

Edited by  
Asa McKercher and Galen Roger Perras

# MIKE'S WORLD

Lester B. Pearson  
and Canadian External Affairs



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# F oreword

There is something maddening about Mike Pearson. His ambiguities irritated Walter Gordon, whose personal wealth and network smoothed Pearson's path to the Prime Minister's Office. He infuriated his close wartime companion Dean Acheson, who found Pearson's ambiguities during the Cold War sanctimonious and dishonest. For his principal Progressive Conservative antagonist, John Diefenbaker, Pearson represented a pretentious, isolated central Canadian elite that, in the eminent and angry historian Donald Creighton's opinion, had deceitfully taken Canada down the perilous American road in the postwar years. Many on the Canadian left simultaneously attacked the sole Canadian Nobel Peace Prize recipient. As a federal civil servant at the Cold War's height, Pierre Trudeau wrote angry denunciations of External Affairs Minister Pearson to diplomats in Pearson's department. As the Cold War was beginning to thaw in 1963, Trudeau publicly denounced the "defrocked prince of peace,"<sup>1</sup> who cravenly collapsed under American pressure and accepted nuclear weapons for Canada.

Later critics on the left, including Yves Engler, Ian McKay, and Jamie Swift, are determined to undermine the image of Pearson as, in the words of McKay and Swift, "a master diplomat, a father of the United Nations, a self-deprecating man of peace, and the prime minister who helped usher in medicare, bilingualism and Expo 67."<sup>2</sup> For these critics, Pearson was too much an apologist for the British Empire for which he fought in his youth and for the American Empire that he served in his later life. Critics on the right were equally vehement

and politically more influential. Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird insisted that the “Lester Pearson Building” be removed from his business card, ordered a tribute to Pearson’s Nobel Prize be taken off the departmental website, and, with much offence intended, named the structure beside the Pearson Building the John G. Diefenbaker Building. More seriously, Harper Conservatives publicly lamented the welfare state that Pearson’s government put in place and attacked the multilateralism and peacekeeping emphasis associated with Pearsonian internationalism.

The fury of fierce extremes that the mostly amiable, often clumsy, and physically ordinary Pearson endured during his prime ministerial years left a mark on historical assessments of him. His success – indeed, his celebrity – prior to 1957 occurred, as Denis Stairs wrote, because the government’s policies made Canadians “feel good – proud of our motives and our accomplishments alike in a dangerous and shrinking world.”<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s, as colonies became nations, Quebec trembled with nationalism, Americans stumbled into Vietnam, and the young shucked off old ways, Pearson suddenly seemed a relic of the past, not at all the right leader for different times. As the editors and authors of this volume explain, Pearson found the end of the “good times” difficult. A child of the Methodist manse who avidly read Rudyard Kipling and G.A. Henty, Pearson refused to see only dark shadows lurking over the legacy of the British Empire. Similarly, the creation of the state of Israel after the horrors of the Holocaust captured his imagination, and he ignored those shoved aside by the birth of the new state. A supporter of conscription in both world wars, the unilingual Pearson was ill-prepared for Quebec’s and France’s challenges in the 1960s to his notions of federalism and Canadian external relations. An admirer of the United States’ role in the postwar construction of the United Nations system, he refused to join those who excoriated its actions and depreciated the need for American leadership in a bipolar world. Moreover, he seemed to have a deaf ear when protesters cried out for new conceptions of human rights. And he was not “Pearsonian” when it came to the Canadian Arctic. This excellent collection clearly points out these weaknesses and ambiguities in Pearson and his policies.

While this volume also captures the contradictions and weaknesses of Pearson, it also underlines his importance. Even for his detractors, it is hard to imagine Canada without him. A recent survey of scholars

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ranked Pearson fifth among Canadian prime ministers even though he served only five turbulent years in minority governments. Among the young who were surveyed, he displaced Macdonald and ranked behind only King and Laurier, who served twenty-two and fifteen years, respectively. In Quebec he ranked third, while his successor Trudeau, who tied him among the younger scholars, ranked seventh in his native province.<sup>4</sup>

It is often said of Winston Churchill that he contained multitudes, but through his long life those many ingredients remained remarkably consistent and unchanging. An imperialist he was born, an imperialist he died. He retained his faith in the military, the British aristocracy and its traditions, and the essential superiority of Englishness. Lester Pearson was born a devout Christian in a British Canadian family in which the values of small town Ontario were honoured and cherished. Later, he was the sole Canadian prime minister to serve in uniform at a war front. Yet the multitudes within the deceptively complex Pearson were increasingly an inconsistent blend, one that responded to and reflected the tragic and brilliant century in which he lived. Had Pearson left politics after his disastrous defeat in 1958, would Canada have had national medicare, the maple leaf flag, official bilingualism, the Canada Pension Plan, racially unrestricted immigration, the unification of the armed forces, and, not least, Pierre Trudeau? *Mike's World* traces how deeply his imprint remains. For critics and admirers, for better and for worse, Mike Pearson remade Canada.

## Notes

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- 1 Trudeau quoted in Denis Smith, *Gentle Patriot: A Political Biography of Walter Gordon* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1973), 119.
- 2 Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012), 107.
- 3 Denis Stairs, "Canada in the 1990s: Speak Loudly and Carry a Bent Twig," *Policy Options* (January/February 2001): 44.
- 4 Stephen Azzi and Norman Hillmer, "Ranking Canada's Best and Worst Prime Ministers," *Macleans's* (7 October 2016), <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/ranking-canadas-best-and-worst-prime-ministers/>.

# Acknowledgments

This project began out of our shared belief that there is too little written about Canadian international history and our sense – dare we, as Canadians, admit such a thing – that American foreign relations historians do things so much better than those of us above the forty-ninth parallel. While each US president seems to have, at minimum, a volume of essays devoted to probing his foreign policy choices and legacies, such a thing has not been done in Canada. Given the marginalization of Canadian international history – what one scholar recently likened to a “tragedy” – such a development is not surprising. But it is lamentable. Hence this book, which gathers together emerging and established scholars to analyze the foreign policy legacy of Canada’s most influential diplomat and to do so from a range of vantage points, some laudatory, others condemnatory, but all bringing important insights to our understanding of the complications surrounding this man and his times.

Obviously, this collection is the result of the efforts of more than just us two. First and foremost, thanks go to our contributors, each of whom took the time to prepare incisive papers, to respond to suggestions made both by the reviewers and us, and to do both more or less on time. We would be remiss also if we did not thank our editors at UBC Press: Emily Andrew, who first spearheaded this project before heading off to greener pastures at Cornell and then Randy Schmidt, who saw it through to completion. And our thanks to UBC Press’s



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While we are both thankful for the support of our partners, families, friends, and colleagues, we dedicate this book to the memory of Kaiti Perras.

## Introduction

### Lester Pearson and Canadian External Affairs

No figure has had a greater impact upon Canada's recent foreign policy than Lester Pearson. As Liberal prime minister from 1963 to 1968, but especially as secretary of state for external affairs (SSEA) from 1948 to 1957, "Mike," to his friends, has been credited with having charted a course in which Canada took on an active global role as a helpful fixer seeking to mediate disputes and promote international cooperation. For those Canadians who recall this era fondly, Canada's reputation as a peaceable "middle power" was cemented when Pearson won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his peacekeeping efforts during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Acclaiming this achievement as a stunning success, journalists covering events at the United Nations crowed that "Canada is almost a magic word here" and that there had been a "break-through to new levels of responsibility for Canada in the world."<sup>1</sup> Suez appeared to be the capstone to a "Golden Decade" of achievement in Canadian foreign policy, with Pearson, backed by a cohort of internationalist-minded diplomats, looming large. Their achievements, and this era, have inspired much myth-making about Canada and its international role. In a 1961 debate on Canada's place in the world, poet Douglas LePan, a former diplomatic colleague of Pearson, remarked: "The world is suffering from many kinds of frustrations and will continue to do so. In such a world there is a particular role for Canada. What that role is depends on what sort of an image you have of a heroic Canadian. For myself, I think of Mike Pearson at the United Nations at the time of Suez, producing a resolution that set up the United

Nations Emergency Force and that got the world by a very awkward corner.” Four decades later, another controversial and influential Liberal foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy, reflected: “Mike Pearson was *the* role model. I became an admirer and a Liberal ... Pearson represented to me the quintessential qualities of a Canadian.” For journalist Charles Lynch, Pearson “walked funny and he talked funny, but he acted very seriously indeed, and his diplomatic achievements, speaking for Canada at the height of its world prestige and influence ... made him the Canadian of the century.”<sup>2</sup> In such characterizations, Pearson personified a notion of Canada as an altruistic, outwardly focused honest broker.

Pearson was part of a generation of policy makers who shepherded Canada into the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), moves reflective of a new internationalist spirit and a commitment to collective security in contrast to the view that Canada, protected by three oceans, was a “fire proof house, far from inflammable materials.”<sup>3</sup> Having been in the thick of two catastrophic wars in their lifetimes, Pearson and his fellow Canadian diplomats seized upon multilateralism and global governance as means to avoid a third conflagration, one that now threatened nuclear destruction. Beyond involvement in the UN and NATO, under their watch Canada made its first commitments to foreign aid and development under the Colombo Plan and participated in a liberal economic order centred on the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Pearson also insisted that Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty – the Canadian Article – should promote economic and social cooperation with the aim of making NATO more than a military alliance. Then, of course, there was Pearson’s storied action during the Suez Crisis when he spearheaded the creation of a UN peacekeeping force that helped to end the fighting. Though motivated by a keen sense of Canada’s national interest, an idealist spirit also guided Pearson and others. It is this appeal to Canadians’ “better angels” that has proved so captivating.

Although only one of many officials charting Canada’s more active course in the world, Pearson became synonymous with this global approach – and as the lengthy list of his publications at the end of this volume attests, he thought deeply about international relations and Canada’s place in the world. His admirers have contended that he was a “brilliant exponent of Canadian foreign policy,” that he “epitomized

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the middle power practice,” and knowing internationalism “gave Canada an influence beyond its size or stature, allowing it to punch above its weight,” he oversaw “a chapter of our history of which Canadians are rightly proud.”<sup>4</sup> Liberals, naturally, have made much of this history and of Pearson. In a 2005 call for an active global role Paul Martin Jr., then prime minister, looked to Pearson’s development of peacekeeping as the genesis of an approach in which Canada had “had a major hand in devising the innovative arrangements our world requires.” Ten years later, in the midst of a bitterly contested federal election campaign, another former Liberal prime minister, Jean Chrétien, asked Canadian voters to “choose a government in line with our great tradition of peace-building, initiated by Mr. Pearson and promoted by all of his successors until the arrival of the Harper administration.” Given these invocations of Pearson and his legacy, is there little wonder why Liberal leaders have been diagnosed with “Nobel Fever”?<sup>5</sup>

Yet Pearsonianism, and its progenitor, had an influence outside of Liberal Party circles. One critic of Pearson, or at least of the mythologizing around the Suez Crisis, had decried the 1957 Nobel Prize win for its “harmful effect on the Canadian military because it began the process whereby Canadians view their soldiers as the world’s natural peacekeepers.” For similar reasons, former Conservative senator Hugh Segal has derided the “largely mythical ‘Pearson in Suez’ peacekeeping heroic innovation narrative.”<sup>6</sup> On a more positive note, as two political scientists noted recently, their students still “embrace a nostalgic image of Canada – the helpful fixer, the peacekeeper, the altruistic good international citizen” that contrasts with the more assertive Canadian foreign policy practised at present.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this yearning for Canada “the peaceable kingdom” reflects youthful idealism, a shallow misreading of the past by political science undergraduates, or simply the power of the myths surrounding Pearson, Canada as a middle power, and the Golden Decade of Canadian foreign policy.

Myths “idealize” in that “they select particular events and institutions which seem to embody important cultural values and elevate them to the status of legend.” Moreover, they are “agents that generate and condition historical action” and “gain their potency from their ability to persuade.”<sup>8</sup> Has what has become known as Pearsonianism had such a lasting influence because of its idealism and its persuasiveness? Certainly, Pearson himself was persuasive – a necessity for a

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diplomat – for Canada’s policy during the Golden Decade often was less than idealistic. But it was his “vision of Canada and the new world order that was largely accepted, and then remembered, by the Canadian people.”<sup>9</sup> Among historians, the middle power ideal and, by extension, the Pearsonian age, have lost some of their lustre, with nuanced studies showing that, instead of being magnanimous internationalists, Pearson and his generation of diplomats were conscious of their limited capabilities, mindful of their place in the Western camp, and cognizant of the need to assist their allies.<sup>10</sup> Not that Canada did not support international organizations; far from it. Rather, these scholars emphasize that, during this Pearsonian era, Canadian diplomatists were frequently cautious and pragmatic even as the public latched onto the middle power rhetoric. The Canadian people, one of Pearson’s diplomatic colleagues once lamented, forgot “Pearson the pragmatist.”<sup>11</sup>

In part, this discovery – not that Pearson hid it – of Pearsonian pragmatism has been why recent years have been tough on Pearson and his legacy. In growing numbers, critics on the left have emphasized that Pearsonianism in action was a far cry from the “progressive internationalism” that Pearson, his colleagues, and subsequent Liberal politicians proclaimed.<sup>12</sup> In this telling, Pearson’s foreign policy during his time both as SSEA and as prime minister was blindly anti-communist and pro-Israeli, suspicious if not hostile towards “Third World” nationalism, promoting Western economic interests and export-driven and growth-based development, and slavishly supportive of the United States. Further, Pearson saw the world through “paternalistic” lenses, a racially driven outlook whitewashed by rhetoric about Canada as a selfless international actor.<sup>13</sup> Thus, much of Pearson’s record of international achievement reads as a list of shameful conduct. As Ian McKay and Jamie Swift note, a paradox surrounds Pearson: “[his image] as ‘Canada’s peacemaker general,’ the epitome of Canadian civility in a disordered world, stands in contrast to his activities as a fierce cold warrior.”<sup>14</sup> Such criticism is not new. Pearson’s left-wing critics have long decried the “bankruptcy” of his approach to world affairs. Pointing to how Pearson backed Washington “to the hilt” on Vietnam, these detractors also emphasize his 1963 decision to reverse the Liberal Party’s opposition to nuclear weapons, a move that paved the way for Ottawa’s acceptance of this weaponry and that led a future Liberal prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, to denounce Pearson as the “defrocked priest of peace.”<sup>15</sup> In these interpretations, Pearson is not the nebbish

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of conservative disdain, but someone who took firm, reactionary positions and is even a “major criminal, really extreme.”<sup>16</sup> It might seem odd to associate the word “extreme” with Pearson, a political moderate and diplomat par excellence. But for many on the left, Pearsonianism has far different, and far more sinister, implications for Canada’s global role than as a reflection of dewy-eyed internationalism. “If Pearson’s foreign policy was to be summarized,” noted his most vociferous contemporary critic, “the best words to describe it would be violent or unjust not peaceful or internationalist.”<sup>17</sup> Some of these criticisms sit far outside the realm of reasoned historical debate. But the questioning of Pearson’s record, and how Canadians remember him, is important.

Criticism has come from the right as well. In Ottawa, until quite recently, Pearson’s stock was low, a result of former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper’s efforts to place a conservative stamp on Canada, thereby erasing much of the liberal – and Liberal – heritage in place after he assumed power in 2006. Hence, the reinstatement of the designations “Royal” to the air force and the navy – a reversal of a Pearson policy; the downplaying of the fiftieth anniversary of Pearson’s introduction of Canada’s maple leaf flag; an emphasis on members of the military as warriors rather than as peacekeepers; the defunding of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, leading to its closure in 2013; and what John Baird, Canadian foreign minister from 2011 to 2015, called the move “from brokerage” to “a values-based foreign policy.” Pearson, as noted, was the honest broker personified. “As you know,” Harper remarked in 2014, “we have brought in a different approach to foreign affairs from previous governments, previous Liberal governments,” whose stance was to “go along to get along.’ Whatever the consensus is, just sign on to it. We have taken stronger stands when we view that important issues, important interests and important values, are at stake.”<sup>18</sup> Such comments by Harper and Baird echo those of Howard Green, SSEA in John Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservative government from 1959 to 1963. Green also took umbrage with Pearsonianism, stating in 1960: “The time has come to drop the idea that Canada’s role in world affairs is to be an ‘honest broker’ between the nations. We must decide instead that our role is to determine the right stand to take on problems, keeping in mind the Canadian background and, above all, using Canadian common sense.”<sup>19</sup> No wonder that the Harper Tories looked to Diefenbaker, Pearson’s political nemesis, to frame the recent political past. They had planned to

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christen a new heavy icebreaker with Diefenbaker's name; in 2010, they created the annual John Diefenbaker Defender of Human Rights and Freedom Award; and, in 2014, they renamed Ottawa's former City Hall after Diefenbaker. The John G. Diefenbaker Building, now housing Canadian diplomats, lies but a stone's throw from the Global Affairs Canada headquarters, a building named for Pearson. The Harper government's values-based foreign policy was characterized by some as "bullhorn diplomacy" and by others as a betrayal of Canada's supposed impartial, multilateral role on the world stage. "The Conservative government," one detractor asserted, "has taken Canada so far from its foreign policy roots and exposed this country as such a high-profile outlier, it defies explanation."<sup>20</sup> Pearson is credited with laying these roots; thus, tough times, indeed, for Mike and for the myths that surround him.

That Pearson could be the target of such criticism from the right *and* the left is not surprising. Since Pearson was a diplomat and a political centrist, not an ideologue, it is only natural that he could represent different things to different people. After all, here was a man who was anti-communist but was also accused by McCarthyites of being a communist himself – conservative newspaper baron and renowned isolationist Colonel Robert McCormick, editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, once dubbed Pearson "the most dangerous man in the English-speaking world."<sup>21</sup> A paradox arises from Pearsonian foreign policy's blend of realism with idealism, a mixture no doubt appealing to political centrists but appalling to those on the ends of the political spectrum. What Liberal hagiography and the continued sniping at him from the right and the left both underline is that Pearson looms over debates about Canada's global role. "Such was Pearson's impact" on foreign policy, writes journalist Andrew Cohen, "that no prime minister since has failed to evoke his legacy or tried to escape his shadow."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, although Pierre Trudeau eventually trumpeted peacekeeping and embarked, at the end of his time in office, on a quixotic quest for world peace, immediately after succeeding Pearson as prime minister in 1968 he had sought to repudiate the honest broker role. Meanwhile, in the judgment of the US State Department in 1960, Diefenbaker's Tories were "haunted by the international prestige which Canadians think was achieved" by Pearson.<sup>23</sup> American sneering aside, Pearson possessed considerable stature, another reason for his position both as a source of inspiration and as a lightning rod for criticism.

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The son of a Methodist pastor, Pearson lived a comfortable if itinerant early life across southern Ontario. His early world was very British, nourished by Canada's imperial heritage, and it left its mark on him. "We are British as well as Canadian," he told his undergraduate students in 1927, adding: "One need not be accused of boastful flag-waving, in saying that, on the whole, the good from the Empire has far exceeded its evils."<sup>24</sup> His own undergraduate history degree at the University of Toronto was interrupted by the onset of the First World War, prompting Pearson and thousands of his contemporaries to rush to defend the imperial metropole. Enlisting in 1915, he served in Greece in a hospital unit and then trained as a pilot in Britain, his military career terminating when he was struck by a London bus and by the onset of what now would be termed post-traumatic stress disorder. Back in Toronto, he finished his BA and then worked at a Chicago abattoir before winning a fellowship to Oxford, excelling in sports if not in academics. Next, Pearson spent five years as a history professor at the University of Toronto. Though he did not publish, rather than perish, in 1928 he joined Canada's small Department of External Affairs (DEA), a ministry dominated by Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.<sup>25</sup>

While his initial diplomatic work was tedious, Pearson pleased his superiors, advancing in the ranks to serve as first secretary at the High Commission in London from 1935 to 1941 and then as the deputy chief of mission to Canada's Legation in Washington in 1942. These were Canada's two most important overseas posts – Britain and the United States being Canada's principal allies, part of the so-called North Atlantic Triangle – and Pearson's international outlook was no doubt shaped by his exposure to life among Britons and Americans, the "English-speaking peoples" who dominated much of the globe prior to the postwar implosion of formal imperialism. The years in which he served in London and Washington were difficult. Watching the events of the later 1930s as the world again descended into war, he complained that King's "do-nothing" foreign policy had left him "thoroughly disheartened and disillusioned." By 1938, he had rejected the isolationism and appeasement of his superiors, asking: "Would our complete isolation from European events (if such a thing were possible) save us from the effects of a British defeat; and, even if it did, could we stand by and watch the triumph of Nazidom, with all that it stands for, over a Great Britain which, with all her defects, is about the last abode of

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decency, reason and liberty on this side of the water?”<sup>26</sup> The war turned Pearson – and his generation of Canadian diplomats – into internationalists, backers of collective security, and opponents of totalitarian aggression.

Yet Pearson had to move carefully as King remained cautious about engaging with the world. In late 1947, the prime minister was irate over Pearson’s shepherding of a United Nations plan to partition Palestine: “The truth is that Pearson with his youth and inexperience and influenced by the persuasion of others around him, had been anxious to have Canada’s [external affairs] figure prominently in world affairs.”<sup>27</sup> Still, King had handpicked Pearson, promoting him to ambassador in Washington in 1944, and then, in 1946, to under-secretary of state for external affairs – deputy minister – making Pearson the third most influential person in the foreign policymaking apparatus after the SSEA and prime minister. Pearson made the jump to the second most important position in 1948, abandoning his civil service sinecure for a seat in the House of Commons, representing the northern Ontario constituency of Algoma East and almost a decade of continuous travel. Asked in 1955 where he made his home, he quipped: “On a C-5, I think.”<sup>28</sup> It was on board this plane, in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings, and in conference halls and meeting rooms across the globe, that, with Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent and a host of able and like-minded diplomats, he set Canada – for good or ill – upon its Pearsonian course.

Like Pearson, St-Laurent believed that Canada must be more involved in the world than it had been under King, though this idealism, and that of many within Canada’s postwar diplomatic corps, was matched by a realistic belief in what Canada could accomplish. In his memoirs, Pearson recalled that, in these years, he and his colleagues “always asked ourselves not only ‘What kind of Canada do we want?’ but ‘What kind of world do we want?’” But he admitted, too, that he, at least, “was not so naïve as to think that we could decisively, or even importantly, influence the policies of the Great Powers, but I hoped we could influence the environment in which they were pursued.”<sup>29</sup> Here was the peculiar blend of idealism and realism so characteristic of postwar Canadian foreign policy. Pearson was the poster boy for this policy, becoming perhaps the most famous Canadian in the world. Beyond his activities as SSEA, he was one of NATO’s “three wise men,” was the president of the UN General Assembly in 1952,

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and twice contended for the position of UN secretary-general, in 1945 and 1952, with his candidacy opposed by the Soviets and by the Americans, a telling reflection of the paradoxical nature of Pearsonianism. The Korean War from 1950 to 1953 exposed this paradox, for Pearson supported Canadian involvement not only to defend the notion of collective security that upheld the postwar order, but to resist communist aggression; in effect, it seemed to be a war for peace, and he helped to broker an eventual end to the fighting.<sup>30</sup> His involvement in similar crises and negotiations marked a departure from the wariness of the King years. The result, was that, as one British military analyst wrote of Pearson in 1955, “in the post war world, in which Canada is still something of a novelty, he has become a world figure in his own right.” Four years later, the young US senator John F. Kennedy paid homage to Pearson as “the guardian of good sense,” a statesman who “enjoyed the confidence of very many nations,” and “the chief architect of the Canadian foreign service, probably the best in the world.”<sup>31</sup> Pearson was, reflected one of India’s foremost diplomats, among those “rare personalities who have combined wisdom with power,” while Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere called him “the Great Liberal.”<sup>32</sup> These views are testament to Pearson’s international renown, or at least to the postwar prestige of Canada and its diplomats, and serve as a reminder that the Golden Age myth had a basis in fact.

While foreigners were beguiled by the bow-tied Canadian, it is worth recalling that Pearson served as SSEA when Canada’s relative international prominence was high thanks to the weakness of war-ravaged Europe and East Asia and the domination of much of the globe by imperial powers. In effect, then, there were few competitors for the international limelight and Pearson had the great luck to head a remarkable foreign service at a time when Canada, by default, was important globally. Moreover, he and his team had St-Laurent’s support. After all, it was St-Laurent who, in 1947, had given voice in his famous Gray Lecture at the University of Toronto to a more active though still pragmatic Canadian role in the world.<sup>33</sup> Regrettably, the world of the late 1940s was entering into a Cold War, and Pearson and St-Laurent placed Canada firmly in the Western camp for they saw the Soviet Union as an aggressive force threatening collective security. As early as March 1946 Pearson had counselled: “The United States and the United Kingdom should convert the United Nations into a really effective agent to preserve the peace and prevent aggression.

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This means revising it radically. If the Russians veto such a revision, agreed on by others, a new organization must be created which, as the guardian of the peace for all nations, and not merely the English-speaking ones, can function without the Russians and, as a last resort, against them.”<sup>34</sup> Under Pearson and St-Laurent, Canada was an active Cold War combatant, both at home and abroad. Canadians generally supported this stance. As late as 1963, the year Pearson assumed the prime ministership, most Canadians in a national sample saw “communism as a danger to the West.” While 47 percent of the same sample disagreed that nuclear war was an acceptable means to defeat communism, 42 percent backed such an apocalyptic solution.<sup>35</sup> Thus, postwar idealism was matched by the reality of great power politics and by a fear of ideological threats to Canada’s liberal order. Pearson, however, was wary of the bomb and aware of the grim realities of nuclear warfare. In 1960, on national television, he declared, sensibly enough, that it would be “better to be Red than dead,” thereby inciting the ire of Canadian and American conservatives.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the Cold War, though often linked closely to it, Canadians also wrestled with the fallout of decolonization. As Pearson once reflected: “It may be that in the verdict of history a hundred years or so from now, it will be agreed that of the communist revolution in Russia in 1917 and the emergence of independent Asian countries after World War II – the latter revolution will be considered in its long-range impact as more important than the former.”<sup>37</sup> He was right, of course, as the end of empire and the emergence of dozens of new states had a profound impact on international affairs while also inspiring oppressed minorities in Canada itself. Canadian responses to decolonization were decidedly mixed. While Canada often backed its Western allies in retaining their imperial holdings, there were instances, Suez most notably, in which Ottawa sided with anti-colonial nationalism. Just eight months before the Suez Crisis, Pearson had asked reporters: “If we hold colonial territories against the wishes of their inhabitants are we going to be stronger or weaker in the long run?”<sup>38</sup> During the Pearsonian era, decolonization and the Cold War were two of the factors that shaped the world and, with it, Canadian foreign policy.

In 1957, the Pearson–St-Laurent compact came crashing down. An election that year saw Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservatives end the Liberals’ twenty-two-year-long run in power. During the Diefenbaker

interregnum, foreign policy sounded different. There was more positive bluster about the British Commonwealth and disarmament; more negative bluster about the Soviets and the United States. Still, the contours remained Pearsonian: adherence to the UN, to the Atlantic alliance, and to the US alliance, and the seemingly inexorable realignment of Canadian trade southwards. After all, Diefenbaker and Pearson were similar men, and “the Chief” shared Mike’s idealism, if not his pragmatism.<sup>39</sup> In the interim, Pearson had become both Liberal leader and a politician. The Opposition years were tough, with the New Democratic Party, formed in 1961, squeezing the Liberals on the left. Pearson rebuilt his party and whittled away at the Tories. “I doubt,” one of his star MPs later recalled, “whether there was any other period of his life when Mike Pearson’s diplomacy was more consistently needed or employed to better effect.” But, as one journalist put it: “The crackle of intellectual electricity that brought him the Nobel Peace Prize seemed only to hamper Pearson in the cut and thrust over domestic issues.”<sup>40</sup> If Diefenbaker was more of a politician than a statesman, Pearson was the reverse.

Despite his initial fumbling, after six years in Opposition, Pearson and the Liberals claimed victory, although astute campaigning by a defiant Diefenbaker limited Pearson to a minority government. There would be a second minority win for the Liberals in 1965, and Pearson resigned and retired in 1968, spending his twilight years first as an adviser to the World Bank and then as chancellor of Carleton University where he led seminars in Canadian foreign policy until his death in 1972.<sup>41</sup> As for his five-year prime ministership, the consensus then and since, as J.L. Granatstein put it, was that “Pearson was a great success as a diplomat. He was not, however, a great success as a prime minister.”<sup>42</sup> His time in office seemed plagued by perennial scandal and incompetence, the latter tendency exemplified by the failure to win a majority. That he did not do better as Canada’s leader is, on its face, surprising given his skill as a negotiator. As for Prime Minister Pearson’s handling of global affairs, there “was no room in the 1960s for the great initiatives of the 1940s.” Rather, as Robert Bothwell observes: “Optimism and commitment were transformed into worry and indecision, as much on the public’s part as on the government’s. The sixties as far as Canadian foreign policy was concerned ended with a whimper.”<sup>43</sup>

Though Canadians welcomed the fact that the 1960s ended without an atomic “bang,” in this volume, our contributors examine Pearson’s foreign policy record and the paradoxical clash between idealism and pragmatism that undergirds Pearsonianism. While the tendency in international history of late has been to move away from elite-focused works towards a welcome emphasis on the social contexts, grassroots, and communities among which elite policy makers moved, Pearson’s legacy deserves attention given his continued importance to the framing of debates about Canada’s role in the world. Indeed, one is tempted to draw connections to the influence of President Woodrow Wilson in the US context. For nearly a century Wilsonianism has served as a model and a foil for discussion about US foreign policy, with adherents of Wilson – like those of Pearson – advocating internationalism and global engagement. Pearson, though, mixed his idealism with pragmatism. The latter meant that Canadian diplomats were not simply “going along to get along,” but it did not mean that Pearson and company were a pack of McCarthyite warmongers. Rather, Pearson’s conduct in foreign affairs sprang from mixed motives. Though Pearson was a partisan for the West in the Cold War, he was deeply concerned by the confrontational and interventionist nature of US foreign policy. He was hopeful yet sceptical that internationalism and multilateralism could prevent a major war; realizing that colonialism was on the wane and opposed to being drawn into decolonial conflicts, he was supportive of Canada’s Western European allies, many of whom were imperial powers. Concerned about both global poverty and the inequality between the First World and the Third World, Pearson championed Canadian economic interests. In short, Pearsonianism was contradictory. Perhaps contradiction has served as fodder for myth-making; but, in any event, Canadians should neither look back too wistfully on this bygone era nor engage too readily in iconoclasm. After all, Pearson won a Nobel Peace Prize for a reason.

Gathering together scholars of Canadian international history, the present volume wrestles with the contradictions of Pearson and Pearsonianism and, ultimately, with the resulting myths surrounding Canada’s role in the world. Some of our contributors take deeply critical positions; others offer considerable praise for Pearson. Together, they provide a sustained analysis of the record of a man who, for better or worse, still influences Canada’s international identity and much of Canadian thinking about its global posture.

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While much has been written about Pearsonian foreign policy during the Golden Age, especially about both Suez and the creation of Israel, comparatively little has been written about Canada's role in the world from 1963 to 1968.<sup>44</sup> Within the limited work on this era, much of the focus is on Pearson and the Vietnam War, an understandable preoccupation as this conflict was one of the period's signal issues, engaging passions and exposing deep societal divides. Pearson's response to the war has recently been characterized as "balancing war and peace," a fitting description that carries with it that sense of Pearsonian paradox.<sup>45</sup> Beyond Vietnam, other studies have intently explored Prime Minister Pearson's relations with the United States.<sup>46</sup> But, despite historians' and the public's deep interest in the 1960s, there has been little focus beyond these areas. Indeed, the recent spate of historical interest in Canada's 1960s has dealt mainly with domestic rather than international history.<sup>47</sup> So, the chapters in this volume analyze Pearsonian foreign policy during an important period in Canadian and global history, pushing past – though not ignoring – the Golden Era into the 1960s.

Pearson was prime minister in trying times. Leading two minority governments, at home he faced English and French Canadian nationalisms, management of an increasingly interventionist state, rapid technological change, intergenerational strife, and a youthful identification with the Third World that called into question Canada's post-war foreign policy status quo with its Pearsonian identity tied firmly to the Western cause in the Cold War and to Anglo-Saxon notions of liberty and progress.<sup>48</sup> Abroad, the 1960s saw important changes that affected Canada's global position. The recovery of Western Europe and Japan created fresh economic pressures even as declining British influence meant that, for Canadians, Britain was a diminishing counterweight to American influences; the dissolution of formal European empires, the emergence of a plethora of new states, and the rise of Third World nationalism created new opportunities as well as new dangers; and an aggressive Soviet foreign policy that aimed, in the words of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, to "bury" the West raised old fears even as a growing sense of détente created new hopes. At the pinnacle of its power, though the United States sought to "pay any price, bear any burden" in its Cold War crusade, by decade's end Washington was mired in an intractable war, its moral and material superiority in doubt. There were new challenges, too, often thanks to

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pressures exerted by the growing ranks of non-governmental organizations, many of which were concerned about international human rights and about the environment. Indeed, the 1960s saw a growing global consciousness and inter-connectedness leading to a great sense that it was a “crucial decade.”<sup>49</sup> The world was very different than when Pearson had been SSEA, and, as prime minister, he also had to focus on domestic issues. Thus, he left much of the handling of foreign policy to his own SSEA, Paul Martin Sr., an openly ambitious Liberal war-horse who had his own priorities, which created tension between the two men.<sup>50</sup> Still, Pearson acted in foreign affairs. That he did not do a better job of charting Canada through these troubled seas seemed self-evident to observers at the time. “Instead of leading the people through this maze of change,” wrote journalist Peter Newman, “the Pearson-Diefenbaker generation of politicians droned on, caught up in the vain hopes of a long-gone epoch, viewing their own peculiar Kiplingesque world through the rear windows of the flag-fluttering limousines in the age of moonflights, mass marches and mod.”<sup>51</sup>

When it came to his handling of foreign policy, was Prime Minister Pearson out of his depth? Did he achieve successes? Or was his record a mixed one, reflective of the paradoxes that surrounded him? Moreover, what does his foreign policy record at the time tell us about how Canadians in the 1960s viewed Canada’s place in the world? The contributors to this collection explore how Pearson and, by turns, Canadians wrestled with this era of rapid change at home and abroad. Yet the authors’ focus is wider for, while examining Pearsonian policy in the 1960s, it traces Pearson’s thinking on issues over his career, a lens that allows us to consider policy over several decades and to probe differences between the Golden Decade and the Sixties. What were the changes in his views, for instance, on East-West relations, on Canadian connections to Britain, on the United Nations, and on the emerging Third World? Furthermore, the authors connect Pearson’s foreign policy decisions with domestic issues and link external events with developments at home. In connecting Pearson with the world in which he lived, they draw attention to the thinking that inspired his world-views, including the ways in which he reflected wider trends within Sixties Canada and how Canadians shaped, responded to, and engaged with international affairs in this period. Last, contributors address the myth-making surrounding Pearson and Pearsonianism

with an eye towards assessing his record and reputation and doing so not uncritically.<sup>52</sup>

The book has three sections. In the first, the authors assess various aspects of Pearsonianism and its legacy. Indeed, in his contribution Robert Bothwell deals with this concept head-on in a probing exegesis of a term frequently invoked but all too frequently misunderstood. In a similar vein, Michael Carroll and Adam Chapnick explore areas synonymous with Pearsonianism – peacekeeping and the United Nations, respectively – highlighting the idealism that informed Pearson’s thinking and the realism that guided his policies. As for policy making, Greg Donaghy looks at the professional relationship between Pearson and Paul Martin. Having had his own goals in foreign affairs, Martin’s imprint is felt throughout the book. Switching gears somewhat, Stephen Azzi places Pearson’s foreign policy in its domestic setting both in terms of Liberal political activities and with regard to the decade’s emblematic upheavals.

The chapters in our second section examine the more pragmatic side to Pearsonian foreign policy. First, Jennifer Tunnicliffe focuses on rights promotion, an issue just beginning to captivate Canadian and global attention in the 1960s. As she stresses, Pearson’s handling of and belief in the promotion of human rights internationally was neither inspired nor inspiring. A similar portrait emerges from Peter Kikkert, Adam Lajeunesse, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer’s analysis of Pearson’s dealings over Arctic sovereignty, a long-standing issue in Canadian foreign policy and one on which, they note, Pearson was distinctly “un-Pearsonian.” In analyzing Canadian actions in the Middle East – from which sprang Pearson’s greatest triumph, the United Nations Emergency Force – Maurice Jr. M. Labelle offers a highly critical analysis of what constituted Pearsonianism. While Pearson took a hardnosed stance toward issues in the Middle East, he showed considerable caution in addressing developments in Latin America and the Caribbean, long an area that most Canadians had ignored. John Dirks indicates why Pearson’s caution may have been shrewd even as Paul Martin hoped to see Canada play a larger hemispheric role. Finally, as Lara Silver shows in her chapter, although Pearson was a product of British Canada and of Oxford, he had a complicated relationship with Britain, thanks to fraying imperial ties and a declining global empire.



Our third section contains chapters stressing the more idealistic side of Pearsonianism. While the early 1960s witnessed tense Cold War crises over Berlin and Cuba, the rest of the decade saw an emerging East-West détente. Pearson, notes Timothy Andrews Sayle, had long been convinced of the need to build bridges to the Soviet bloc, and so his views aligned well with the prevailing post-Cuban Missile Crisis spirit that sought to defuse Cold War tensions. Like many Canadians in the postwar era, Pearson saw a role for Canada in building bridges not just between East and West but also between the West and newly independent states. As Ryan Touhey demonstrates, nowhere was this ethos more in evidence than in South Asia. Meanwhile, growing détente also had an impact upon trans-Atlantic relations, as did changing US nuclear policies. In her chapter, Isabel Campbell charts Pearson's efforts to understand the shifting strategic landscape in Europe and its effect on NATO, an alliance that he had helped to create and to which he was deeply attached. In Europe, and elsewhere, Pearsonianism clashed with Gaullism. Offering fresh insights into the hostile Franco-Canadian relationship, Brendan Kelly shows how Pearson's difficulties in dealing with French president Charles de Gaulle touched on the most pressing domestic question at the time – namely, Canada's future as a united country. Also emphasizing the interplay between the global and the local, in our final chapter, Norman Hillmer, Daniel Macfarlane, and Michael Manulak examine Pearson's record in environmental diplomacy. Like human rights, environmentalism was emerging as a serious issue in the 1960s and it was a matter in which Pearson displayed considerable interest, particularly for the time period.

The image of Pearson that emerges from this volume is that of a paradoxical policy maker who shrewdly pursued what he perceived to be Canadian interests while also seeking to foster cooperation along liberal internationalist lines. If there was a conflict here, as many of our authors note, it occurred because, as Barbara Ward once observed, his “principles made him an idealist, his sensibility a realist.”<sup>53</sup> Mixing pragmatism and idealism, he directed Canada through a troubled time both at home and abroad. That he continues to inspire debates about Canada and its role in the world speaks not simply to the power of myth and of self-aggrandizing notions of Canada as a middle power, a peacekeeper, and an honest broker, but to the legacy of a man who for two decades, and for better or for worse, was Canada's face to the world.

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