



Statements and Speeches

No. 79/22

FOREIGN POLICY REVIEW

A Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Flora MacDonald, before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence, Ottawa, October 30, 1979

I want to begin by saying how delighted I am to appear before this Committee, for the first time as Secretary of State for External Affairs. Since my appointment, I've had the opportunity to speak to a number of you on matters relating to foreign affairs. In addition, my officials, on my instructions, have been available for briefings to your respective caucuses on matters you viewed to be important. It is my intention to continue this policy of providing a flow of information to parliamentarians, especially the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence.

Prior to an examination of the supplementary estimates, which is the subject of this morning's meeting, I thought that it would be appropriate for me to make a few brief remarks concerning my approach to foreign policy and the foreign policy review presently under way.

One of the points made to my leader by Progressive Conservative members of this Committee in the last Parliament was that "for too long the making of Canada's foreign policy has been shrouded in the domain of public servants, diplomats and cabinet committees."

Among the first things I sought out to accomplish after June 4th was to increase public interest in external and aid policy. If the Government of Canada is to continue and even increase its commitments in these fields, it is essential that it have the active support of the Canadian people. I also believe very sincerely that an informed public will support humane and enlightened policies both at home and abroad.

Foreign policy must not be the exclusive preserve of the few, inside or outside government. I believe that the time is right to undertake a comprehensive review of Canada's foreign policy. The last foreign policy review took place ten years ago but it has largely been overtaken by events. A lot has changed in the past decade.

New areas of instability have emerged while some old ones linger on. Economic interdependence has increased, while discrepancies between different groups of countries in the developing world have grown. There has been extraordinary growth in the production and sale of conventional arms, of an increasingly sophisticated kind, all over the globe. More and more countries have been manoeuvring for position, exercising political, economic or military leverage under the nuclear arch provided by the United States and the Soviet Union. It is clearly time to stand back and take a good look at all this, to ascertain what it means for Canada, and to chart our course for the future. That is the purpose of a foreign policy review at this time. It is not a

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luxury. It is essential.

On my first day at the Pearson Building last June, I was presented with a large briefing book containing some 115 briefs. They covered every conceivable subject: political, economic, security, environmental, institutional; they raised questions or identified issues affecting Canada's position in virtually every corner of the globe. Even then the briefing book contained only a selection of foreign-policy-related subjects; it by no means covered them all.

Seeing that book brought home to me in concrete terms what I was already well aware of in general terms — the complexity of the international scene, the unpredictability of events, and the extent to which Canadian points of view needed to be confirmed, changed or developed.

It was in this context that I concluded that our foreign policy review should begin with the preparation by my officials of a paper which would try to show Canadians the kind of world we live in today, underlining the changes which have occurred and identifying the implications for Canada.

This paper is almost completed. It describes forces at work in the world, political motivations, changing power relationships, and changing economic conditions. It raises a lot of issues which I think must concern us. Like my recent speeches, it poses some provocative questions, and is meant to serve as a stimulus to discussion, not prejudge it.

In the same spirit and within the framework of reviewing Canadian foreign policy, a companion paper is being prepared on aid; and it will see the light of day simultaneously with the first paper on Canada's place in a changing world.

It is the Government's intention to refer these two papers, and possibly other documents, to a Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and Senate in the near future. It is also my intention to involve that Committee in Canada's preparations for the Madrid Review Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to be held in the fall of 1980. It may be that the entire Committee will want to take a look at that subject, or it may be that in the preparation for that very important conference it will want to designate a subcommittee to work on the specific arrangements for the Madrid Conference in 1980.

The Government's purpose in this is twofold: first, to help revitalize the role of Parliament in the consideration of Canadian foreign policy; and second, to provoke discussion in the country at large of the foreign policy issues of the day, giving the largest number of people the maximum opportunity to participate.

I have stressed, and cannot stress enough, the importance I attach to parliamentary and public input in our foreign policy review. I combine this with an assurance, however, that the Government cannot, and will not, abdicate its responsibilities in the meantime. Government decisions in specific areas will obviously have to be made.

I look forward to the inquiry to be carried out by parliamentarians of both chambers and particularly to its report, which will no doubt include its own assessment of the issues we face in the Eighties and some advice on how we should confront them. I would hope the Committee could make its report by early June, 1980.

The parliamentary and public contribution to the foreign policy review process is an important, and indeed vital, stage. It will provide the firm groundwork upon which the Government of Canada will be able to conduct its foreign policy in the 1980s.