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Victims of Their Own Success?

Canadians and Their Foreign Policy at the Onset of the Cold War

Zusammenfassung

Am 19. Januar 1957 behauptete Maxwell Cohen, Ottawa habe durch seine erfolgreiche Vermittlung in der Suez-Krise das Profil einer Weltmacht erworben. Diese Botschaft gefiel den Kanadiern gut. Die Erwartungen, das eigene Land als eine Weltführungsmacht anerkannt zu sehen, erhöhten sich sprunghaft, nachdem Lester Pearson im Herbst 1957 den Friedensnobelpreis erhalten hatte. Als sich späterhin die Rolle als Weltmacht doch nicht so recht ausfüllen ließ, entstand als Folge davon im Land eine beträchtliche Unsicherheit über die Bedeutung Kanadas im internationalen System. Sie ist bis heute nicht abgeklungen.

In diesem Aufsatz wird die Geschichte Kanadas und seiner Außenpolitik im Kalten Krieg skizziert und der Frage nachgegangen, ob der große außenpolitische Erfolg Pearsons in der Suez-Krise sich im Laufe der folgenden Jahre nicht doch als eher problematisch herausgestellt hat. Seine Auszeichnung hat dem Nationalstolz geschmeichelt und den bis heute lebendigen Mythos von Kanada als dem Großen Friedensbewahrer in die Welt gesetzt. Zugleich jedoch hat er völlig überhöhte Erwartungen an die Möglichkeiten der kanadischen Regierung geweckt, als Weltmacht zu agieren - zum Schaden der konkreten Alltagspolitik.

Résumé

Le 19 janvier 1957, le commentateur Maxwell Cohen affirmait qu'en intervenant avec succès pendant la crise de Suez, Ottawa avait acquis le statut de puissance mondiale. Évidemment, ce message plut aux Canadiens. Leur espoir de voir leur pays reconnu à titre de leader mondial s'accrut considérablement, d'autant plus que Lester Pearson reçut cet automne-là, le prix Nobel de la paix. Lorsque par la suite le rôle de grande puissance ne se matérialisa pas comme prévu, une inquiétude quant à la place du pays sur la scène internationale s'installa. Une inquiétude qui persiste encore aujourd'hui.

Cet article passe en revue l'histoire du Canada et de sa politique étrangère pendant la guerre froide et tente de répondre à la question de savoir si, avec le recul du temps, le triomphe de Pearson lors de la crise de Suez devrait être considéré comme une arme à deux tranchants. Il est certain que son prix Nobel a accru la fierté nationale et a lancé le

mythe, encore vivant aujourd'hui, du Canada en tant que grand défenseur de la paix dans le monde. Néanmoins, il a également créé des attentes excessives sur la capacité d'Ottawa à être un leader mondial, attentes qui hantent depuis les praticiens et les décideurs.

On 19 January 1957, while Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester Pearson's diplomatic performance during the Suez Crisis was garnering international praise and acclaim, a respected Canadian commentator on world affairs announced "a kind of break-through to new levels of responsibility for Canada in the world" (Cohen 1957, 5). Having been instrumental in coordinating the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force, a revolutionary peacekeeping unit designed to separate warring Israeli and Egyptian troops in the Suez region, Canada, argued Maxwell Cohen in a popular Toronto magazine, had taken on the obligations of a major world power. This precedent, he predicted, might "become a turning point in the Canadian world role inside and outside the United Nations" (Cohen 1957, 28).¹ And for many Canadians, it was. Expectations of Canada's ability to become a recognized world leader increased steadily following Pearson's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. Subsequently, when the new role did not materialize as expected, successive governments – Liberal and Conservative – faced criticism for the country's steady fall from international grace.

Cohen's initial optimism was understandable. Fourteen years earlier, *The Economist* had already identified Canada as exhibiting characteristics that differentiated it from the smaller states (cited in Soward 1963, 115).² In 1946, writing in the noted American periodical, *Foreign Affairs*, Lionel Gelber proclaimed that the evidence of Canada's newfound middle power status was "unmistakable" (277). Historian turned civil servant George Glazebrook argued similarly in 1947, as did his colleague Gerry Riddell (1948) the following year. Canada, they both concluded, now had to be thought of as a significant actor in the new world order. Apparently, Cohen interpreted Pearson's success as evidence that his country had taken yet another step forward in its progression from inward-looking non-factor in world affairs to significant global power.

He could not have been more mistaken. As historian Trevor Lloyd (1968) documented just ten years later, rather than launching it, the Suez Crisis culminated an exceptional period in Canadian foreign policy, one that was followed almost immediately by a decline in the country's status and prestige that many would argue has only begun to abate over the last few years, if it has at all. In the post-Suez era, successive federal governments reduced budgetary support for defence, diplomacy,

1 On the Suez Crisis itself, see Pearson 1993, 137-55; English 1992, 121-145; Holmes 1982, 348-70; and Eayrs 1957.

2 The original article was published on 9 May 1943.

and development to the point that analysts began to speculate openly about the decline of Canadian autonomy on the world stage.³

Like much of his contemporary public, Cohen's understanding of Canada's place in the world developed more slowly than did his country's actual prospects for influence. The circumstances that facilitated Ottawa's temporary increase in global reach originated during the Second World War and developed largely through the UN during the early Cold War period. Nevertheless, it was not until the mid-1950s that international prestige became a partisan, political issue and thus a topic of concern for a greater number of Canadians.⁴ By that point, opportunities to exert a consistently disproportionate role in world affairs had abated, and Canadian governments were saddled with popular expectations to demonstrate Pearsonian-like leadership that generally exceeded what could have been reasonably expected (Lyon 1989, 21; Lloyd 1968, 8). One might even go so far as to say that efforts to maintain the façade of middle power status have inhibited successive governments from formulating a legitimate strategic vision of how Canada might best contribute to world affairs.

In retrospect, Pearson's triumph at Suez might therefore be looked upon as a mixed blessing.⁵ Certainly, his Nobel Prize brought pride to his country and launched a national mythology of Canada as global peacekeeper that continues to resonate – as analyst Leigh Sarty (1993) wrote more than thirty-five years later, "Pride in a purportedly selfless commitment to internationalist principles became an integral part of the Canadian character, one of the few things that still binds the country together" (755) – but it also created excessive expectations that have haunted practitioners and policymakers ever since.⁶

With these thoughts in mind, this paper does three things. First, it establishes the context – international and domestic – for what is known as Canada's early postwar golden age. Second, it explores Canada's UN experience between 1945 and 1957 with the goal of reassessing traditional interpretations of Ottawa's achievements. Finally, it speculates provocatively about whether Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize might have had an overall negative impact on the subsequent direction of Canadian foreign policy thinking and planning.

3 Lloyd's analysis of the end of the so-called golden age remains as valuable as anything that has been written since. For more contemporary analyses, see Cohen 2003; and Greenhill 2005, 34-39.

4 As one American observer explained in 1942, editorial writing in Canada, which indeed did focus on Ottawa's enhanced position in the world, did not exercise "any important influence upon the general public" at the time. See American Legation, Ottawa 1942.

5 It is worth noting that Pearson himself envisioned a far different kind of peacekeeping force than the United Nations Emergency Force that emerged in late 1956. The implications of Pearson's compromise for UN peacekeeping, however, are beyond the scope of this discussion.

6 See, for example, Gwyn 1978, 27/29; Hadwen 1992, 19-22; Andrew 1993; Gotlieb 2004; and Molot/Hillmer 2002, 1-33.

I. Understanding the Golden Age

The International Context

How did Lester Pearson, the foreign minister of a country of just 16 million people in 1956, manage to take centre stage in a conflict that could well have expanded to involve all of the great powers and was located in a part of the world in which Canada had few direct interests? There is no question that the man himself is part of the answer. As his senior assistant during the crisis, John Holmes (2007), later explained: "He was a strategist and tactician with a remarkable capacity for adapting methods and exploiting circumstances, even those that were adverse" (300). Add to that "the equally essential quality of moral conviction" (302), and he was ideally-suited to masterminding the escape of Britain and France from international humiliation without at the same time validating their failed effort to retake the Suez Canal by force. Pearson's personality and abilities were, however, just two of many international and national factors that made his successful intervention possible.

At the global level, the 1940s and 1950s witnessed a dynamic transformation of the world power structure that, at least temporarily, improved Canada's status and standing to the point that in certain, 'functional' instances, during which Ottawa had the capacity, interest, and willingness to act assertively, it could exert great-power-like influence.⁷ The changes began with the fall of France near the beginning of the Second World War. To that point, while the Canadian government had been committed to the conflict alongside its British and French allies, the national contribution had been relatively insignificant, and unimpressive. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King brought his country into the war united, if also unprepared, and initially his primary concern was keeping obligations to a minimum (Stacey 1981, 272-274/281).⁸ When France fell, however, Canada became Great Britain's most significant wartime ally. Ottawa's commitment to the conflict and influence upon it – both in economic and military terms – necessarily increased.

France's decline was followed by a series of fundamental changes that overtook Europe and Asia during the Second World War. Leading states like Great Britain saw their economies profoundly depressed and their fiscal infrastructure destroyed. Other former and future powers, like China, Japan, and Germany, were also left in political disarray. As a result, for a short period in the late 1940s, those states whose geography had shielded them from the destruction of the conflict, like Canada, emerged disproportionately strong and capable of exerting unusual influence on international developments.

Also strengthened by the outcome of the war was Ottawa's most significant economic and military ally, the United States. And while the America of today has a

7 On Canada's functional principle, see Chapnick 2005, 23-24; and Chapnick 2002, 68-85.

8 On King and national unity before the war, see Granatstein/Bothwell 1975, 212-233. On Canada's unpreparedness, see Preston 1993, 98-102.

reputation for unilateralism, in the 1940s Washington was particularly open to cooperating with like-minded nations to consolidate an international anti-communist network (Dobson/Marsh 2006, 29). Canada was among the United States' most valuable partners both in the Cold War and in the development of a new global economic order, and the US State Department, along with its executive leaders, was therefore more apt to include Ottawa in high-level discussions than it had been in the past or would be in the future.

The end of the Second World War also coincided with the creation of a new system of global governance. Between 1943 and 1947, at a time when much of the developed world was shifting its focus to reconstruction, Canada was able to play a significant role in the founding of a series of critical multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Chapnick 2005; Keating 2002; Rasmussen 2001). Certainly, the Canadians were taken seriously because of their abilities, but one cannot deny the opportunities that were created by the difficulties experienced by their allies and associates.

Although a great majority of North Americans felt relatively safe prior to World War II, with the launch of the first atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the international community encountered a danger that left no person entirely secure. At a time when only the United States had mastered atomic technology, those in the possession of the materials necessary to build the bombs became disproportionately important. Canada, as the only allied power with an active uranium producing and refining industry, again found itself in a position of influence (Bothwell/Kilbourn 1979, 168-169/213).

Finally, the complexities of international diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s necessitated the active involvement of more than just the heads of government. Between 1940 and 1945, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill paid little attention to postwar planning, leaving the work largely to his foreign secretary, Anthony Eden.⁹ Similarly, United States President Franklin Roosevelt originally left the responsibility for crafting new international institutions in the hands of the State Department (Notter 1949). During the negotiations that refined the blueprint for the United Nations organization at Dumbarton Oaks, Churchill and Roosevelt were at the Château Frontenac Hotel in Quebec discussing military matters. Joseph Stalin was similarly occupied in Moscow. Even after the war ended, the great power leadership was largely preoccupied with details surrounding the occupation of Germany and Japan. It followed that the foreign ministers, with Lester Pearson soon to be included among them, exercised disproportionate influence on those aspects of world affairs for which their superiors had insufficient time.

In summary, changes at the global level that began with the fall of France in 1940 and extended into the early postwar period provided an opening for states like

9 See, for example, Churchill 1950, 562.

Canada to exert unusual authority on the world stage. There was room for countries who were unaccustomed to playing a major role to do so if they so chose. Nonetheless, not every state that would soon be called a middle power embraced the opportunity.¹⁰ In this context, one must consider issues and events at the national level that facilitated Ottawa's specific effort.

The Domestic Context

The first, and perhaps most significant, was the state of the Canadian economy. Although there were initial challenges in the immediate postwar period, after 1946, real GDP in Canada rose every year during the next decade (and indeed into the early 1970s). Consumption increased, as did business investment. Oil and gas reserves were discovered in Alberta, and national projects like the TransCanada Highway created jobs and stimulated an already vibrant domestic market. Growth rates into the early 1950s were also impressive, allowing for new government spending and investment (Norrie/Owram/Emery 2002, 374-379). Canada's economic strength lent it international credibility, while the stability it provided gave Ottawa freedom to concern itself with matters beyond the country's borders.

The federal government's control over its often disgruntled provinces was also particularly strong. In 1941, Mackenzie King used his wartime powers to impose a series of tax rental agreements that provided the federal government with overwhelming control over the national economy. In exchange for their cooperation, the provinces received unconditional transfer payments. Tax rentals were not replaced by tax sharing until 1957 and by tax collection agreements in 1962 (Norrie/Owram/Emery 2002, 347/396). Until then, inter-governmental relations rarely ventured into the realm of foreign policy, leaving Ottawa with one less factor to consider while developing and implementing its global strategy.

Not only did the federal government and the provinces demonstrate a degree of unity in their outlook on external relations (if only because the provinces were otherwise occupied and constrained), so did Canada's political parties. The period that followed the conscription crisis of 1944 was one of refreshing parliamentary cooperation on the world stage. Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King invited the Conservative House leader, Gordon Graydon, and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation leader, M.J. Coldwell, to join the Canadian delegation to the United Nations' founding conference in San Francisco. Representation during subsequent meetings of the UN General Assembly during the early years of the Cold War was also multipartisan (English 1998, 77). This civilized environment enabled the federal government to advance a clear vision of Canada's role in the world consistently. As voiced publicly by Secretary of State for External Affairs Louis St. Laurent in January 1947, Ottawa pledged that "in its external relations the government in office should

10 On middle powers, see Chapnick 1999, 73-82. On the differences between Canada and Australia at the end of the war, see Chapnick 2005, 143-44.

strive to speak and to act on behalf of the whole of Canada and in such manner as to have the support of all the Canadian people regardless of party affiliation at home" (cited in Chapnick 2007, 448). What has since become known as the Gray Lecture remained the standard declaration of the nation's foreign policy principles for at least a decade.¹¹

Canada spoke with one voice in world affairs, and its government had a coherent grand strategy (Pratt 2008). As St. Laurent explained, ever since the battles of the Second World War had ended, his country had become an active player in the new conflict against communism on the side of political liberty, the rule of law, and the values of what was then known as a Christian civilization. No longer could Canadians remain isolated in North America; in the postwar world, they had both a duty and a responsibility to promote their international interests, as well as those of their allies. Ottawa was a secondary power. It could not be expected to contribute to the same extent as some of its global peers, but it would do what it could, and would likely exert its most significant influence through multilateral organizations and institutions.

The government advanced this vision effectively because its relationships with the media and the public service were exceptionally strong. For a brief period in Canada's national history, all three groups largely agreed on the importance of active participation on the world stage and of cooperating to spread their message to the widest possible audience. As historian Patrick Brennan (1994) has explained, for the journalists, "getting the story straight necessitated the closest of contacts with the establishment that formulated and implemented foreign policy" (142). Moreover, he has noted, "Admiration for the brainpower and dedication [within the Department of External Affairs] ... was eclipsed only by the degree of respect and affection the press, and especially the top-ranked men, had for [Lester] Pearson" (143).

The Department of External Affairs and its related public service agencies were populated by a selfless group of internationalists whose talents and acclaim were appreciated beyond Canada's borders. Louis Rasminsky was a leading voice in the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Hume Wrong was treated with the utmost respect as Ottawa's long-time ambassador in Washington. Norman Robertson was on America's short list to become the United Nations' first secretary-general. And John Read was one of the original nominees to the International Court of Justice in 1946.¹²

Finally, members of the Canadian public were supportive of global engagement without demanding direct input into the process. They expressed pride in their country's achievements during and after the Second World War while permitting their external representatives the freedom to operate without overt concern for the

11 See also Mackenzie 2007, 459-73.

12 For more detail, see Granatstein 1998.

domestic political ramifications of their initiatives (Bothwell/English 1983-84, 65).¹³ The mandarins acted accordingly, balancing pragmatism with idealism while never losing track of Canada's national interests. Once politics re-entered the equation in the mid-1950s, the national foreign policy process deteriorated.

II. Canada's UN Experience, 1945-1957

The Canadian experience at the UN between 1945 and Pearson's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 is an ideal case study of the exceptional circumstances that led to Maxwell Cohen's mistaken conclusion. By 1956, Ottawa had established a noteworthy reputation within the world organization, one which undoubtedly facilitated the success of the Suez peacekeeping initiative (Holmes 1981, 36). How that credibility was nurtured, and what it actually stood for, however, demonstrates that Canada's emergence in the international spotlight was largely inadvertent. Prior to Suez, when acting in support of its national interests during a period in which it was possible to do so largely free of significant interference, Canadian representatives were focused on unglamorous process issues that promoted the country's future prospects but rarely brought its leadership dramatic accolades.

When Mackenzie King led Canada's delegation to the San Francisco conference to found the United Nations in 1945, his primary objective was clear: "to co-operate as completely as we can with the delegations of other nations in bringing into being, as soon as possible, a Charter of world security" (quoted in Canada 1945, 10). He later added: "We shall not be guided by considerations of national pride or prestige ... We recognize the principle that power and responsibility must go hand in hand and that international security depends primarily on the maintenance of an overwhelming preponderance of power on the side of peace" (11). It was, as the Department of External Affairs later reflected in its own review of the Canadian experience, a pragmatic, low key approach that best suited King's conception of the national interest (Canada 1966, 14).

That same tone and manner was evident the following year at the first session of the General Assembly. Rather than attempting to make front page headlines by speaking out on contentious security issues, the Canadian delegation spent much of its time advocating clear and transparent hiring practices for international civil servants. As a country committed to a functional and effective organization, Canada viewed the selection of UN staff as a priority (Canada 1946, 28). In the second part of the same first session, after the Soviet Union introduced a clearly unsatisfactory resolution on disarmament, the Canadian delegation determined that it was inap-

13 See also Chapnick 2005, 149; Holmes, 1982, 332-333; and Andrew 1993, 32. Polls from the period confirm Canada's support for internationalism as well as evidence of Canadians' relative ignorance of world affairs. On internationalism, see Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, 1945, 106-07. On the lack of sophisticated understanding, see Gallup 1944, in which 50% of respondents declared themselves either not familiar with or undecided on whether the United Nations had been making progress.

propriate for a small nation with only limited military power to take the lead in proposing an amendment. This was more properly the job of the United States. Instead of challenging Moscow, Ottawa insisted that UN committee chairs be selected for their "efficiency, competence, and integrity" (Canada 1947, 157).¹⁴ Again, the focus was on the functioning of the organization, with Canada acting as what historian Robert Spencer (1959) has called a "constructive critic and conciliator" (97). It was a subtle role that suited the country's status and capacity for real influence.

The trend towards moderation at the UN continued through the later 1940s and into the 1950s. In 1948, the delegation's most notable contribution to the General Assembly's deliberations was its effort to highlight the importance of fiscal prudence and efficient administration. An expanding number of specialized UN agencies were failing to coordinate their actions so as to avoid duplication. Those groups that were not functioning efficiently received explicit criticism, with the Canadian delegation calling out the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization specifically for having "dissipated its energies and resources on too many projects" (Canada 1949, 142).¹⁵ In 1949, representatives from Ottawa spoke out against "advocating United Nations action which does not appear to accord with practical realities" (Canada 1950, 73), and criticized fellow conference delegates who used the general assembly as a platform "designed more for propaganda purposes or for domestic consumption than for the purpose of promoting a solution to the problem under discussion" (85). Even during the Korean War, while the federal government eventually supported Washington on most of the significant security decisions, Ottawa made great efforts to maintain the integrity of the United Nations as a whole by liaising with non-aligned states who often disputed America's thinking.¹⁶

The Canadian government also never shirked its financial commitments to the organization, no matter how concerned it became with the UN's actions. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Canada was among the top seven financial contributors. It served on the Security Council from 1948 through 1949, on the Economic and Social Council from 1946 through 1948 and again from 1949 through 1952. It was a member of all of the specialized agencies, and hosted the meetings of the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal (Canada 1959, 254).¹⁷

It is hardly surprising that Lester Pearson was elected to a one year term as president of the General Assembly in October 1952 (having already presided over a special session in 1947). The following year, in his report on Canada's UN contribution, Pearson took pride in his country's moderate approach. "We can be proud, as Canadians," he wrote with respect to Ottawa's prudent, mediatory role, "that we have shown ourselves on the whole willing to master the facts and accept their full implications without either excessive discouragement or excessive optimism" (Canada

14 See also Canada 1947, 37.

15 See also Canada 1949, 23/200.

16 The standard account of Canadian foreign policy during the Korean War remains Stairs 1974.

17 See also Holmes 1982, 332-333.

1954, iii). One analyst later explained: "In general, Canadians were liked in the United Nations. Their characteristic qualities of geniality and an ability to negotiate compromises made them useful in committees and in the work of the Assembly. Since Canada was a country too small to be feared and too large to be ignored, their opinions were generally assured a fair hearing" (Masters 1959, 182-183).

Canadian successes eventually led to opportunities for more public recognition. By 1955, for example, years of unproductive debate over the admission of new members to the organization had resulted in an awkward standstill. There was a general consensus that a number of states who had not yet joined the organization (including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, and Romania) deserved admission, but the great powers refused to welcome any country that they considered an enemy. Canadian cabinet minister Paul Martin worked tirelessly to create a compromise. Sixteen new members were eventually admitted as both the Soviets and the Americans withheld their veto. According to the official history of Canada's Department of External Affairs:

The exercise provided the delegation with valuable experience in UN diplomacy, broadened its range of official contacts, and enhanced Canada's reputation, especially among the new members. The achievement was also a tribute to the solidarity of the government as a whole pursuing foreign policy objectives, and to the effectiveness of teamwork between the department and a minister who, although his main responsibilities lay elsewhere, had a keen awareness of the international issues of the day (Hilliker/Barry 1995, 122).¹⁸

What is missing from this analysis are the more problematic precedents that were set. At the international level, as John Holmes (1982) has explained, the compromise marked the first time that Canada's greatest ally, the United States, had been successfully defied in the UN environment: "Some of the mystique of American predominance, the managerial role, had now been dissipated" (346). The decline of US influence had direct implications for Canada, whose international successes were often dependent on relations with Washington. Moreover, as Ottawa itself admitted the following year, there were implications of an increased UN membership that were less than positive. The broader reach of the organization meant greater responsibilities, and because many of the newly admitted members were developing nations, there would not be an equivalent increase in institutional resources. The need for practical compromises and effective negotiations therefore became even more important at a time when the Cold War was intensifying (Canada 1957, 1).

At the domestic level, two analysts considered the problems with public successes in foreign policy just months before Pearson's Suez triumph:

18 See also Donaghy/Barry 2001, 3-20.

There is no doubt that national pride would be gratified if Canada appeared more often in a leading role when major world issues are being decided. But if Canada's representatives normally speak in a more subdued tone than some of their more colorful associates, it is a manner appropriate no less to the role they envisage for themselves than to the Canadian temperament. The role of conciliator only rarely calls for dramatic interventions or rhetorical displays. It calls instead for patient explorations and friendly suggestions, for persistence in the search for workable compromises, and for persuasiveness in their presentation. Such methods by their very nature lend themselves much more to private negotiations than to public pronouncements, and it is not surprising that the Canadian contribution in the sphere of peaceful settlement frequently goes unremarked and even unrecorded. (Soward/McInnis 1956, 103)

Martin's success, they implied, should have been viewed as exceptional, not the new standard against which future Canadian contributions should be compared.

And perhaps it might have been, had Pearson's achievement not followed so shortly after. When it did, however, both the international situation and Canada's domestic environment had changed significantly. Europe had recovered and was reasserting itself. Decolonization, evident in part by the success of the Martin initiative to expand the UN's membership, had increased the number of global actors competing for influence. The United States, soon to be led by a new president, had embraced a more unilateralist and militarized approach to foreign policy under which Canada had a lesser role.¹⁹ And executive level summits were gradually replacing meetings of foreign ministers as the primary venue for international diplomacy. The number of opportunities for a country with Canada's abilities on the world stage to make a public difference was clearly on the decline, and all signs pointed to this trend continuing.

Domestically, the Canadian economy was struggling. Coincidentally, the focus at home on social welfare empowered provincial governments (who were constitutionally responsible for health and education) across the country. The Conservatives had begun to politicize foreign policy again, using both anti-American and imperialist rhetoric to effectively end the national Cold War consensus. Canadian journalists were behaving less deferentially and more adversarially, reflecting an evolving conception of the role of the media in reporting domestic politics. Finally, the national public, yet to be inspired by Pearson's success, was already demanding

19 John Holmes has argued that Canada's special status in the early international disarmament discussions was unsustainable from the beginning. See Holmes 1982, 44-45.

visible leadership on the world stage. Taken as a whole, the changes were a recipe for long-term disappointment.

III. What if ... Pearson had not Received the Nobel Peace Prize?

Would Canada have been better off if Pearson had not received the acclaim that he did, or indeed if the Suez Crisis had not been resolved in the way that it was? Such a question would be deemed scandalous by many Canadians, and therefore has rarely been asked. More than fifty years after the fact, however, it merits consideration.

To argue that Canada should not have assumed a leading public role in a crisis that implicated its British, French and (indirectly) American allies, threatened a split in the Commonwealth along racial lines and challenged the legitimacy of the United Nations is counter-intuitive. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom how Lester Pearson could have acted any less aggressively than he did in 1956. Even at the time, however, Canada's secretary of state for external affairs was forced to justify his actions to a sceptical Conservative opposition, explaining not only why Canada was not standing by Britain's side, but also why it was not doing more in response to a second global crisis.²⁰ In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union had invaded Hungary in direct violation not only of the principles of the United Nations, but also of its own Warsaw Pact.²¹ The invasion was a direct concern to NATO and a collective response might well have offered the British and French a means of atoning for their sins at Suez. Any success in encouraging a Soviet withdrawal could have begun a rollback of communism.

Alternatively, Soviet intransigence would have isolated Moscow in the international community. Whereas the Suez crisis divided Canadians along imperialist-internationalist lines, no such divisions would have appeared in a spirited defence of neutral Hungary against its communist aggressors. Finally, action in Hungary would have been collective, with no individual Canadian in the lead. Pearson would not have received the Nobel Prize and public expectations of his successors would have necessarily been lower at a time when Canada's international influence had begun its inevitable decline.²²

Clearly, a western initiative against the Soviets in Hungary could have been a complete failure, and the Suez situation could have deteriorated further, resulting in greater disgrace for Britain and France, insecurity in the Middle East, and significant harm to western and Commonwealth unity. Nevertheless, it remains worthwhile to

20 A Gallup poll from November 1956 found that just over 50% of Canadians approved of the UN intervention into the Suez region while over 40% did not approve. See Gallup 1956.

21 The Warsaw Pact protected the independence and sovereignty of its member states and guaranteed non-interference in their internal affairs.

22 The author would like to thank Canadian Forces officer Michael Barker for first raising this intriguing idea in a class discussion. See also Lenarcic 1996, 29-30; and Reid 1986, 133-139. For an alternative argument also critical of Pearson's conduct at Suez, see Granatstein 1985, 27-44.

ask whether Canadians, in succeeding so publicly, did more harm than good to their long-term strategic position in world affairs. In 1956, analysts Fred Soward and Edgar McInnis warned that a country such as Canada “may legitimately feel at times that there is a genuine disparity between its responsibilities and its influence, and 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 a kind of world that Canada’s national interests demand” (219). Pearson’s Nobel Peace Prize made Canadians believe that they could have it all: international acclaim, worldwide influence equal to their functional contributions, and a global governance structure that was consistent with their interests. But that was not to be. The unnecessary focus on the need for public recognition of national foreign policy achievements remains to this day one of the most tragic legacies of an otherwise exceptional period.

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