demands a concern for accuracy and a desire not to mislead or to be misunderstood. It also demands the maintenance of the same -- I repeat, the same -- critical standards towards both sides.

Unless one were to prejudge the issues at stake in Vietnam and to conclude that the South and the United States are totally wrong and the North wholly in the right, it is senseless to argue that Canada can demonstrate its independence of judgment only in criticism of United States policy -- and in criticism of that nation alone.

There have been other instances in which Canada has had to choose a course of action when there was little unanimity among its allies about what the general Western interest required. It has always been difficult to decide, for example, to what extent trade and other relations should be developed with the Communist nations. We have taken the view, however, that trade in non-strategic goods was desirable. We have tried to develop contacts and exchanges, provided the other side was prepared to deal with us on a basis of genuine reciprocity. Although we have not been prepared to support the entry of Communist China into the United Nations on the terms it has so far set, we have made it clear in our own statements of policy that we recognized the desirability of having that nation in the world organization.

In many ways in the United Nations, in the Commonwealth and in other international organizations, Canada has developed a reputation for independent action. I was told by a departing ambassador in Ottawa a few days ago that he had come to this country expecting to find us very much influenced by our giant neighbour to the south. He is leaving with the conviction that Canada has clearly established its own political identity in world affairs. He was grateful for some things which we had done for his country and he paid tribute to our willingness to help in the solution of disputes. Our representatives abroad report many such tributes to Canadian policies.

The fact of our independence in foreign policy seems to me, therefore, to be well established by the evidence available.

I believe that it is also important to consider why we are able to take an active and constructive role in international affairs. Proof of a genuinely independent Canadian role is to be found as much in an examination of the fundamental circumstances of our national existence and of our diplomacy as in an indication of viewpoints on current problems,

In examining these fundamental questions, I should like to comment on the views of those who ask whether the true logic of independence should not be to stay outside alliances and to avoid close economic relations with the United States, lest our independence be jeopardized.

I believe that there are five basic objectives which the Government must seek if we are to remain truly independent:

- (1) We must have military security;
- (2) we must have expanding economic strength;
- (3) we must be able to exert influence on others;
- (4) we must be able and willing to play a creative role in many areas of international affairs; and
- (5) we must maintain a basic unity at home in Canada concerning our national interest in world affairs.

The Canadian Government believes that NATO defence arrangements, and the continental arrangements which fit logically into them, provide security, which is the basis of independence. It believes that these defence arrangements offer the partnership into which a sovereign state can enter without loss of national identity or independent viewpoint. For this reason, it has set a high priority on maintaining strength, stability and good political relations among allies.

I know that there are some Canadians who see in such arrangements only the political constraints of an alliance, only the possible dangers of undue political influence by larger members in the affairs of others. I wonder how seriously these critics have considered the overwhelming limitations on our independence and on our fruitful participation in world affairs which isolation, neutrality and military weakness would create.

There is no nation more subject to pressures, more dependent on the views of others or more uncertain of itself, than one with a precarious economy.

I have referred to growing economic strength rather than to current prosperity. We must consider the long-term needs of the country in developing our industry, in making better use of our resources, in increasing the population and in ensuring stable markets. Our experience has been similar to that of all the more economically advanced countries of the free world. A free movement of capital and of business experience and liberal conditions for trade and competition are among the best guarantees of sound economic development.

For Canada, of course, geography and economic facts make it inevitable that a large part of that capital should come from the United States and that a large part of our trade should be with that nation. In entering into agreements with the United States on the Columbia River, on automotive products and on many other matters affecting economic conditions, the Government has considered the long-term economic needs of the country.

The very scale of our involvement with the United States in economic matters naturally brings some problems, along with major benefits. Some argue that, in time, economic involvement on this scale will submerge our independence.

I believe that there are some simple and effective answers to this prediction. I do not accept this type of political or economic fatalism. We shall not lose our independence in this way unless we want to. We are engaged in a process of economic development which should render us basically stronger, not weaker, both in a continental and in a world sense. Where our exposure to the much greater forces of the American economy creates particular problems for some part of our economy, we take remedial action. On the basis of friendship and mutual respect, we bargain with representatives of the United States to obtain the best conditions for our country, as they do for theirs. We have certainly not ignored other possibilities for developing our country and our businessmen contest world markets as vigorously in competition with close friends as with anyone else.

It is important that we should see these basic conditions of an alliance and of close economic relations as being, on balance, means of fortifying our independence in world affairs, not as limitations upon it.

The third basic objective I mentioned is that we must be able to exert influence on others. We should have a wide association with other nations and we should systematically cultivate friendly relations with allies and other nations as a means of developing our capacity to influence the course of events. These may appear to be obvious diplomatic objectives not necessarily related to the specific questions on independence being discussed. It is, however, particularly important for a middle power to make such an effort if it wishes to understand and to exert its own influence upon current events. We are more fortunate than some nations in the range of our relations. We have valuable associations with other Commonwealth and NATO members, with France and French-speaking nations, with the countries involved in our aid programmes, with many nations sharing in special tasks in the United Nations. These associations heighten our status in world affairs and prevent us from becoming unduly influenced by any one nation or group.

We must make use of our position of military security, economic strength and wide contacts to play a creative role in world affairs, not only in our immediate interests but in the long-term interests of the world community. I believe that the number of fields in which we take a constructive role provides ample evidence not only of an independence of thought or publicly-declared policy in controversial matters but of action in taking initiatives or accepting responsibilities which are not always well known. I am thinking of our role in all the major peace-keeping operations of the United Nations, in disarmament discussions, in international development aid and relief and in cultural and

educational relations. Canada is accepted and welcomed by nations in many different parts of the world as a participant in important ventures. Those who ask whether we have an independent identity before the world must consider all this evidence of decision, action and participation in international affairs.

We have fulfilled the terms set forth by Sir Robert Borden, full sovereignty and service to the world.

There is, finally, one aspect to this question of maintaining independence which is not really one of foreign policy but rather of the domestic conditions supporting an effective foreign policy. There will never be complete agreement in the country as to the exact course of action which we should follow in any major problem of international affairs. I should hope, however, that we should agree on certain fundamental requirements in the national interest. One is that there can be only one official voice speaking for Canada on foreign policy in matters of national interest when the decisions have been made. The other -- and I realize that this is a matter of judgment or degree -- is that we might well agree, in view of the weight of evidence available, that Canada does have its own independent policies and its own role in world affairs and that we should concentrate rather on debating the most effective means in any given case to serve the national interest.

I have attempted to set before you the dimensions of independence in foreign policy -- the proof of it in specific international problems, the conditions on which it rests in our existence as a nation. It will be apparent that, in the contemporary world, independence is as many-sided as freedom itself. There is the freedom to agree as well as to disagree; the freedom to consult and not only to go it alone; the freedom to show self-restraint as well as to assert ourselves ostentatiously; the freedom to make our voice heard but also the freedom to remain silent; the freedom to assess the consequences of our acts and utterances and not to behave as though we could be entirely unmindful of the reactions of others; the freedom to recognize the facts of our geography and not to imagine that we are a detached island in space.

The objective of an independent country in the dangerous world in which we live should surely be to make the greatest possible contribution to peace and security and not merely to flaunt a hollow independence for its own sake. In the modern world, independence exists not so much to be displayed as to be used -- and to be used responsibly and effectively.

I believe that the statesmen who first charted the course of our independence saw our destiny as a nation in this way and that the people of Canada today would wish its Government to act always in the spirit of civilized patriotism and of enlightened internationalism.