



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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Text of an address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L. B. Pearson, before the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Friday, June 4, 1954.

Canada's development in the last two decades has been almost as striking in her external relations as in domestic progress. If we compare our foreign policy with that of the mid-1930's there are certain particulars - and they are by no means minor ones - in which the changes will appear so dramatic as to amount almost to a complete reversal. For example, it would not be wholly wide of the mark, though an over-simplification, to say that before World War II Canada often appeared to be seeking peace through a policy of avoiding commitments; whereas during recent years we have been ready to assume them as the main element in our hope for security.

It is, I think, useful to consider to what extent we have, in fact, during the past few decades changed the fundamental principles underlying our foreign policy; and to what extent we have merely developed and adapted them to altered circumstances.

Early in 1937, Mr. Escott Reid, now our High Commissioner in New Delhi, but then National Secretary of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, analyzed in an article in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Mr. Mackenzie King's foreign policy and summed it up in certain practices and principles.

He had this to say, first, about our practice in declaring policy:

"Since the war" (the 1914-18 war) "imprecision has been the common characteristic of most statements on foreign policy by Canadian Prime Ministers. In this the Prime Ministers of Canada have not been unique. As Mr. Harold Nicholson has pointed out, though 'the essence of a good foreign policy is certitude' and though 'an uncertain policy is always bad' yet 'on the other hand a parliamentary and press opposition is less likely to concentrate against an elastic foreign policy than against one which is precise. It is thus a grave temptation for a foreign minister under the democratic system to prefer an idealistic formula, which raises only intellectual criticism, to a concrete formula which is open to popular attack'."

Well, you don't have to be a politician, like myself, to know what Mr. Reid and Mr. Nicholson meant by that. It is always safe, politically, to say that you are against sin. It sounds well. Whereas to be precise on a controversial issue is often - well, controversial.

Furthermore, when there could be two views on an issue, political or domestic, prudence may in certain circumstances suggest vagueness and imprecision. In our pre-war foreign policy, it often did.

But there is an opposite danger; that of confusing precision with rigidity. There are certain situations in which too rigid a formulation of policy, and too precise an expression of it could prove costly and conceivably even disastrous. Yet in times of strong popular passion, bold and sweeping assertions may appear momentarily popular, and may prove alluring to the demagogue. If a complex issue is popularly seen in the over-simplified colours of black and white, the easy course may be to make dogmatic pronouncements - to proclaim loudly that whatever the circumstances, you yourself will stand rigidly on the side of righteousness, or at least on the side that appeals most to public opinion of the moment. There is, in fact, a tendency today to reduce democracy to a sort of competition in popular superlatives - either for or against.

There are occasions, of course, and issues, when a man or nation "must decide, in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side". But there are others, and they are the more numerous, when the merits of a situation are by no means so simple, or the right solution so clear-cut and easy to find; except, of course, for those who are sure that on our side all men are wholly saints, and the others irredeemable sinners.

Self-righteousness is still a cheap and easy temptation. Just as absolute monarchies could be a prey to hypocrisy and insincerity in their courtiers, democracies are not necessarily inoculated against the same unamiable characteristics in those who seek power.

There is also the danger of the well-meaning but limited mind creating rigidity - and thereby preventing growth - because its imagination of the moment is not equal to the almost infinite variety of fact and circumstance in any given situation.

I could give current examples, but perhaps I shouldn't.

Judging from the debate this spring in our House of Commons on external affairs, some Canadians might have considered it desirable officially to state, as indeed has been stated elsewhere, that we would never recognize Communist China.

There was a popular song of the 1930's, which ran, "I'll never say 'never again' again". As I recall, it was a young man in love who learned that wisdom. The same lesson can, however, apply to diplomats or foreign ministers. It may look vigorous, and decisive, and courageous, to burn bridges in front of you - but it is seldom wise. It is certainly not the historical approach to international problems!

It is, I think, more than normally easy to fall into the danger of excessive precision and undue rigidity on the eve of an international conference. This is particularly tempting in the case of a conference with a dangerous ideological enemy; especially if it is a conference designed to put an end to inconclusive but costly fighting. One can even find oneself under contradictory pressures from the same well-intentioned sources, (a) to bring the boys back home by negotiating a settlement, (b) not even to talk to the enemy with whom any settlement would have to be negotiated.

Even if you avoid these particular pitfalls, as I have indicated you may run into the lesser, but nonetheless serious danger of being urged to adopt in advance, and to announce, principles so rigid that they leave no room for manoeuvre or negotiation.

If diplomacy, however, is to get anywhere, it must avoid not only the excessive flexibility of the jelly fish, but the excessive rigidity of a mastodon. Remember what happened to mastodons!

Historians may come to consider "Unconditional surrender" a diplomatic demand of questionable wisdom even in an all-out and victorious war. Certainly it is out of place in a localized conflict of limited objectives. Yet an international "police action" is, as I see it, precisely that: and one of our basic purposes in such actions must be to keep our objectives limited and the fighting localized so that it can be ended without the holocaust entailed in the destruction of great societies.

On a different plane, some people might counter the doctrine that "an uncertain policy is always bad", with the desirability of "keeping them guessing". If this can be applied to the potential enemy rather than to your allies, then in a cold war situation the doctrine may have something to be said for it. But even here the uncertainty should be limited to non-essentials. It would, for instance, be morally wrong, and politically unwise, to allow the slightest uncertainty on the fundamental point that, in default of anything better, we on our side of this cold war accept co-existence, not merely as a temporary tactic, but as firm policy: that our purposes are defensive and pacific; that we will never start a world war. We must do all we can to prevent responsible persons in any part of the world concluding that war is inevitable, lest they ever be tempted to the desperate and fatal expedient of launching a preventive aggression.

On this fundamental point, therefore, let us not keep anyone guessing. Our purposes are defensive, and defensive alone. On this at least, let us be utterly precise; rigid, if you like.

So much, then, for Mr. Reid's first point - precision or the lack of it in the practice of diplomacy and foreign policy.

Of the principles which Mr. Escott Reid found in Canada's pre-war foreign policy, some of them have clearly been modified not a little since he wrote. It is interesting to relate them to the situation of 1954.

Two of these principles laid it down that Canada was under no special obligation to participate in the military or economic sanctions of the League of Nations. Well, as you know, most Canadians as well as other peoples came to realize, after the tragic mistakes in our dealings with Hitler and Mussolini, that there was little safety in a policy of no commitments, no collective obligations. In the United Nations Charter, we therefore willingly accepted certain quite explicit commitments for a system of collective security. This could have proved workable if the co-operation of the Soviet Union with the West had continued after World War II. When this expectation proved unfounded, our Prime Minister voiced, I think, the feelings of the great majority of Canadians when he suggested, in a memorable speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 1947, that more explicit obligations for collective security than those of the Charter might be adopted by those countries who would be prepared to accept them. This proposal became one of the sources of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Quite apart from our NATO obligations, which are quite explicit, Canada has also accepted certain collective security obligations, moral if not legal, in the "Uniting for Peace" resolution of the United Nations General Assembly. These are, of course, in addition to the general obligations of the Charter.

That these various military and political obligations are by no means academic is amply evidenced by the fact that at the present time Canada is maintaining an air division in Europe, and an infantry brigade in Korea and one in Germany.

As contrasted with Canada's unwillingness, in the 1930's, to accept an obligation to participate even in economic sanctions of the League of Nations, Canada is today participating not merely in such sanctions under a United Nations resolution (against Communist China, as a result of its declared aggression against Korea), but in collective measures, prudential rather than punitive, which have been adopted by a group representing many of the free nations of the world, to limit or prevent trade in strategic materials with the communist totalitarian nations of Eastern Europe.

I do not myself accept the argument that our claim to have accepted, as a Canadian Government our fair share of responsibility for collective security, is weakened by hesitation now to undertake additional specific defence commitments in other areas than the Western Hemisphere, Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Turkey.

It is not, I think, a valid criticism that we are inconsistent and weak if we show great caution in joining any collective defence arrangements for Southeast Asia, which might not include the most important free Asian countries, and which would probably include commitments for Canadian participation in military planning and defence contributions of men and material, such as we have already undertaken in NATO.

I think also that the special obligations we have already assumed, along with the fact that we take seriously our United Nations collective security commitments, gives any Canadian Government the right, and, indeed,

imposes on it the duty, to make its own views clearly known, and even to produce its own "formulae" in respect of situations anywhere which threaten the peace and which might bring about that general conflict, the dread consequences of which we could not escape.

It should be remembered, however, that this earlier Canadian policy of refusing to accept the obligations of collective security was motivated primarily by domestic considerations, by the desire to avoid taking up a position on issues which would split the country. It was, therefore, in substantial part a deduction from another principle - the maintenance of domestic unity.

This anxious preoccupation with the danger of provoking domestic disunity was the most important consideration behind that principle of our foreign policy in the 1930's, formulated by Mr. Reid as follows:

"Canada should, as a general rule, occupy a back seat at Geneva or elsewhere when European or Asiatic problems are being discussed."

This back-seat policy did not mean that the Canadian Government was content to follow where others led. Rather, we tried to be so inconspicuous that a leader would not know whether we were following him or not; or, to put it another way, to avoid anything that could be interpreted even as an implied moral commitment to share in the responsibility of putting things right if the situation in Europe or Africa or Asia should deteriorate. We were cautious about joining even in the discussion of dangerous issues. It was not, in fact, a policy of disinterest; but it often was made deliberately to appear so.

It would, I think, be wrong to believe that pre-war governments in Canada were naive enough seriously to expect that a policy of avoiding commitment could really keep us free from entanglement in a general war, should one develop. There were, of course, people in this country who believed that if we buried our heads in the Canadian sand we could avoid the effects of the storm. But this optimistic viewpoint was never, I think, held by the majority of those, in any section of our country, who thought about international affairs. The real reason behind the so-called "back-seat" policy of pre-war Canadian Governments lay in the profound differences of opinion on European affairs held by important sections of our countrymen. International commitments were avoided not so much, I think, because they might involve us in international military responsibilities abroad, but because they would certainly have involved us in domestic political difficulties at home.

Thus each of these dogma of our pre-war foreign policy, which Canada has reversed since 1939 - imprecision, no commitments, and a reluctance even to consult with other nations on the major issues which could threaten the peace - were corollaries of what Mr. Reid stated - and I think rightly - to be the first and guiding principle in the formulation of Canada's foreign policy: "the maintenance of the unity of Canada as a nation".

Mr. King himself put this first principle of his foreign policy in the following terms, at the time of the Rhineland crisis in 1936:

"I believe that Canada's first duty to the League and to the British Empire, with respect to all the great issues that come up, is if possible to keep this country united".

The fact that since 1945 Canadians have been able to reverse almost all the corollaries which Mr. King drew in pre-war circumstances from the paramount necessity of national unity, has been due in part to the lessons of World War II itself, due also in part to the nature of the threat to peace since that war - communist imperialism. But it is also a monument to the success of the policies which during the past several decades have welded this nation together.

It is still the fundamental principle of wise statesmanship in Canada - and I hope it will always be recognized as such - that on important issues the nation's leaders should seek and pursue a policy which will, if possible, commend itself to a majority of our people in each section of the country. This is, of course, only possible to the extent that there is, among us all, a sense of restraint and responsibility, and sufficient intellectual flexibility and moral stature to be able to understand another section's point of view, when it differs from our own, and to respect it even though we may not agree with it.

Canadian unity has been maintained and consolidated precisely because a sufficient number of our people, in all sections, have developed these moral and intellectual qualities of self-discipline in a degree adequate to the challenges and crises which we have faced. If we can today have a positive foreign policy, it is precisely because of the degree of internal cohesion and unity which we have achieved.

This does not, of course, mean that national unity can be taken for granted. But our society of two cultures has by now reached the more mature stage where foreign policy can be formulated as a result primarily of a dispassionate analysis of the foreign situation.

In the '30's, then, we were intensely preoccupied with the effect of our foreign policy on the unity of our country. But in the '50's we are also concerned with the connection between that policy and the unity of the coalition against aggression, in which Canada is playing an active part. Hence the problem of seeking unity has been vastly enlarged in scope and complexity.

With the fantastic development in weapons and communications which technologists have produced, the effective scale of political affairs on our planet is rapidly changing. And as the scale changes the effective unit of manoeuvre in international politics changes too. Today no nation, not even the greatest, is big enough to be a fully effective unit of foreign policy.

In the 19th century, and to a large extent too in the first half of this one, most of the problems of foreign policy were problems within our Western civilization: usually problems between European states. Today the most challenging and most significant issues are found in the relations between two concepts of world organization: and in the emergence of new Asian states, free and insistent.

The main problems of foreign policy in a democracy now have to be assessed, and day to day decisions taken, against this background of global relations between civilizations. And against this background it is of course obvious that our greatest need, our one indispensable asset, is unity among those who are working together to defend freedom and maintain peace. Today we certainly cannot take this unity for granted.

It is not easy, but it should be possible, for democratic statesmen to cultivate effective cohesion and cooperation within a coalition. For one thing, successful politicians in a democracy are inevitably schooled to sense quickly, almost before they appear, the first signs of disunity within their own section or nation.

Again, when action is needed, careful and timely consultation is the democratic politician's stock in trade. Anyone experienced in the operations of a democracy, with its committees, cabinets, caucuses, trade union meetings, or boards of directors, knows, or soon learns, the value of having private consultations with his leading associates, before confronting them in public with the need to pronounce judgment on a new issue. These processes are equally important in a coalition of states. They are not always followed. But I think that, in our coalition against aggression, we are improving our techniques of co-operation and, more important, increasingly acquiring the habit of consultation. We are learning the value of prior discussion - not as a substitute for action - but as essential for united action.

Needless to say, consultation does not mean merely the opportunity either to share in responsibility for implementing a decision already taken, or alternatively to stand aside. Consultation means the opportunity to participate in the give and take of ideas, the weighing of pros and cons, and the formulation of policy.

This may seem like a "tall order" between a group of sovereign states, varying so much in power and influence as is the case with the members of our Atlantic coalition. It is a "tall order", and its achievements will take considerable time. In crises, indeed, something less may seem to suffice or may have to suffice. But eventually nothing less than this true consultation will be adequate to consolidate a coalition of free peoples, and to forge out of several democracies a unity deep and strong enough for the international situation of risk and menace with which we may have to live for a long time.

This broader responsibility does not in any sense remove, or weaken, the direct constitutional responsibility of each democratic government to its own nation. It is something additional. It is nothing formalized. It is, rather, an attitude which must be developed, a quality of outlook that must be achieved.

This requirement of unity will put a premium on those qualities of detachment, patience, and moral courage which any politician in a democracy needs from time to time if he is to stand firm despite the passing currents and passions of the moment. For, though not only interests, but intellectual appreciation and the understanding of a situation

may be shared in common throughout a coalition, yet the emotions and passions of political moods are usually limited to a single country; at times, indeed, to a section thereof.

As Gouzenko, and Kravchenko, and Petrov, and many others have proved, the free individual is the Achilles' heel of totalitarianism. But a democratic coalition also has its Achilles' heel; in the temptations, which can beset any democratic politician, to yield too much to expediency, to the claims of immediate time and place and circumstance.

Above all, if we are to make a coalition work, we must accustom ourselves to living with requirements and within a framework, broader than that of our own state.

This will apply, of course, to the economic as well as to other aspects of policy. Excessive economic nationalism, if unchecked, will sooner or later corrode any coalition, and weaken until it destroys co-operation and unity in foreign or defence policies. Attitudes to neighbours and allies cannot be kept in water-tight compartments.

Finally, those peoples within our coalition whose strength gives them a position of leadership have a special obligation to cultivate self-denying qualities of patience, restraint, and tolerance. In their turn, the smaller and less strong members will have to demonstrate, not a surrender of their identity or free judgment, which would be undesirable and impossible, but a sense of proportion and accommodation and a recognition that the acceptance of leadership and the possession of power warrant special influence and weight in the counsels of the coalition.

An acceptance of the over-riding claims of unity, and the acceptance of the delays and concessions which are sometimes necessary to cultivate it, come hardest, of course, to the strongest: for a consciousness of strength naturally encourages self-confidence and is apt to induce a tendency to take for granted the acquiescence of others. The less strong members of a coalition probably find it easier than the stronger to be conscious of the anxieties and attitudes of others; and easier also to recognize the perils of disunity within the greater society of which they form a part.

The importance of doing what we can to strengthen the unity and cohesiveness of our Atlantic coalition is, in one sense, then, a new, though a very important principle of Canadian foreign policy. In another sense, however, it is merely a new expression of something that always has been considered a main objective of that policy; good relations and close co-operation between the United Kingdom and the United States. Canada's absorption in this objective is as old as the Canadian nation. That is why Mr. Reid stated as his second principle that Canadian foreign policy was, in the main, not a matter of Canadian relations to the League of Nations, but of Canadian relations to the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The first part of that statement does not apply today for we take the United Nations far more seriously than ever we did the old League. But the latter part remains

valid - with this difference. In the thirties our relations with the United Kingdom and the United States were, in the main, direct. Now they are to a large extent concerned with them as members of a coalition of which Canada is itself a member. That is one reason why Canada is so strong a supporter of such an organization as NATO; it is a vehicle of Anglo-American-Canadian co-operation as well as a bulwark of peace. The triangle rests more comfortably in such a system.

I could, Mr. Chairman, say much more on this subject, "Thoughts on Canada's External Affairs", but I have gone on long enough. My thoughts have not, I fear, been very original, but I hope they may stimulate some discussion and provoke some enquiry.

You may have heard of the story of a conversation between H.G. Wells and a friend, which was interrupted by Bernard Shaw with a question as to what they were speaking about. "I was just thinking out loud" said Mr. Wells. "Oh", replied Shaw, "I thought I heard a faint sound". My faint sound, Mr. Chairman, has ended.

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