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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Transcript of a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Television programme "Press Conference" held in Ottawa on March 21, 1956, with the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, and members of the press participating.

The Change in Soviet Tactics

Press:

Mr. Pearson, a great many people, a lot of people in North America I think, are worried about whether Russia is outmanoeuvring us today, whether our policy is too rigid, too fixed and whether perhaps there is a little lack of leadership on the part of the West. I wonder what you think about that.

Mr. Pearson:

I am one of those people who are worrying. I think it is a good thing that we are worrying about it because it is a very serious problem. In my opinion, there is no doubt that the Soviet Government has changed its tactics. As I said the other night, and this is an over-simplification, they have begun to substitute vodka for violence. What I mean by that is they may have given up the idea of armed conquest and decided to substitute for what they call competitive co-existence. But their objectives may be just the same -- their ultimate objectives. While we may welcome the change in tactics, it does pose new problems for us and we may have to change our own tactics accordingly. But, when I say "we" -- I am not talking about six or seven men around a table in the Kremlin who can change their tactics in a hour and press a button and everybody else changes -- we are a coalition of free states. And it is a little more difficult problem, to work out agreed changes in a coalition; sometimes it is even difficult to work out agreed changes within a single government in a coalition.

Press:

And when you take the pressure off a coalition, it stops coalescing sometimes.

Mr. Pearson:

I think that is our major problem now. If fear lessens, have we any other stronger basic cement to hold the coalition together? Cooperation based, not on fear, but on something more positive and constructive?

Press:

Mr. Pearson, the Russians seem to be succeeding pretty well in their economic offensive all over the world. Do you have any views as to how the West could match this penetration of the Russians?

Mr. Pearson:

I am not sure that we may not exaggerate their success in what you call their economic offensive. I think they have been more successful in their psychological offensive than in their economic offensive. After all, they have not really done very much to help other countries economically but they have made sensational promises and they have given the impression that they are going to do a lot. Now you say "Can we match them?" I don't think we should try to match them, in the sense that we should try to outbid them. We should base our policy in this field, as we have tried to in the past and maybe we should do more in the future, in helping materially underdeveloped countries in our own interest and in their interest. If we base our policy on these principles, we don't have to worry so much about the Russians as long as we know what we are doing.

Press:

Do you think, for instance, Mr. Pearson, that the West should take the lead in offering economic assistance to the countries in Africa which are now gaining their independence, such as the Sudan, rather than waiting for the Russians to do something about it?

Mr. Pearson:

I think that is right. I think that with the new countries who are coming on the stage, and who need help, we should take the initiative in offering them that help without political strings attached.

Press:

Mr. Pearson, I should like to know why it is that we in the West always seem to lose out in this contest. It seems to me that the Russians always seem to have the initiative. They are one step ahead of us. They are carrying the ball. Why is that and what can we do about it?

Mr. Pearson:

I do not agree that we are necessarily losing it. I think it is true that they seem to have the initiative in this field because, as I have said, it is so much easier for them to operate in it. They are one government, if you like, centred in Moscow, one little group of men running that government who can make their plans, start their initiatives, change their tactics, and do it very quickly and very simply. Therefore, it is not too difficult for them to be ahead of us, as you put it.

Press:

Is this a sort of fatal handicap for us? Are we never to achieve a basis whereby we will have that flexibility that seems to characterize their system?

Mr. Pearson:

I think that we have a certain amount of flexibility, but who are "we"? We are fifty free states and it is very difficult for us to operate collectively. If you say, by "we", "Canada", we are only a small country compared with Russia. But take India, for example! Which country has done most in this field to help India in the last five years, Canada or the Soviet?

Press:

And yet which country seems to have got the most credit? The Soviet Union.

Mr. Pearson:

That may be at the moment. But I think the Indians will realize over the years that we carry out our promises and I am not sure whether the other people will carry out their promises. They can be more exciting and more sensational and therefore they may seem to be away ahead of us.

United States Leadership

Press:

Mr. Pearson, you have mentioned two things here. One, the necessity for a change of tactics and, the other, the fact that we are fifty states. Now can we expect to get leadership? We have been looking to the United States as a leader. Are you satisfied we are getting the kind of leadership from the United States now that we need at such a time?

Mr. Pearson:

I think, of course, we are getting leadership from the United States but, because we are free countries, we have to pay a price for freedom and that price is the right to criticize ourselves and our friends. So we do criticize the United States and the United States criticizes its friends and the result of that criticism very often gives the impression that we are not working together. There may be a great deal of criticism going on inside totalitarian countries, inside these little groups. But you never hear about it. I think the United States has given magnificent leadership since World War II. And when I say that, I do not mean that there are not lots of occasions when we feel like criticizing the United States as they feel like criticizing us.

Press:

You do not feel that now is the time when we need a bold, active leadership to unite us in face of this new peril that is so apparent?

Mr. Pearson:

I am going to ask you a question. I know this is unprecedented. What do you mean by bold, active leadership?

Press:

Well, I mean this -- that at the present time you see the British going one way in Cyprus, the Greeks going another way. You see the United States making statements which go in a third way. You have this kind of situation in almost every issue that comes up. The Middle East, of course, as well. It seems to me that you need someone now to tie these things together and give direction to international diplomatic policy.

Mr. Pearson:

I could not agree more.

Press:

I am going to split your fee with you this evening incidentally!

Mr. Pearson:

You need someone to tie these things together. What you are suggesting is that we need some superman to tie together all the national policies of a group of free states with their own national interests and who are trying to reconcile those national interests with their international obligations. This is not an easy thing to do.

Press:

Would you say, Mr. Pearson, on this particular question, that the stand which the Americans have just taken, backing the French in Algeria, might be a right step in this direction?

Mr. Pearson:

I read, of course, as I am sure you did, with very much interest, the speech of the American Ambassador in Paris yesterday in which he, and I may not be quoting him textually, said substantially that he pledged the support and sympathy of the United States to the efforts being made by the French Government to bring about a liberal solution, and I use the word "liberal" with a small "l", for the Algerian question. I would certainly myself say "Amen" to that and I am sure the Canadian Government would back that kind of statement of sympathy and support to bring about a solution in Algeria; a liberal one, which would be in accordance with the wishes of the people of that country; and best for them, for their welfare as well as for their freedom.

Press:

Weren't we a little late, Mr. Pearson, in getting around to that? When I say "we", I refer to the Western nations and specifically the United States. Shouldn't some such action as Mr. Grandlandau mentioned have been taken much earlier than it was?

Mr. Pearson:

I think it might have been difficult because it was only in the last two or three weeks that the French Government has stated very frankly and fully its policy in Algeria and it was to that statement of policy not very long ago, a few days ago, that the American Ambassador pledged his support and sympathy.

The Middle East

Press:

I would like, Mr. Pearson, to ask you a question on the Middle East. Some time ago, you told the House of Commons that the situation in the Middle East wasn't quite as serious or as explosive as it would appear. I was wondering how you could reconcile that position with the American initiative to reconvene the Security Council or do you feel that the Arabs or the Israelis are deliberately depicting the situation as bad as possible just for the sake of obtaining arms?

Mr. Pearson:

I do not think I said that the situation wasn't serious. I did say, the other day, that I do not think, to use your expression, that it was quite as explosive as it was a week or ten days before. Fundamentally, it is serious. When I said it wasn't quite as explosive, I meant that, about ten days or so ago, things looked very black indeed out there with the dismissal of Sir John Glubb, with the massing of troops on the border and with incidents. It was felt at that time that we were right on, if I may put it that way, the margin of disaster. I think there has been an improvement since, and the worse forebodings of that time, ten days or so ago, have not been, thank God, fulfilled. There has been an easing of tension in the last few days but the situation is very, very serious. There is no doubt about that. The reference of the matter to the United Nations Security Council is not, as I see it, an indication of a deterioration of the situation but an indication of the realization of members of the United Nations that the Organization should now do something about it.

Press:

Well, if the situation has not deteriorated, Mr. Pearson, I think it seemed to some of us at least that it was almost uniquely coincidental that Canada, the

Canadian Government, should have seen a slight easing of tension in the Middle East at the specific time when for, shall we say, domestic political reasons we might like to have let some of our arms shipments go off.

Mr. Pearson:

Of course, that is one interpretation of it. No, I think those things may appear to have coincided but I do feel, however, that in the last two weeks or so, quite irrespective of any other considerations, things have eased a little bit. You have heard the reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and of the British Foreign Secretary when he got back. While it would be very silly to suggest that fundamentally there has been a change, for the problems have not been solved, I think there has been an easing somewhat of tension in the last two weeks.

Press:

Since we have got onto this question of Canada's part in the Middle East, I think a lot of Canadians wonder just what Canada is doing in shipping arms to the Middle East at all. This is perhaps an explosive area at some times at least and I think we wonder what we are doing in the arms business out there.

Mr. Pearson:

Oh yes, that is a subject we have all been discussing, I think rightly so, because it is a matter not only of interest but of importance. When you talk about Canada being in the arms business, I prefer putting it this way, whether Canada should refuse to ship defence equipment to countries which are building up their own defence forces and who don't represent any threat to Canada at all. It would be a very simple and convenient thing, I suppose, from some points of view, if we could say "we will ship no arms to anybody".

Press:

Well, at least not to explosive areas.

Mr. Pearson:

To any area of tension, we will ship no arms. If you had applied that principle to the Middle East, that area, since the birth of Israel, has been an area of tension hasn't it? In fact, it was an area of war when Israel was founded. If we had all decided at

that time that "this is a dangerous area, we will not ship any arms to it", Israel would have been destroyed by now. She would have had no means for defending herself. Similarly, if you took that position now: (the United Kingdom does not take it, France does not take it,) that we will not ship anything to this area. That would mean that Israel would be cut off from the means of defending herself while the Arab states would have free access to all the arms industries of the Communist states.

Press:

It just struck me that the entry of the Soviet into this situation has changed the situation a little bit. Here we have Czechoslovakia supplying arms to Egypt and destroying what Canada and, I think, the United States, has tried to maintain -- a balance of force, a disequilibrium. So, doesn't it follow that either Canada has to -- Canada or the United States, -- has to repair this imbalance and run the risk of getting into an arms race with Russia or sit back and wait?

Mr. Pearson:

I think so. I feel that the refusal on the side of the West to ship any arms to this area would not be a wise thing to do now. I think probably one of the most dangerous features of this situation is the feeling that Israel, the feeling on the part of Israel that she has now been isolated, that she is alone, that she is getting relatively weaker and that nobody is prepared to help her, while the Communist states are prepared to help the Arab states. That feeling might become so intense in Israel that it might even provoke a preventive action and I think we should try to remove that feeling. But, having said that, I add that Israel is not going to be saved by arms. This may be a good thing to do at the present time, controlled shipments of arms to Israel, but that is not, in the long run, going to save Israel. It would be a fine thing, for instance, if we could agree on both sides, on the Communist side and our side, not to ship any arms to that area. That would be one way of doing it but, in default of that, I think the present policy is not unwise. Nevertheless, and I said this in the House of Commons, the important thing is to make peace in that area, not to ship arms.

Press:

But is there enough hope of making peace at this moment to justify not shipping arms and allowing the Soviet bloc to strengthen Egypt and the Arab states to a point where a year or so from now they will be able to defeat Israel?

Mr. Pearson:

I do not think so. I do not think it would be conducive to peace to allow the Communist states to change the balance of power in that area so that the Arab states would be so much more powerful in modern weapons that they might be tempted to attack Israel. You must remember that the Arab states have said that they will not recognize the existence of a state of Israel.

Press:

But, isn't that what the Russians are doing now?

Mr. Pearson:

It is what they are doing now. Isn't it important, therefore, to try to make some kind of arrangement with the other side, with the Communist side, not only to control arms to that area but to bring about peace there. That is why I welcome the reference of this matter at this time to the United Nations Security Council and I hope that as a result of that reference both sides, may at least try to work together to bring about a better solution than to ship arms to both sides.

Press:

If that effort failed, then would it be the thing to do to consider rebalancing this military situation in the Middle East, the situation that is developing?

Mr. Pearson:

I think, if that effort failed, then it would be surely not conducive to peace and security in that area to have all the arms going to one side.

Press:

Because right now the whole problem would appear to be one of securing the friendship of the Arabs because of the oil which is vital to Europe. Isn't that one of the main considerations?

Mr. Pearson:

That is one factor but we want to secure the friendship of the Arabs for other reasons than that. As far as Canada is concerned, we want the friendship of the states on both sides of this issue, but it will be difficult to secure that friendship as long as they are so bitterly hostile to each other.

Press:

Mr. Pearson, I cannot say that I am entirely convinced that Canada should be dribbling a few arms here to Egypt and Israel. To take it on a broader plan, isn't a lot of the trouble in the Middle East that the Arabs are fed up with Western colonialism and they would like us to get out?

Mr. Pearson:

On your first point, dribbling a few arms to Israel and Egypt; the only arms of any significance at all that we have shipped to any Arab state since World War II have been fifteen Harvard planes. On the other question, you are perfectly right. Israel, and the establishment of the state of Israel, has been an important factor in stirring up trouble there between the Arab states and the people in Palestine. But I am satisfied myself that, if there never had been a state of Israel, there would still be ferment and unrest in the Middle East because of the surge of Arab nationalism.

Colonial Territories

Press:

Could you say, Mr. Pearson, whether you share the view of certain countries that there are some colonial territories which are vital to the North Atlantic Organization?

Mr. Pearson:

I don't know whether I can answer that question. There are colonial territories which are of great strategic importance to the North Atlantic Organization but, if we hold those colonial territories against the wishes of their inhabitants, are we going to be strong or weaker in the long run?

Cyprus

Press:

Mr. Pearson, I would like to interject something here about the explosive effects of the dispute between Britain and Greece about Cyprus. It seems to me that this is an issue that may well cause a breach in the NATO ranks in a very vulnerable area.

Mr. Pearson:

Why don't you chaps ask me something about Canadian policy, however

Press:

You are interested in NATO.

Mr. Pearson:

That is quite true and I think as a member of NATO, we and all other members must deplore the Cyprus dispute between two NATO members. It is very difficult to maintain solidarity inside NATO when you have that kind of bitter dispute. We are going to have a NATO council meeting in about a month and maybe the NATO council, in certain circumstances, will be able to help solve this dispute.

Press:

Which do you regard as more serious for the Western Alliance? The danger of an immediate war between the Arab states and Israel or the disruptive effect of this quarrel among Greece, Turkey and Britain?

Mr. Pearson:

I regard them both as serious problems. I think, if you force me to choose between the two in priority of seriousness, from the point of view of an

immediate outbreak of war, I would say the Israel-Arab dispute is the more dangerous at the moment but they are both bad enough.

Revised NATO Concepts

Press:

Mr. Pearson, I am wondering if this new Russian economic and psychological offensive you have mentioned has to some extent invalidated the military concept on which NATO is based and whether we do not now need to put our emphasis on something else entirely?

Mr. Pearson:

I agree entirely that, to some extent, not only new Russian tactics but also our new military tactics, atomic military tactics, have invalidated many old concepts of NATO military defence. They recognize this in NATO. There was a military conference of the NATO nations last month in which they went into this question in great detail.

Press:

Just on that point, could I ask you does this mean that we can possibly do without the German army or German rearmament?

Mr. Pearson:

I don't think we can do without a German defence force as long as Germany is in NATO. Germany is a member of NATO and Germany should participate in collective defence in NATO. When we met at Lisbon, however, three or four years ago, we talked then about a NATO defence force in Western Europe of 95 to 105 divisions. Even the generals do not talk about that now. They will settle for 50 or 55. So they have adjusted their own methods and their own plans to the new tactics. That is one change. But we have got to change in other respects too. Economic assistance and psychological warfare and all that; this is also part of our defence. We have got to put more emphasis on that from now on in NATO and outside NATO and we are recognizing that fact.

Press:

Can you suggest a general framework, something like the NATO military framework in which we could work cooperatively?

Mr. Pearson:

We will talk about this in NATO. I have already begun to talk about it in a mild way; as have other Canadians. I think one of the things we ought to do now is to coordinate -- that is a word we use a lot nowadays -- coordinate all our efforts for international economic assistance and technical assistance through the United Nations. By that I do not mean we should ask the United Nations to administer all these plans. The Colombo Plan is now a going concern and I would not like to see it altered. But I think we should have a United Nations committee where all these plans could be submitted and we could see what each other is doing. Also it would be a very good thing to put up to the other side; "If you really want to help in this field, let us all help together through the United Nations and if you are not willing to have your plan examined and discussed and checked at the United Nations, if you are not willing to go to the United Nations with your schemes of technical assistance, then there is something phoney about them."

Events in Russia

Chairman:

I wonder if, just in the minute we have, could we change the subject and ask you if you have any better idea than the rest of us what is happening in Russia in this tremendous attack on Stalinism?

Mr. Pearson:

No, I haven't. But, like the rest of you, I am as interested as anybody could be. I think of course, something of significance is happening. I do not see how you can take this man Stalin out of the pantheon of Communist gods and throw him into the dustbin of history without a big shock being administered not only to the Russian people but Communist parties in other parts of the world.

Press:

You were there last summer, how flexible do you think the Russians are to this sudden change of direction?

Mr. Pearson:

I do not know whether they are very flexible but they are well disciplined and they are well controlled and they may take this change of front. But I think way down deep they are going to be disturbed.

Press:

Is there any evidence of disturbance?

Mr. Pearson:

There are already evidences. How serious they are we do not know.

Chairman:

I'm sorry, we do not have time for that question. Thank you, Mr. Pearson.

s/c