



## IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

**Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909-2009**

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**THE DEPARTMENT OF  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND  
THE UNITED NATIONS  
IDEA, 1943-1965**

Adam Chapnick

In 1965, while the United Nations was celebrating its twentieth anniversary, Canada's Department of External Affairs drafted a short book, *We the Peoples: Canada and the United Nations, 1945-1965*. According to its authors, the text presented "in compact form, an accurate and balanced survey of Canada's participation in United Nations activities." It explained "something of the philosophical basis of Canadian policy, or in other words, the Canadian 'approach' to issues coming before the United Nations."<sup>1</sup> More realistically, the tone of the publication was faithful to the department's understood duty to reflect the sentiment of the time: Confident and optimistic, *We the Peoples* celebrated Canada's early United Nations experience.

Neither the tone nor the sentiment lasted. In 1967, Egypt brashly dismissed the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in Sinai, shocking and disillusioning Canadians who saw the peacekeeping force and their participation as a symbol of their country's worldly effectiveness. The following year, Canada's new prime minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, promised to recalibrate Canada's approach to world affairs. As historian Robert

Bothwell has explained, to Trudeau, and others, Canadian foreign policy “had become the handmaiden of a misguided devotion to international institutions. Along the way, Canada’s national interest had been lost, or at least submerged, and Canada had earned itself the reputation of an international busybody.”<sup>2</sup> When Trudeau’s secretary of state for external affairs revised *We the Peoples* ten years later, he went so far as to take explicit aim at its predecessor, noting that *his* text was “written from a more critical point of view; failures as well as successes [were] recorded, and disquietude [was] expressed as well as satisfaction.”<sup>3</sup>

What caused Canadians to become so distressed about the United Nations? And how did their understanding of the venerable international institution become so detached from their interpretation of the national interest? While some of the answer lies in objective developments in New York and further abroad, part of it lies in the way that External Affairs and its political masters explained their conduct on the world stage during the organization’s opening decades. This explanation was regularly given in annual reports, which permit historians to see how the Canadian public’s understanding of Canada’s place and role within the United Nations became increasingly removed from the national interest.

During the negotiations to create the United Nations and through the term of Secretary-General Trygve Lie (1945–52), the Department of External Affairs pursued a United Nations policy of advocacy without insistence: a measured approach that acknowledged the country’s strengths and weaknesses and was indeed informed by the government’s interpretation of the national interest. The ultimate goal during this period was to ensure the institution’s long-term viability. As the United Nations adjusted to the leadership of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1953–61), the death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, and the beginnings of decolonization, the department experienced its own transition. Having established a reputation in New York for diplomatic excellence, it often found itself in the spotlight. What resulted was an approach to the organization that was at times less pragmatic but also more outwardly and politically rewarding. In the words of the former official turned commentator, John Holmes, Canada’s United Nations diplomacy “was not yet self-conscious,”<sup>4</sup> but it was heading that way. Departmental reports during the early U Thant years (1961–65), a time largely characterized by global optimism and idealism, were more

boldly positive. Although still conscious of the national interest, two successive secretaries of state for external affairs, Conservative Howard Green and Liberal Paul Martin (Sr.), reshaped the Canadian commitment to the United Nations, framing it as a self-serving means of asserting a national presence on the world stage more than a necessary strategic duty. Canadian rhetoric came to emphasize what Ottawa was doing for the world rather than what an effective United Nations meant to the national interest. In summary, then, the language of the External Affairs' reports throughout the organization's first two decades reflected an evolving Canadian attitude towards the United Nations that was consistent with the changing national and international mood of the time. Nevertheless, by developing and articulating policy that was consistent with the aims of its political masters, the Department of External Affairs was complicit in diplomatic efforts that increasingly lost sight of Canadian national interests.

Demands for Canada to commit itself to the "construction of an effective collective system" could be heard within the Department of External Affairs as early as January 1942, but the mandarins who worked in the East Block on Parliament Hill were not genuinely involved in discussions of the United Nations organization until more than eighteen months later.<sup>5</sup> Before that, a plebiscite to release the government from its promise not to impose conscription and a much slower evolution of public attitudes in favour of greater internationalism allowed the reluctant Canadian prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, to limit any opportunities for comprehensive planning. King did not receive a serious update on the state of British and American thinking about a new world organization until the end of March 1943, and it was only in July that the prime minister, who served as his own secretary of state for external affairs, publicly declared his support for what became the United Nations.<sup>6</sup> Later that month, King's under-secretary of state for external affairs, Norman Robertson, finally set in motion a process that resulted in the department's first postwar planning groups, the advisory and working committees on post-hostilities problems.<sup>7</sup>

Over the next year and a half, the occupants of the East Block strove to determine how Canada might best contribute to the creation of a world organization that promoted the interests of the United Nations allies.<sup>8</sup> Ensuring that the small powers were not taken for granted — while Britain, the United States, and eventually the Soviet Union devised the basic

framework of the world body was a priority.<sup>9</sup> The chair of the working committee on post-hostilities problems, Hume Wrong, explained Canadian thinking in February 1944: “as a secondary country we have not a great enough influence to make our views prevail. We should, however, be in a position at least to decide what is not acceptable and to advocate greater changes or additions to fit our particular interests.”<sup>10</sup> Those interests included multilateral cooperation to promote national security, freedom to diverge from the United States on foreign policy, and fair representation of the smaller and medium-sized powers on the most significant UN bodies.

Not much later, Wrong described a Canadian dilemma. His government, he wrote, “had two points of view to consider. We did not want to throw a monkey-wrench into the harmony among the Great Powers, but, on the other hand, we wanted to protect the Canadian position as well as that of the small countries.”<sup>11</sup> It was vital to Canada’s interests that the new world organization be created. Once its establishment had been confirmed, Ottawa had to do its utmost to ensure that the perspective of smaller states was considered before significant decisions affecting Canadians were made. What became known as the functional principle – the idea that non-great powers should be granted influence in world affairs on a case by case basis commensurate with their capacity and willingness to contribute – formed the basis of the department’s philosophy going forward.<sup>12</sup>

The functional principle was based on the premise that there were two types of states in the global order: great powers, who participated in all international decisions; and everyone else, whose impact varied by issue. A corollary to this principle, albeit one that was never explicitly articulated, was that lesser states could exert more significant influence on those issues that concerned the great powers the least. Led by Wrong, the Department of External Affairs therefore focused its postwar planning exercises on those elements of the United Nations Charter that played a lesser role in the US–UK–USSR negotiations. This meant thinking seriously about the economic and social aspects of the new organization, as well as making a significant contribution to the development of international law.<sup>13</sup> At the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in April 1945, the department ultimately disappointed many of its smaller allies by supporting a relatively broad interpretation of the great power veto. Its middle power-like leadership came through its exemplary diplomatic behaviour

during the drafting of the more innocuous articles of the United Nations Charter, which established the Economic and Social Council as well as in the discussions to create a world court.<sup>14</sup>

Diplomatic professionalism became the defining feature of the department's approach to the United Nations during the Trygve Lie era. Described generously by political scientist Anthony Gaglione as "turbulent years" for the organization, the period between 1945 and 1953 largely disappointed. Cold War politics dominated UN meetings and caused the great powers to lose faith in the organization as a legitimate stage for diplomatic negotiations.<sup>15</sup> External Affairs therefore channelled its efforts into low-key initiatives designed to ensure the long-term viability and credibility of the United Nations as a whole. As Prime Minister King had explained at San Francisco, the ultimate goal was to build a structure "which over the years and decades to come will be strong enough to stand any strains to which it may be subjected."<sup>16</sup>

The department sent many of its best officials to the early UN meetings.<sup>17</sup> They were drawn from the First Political Division — the ultimate domestic destination for talented diplomats — which was aptly renamed the United Nations Division in 1948. The group was assigned a broad mandate, including the provision of all advice on the government's United Nations policy as well as public relations and communication with the organization's secretariat. As historians John Hilliker and Don Barry have explained, Canada's permanent delegation in New York shouldered greater responsibilities than many of its international equivalents. It liaised with other states' UN offices and took the lead on virtually every foreign policy issue that related even indirectly to United Nations activities.<sup>18</sup>

From the beginning, Canadian diplomats were concerned with the composition of the United Nations Secretariat. At the international meetings that followed San Francisco (which focused on the technical challenges of turning a blueprint for a new world body into a functioning political structure), the Canadians emphasized, in their own words, "the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity ... in the selection of the staff."<sup>19</sup> The call for competent representatives extended to individuals chosen to serve on UN committees and chairpersons selected to run their meetings. Members of the East Block also advocated a new committee on procedures and organization to maximize the efficiency

of General Assembly sessions and to guarantee that, when the political and diplomatic elite did travel to New York, their time would not be wasted by faulty organization and rhetorical excess.<sup>20</sup>

This rather conservative approach — emphasizing the little things and staying clear of the spotlight — was in evidence at the second part of the first session of the General Assembly in 1946. When the Soviet Union introduced an unhelpful resolution on disarmament, the Canadian delegation declined to respond publicly. As the official report on the session made clear, Ottawa did not “consider it appropriate that a nation with a comparatively small population which had never had armed forces which might constitute a threat to the peace of the world should take the lead in putting forward the necessary amendments.” Rather, the Canadians argued, it was the United States — the only state then capable of launching an atomic weapon — that was best positioned to lead the effort.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of its disappointment with the world organization during its initial sessions, the Department of External Affairs orchestrated a successful campaign to obtain a seat on the Security Council for 1948–49. Although some states viewed accession to the ineffective council as an ill-advised misuse of diplomatic resources, and others looked upon membership on the elite body merely as an opportunity to bolster international prestige, the Canadians considered service on the council to be a duty and indeed a responsibility that self-proclaimed middle powers were obligated to accept. Just as Canada contributed more than its per capita share to the United Nations’ budget, it also allocated the human resources necessary to maintain the organization’s viability. Moreover, while other middle-sized states seemed to aspire for greatness, Canada’s diplomats remained focused on the basic practicalities that made international order possible.<sup>22</sup>

Ottawa’s term on the Security Council began just as the Cold War increased in intensity. Even as the great power conflict brought much of the work of the United Nations to a stand-still, however, Canada’s representatives remained calm. The difficulties were not grounds to dissolve the organization, they argued; rather, increasing use of the great power veto at the Security Council meant that expectations would have to be lowered, and member states would have to become more creative in their efforts to maintain peace and order. One of the most effective ways forward was to minimize grounds for great power conflict. Canadian representatives



therefore spoke in favour of a rigorous and transparent budget-setting process. Their campaign to minimize duplication and promote fiscal restraint among a proliferation of United Nations agencies continued as well.<sup>23</sup> Members of the Canadian delegation also did not hesitate to criticize their international peers for idealistic overreach, with Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester Pearson going so far as to proclaim: "We must not dissipate the moral and other resources of a world which desperately needs peace on too many secondary objectives, however desirable they may be in themselves." In 1948, the delegation publicly identified the United Nations' Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization as one of the worst offenders.<sup>24</sup>

As Canada's term on the Security Council came to an end in 1949, members of the Department of External Affairs remained guarded in their hopes for the organization as a whole. In reflecting on the international response to a Soviet blockade of Berlin, they noted,

The United Nations did what it could ... to provide the machinery through which an agreement could be reached if and when both parties wanted to agree. Although the importance of this function ought not be exaggerated, it should not be underestimated. At a time of crisis, negotiations such as those which took place through the non-permanent members of the Council may well serve to reduce tension and to find ways out of a dilemma which might otherwise lead to war.<sup>25</sup>

The department continued to lobby for greater efficiency in the conduct of United Nations meetings and remained outspoken in its criticism of speeches that were clearly intended to serve a domestic political agenda rather than to advance the global dialogue. It persisted in linking economic and social development to peace and security — lending credence to the value of the proliferation of UN agencies — but at the same time it urged the secretariat to manage the organization's budget prudently.

The department's plea for caution and moderation hardly abated as the United Nations entered its second decade. In his preface to the report on Canada's involvement with the United Nations in 1950, Pearson wrote:



The United Nations should not be judged as if it were a court to try offenders, with a police force always ready and able to punish those found guilty. The United Nations is not an entity in itself. It is the sum total of the wills of its members and of the combined contributions which they are willing to make. It is not now able to apply overwhelming pressure at all times on all offenders, major or minor. Its members must therefore conserve their limited resources in order to be able to apply them collectively where they are most needed.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing on the unspectacular, setting realistic expectations, and managing efficiencies: this was the Department of External Affairs' approach to UN engagement as the 1950s began.

There is scholarly debate over the extent of Canada's loyalty to the United Nations during the Korean War, which dominated the organization's agenda toward the end of the Trygve Lie era. Although it is clear that Canadian policy-makers disagreed over whether their country should support the United Nations at the expense of Western solidarity, most analysts have concluded that Canada remained a moderate actor throughout the conflict, perpetually concerned with the long-term viability of the United Nations as a global institution.<sup>27</sup> The East Block continued to measure the United Nations' successes and failures realistically and recognized the limited impact of the General Assembly on any particular crisis.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, argued Pearson, in spite of this lack of influence, Canada could not forsake its international commitments. "The basic principles of our national life," he argued in the report for 1951-52, "our need for unity and security, our belief in political liberty, the protection of our heritage of Christian civilization — affect every aspect of our external affairs. Canadian policies — though they should be national policies — will always be influenced by international factors."<sup>29</sup> Such thinking did not imply that Canada would be everywhere every time; Ottawa's acceptance of global responsibilities remained contingent on the state of its and its allies' resources and a strategic assessment of where Canada could maximize its impact.

The measured, conservative approach of Canada's Department of External Affairs was similarly evident in United Nations discussions of North-South issues. As countries in the rapidly decolonizing developing

world demanded greater freedoms, if not outright independence, the Canadian response favoured deliberate evolution over radical, and potentially violent, change. Moreover, in spite of the broad political failures of the United Nations as a whole, and of the international campaign for disarmament more specifically, it was incumbent upon member states to remain diligent and committed to promoting peaceful means of conflict resolution. This was not to say that alternatives to the United Nations could not and should not be explored – the department noted repeatedly that its membership in NATO in no way contradicted its commitment to the UN – but that abandoning the world organization was not consistent with Canadian interests.<sup>30</sup>

The end of Lie's term as secretary-general in November 1952 coincided almost exactly with Lester Pearson's accession to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly. (Pearson was elected less than a month before.) Both occurrences were critical to the Department of External Affairs' subsequent United Nations experience. Lie's successor, Dag Hammarskjöld, was a pragmatist, but he was also an activist, determined to use his position as secretary-general to rehabilitate the reputation of the world organization and increase both its influence and its effectiveness.<sup>31</sup> Joseph Stalin's death in March 1953 and the subsequent thaw in Cold War tensions empowered the secretary-general to act more boldly than his predecessor could have ever thought possible. Over the next eight years, the United Nations played a more aggressive role on the world stage, one that included Canada to a greater extent than historical precedent might have supported.

The increase in Canadian activism began symbolically with Pearson's election. The foreign minister, already popular with the international media and within diplomatic circles, emerged as a recognized UN leader, and Canadians grew proud of his significance in New York. The combination of global acclaim and domestic enthusiasm for Canadian internationalism gradually shifted the focus of the Department of External Affairs. Over time, the United Nations became less of an organization to be nourished, and more of a platform to celebrate and perpetuate Canadian international achievements.

At first, changes in the behaviour in New York were hardly noticeable. Members of External Affairs continued to focus on the importance

of sound economic management: the reach of the organization as a whole was not to exceed its grasp.<sup>32</sup> The 1953 department's general report recalled the significance of the great powers to UN affairs, noting that their disagreements limited the ability of the smaller states to advance their own initiatives.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, there were signs of political adjustments. The report on Canada and the United Nations from 1953 to 1954 expressed hope that the organization would become "the principal forum for the *settlement* of contentious international issues."<sup>34</sup> Such an ambitious statement was a departure from previous depictions of the United Nations as "a meeting place of rival political and economic philosophies,"<sup>35</sup> one that had "not yet achieved sufficient strength to resolve the major political problems of the contemporary world," nor had "yet been able to provide to its Members the degree of security which would enable them to put it to full use for the peaceful settlement of international disputes."<sup>36</sup>

In 1954, Canada accepted a seat on an exclusive subcommittee of the UN's disarmament commission, a position which placed it on a relatively equal level with four of the five great powers. (Only China was excluded.) Again, recalling the prior unwillingness of Canadian delegates to assume a public leadership role on this issue, one might infer at least a modification of Canadian policy. The decision to co-sponsor a resolution praising the establishment of an International Atomic Energy Agency in 1955 is consistent with such a conclusion.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps in part reflective of an improved international mood — made possible by an increasingly moderate and conciliatory Soviet Union — there was also a new optimism in the tone of the official departmental reports. Writing in early 1956, Pearson remarked,

There is now, it seems to me, a much greater comprehension of how closely the nations of the world are bound together, and the more fortunate peoples of the earth have assumed increasing responsibility for the progress of less technically advanced countries. All this, and more, constitutes a considerable body of achievement. If we have the wisdom and courage to avoid the ultimate catastrophe of war, the United Nations can grow and develop as an effective and well-equipped organization for man's progress toward an incomparably better life.<sup>38</sup>

Pearson's idealism built on his colleague Paul Martin's success in facilitating the admission of sixteen new members to the United Nations General Assembly in 1955. Martin, the federal cabinet minister who had been asked to lead the Canadian delegation while the secretary of state for external affairs was away in Moscow, lobbied tirelessly to secure an agreement among the great powers who had previously vetoed the application of any state whom they viewed as an opponent in the Cold War.<sup>39</sup>

Whether Martin's efforts should be considered an achievement in line with Canadian interests is debatable. Certainly, the Department of External Affairs thought so. In the words of its 1954-55 UN report: "The United Nations could have been formed with a membership 'exclusive to those who see alike on most things,' but Canada never had any doubt as to the infinitely greater value of an organization embodying all the major traditions and contemporary philosophies of government."<sup>40</sup> The official history of External Affairs is similarly positive, noting the impact of Martin's initiative on Canada's international reputation.<sup>41</sup>

Political scientist Tom Keating's analysis, however, is more measured. Although Martin's achievement demonstrated Canada's ability to negotiate multilaterally, expanding the United Nations membership changed the organization fundamentally, and not necessarily in a way that benefited Canadian national interests. Certainly, the United Nations better reflected the contemporary geopolitical environment but, in doing so, it became less of a servant of the West in the Cold War.<sup>42</sup> John Holmes, who spent close to a decade as the department's primary conduit on United Nations affairs, concurs, adding that because Minister Martin forced the United States to compromise on the world stage, the influence of Canada's greatest ally over the rest of the world body declined.<sup>43</sup>

Regrettably, none of these analyses link the department's United Nations experience in 1955 to Canadian conduct during the Suez crisis the following year. In 1956, Lester Pearson played a leading role in brokering a compromise between the warring factions of Britain, France, and Israel on one side and Egypt on the other. The result was the imposition of what is known today as the first modern United Nations peacekeeping force. For his efforts, Pearson received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. His success, following so closely after Martin's, signified to many what one analyst called "a kind of break-through to new levels of responsibility for Canada

in the world.” To the respected commentator Maxwell Cohen, Ottawa had assumed the obligations of a great power, setting a precedent that could lead to significant changes in Canada’s international role and responsibilities.<sup>44</sup>

The Department of External Affairs was initially less optimistic than the general public. Pearson’s achievement had been a source of significant national division at home (the Conservatives had accused him of selling out the British), and it coincided with the UN’s failure to respond to a brutal Soviet invasion of Hungary.<sup>45</sup> On the peacekeeping force itself, the department wrote cautiously: “we have been able to introduce a new element into the conduct of international relations which may be important if it works effectively on this occasion.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the theme of the United Nations report for 1956–57 was the familiar one of restraint. “The fact to remember,” wrote the foreign minister, Pearson, “is that the United Nations is none other than the nations of this earth with all their weaknesses and conflicts. It is not some heavenly body beyond our world’s problems. It cannot accommodate what we its members are unprepared to do.”<sup>47</sup> He went on to accentuate the limits of the organization and praised Canadians for their consistently moderate expectations of the United Nations as a global actor. Rather than advocating complete nuclear disarmament, the report suggested a more realistic short-term goal of limiting any further arms build-up. It cautioned against devising international development strategies based on any perceived moral necessity while encouraging greater focus on the possibility of success. It noted the potential benefits of the creation of an international civil service, but then conceded the perhaps insurmountable challenge of convincing United Nations member states to contribute their most effective diplomats to a cause that obligated them to put global interests ahead of national concerns. On the development of a covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights, the department sided with a minority in opposing the explicit enumeration of the steps necessary to make global commitments. “By their nature they were not rights which could be guaranteed unequivocally by legislation,” Ottawa explained, “and might more appropriately be considered as objectives to which governments and peoples should strive, by legislative or other means, as appropriate to the conditions and systems of individual countries.”<sup>48</sup>

In summary, the final report on the United Nations published under the leadership of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and Secretary of State for External Affairs Pearson downplayed recent national accomplishments and lowered expectations of what Canada might achieve in the future. That the new Conservative prime minister, John Diefenbaker, allowed it to be published after winning the 1957 election, however, did not mean that his government planned to follow its implicit advice. Diefenbaker's early public statements as prime minister and acting secretary of state for external affairs suggest that he was much more enamoured with Maxwell Cohen's thinking than with the message that his department was sending him. At the meeting of the General Assembly in September 1957, Diefenbaker announced to the world that, "so far as Canada is concerned, support of the United Nations is the cornerstone of its foreign policy."<sup>49</sup>

Departmental publications under Diefenbaker's first secretary of state for external affairs, the sincere, yet inexperienced Sidney Smith, reflect the conflict between the two approaches. The 1957 report was measured, yet optimistic. Smith conceded that the United Nations had often struggled because of the great powers' inability to compromise, noting that accepting its limitations was "merely to face the facts of international life." But he also called the organization "a unique and indispensable instrument of international diplomacy which has achieved important results in all of the various spheres of activity for which it was created." The latter statement was an exaggeration that even the rest of the report itself could not sustain. The department in fact admitted that there were significant limits to what the organization had achieved in the security realm, emphasizing instead the importance of the UN's social and economic accomplishments.<sup>50</sup>

Smith passed away before the 1958 report had been completed, and its relatively modest assessment of the United Nations and Canada's contribution to its conduct that year is consistent with a department whose leadership was in flux.<sup>51</sup> The 1959 version was similarly restrained, prompting one analyst to observe that under the foreign policy novice, Howard Green, Canada appeared to have withdrawn from the international spotlight.<sup>52</sup>

There were signs, however, that the pressures — domestic and international — that were pushing a more idealistic approach to the fore were becoming greater. In September 1959, the department published an unusually comprehensive and retrospective summary of Canada's UN contribution

in its magazine, *External Affairs*. “Canada and the United Nations: The Record after Fourteen Years” was the first comprehensive (official) analysis of the history of Canadian participation in the organization and marked a departure in the overall approach to reporting the East Block’s activities. The tone was different from the yearly summaries. Whereas the annual publications had concentrated on the progress of the institution as a whole, this article put Ottawa front and centre, emphasizing Canada’s impact on United Nations policies and practices. On the first page, the department boasted of “the frequency with which Canada and Canadians have appeared in the record of the United Nations.” The essay also concluded with an optimism that was hardly consistent with the more guarded general tenor of the previous thirteen years: “the accomplishments of the United Nations during its lifetime are indeed impressive, and the successes far outweigh the failures, not only in the more serious and spectacular crises, but also in the lesser disagreements which have been settled before they could develop into something serious.”<sup>53</sup>

The accounts of the following year confirmed that Green’s era would be different. The decision to focus on Canada was proclaimed immediately: “The Annual Report of 1960 differs from previous Annual Reports. Instead of methodically recounting events in various countries and organizations during the year, it concentrates on a few main themes in which Canada has a special interest or concern and expands the Canadian Government’s position on them.” The document captured the zeal and passion of its minister as well as Green’s personal opposition to nuclear proliferation. It emphasized Ottawa’s efforts to pass a resolution at the Disarmament Commission, which admittedly had little real impact, as well as its commitment to working with like-minded countries, a statement that constituted a rejection of the unspoken tradition of ensuring that Canada’s great power allies were on side for any major United Nations initiative.<sup>54</sup> More cynically, the report reflected what analyst Peyton Lyon later described as a Conservative obsession with Canadian prestige that was measured by the popularity of the delegation in New York.<sup>55</sup>

The shift in focus coincided with the UN’s greatest crisis to date. At a time when Soviet intransigence, under the now firmly in power Nikita Khrushchev, was once again threatening the future of the organization, and members of the developing world were plotting to reshape the political



and economic agenda, Secretary-General Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash. The choice of his replacement, the former Burmese diplomat, U Thant, was telling. Decolonization and its implications soon dominated the United Nations dialogue.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, the emphasis on the global south enabled a more rigorous pursuit of the Conservatives' agenda. As advocates of the functional principle might have predicted, once the United Nations began to tackle challenges that were of less direct concern to the great powers, Ottawa could make its public presence felt more easily.

In the departmental report on Canada and the United Nations for 1961, Green and his officials took credit for improving the atmosphere in New York in the wake of Hammarskjöld's tragic death. Canada, the account maintained, urged the organization to strive for consensus on the most pressing international issues, such as global disarmament and the impact of science and technology on national and international outer space strategies.<sup>57</sup> The following year, in spite of the nearly catastrophic Cuban Missile Crisis, the Department of External Affairs proclaimed that the United Nations "found itself in a position of enhanced prestige and authority increasing the confidence of members states about the future of the organization."<sup>58</sup> Having now fully abandoned the conservative perspective of the past, the report celebrated the organization's "remarkable resilience" and expressed hope over the future of the recently revived disarmament negotiations. Even though U Thant was precluded from playing his prescribed role in Cuba, his general assistance enhanced the UN's prestige. The specialized agencies continued to demonstrate their critical contributions to international economic and social development. And the organization in New York remained the only quasi-universal body designed to promote and support improved global understanding.<sup>59</sup>

The defeat of the Diefenbaker government had no impact on the increase in the announcements of Canadian leadership in New York. Rather, the period of *détente* (and increasing Western influence in the developing world) which followed the Cuban Missile Crisis seemed to inspire even greater internationalist optimism throughout Ottawa. When Paul Martin took over as secretary of state for external affairs under Prime Minister Lester Pearson, the Department of External Affairs became more aggressive. At the meeting of the General Assembly in September 1963, Pearson called for an expansion of both the Security Council and the Economic

and Social Council as well as a new team of military experts to advise the United Nations Secretary-General on the future of peacekeeping.<sup>60</sup> These dramatic pronouncements betrayed the caution of the 1940s and 1950s as well as the idea that major constitutional changes should be great power initiatives.

Martin's summary of the Canadian experience at the United Nations predictably echoed Pearson's confidence in Canada's diplomatic abilities. More interesting, however, was the conflicted nature of the report as it related to the progress of the UN as an organization. The first pages presented an overly optimistic view of the state of United Nations affairs. Martin celebrated the hope, calmness, and moderation that seemed to typify the post-Cuban strategic environment and praised the work of the specialized bodies in promoting economic and social stability. Later on, however, the tone became sombre. Rejecting Pearson's call for dramatic structural changes, Martin argued that real progress was most likely to result from "a painstaking process of accommodation." The key, he alleged, was for the United Nations to "keep its house in order and all its instruments of conciliation, co-operation and collective response ready for instant service in the cause of peace and understanding."<sup>61</sup>

The next year, the general departmental report used pragmatic language but stressed idealistic thinking. "In a constantly contracting world," wrote Martin, "the national interest can be defined only in part by reference to what preoccupies us within our national boundaries. In many respects, the national interest can best be advanced by cooperative international action designed to further the interests of the world community at large." Later on, he added, "We are concerned that the United Nations should continue to have an effective capacity to keep the peace because this is something in which we believe." Peacekeeping, he wrote, "is one of the practical ways in which a middle power like Canada can meet its responsibilities as a member of the world community."<sup>62</sup>

These comments mark a shift in Ottawa's conception of the United Nations as an organization. With Canadians feeling more secure about their place in the world, and their government intent on transforming its minority position into a majority, the United Nations became valued for its role in promoting the ideals of peace and disarmament, not because it advanced Canada's national interest in order and stability. Ottawa became

an ambitious coalition builder as opposed to a secondary actor whose greatest role played out behind the scenes. In 1957, in recalling the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force that established a temporary peace in Suez, the department had written, "The United Nations has been able to establish an Emergency Police Force in the Middle East."<sup>63</sup> In 1965, it celebrated Canadian leadership "not only in establishing UNEF but in securing a basis for its financing which reflected the belief that the peace-keeping endeavours of the United Nations were in every sense the collective responsibility of its members."<sup>64</sup> It was this optimism that explains the language and tone of *We the Peoples*, an internationalist spirit that did not survive the 'Canada First' mentality of the early Trudeau era.

In conclusion, the change in tone within the UN reports of the Department of External Affairs between 1943 and 1965 reflects the ministry's loyalty to its political masters and the circumstances of the time. Regrettably, the department's effectiveness enabled Canadian leaders to gradually set aside the national interest in favour of more parochial concerns. And although the drift was eventually arrested, elements of the misguided optimism remain in much of the historical literature.<sup>65</sup> More realistically, as two analysts reflected as early as 1956, "membership in the United Nations, insofar as it means an increase in responsibilities without an appreciable advance in influence, exacts a price that is far from negligible in return for its contribution to the creation of the kind of world that Canada's national interests demand."<sup>66</sup> Functionalism was critical: Canada's Department of External Affairs could indeed play a significant role at the United Nations, but only on particular issues based on its capabilities and the relative interest of the great powers.

## NOTES

- 1 Canada, Department of External Affairs (DEA), *We the Peoples: Canada and the United Nations, 1945-1965* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966), 3.
- 2 Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 278.
- 3 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1945-1975* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1977), xiv.
- 4 John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 41.
- 5 Escott Reid, "The United States and Canada: Domination, Co-operation, Absorption," 12 January 1942, Escott Reid Papers, vol. 30, United States and Canada 1945, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).
- 6 William Lyon Mackenzie King, 9 July 1943, in Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4558. See also Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 31 March 1943, Privy Council Office Papers, vol. 12, Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, 6 January & 14 May 1943, LAC.
- 7 The best summary of this work can be found in Don Munton and Don Page, "Planning in the East Block: The Post-Hostilities Problems Committees in Canada, 1943-5," *International Journal* 32, no. 4 (1977): 677-726.
- 8 On the British connection, see Tuthill, Memorandum of Conversation with Saul Rae, 14 October 1943, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Box 95, Canada, Ottawa Embassy, Security, Segregated General Records 1939-1949, 1943, 710, Relations with Great Britain, National Archives and Records Administration.
- 9 Adam Chapnick, *The Middle Power Project: Canada and the Founding of the United Nations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 65-125.
- 10 Hume Wrong, memorandum, 23 February 1944, in John F. Hillker, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 11: 1944-1945, part 2 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990), 1.
- 11 Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the Working Committee on Post-Hostilities Problems, 25 August 1944, Department of External Affairs Records (DEAR), vol. 5711, file 7-AD(s), pt. 2, LAC.
- 12 Chapnick, *The Middle Power Project*, 36.
- 13 Wrong to Heeneey, 17 January 1945 and again 18 January 1945, both in DEAR, vol. 5709, file 7-V(s) pt. 5.1, LAC.
- 14 "San Francisco," *Canadian Forum* 25 (July 1945), 81. See also Cox to Stettinius, 9 May 1945, Oscar Cox Papers, box 151, Diary: March-April-May 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library.
- 15 Anthony Gaglione, *The United Nations under Trygve Lie, 1945-1953* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), ix.
- 16 King, 27 April 1945, quoted in Canada, DEA, *Report of the United Nations Conference on International Organization Held at San Francisco, 25<sup>th</sup> April & 26<sup>th</sup> June 1945* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1945), 11.
- 17 According to a 1949 report, a typical Canadian delegation to the UN General Assembly was comprised of approximately five representatives, five alternates, ten advisors, two information officers, and a number of additional administrative staff. Unless otherwise occupied, the secretary of state for external affairs chaired the delegation. The representatives included politicians drawn from across party lines, along with senior members of the Department of External Affairs. Most of the rest of the delegation came from the East Block. See Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1949* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), 14.

- 18 John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, vol. 2, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 33.
- 19 Canada, DEA, *Report of the First Part of the First Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1946), 28.
- 20 Canada, DEA, *The United Nations, 1946: Report of the Second Part of the First Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1947), 157, 160.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 22 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1947* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), 17, 137. See also Canada, DEA, *Report of the Secretary of State for External Affairs for the Year Ended December 31, 1947* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), 13.
- 23 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1948* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1949), 23.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 200, 142.
- 25 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1949* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950), 39, 85, 173-75. For a brief summary of Canada and the Berlin Blockade, see Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 67-68.
- 26 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1950* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951), viii, 56, 79, 143.
- 27 Those who emphasize the UN commitment include Denis Stairs, "The Diplomacy of Constraint," in *Partners Nevertheless: Canadian-American Relations in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Hillmer (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1989), 214-26; Timothy Andrews Sayle, "A Pattern of Constraint: Canadian-American Relations in the Early Cold War," *International Journal* 62, no. 3 (2007): 689-705; and Greg Donaghy, "Pacific Diplomacy: Canadian Statecraft and the Korean War, 1950-53," in *Canada and Korea: Perspectives 2000*, ed. R.W.L. Guisso and Young-sik Yoo (Toronto: Centre for Korean Studies, University of Toronto, 2002), 81-100. Those who are less convinced include John Price, "The 'Cat's Paw': Canada and the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea," *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (June 2004): 297-324; and Robert Prince, "The Limits of Constraint," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1992-93): 129-52.
- 28 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1951* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), iii.
- 29 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1951-52* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), vi, viii.
- 30 *Ibid.*, viii, x, 15, 18. See also Greg Donaghy, "Coming off the Gold Standard: Re-assessing the Golden Age of Canadian Diplomacy," <http://www.suezcrisis.ca/pdfs/Coming%20off%20the%20Gold%20Standard.pdf> [cited 20 May 2009], 5-6.
- 31 On Hammarskjöld see, among others, Peter B. Heller, *The United Nations under Dag Hammarskjöld, 1953-1961* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001).
- 32 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1952-53* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953), 101, 45.
- 33 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1953* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1954), 1.
- 34 Emphasis added. Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1953-54* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1954), 2.
- 35 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1949*, 23.
- 36 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1948*, 23.
- 37 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1955* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1956), 8.
- 38 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1954-55* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1956), iv.
- 39 On Martin's experience, see Greg Donaghy and Don Barry, "Our Man from Windsor: Paul Martin and the New Members Question, 1955," in *Paul Martin and Canadian Diplomacy*, ed. Ryan Touhey (Waterloo: Centre for Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2001), 3-20.

- 40 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1954*, 30.
- 41 John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, vol. 2, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 122.
- 42 Tom Keating, *Canada and World Order: The Multilateralist Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002), 103.
- 43 Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, vol. 2, 346.
- 44 Maxwell Cohen, "A New Responsibility in Foreign Policy," *Saturday Night*, 19 January 1957, 5, 28.
- 45 See Pearson's cautious summary in which he noted "some practical disadvantages to be faced in swelling numbers," in Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1956* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), 1.
- 46 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1956* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), iv.
- 47 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1956*, iii.
- 48 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1956*, 67. See also 3, 52, 62.
- 49 John Diefenbaker, 23 September 1957, quoted in Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1957* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1958), 2.
- 50 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1957* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1958), iii, 4.
- 51 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1958* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1959).
- 52 Richard A. Preston, *Canada in World Affairs, 1959* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 253. See also Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1959* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960).
- 53 "Canada and the United Nations: The Record after Fourteen Years," *External Affairs* 11, no. 9 (1959): 253, 260.
- 54 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1960* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1961), v, 11, 14.
- 55 Peyton V. Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs, 1961* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 280.
- 56 On the emergence of U Thant, see Bernard J. Firestone, *The United Nations under U Thant* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), vii-xxiv.
- 57 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1961* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), 4, 12, 14.
- 58 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1962* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1963), 9. It is worth noting that the exact same words were used in Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1962* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1963), 10.
- 59 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1962*, 1. See also 3. Canada even claimed responsibility for the establishment of the World Food Programme, see 46.
- 60 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1963* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), 11.
- 61 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1963* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), 8. See also 1.
- 62 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1964* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965), v, vi, vii.
- 63 Canada, DEA, *Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1956*, iv.
- 64 Canada, DEA, *Canada and the United Nations, 1964* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965), 21.
- 65 Adam Chapnick, "Popular Attitudes towards the United Nations in Canada and the United States: A Study in National Images," *Association for Canadian Studies in the United States Occasional Papers on Public Policy Series* 2, no. 1 (2008).
- 66 F.H. Soward and Edgar McInnis, *Canada and the United Nations* (New York: Manhattan Publishing, 1956), 219.