



# Statements and Speeches

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## CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY AND FOREIGN POLICY

An Address by De Montigny Marchand, Deputy Minister (Foreign Policy), Department of External Affairs, at the Conference of the Canadian Association of Futures Studies, Vancouver, August 14, 1982

...I shall structure my remarks, most of them arguable and all of them personal, around four themes.

*First*, some of the formative continuities that strike me as fundamental in shaping the way Canadians look at the world and at themselves.

*Second*, a look at change and vulnerability in our own more recent experience, producing fluctuation and evolution in some of our assumptions and beliefs.

*Third*, and to illuminate our policy culture, a discussion of two trends in Canadian foreign policy, often portrayed as in conflict but which, I shall do my best to persuade you, are two sides of the same coin.

And *fourth*, by way of a conclusion, roughly equal parts of optimism and pessimism about our policy culture projected into the future.

### Policy culture

First some formative elements — some of the continuities in our policy culture.

Canada's space, geography and climate are in many ways the most fundamental of the formative influences on our policy culture. They are so obvious that they must be laboured a bit to be understood.

The geographic scale and climatic harshness of this country explain a range of behaviour from our leading role at the Law of the Sea Conference to the consular work of our missions in California or the Caribbean. They explain our very early dedication to the technologies of transport and communications, and an intimate experience of the energy demands of those technologies. They may also explain why we are the homeland of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, those twin prophets of culture and communications.

And I believe our space and climate also serve to engender such values as self-reliance and mutual aid, the rewards of wanderlust and encouragement of mobility. What is perhaps surprising is that our experience of space and distance did not promote a sense of isolation but, on the contrary, appears to have conditioned us to welcome the existence of a wider world, and predisposed us to take an interest in its diversity.

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That predisposition was reinforced by the composition of our people — French and English in foundation, multiracial in evolution, first inheriting and then importing values, customs, languages and beliefs from many parts of the world, and retaining ties or sympathies with them.

Our geography and demography are significant assets in shaping an approach to the world, but they also generate liabilities. Fragmentation and dissonance between regions, levels of government and ethnic groups; importation of political tensions or allegiances from offshore — and perhaps a tendency to concentrate on isolated issues rather than grapple with the complexity of the nation's interest as a whole.

**Dedication to trade**

Another continuity has been our dedication to trade.

Trade brought a more detailed consciousness of the outside world, and of our dependence upon it, and gave us a direct interest in influencing events and decisions in foreign capitals. Trade also taught us our vulnerability to shocks and changes in the global economy, and has established a profound Canadian stake and investment in a fair and open international system.

But economic circumstances also provoked, and continue to present, the dilemma of promoting and protecting our own industry on a national basis. Tension between our dedication both to an open global system, and to provisioning our own sovereignty, is a fundamental feature of our national life and policy culture whether past, present or future.

But our formative continuities are not limited to functional matters. They embrace that "dynamic value system" which our UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] definition of culture identities. In the global context, our values are clearly those of the contemporary, advanced industrial democracies. But what strikes me as unique, and I have no specific determining factors to explain it, is the peculiarly Canadian urge to "do something" about the shape of the world.

I have no embarrassment in talking about this missionary spirit. It has inspired some of our finest hours in international affairs. It is a spirit which may or may not be animated by a cold calculation of our national interest. It is the Canadian itch, and we have done well to scratch it. Our moral activism is, at its best, a proud projection abroad of our policy culture.

We are hopeful, constructive, conciliatory, optimistic and good joiners. But our missionary spirit can also, on occasion, lead us to overestimate our power and influence, to expose ourselves to the kind of criticism invariably levelled at idealists — accusations of naiveté, hypocrisy and self-deception.

**Cultural ties  
with the US**

Woven through some of the formative elements in our policy culture are the complexities of our relationship with the United States. Herschel Hardin, in his brilliant book *A Nation Unaware*, identifies the position of Canada as against the United States, as one of what he terms the three basic contradictions in the Canadian experience – contradictions across which Canada has defined itself.

I would not underestimate the importance to Canada of proximity to the USA, across a border which is undefended in only the military sense. But it is ironic, against our current preoccupation with Canada-USA relations, to recall that we survived in the colonial period a time when trade and other ties with the newly-born USA was forbidden. One of the results was a set of special links and interests in the Caribbean where, to this day, we continue to behave very differently indeed from the USA.

Our geostrategic location beside the United States also highlights a further fundamental point about Canada: that we are a relatively secure country in a relatively insecure world. In a century in which violence among nation states continues to persist as a means of resolving disputes, and in which national borders are daily trespassed with force or the threat of force, Canada has been remarkably immune.

Indeed our experience of relative security is, in comparative terms so different from that of, for example, Afghanistan, Uganda, Israel, Poland or Argentina that we are virtually at the far and fortunate end of the spectrum of national peace and security. This does not deny our participation in two world wars and in the common defence of the West today. But I contend that the Canadian experience has, by and large, been one of remarkable insulation from the day-to-day violence and instability so common in today's world.

And there are other formative elements in our policy culture, expressed in the way we perceive the world and in our international behaviour: our empathy for resource-based developing countries, our sense of hinterland, the maritime concerns imposed by our borders with three seas, a strain of nordicity, innovation in government enterprise, and so on. They represent some of the continuities which will, I suggest, in one form or another, always be with us.

**Changes in  
cultural policy**

The demon of change, however, is certainly at work. And I want now to turn to my second theme: some indicative areas of change and vulnerability in our foreign policy culture, caused in large part by our recent experience and by our apprehensions about the future.

The international environment has, over the past 15 years, forced Canada as a nation to be very clear about its aims and interests in the international arena. We have, curiously for a country entering its second century of life, been forced to pay an inordinate amount of attention to our national sovereignty – in legal affairs such as maritime boundaries and pollution control in the Arctic; in the control of electronic

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**International  
institutions**

media; in the development of our resources; and of course in the determination of our own economic structure.

Another area of change in our policy values lies in our attention to international institutions. Our early and imaginative commitment to the United Nations, the IMF [International Monetary Fund], NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], the Commonwealth and the OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development], has had more recently to contend with a growing sense that these institutions are tired, exhausted, serving neither our aspirations for global stability, nor our interests as an independent nation.

Perhaps there is a latent readiness to conclude that the era of international systems and institutions is over and that a predatory and protectionist world of beggar-my-neighbour and devil-take-the-hindmost is the reality which we should emulate in future.

This attitude is clearly at odds with our missionary spirit and our dedication to world order. It reflects a time of economic troubles, of seemingly random turbulence, and of institutional overload in the global system. I believe that our fundamental commitment to international institutions continues to assert itself, but it is a sign of our maturity that our expectations have been tempered, since the postwar period, with a sense of realism.

Let me add a further point to this sketch of change and evolution in our attitude towards the world and towards ourselves. I have described Canada's demographic diversity as a significant national asset. We have prided ourselves on being an open and tolerant society.

Yet one of the most troubling questions, as we look to our values and to our future, is whether Canadian society will maintain its greatness of spirit. Racial prejudice, resentment toward newcomers, and a growing stridency in public debate on social issues, strike me as the most disturbing signs of potential erosion in the policy culture of this country.

These negative phenomena have their impact on our immigration program, our receptiveness to refugees, our attitudes towards economic assistance to developing countries; and on our international credibility and effectiveness in promoting human rights and democratic values. The more we belittle others, the more we diminish ourselves.

I have mentioned the demon of change, and there are those who say that his name is technology. Certainly, in terms of foreign policy, technology has taken us into new and uncharted areas: trans-border data flow; "grey area" weapons systems; direct broadcasting by satellite; seabed mining; STOL aircraft; Telidon; acid rain and so on.

But of vital concern to our policy culture is where we, as a nation, stand in the Darwinian pace of technological innovation and obsolescence: whether we can keep up; whether we can identify the right sectors for concentration and ensure an international environment which is congenial for their development; whether our place is up on the sharp edge of new science, or back on the handle of the resource pump; or whether we can be in both places at once.

I have so far been attempting to sketch for you some elements of continuity and change in what I have termed the Canadian policy culture. Now I want to indicate how these elements have been expressed. In a more specific way, in intellectual frameworks for our international behaviour, priorities and initiatives.

It is commonly alleged that there are basically two schools of thought, and it is these two which I hope to persuade you are fundamentally one. The two schools may be named after the Canadian statesmen most commonly associated with them: the Pearsonian approach to internationalism, and the Trudovian approach to national interests.

My proposition is that these contrasting tendencies are by no means mutually exclusive, that both are deeply rooted in our policy culture, and that an emphasis on one or the other is as much determined by international realities as by fluctuations in our national mood. Moreover, these two themes are, for better or for worse, among the instruments which our country will deploy in coping with the future.

**Pearson's internationalism**

When we speak of Pearsonian internationalism we usually refer to the postwar period of institution-building in which Canada, and many eminent Canadians, took such an effective part, at the San Francisco conference to found the United Nations in 1945, or at the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, Canada was not only present but visible, articulate and influential.

It was a time when our own national strength, our specific gravity in the world, was perhaps at its most solid in relation to others. Our armed forces were large and modern. Our economic circumstances were ideally adapted to postwar development, and our infrastructure had not been ravaged by wartime destruction.

And yet I think we learn something about ourselves and our policy culture from the fact that, at the moment when our national power was at its height, we chose to channel our energies towards the creation of an international system which would promote security and prosperity for others as well as ourselves.

The Canadian statesmen of that period saw no contradiction between world order and national interest. Indeed, we came very early to the conclusion that we could only pursue our national interests in a stable and open international environment. We needed to assert ourselves if we were not to be left out of the process shaping the

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postwar world. And there were benefits, Lester Pearson once described NATO as a form of group insurance which, as was well known, was always cheaper than an individual policy.

**Canada's nuclear  
policy**

That comment brings me to another key element in Canada's foreign policy framework which is by no means simple to explain. In terms of our security we consistently opted for group insurance, and deliberately chose, in the nuclear age, not to develop our own nuclear weapons. This despite the fact that we were, at the close of the war, among those very few countries with the technology and resources to produce nuclear weapons.

Both for our past and for our future that has been a fundamental and resonant decision. It has taken us into collective security arrangements with associated obligations in Europe and in North America. It has taken us into the forefront of the complex and controversial use of nuclear power for peaceful purposes, made us experts on safeguards against the military application of nuclear technology, and on non-proliferation policy. It has brought home the strategic vulnerability of our location between the two super-powers.

This choice not to "go nuclear" in military armament was not taken from ignorance of our potential. Futurists should note that Lester Pearson, speaking in 1934 when nuclear weapons were no more than a dark shadow on some laboratory wall, said and I quote: "It is altogether likely that in 25 years from now the weapons of today will be as out-of-date as pikes and tomahawks.... We get almost into the realm of the fantastic when we consider the release of atomic energy as a destructive agency.... If that energy is ever released...and applied to destructive purposes, we would doubtless have world peace, because the world would be blown to bits."

For 1934, that was a remarkable insight into the future. And Pearson's political assessment still stands in the sense that fear of the nuclear holocaust has so far maintained a condition which, if it is not precisely peace, is not exactly war either.

My point therefore is that the conscious abdication of nuclear weapons evolved in Canada, as in no other country at the time, both in the full knowledge of the power which nuclear weaponry could endow, and with the capacity to produce nuclear weapons ourselves.

A choice of this kind is, it seems to me and has evidently seemed to successive governments, so deeply grounded in Canada's policy culture as not to be a choice at all. It is simply not an issue. Its ramifications of course continue to be hotly debated, but the basic premise that Canada will not construct nuclear weapons is, quite rightly in my view, never questioned. It is a tribute to what I have earlier called our relative security in a relatively insecure world.

But questions of collective security are only one side of the set of national interests which inspired us to work on international, multilateral, systems and institutions despite the national strengths which could have impelled us in a different direction. Pearson, although inaccurately identified exclusively with the internationalist and altruist stream in our policy culture, also said that foreign policy was no more than "domestic policy with its hat on".

Our domestic needs for markets, labour, capital and technology were very directly served by the international organizations and agreements established in the postwar period. And if our missionary spirit enhanced Canada's ability to contribute to world order, then so much the better.

Trudeau's  
nationalism

If Lester Pearson is identified with the internationalist strain, then Prime Minister Trudeau is often identified with the national-interest school — with a period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when people began to question what Canada was up to in the world; a period when so many new actors had entered the world stage that the Pearsonian premise — that international systems could be effective in their work — was being called into question on all sides.

The national-interest stream of our policy culture moved from recessive to dominant. The foreign policy review of 1970 said, and was widely criticized for it despite the similarity of the Pearson definition I just quoted, that foreign policy was the "extension abroad of national policies". The review cited public disenchantment with the role of "helpful fixer", suggested we concern ourselves less with being thought good fellows and more with the interests of our nation, and stressed the direct link between behaviour abroad and such issues as sovereignty and national unity.

Now this shift in emphasis is to be explained, to some extent, by those fluctuations in our policy culture which I have already discussed. And to be sure, there is a whiff of nationalism in our response to many of the pressures of the outside world. But there is also, occasionally, a form of bizarre and persistent Canadian modesty which presents itself as self-deprecation.

Robertson Davies has spotted this trait in relation to Canadian literature and once wrote: "Our national attitude towards literature is ambiguous. We ask gloomy questions about it: where is our great poet? when will our writers reveal our national identity? But when a book which is unmistakably about Canadians appears, it is greeted with some embarrassment. Our demand for a national literature is like an outcry for portrait painters in a country where nobody wants to be a sitter."

Somewhat the same syndrome is at work in relation to foreign policy. We may be proud that Lester Pearson wins the Nobel Peace Prize, but are just as likely to be found grumbling that peacekeeping is a drain on our resources, that foreign aid is a waste of money, or that the North-South dialogue is a feeble act of faith.

**Foreign policy  
at the service  
of national unity**

A point which returns me to the allegation that the Trudovian concept of national interest is somehow mean-spirited. This is surprising because a massive increase in foreign aid, and a very strong engagement with the Third World, have been just as much the hallmark of the past 15 years of Canadian foreign policy as has any cold-eyed construction of national interests and *realpolitik*.

True, we have done our best to ensure that our foreign policy reflected our economic, cultural and security interests. We have put foreign policy very much at the service of national unity. We have acted unilaterally in protecting our maritime environment and resources, although I would add that these steps were taken only after an exhaustive search for international agreement. And we have moved to the defence of our media and of our electronic sovereignty.

But our concept of national interest has never been so narrowly construed that our dedication to the global system has seriously slackened. I think of work at the Law of the Sea Conference. Work in new fora such as the Cancun Summit on North-South relations. And participation in a range of international organizations and multilateral negotiations.

In sum, I contend that the point and counterpoint of internationalism and self-interest both have been, and will probably continue to be, an expression of our policy culture in foreign affairs.

**Nuclear-weapons-  
control a priority**

I have now arrived at my fourth and final theme, which is to take a look at our policy culture when projected into the future. Which elements will change? What choices will we face? How will we manage the shocks and surprises which the future undoubtedly holds? If Lester Pearson, in 1934, could spot nuclear energy as the miracle and the menace of the future, what should we be keeping our eye on?

Much as one would prefer to forecast the arrival of new social or political ideas promoting world order, peace and prosperity — and we may be wrong not to — I fear it is the world of technology which will provide the most powerful motor of change.

I would venture to suggest that no single breakthrough in the coming decades can out-rank the destructive power of annihilation unlocked by the continuing development of nuclear weapons. We may find other ways of destroying ourselves and our species, such as punching great holes in the biosphere, melting down the polar ice-cap, or turning the earth into Swiss cheese by deep drilling. But none seems likely to rival the proliferation of nuclear weapons whose use is threatened as an instrument of state power.

To control these weapons, and to arrest their spread to other nations, will be an overriding priority for the foreseeable future, at least until such time as the security of any one nation can be maintained without the promotion of insecurity among others.

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**New technologies**

Turning to developments in other areas of technology, it strikes me that what we will continue to experience is more the shock of the cumulative application of the new technologies, rather than the impact of one or another major breakthrough. The application of silicon-chip microcomputers to ever-widening areas of life is a prime example.

The shock of cumulative application also applies to the emergence of new linkages between existing technologies. The union of computers and telecommunications produced telematics, and I can give you an example of the shock of telematics on my own Department of External Affairs. In 1961 the number of telegrams moving through our diplomatic communications system each day was about 2 700. Today the number is close to 19 000. This is a sevenfold increase in 20 years, and no other activity associated with this department has grown by the same factor.

Another potential linkage, with undoubted impact on international affairs, has been created in the biotechnologies. This new science uses microbes as tiny employees to produce protein, medicine, livestock fodder, and plastics. Biotechnology has applications in agriculture, forestry and mining. The transfer of biotechnology to developing countries could have an enormous economic impact.

Technology, however, is not a neutral element. In terms of international relations, we are frequently confronted by its destabilizing force: the increasing sophistication of conventional arms, and their widening availability; violence in the reaction of traditional societies to the stress of technological change; ambiguity in the transfer and distribution of industrial technology — a transfer which may be right in itself, but whose results may promote competition, rivalry, and economic dislocation; the denial of technology used as an instrument of leverage in East-West relations. All these must be digested by the global system, and by our own policy culture.

But these are other choices which may lie ahead. The work of Dr. Gerald Barney and associates, on the implications for Canada of his *Global 2000 Report*, considered trends in population, natural resources, and the environment. Their assessment is remarkably positive in many ways.

**Outside pressures**

But Barney and company do spot one trend which could have considerable impact on our policy culture, could pose very difficult choices and could even bring about significant revision in the way we relate to the rest of the world. This is the forecast of increasing pressure upon Canada, from the rest of the world, for ever greater supplies of resources such as food, energy, forest products and minerals. Such pressure will place increasing stress upon our land, air and water resources.

Canada, as a relatively secure country in a relatively insecure world, could become even more envied. The perception of us held by others could be much less benign than it is today. Pressure upon us to share our space and territory with a much larger population could also be expected.

**What of the future?**

I want to dwell on this scenario because we have not so far in this century considered our country to be subject to siege from the outside. Certainly we know our vulnerabilities and we hope to manage them. The balance between foreign investment and national control, controversial though it is, is one we live and work with. Our sales of grain are guided by a rough equilibrium of domestic capacity, government enterprise, the open market, and long-term agreements. The export of our natural resources is handled by that comfortably Canadian muddle of private sector, provincial rights and public interest as interpreted by our national government.

But how will all of us, and our policy culture, react when the demands of the world around us not only vastly exceed our capacities, but are placed with increasing pressure or even force? Or when sales of food or paper are transformed from commercial transactions to the fundamental allocation of planetary resources?

This picture of a Canada under siege is distinctly new and different for us. And the first strain will come at the heart of my analysis of our policy culture: it will make it ever more difficult to maintain both our dedication to world order and our self-interest as an independent nation.

Those twin preoccupations, which I hope I have persuaded you are one, would come under extreme pressure. Our dedication to an open international trading system could recede before a network of separate bilateral agreements. We could expect consumer nations to exercise heavy leverage against us and we would have to design national strategies accordingly. The easy pluralism of our society might have to take lessons from those nation-states which behave like corporations – or from those corporations which behave like nation-states.

We would have to envisage much more complex, calculated and well-crafted economic relations with resource customers such as the European Community, the United States and Japan. A significant level of high technology benefits for Canada might have to become a condition for access to our resources. We would have to manage an advanced degree of interdependence with the other industrialized nations in ways which we have only just begun to perceive.

And there is a further element, I believe, in any such scenario of the future, one which would be extremely difficult for our policy culture to absorb. We would by no means be able to count on economic growth, as we know it today, as the driving force of our own or other nations.

Economic growth has, until the present time, been regarded as one of the prime indicators of economic health and well-being. Although challenged by environmentalists and by the advocates of "small is beautiful", economic growth, and the expectation of economic growth, have virtually been regarded as laws of nature. Growth is good – growth is progress.

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I wonder if, in the near future, we will not have to rethink our approach to economic growth — to adjust our values so that we focus not on the size of our national economic basket, but on the composition of its contents. Do indicators of no-growth necessarily mean stagnation and recession? Maybe we need a radical revision of our policy culture, our social fabric and our individual and collective expectations.

A change of this order, however, could not happen in isolation. The expectation of growth, still evident in many countries, would have to be reduced in common and in concert, lest the international system be torn to shreds by conflicting goals. As for our own policy culture we should have to create, to a much greater degree than we have so far, a sense of cohesion among government, business and labour. We would need a strategic compact to ensure that we are neither divided, nor ruled, by others.

I cannot be certain that any such scenario will take place, together with the necessary changes in our policy culture. But if you, like me, have come to this conference in order to reflect on how the known can reach out to the unknown, then it is an hypothesis which I want to leave with you.

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