

THE NUCLEAR NORTH

*Histories of Canada in
the Atomic Age*

EDITED BY SUSAN COLBOURN
AND TIMOTHY ANDREWS SAYLE



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INTRODUCTION

Nuclear If Necessary, but Not Necessarily Nuclear

Susan Colbourn

In July 1945, the first nuclear weapon was detonated in the deserts of New Mexico. For those who knew of the Trinity test, the weapon's potential inspired awe – and fear. “I feel that we are approaching a moment of terror to mankind,” William Lyon Mackenzie King, the long-serving Canadian prime minister, confided in his diary late that month, “for it means that, under the stress of war, men have at least not only found but created the Frankenstein which conceivably could destroy the human race.”¹

Canada had, of course, played a role in the creation of this Frankenstein's monster. Throughout the Second World War, Canada participated in the Manhattan Project as a junior partner to the United States and the United Kingdom in the development of the first atomic bomb. King's government paid for an atomic laboratory in Montreal during the war, in cooperation with the British. And the Manhattan Project relied on uranium mined and refined in Canada.² Canada's nuclear history, however, extends far beyond its wartime role as Igor to Dr. Frankenstein, predating the Trinity test.

A NUCLEAR NATION

Canada's history as a nuclear nation began at home, with natural resources. In 1930, Manitoba-based prospector Gilbert LaBine found a deposit of silver and pitchblende at Great Bear Lake. Successive discoveries

in the 1940s and 1950s identified crucial deposits of uranium, such as those near Uranium City, Saskatchewan, and Elliot Lake, Ontario. In 2013, Canada churned out over 9,000 tonnes of uranium, extracted from mines dotting the landscape of northern Saskatchewan.³ Demand ebbed and flowed over the decades, but these resources granted Canada a role in the development of nuclear weapons and the spread of nuclear power.

Canadians invested in their nuclear know-how, expanding on the foundations laid through the nation's ties to the Manhattan Project. At Chalk River, in Ontario's Laurentian Hills, the Zero Energy Experimental Pile (ZEEP) nuclear reactor went critical before the end of 1945. Two years later, the National Research Experimental (NRX) reactor did as well. Later breakthroughs, such as the Canada Deuterium Uranium (CANDU) heavy water reactor, powered Canadian homes and generated export sales.⁴

Wartime nuclear research also afforded Canada a seat at the first nuclear negotiating table, as the nascent United Nations established a dedicated committee to debate the international control of atomic energy. As with so many others, this was a seat Canada sought and kept; Canadians, one US official reported in the autumn of 1945, felt "that Canada should have a voice in the determination of policy concerning atomic power."⁵ Canadian claims rest on access: Canada was part of an exclusive inner circle, one of the first three countries to hold the nuclear secret.

Nuclear issues have shaped Canadian life throughout the Cold War and beyond, both at home and abroad. Grappling with nuclear questions – and with Canada's own nuclear capabilities and resources – influenced the country's defence policy, diplomacy, trade relations, and global reputation. At home, the atomic age reshaped communities and landscapes, as the mining of nuclear materials became part and parcel of Canada's larger extraction economy. Elliot Lake emerged "literally overnight," as mining companies flooded in after the discovery of uranium ore in 1953.⁶ Like it or not, Canadians were living in a nuclear nation.

CANADIAN CONUNDRUMS

At first glance, the assertion that Canada is, in fact, a nuclear nation might still surprise some. Certainly, during the writing of this book, more than one colleague asked whether Canada had any nuclear history at all. Scholars

of Canada will laugh, then rattle off a list of Canada's entanglements, starting with the discovery of pitchblende and the founding of the Montreal Laboratory. But the basic point remains, and it is a sharp reminder of how we define – or don't, as the case may be – being nuclear. Often, we associate the idea of being a nuclear nation with one particular technology and the ownership thereof: the atomic bomb.

The answer in the Canadian case, then, seems clear-cut: an obvious and resounding no. After participating in the Manhattan Project, Canada elected not to pursue a national atomic program of its own. The decision, as the oft-repeated tale goes, was a simple one: C.D. Howe made a spur-of-the-moment announcement, rejecting the prospect of a Canadian nuclear weapons program in response to a question in the House of Commons.⁷ Thanks to Howe and his remark, Canada became the first nuclear non-proliferator. Subsequent generations harked back to this choice, holding it up as prime evidence of the country's longstanding commitment to arms control and disarmament starting at home.

But geography virtually ensured that Canada would be protected from the Soviet Union by the US nuclear arsenal, an outcome made all the more likely given that Canada lay directly between the two Cold War superpowers. Against the backdrop of the Cold War confrontation, successive Canadian governments committed and reaffirmed the country's participation in bilateral and multilateral nuclear alliances. Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's government helped to forge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a defence arrangement underwritten by the military power of the United States and, in particular, Washington's nuclear forces. The North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), too, carved out another role for Canada in US nuclear strategy and the defence of the continent.⁸ The foundation of Canadian defence policy was the coverage and security afforded by its place under the US nuclear umbrella.

Countless Canadian policies aimed at strengthening Washington's nuclear deterrent, and Ottawa offered Canadian territory and forces to support and defend the US nuclear force. Radar lines stretched out across the Canadian Arctic, designed to sound the alarm on a Soviet nuclear strike and allow enough time to launch a Western response. At NATO, Canadian forces prepared for a nuclear strike role should a conflict break out with the Soviet Union. Canadians trained to conduct nuclear strikes in Europe,

and at home the government agreed to station US nuclear weapons on Canadian soil, realities that complicated the common refrain that Canada was not a nuclear power.⁹

To attempt to make sense of Canadian policies during this period is to engage in a battle of semantics. Canada did not own the nuclear weapons stationed on Canadian territory, nor did it own the warheads that its forces trained to fire. But what made the country a nuclear one? Was it simply a question of Canadian ownership of a national atomic program?

This awkward position was hardly secret at the time; in fact, it was the stuff of politics and public protest throughout the Cold War. Canadians repeatedly debated what kind of nuclear role the country should take on as part of its membership in NATO or in NORAD. Be it the political and public debates over the Bomarc missiles in the early 1960s or the testing of US air-launched cruise missiles some two decades later, Canadians argued about their obligations as an ally. Some went so far as to question whether Canada's alliance, with its nuclear connection, actually endangered Canadians rather than protecting them.

Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau transformed Canada's nuclear weapons policy. Part of a broader reassessment of Canada's international commitments and, in particular, the country's participation in the North Atlantic Alliance, Trudeau abandoned the country's existing nuclear operational roles. Canadian forces stationed in Europe would no longer have a nuclear strike role. At home, the government prepared to remove all nuclear weapons from Canadian soil. It took over a decade to complete that task, a testament to just how enmeshed Canada had become in the nuclear weapons enterprise. By the early 1980s, Canadian officials could finally guarantee that Canada did not have any nuclear weapons, but this did not change the fact that Canada adhered to and upheld nuclear alliances.¹⁰ Even as Trudeau pursued initiatives to "suffocate" the arms race, his government freely affirmed and underscored the crucial role that nuclear weapons played in the "deterrent and defence policies of [the] West" to which Canada belonged.¹¹

Canada's international reputation – both real and perceived – has been the subject of much debate. To some, Canada has an obvious and consistent track record as a champion of arms control and disarmament. Other, more critical voices identify a long history of Canadians aiding and

abetting damaging nuclear policies. One 1980s pamphlet summed up this history succinctly with the slogan “Atomic Bombs: Canada’s Gift to the World.”¹²

Even after the removal of nuclear weapons from Canadian soil and the end of Canada’s nuclear strike role at NATO, no small number of Canadians remained concerned about the country’s relationship with nuclear weapons. Central to these worries was the role of the United States and Canada’s ties to its more powerful neighbour to the south. “Despite its non-nuclear halo,” the prominent peace activist Simon Rosenblum wrote in 1985, “Canada has been a willing auxiliary to American nuclear weapons policy since the development of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.”¹³

For critics like Rosenblum, Canadian corporations’ production of components used in nuclear weapons, such as missile guidance systems, were obvious examples of Canadian complicity in the nuclear arms race and with Washington’s nuclear policies. Nor were nuclear weapons their only concern. A growing number of Canadians turned their attention to the dangers of nuclear energy in the 1970s, like those in Nova Scotia determined to stop the construction of a nuclear power plant on Stoddart Island.¹⁴

One 1980 flyer distributed by the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, for instance, highlighted the country’s role in the Manhattan Project and the use of a Canadian reactor in India’s May 1974 “peaceful nuclear explosion,” along with the export of Canadian nuclear reactors to potential proliferators such as Argentina.¹⁵ In doing so, it underscored the links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons as two sides of the same atomic coin.

Canadians have always recognized the Janus-faced nature of the harnessed atom and of their own relationship to all things nuclear. From the onset of the atomic age, Canadians have debated the role of nuclear power in Canada, the peril of nuclear weapons, and Canada’s role in a nuclear world. Should Canada remain a member of an alliance dependent on nuclear deterrence? Should Canadian nuclear technologies be sold to potential nuclear proliferators across the globe and built in Canadians’ own backyards? What of the costs of these nuclear technologies, and their impact on local communities and on the environment?

TELLING NUCLEAR HISTORIES OF CANADA

Canadians' efforts to navigate the atomic age have been diverse, complicated, and at times contradictory, a fact showcased in the chapters that follow. Some of the themes that emerge will be familiar to students of Canadian history, such as functionalism's role in shaping postwar diplomacy, the perceived value of having a seat at the negotiating table, and chronic anxieties about Canada's relationship with the United States. These bedrocks of Canadian foreign policy, seen through a nuclear lens, help to break down an artificial divide between nuclear history and Canadian history – they are one and the same in the postwar world.

We already know a great deal about Canada's nuclear past. We know how a wide array of Canadians tried to make sense of the dangers of nuclear weapons, whether by developing civil defence plans or organizing campaigns to abolish these destructive devices.¹⁶ Increasingly, with the growth of environmental history, we are learning more about how the nuclear industry transformed communities and landscapes across Canada.¹⁷ High-profile nuclear episodes punctuate the country's political history after 1945; the Gouzenko affair, the Bomarc missile debates, and Pierre Trudeau's Peace Mission, to name but a few, remain popular subjects of study.¹⁸

Rarely, however, do we consider these histories in any holistic sense. If we reflect on these issues together, as part of one whole, what do these seemingly discrete episodes tell us about Canada's history? This collection takes a step in that direction, illustrating how Canada's nuclear history links the domestic to the global. Understanding Canada's nuclear past and, for that matter, the foundations of its still-nuclear present, brings together politics, trade, science, medicine, the environment, the military, and many more lines of historical inquiry. This collection of essays underscores the sheer number of issues with nuclear dimensions, of which the topics included here are only a small sampling. To highlight the degree to which nuclear history is woven into the very fabric of Canadian history in the atomic age, this book is divided into four sections, arranged thematically.

Setting the stage, Katie Davis sketches out in [Chapter 1](#) the intersections between the postwar tradition of functionalism and the early wrangling over the atomic bomb. Having gained a seat on the United Nations Atomic

Energy Commission (UNAEC), Canadian diplomats attempted to navigate the politics of the early atomic age and of the burgeoning Cold War. The Canadian delegation supported the commission's efforts to develop a program of international control, but these efforts were hamstrung by the geopolitical realities of souring relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. General A.G.L. McNaughton, the head of the Canadian delegation at the UNAEC, attempted to bridge the growing divide. His efforts achieved few, if any, real successes. McNaughton was essential in the commission's first report, ensuring it was adopted and sent to the Security Council. The fact that the Soviet Union and Poland abstained during the vote illustrated the obvious limits of any Canadian diplomacy. Yet, as Davis demonstrates, Canada's presence on the UNAEC could be seen as significant in its own right: it was an example of functionalism in action.

In [Chapter 2](#), Timothy Andrews Sayle picks up on a similar theme, telling a sometimes bizarre tale about how Canada leveraged nuclear weapons – and Canada's own nuclear strike role – to secure a place on another international committee, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). Created in hopes of resolving the Western allies' chronic debates about who would decide to drop the bomb and with what degree of allied consultation, the NPG's membership was the source of much consternation. To win a seat at that table, Canada's permanent representatives in Brussels skillfully maneuvered to keep the country's diplomatic options open and ultimately leveraged Canada's nuclear capabilities to demand a place.

In [Chapter 3](#), Michael Stevenson revisits one of the most crucial episodes in Canadian nuclear history as he considers the nuclear policies of John Diefenbaker's government and Canada's defence relations with the United States. Focusing in particular on Howard Green's tenure as Diefenbaker's secretary of state for external affairs, Stevenson challenges the prevailing interpretation of Green as naive. Green's handling of the disarmament and defence portfolios showed consistency and clarity, identifying a desired role for Canada to play on the global stage and the considerations that should shape the country's relations with the United States.

Jack Cunningham examines these same debates in [Chapter 5](#), but from the view of the opposition benches. He traces Lester B. Pearson's thinking on nuclear weapons and on Canada's obligations as a member of nuclear alliances throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Pearson's approach to

the nuclear issues of the day, including the acquisition of US nuclear weapons, reflected a striking consistency. As leader of the Opposition, Pearson repeatedly returned to the question of command and control of the West's nuclear weapons and how a decision would be made regarding their use. Even as he continued to highlight these themes, his policies and those of the Liberal Party responded to the changing political climate. The Liberals, as Cunningham highlights, argued over how best to calibrate a nuclear policy that ticked all the necessary boxes: addressing public anxieties about the dangers of nuclear weapons and assuaging concerns about the Canada-US relationship while also remaining a reliable ally in Western circles.

Offering another fresh perspective on the contentious debates of the early 1960s, Asa McKercher explores James Minifie's *Peacemaker or Powder-Monkey* in [Chapter 4](#). Minifie's bestseller reflected a much larger debate taking place within Canadian society, as Canadians questioned the value of their close relationship with the United States and mused about the potential benefits of a neutralist path in the Cold War. However, even as some Canadians questioned the assumptions at the heart of the country's foreign and defence policies, neutralism did not mean isolationism but rather independence. McKercher links the circulation of ideas about neutralism to support for peacekeeping. Using Canadian military power in peacekeeping roles afforded neutralism's champions a way for Canada to remain engaged in the world without being in direct service of the United States.

Nor were Canadian anxieties about the country's place in the global order confined to the debates of the early 1960s. When Brian Mulroney's government contemplated the purchase of nuclear-propelled submarines in the late 1980s, the ensuing debates reflected much of the same jockeying over Canada's past and future. In [Chapter 6](#), Susan Colbourn sketches out the broad contours of popular debate over the nuclear submarines, illustrating the diverse ways in which Canadians interpreted and marshalled their country's nuclear history to make their case, both for and against the submarines. Critics wondered about the submarines' value to the defence of Canada and to NATO as an alliance, the potential damage that might be done to Canada's global reputation as a champion of arms control and disarmament, and the shocking price tag of acquiring nuclear submarines.

To others more supportive of the submarines, however, the acquisition was a logical extension of Canada's existing experience with civilian nuclear reactors befitting an already-nuclear nation.

In [Chapter 7](#), Matthew Wiseman picks up on related questions of expertise, as he delves into the history of No. 1 Radiation Detection Unit (1 RDU). Soldiers in this specialized unit of the Canadian Army observed nuclear weapons tests at the Nevada Test Site and at Australia's Maralinga Range. They also conducted decontamination work at Chalk River. The unit's creation was a direct response to the dangers of the nascent atomic age; its creators envisioned that the experimental group would enable the Canadian military to prepare itself to deal with radiological problems should a nuclear attack take place. Wiseman considers the circumstances surrounding the exposure of 1 RDU members to high levels of radiation, along with the broader impact of the unit's work on the health and safety of its personnel.

In [Chapter 8](#), Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer examine Operation Morning Light, an eighty-four-day mission to recover the radioactive debris strewn across the Northwest Territories after a satellite crashed in early 1978. The nuclear-powered Soviet reconnaissance satellite Cosmos 954 malfunctioned and fell out of orbit, scattering radioactive wreckage as it crashed to earth. Canada and the United States coordinated an emergency response, bringing together military and civilian specialists to assess the problem and conduct an extensive cleanup and recovery mission. Operation Morning Light reflected the myriad and diverse issues touched by the atomic age, for the crash and cleanup encompassed environmental issues, health and safety concerns, the politics of the Cold War, and Indigenous-Crown relations, among others.

In [Chapter 9](#), Se Young Jang turns our attention to another crucial aspect of Canada's nuclear policy: the export of Canadian nuclear reactors. Canadian policy shifted considerably in the wake of India's May 1974 nuclear test, which had used plutonium from a Canadian-provided civilian reactor. Hoping to improve Ottawa's reputation both at home and abroad, the Trudeau government doubled down on its non-proliferation policy, even if this emphasis threatened potential export deals to sell Canadian nuclear reactors overseas. And yet Canada's export policy remained inconsistent, applied on a case-by-case basis. After the Indian test, Canada stopped its

negotiations to sell heavy water reactors to South Korea. Prior to any sale, Ottawa insisted that Seoul must accept far more rigorous nuclear safeguards and become party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Strikingly, none of those same conditions were applied in the ongoing negotiations with Argentina.

Placing these histories in conversation with one another, this collection speaks to the diverse ways in which Canada and Canadians were enmeshed in the global nuclear order during the Cold War. Canadians developed and sold nuclear technologies, extracted resources that helped to fuel the nuclear arms race, and tried to reduce the risk of their own nuclear annihilation. Canada's natural resources, geographic position, alliance commitments, and national self-image all shaped the country's place in the international nuclear landscape.

Taken together, these chapters hint at just how many aspects of Canadian life have been shaped by Canada's presence in the atomic age. Canada's Cold War engagement with nuclear technologies brings together histories of science and technology, of domestic politics and international diplomacy, of economics and trade, and of social movements, to name but a few of the historical approaches employed by the contributors to this volume.

Revisiting old debates and introducing new lines of inquiry, this collection suggests the vast possibilities for scholars going forward to tell more entangled histories of Canada as a nuclear nation, how Canadians participated in the global nuclear order, and how the atomic age shaped the country. This is merely the tip of the iceberg, and we hope it will encourage more scholars to explore the complex connections between the history of Canada and that of the atomic age.

NOTES

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- 2 Robert Bothwell, *Nucleus: The History of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 3–82; Donald H. Avery, *The Science of War: Canadian Scientists and Allied Military Technology during the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 176–202.
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- 4 For an overview of Canada's CANDU policies, see Duane Bratt, *The Politics of CANDU Exports* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
- 5 Matthews note, November 10, 1945, RG 59, Office of the Secretary, Special Asst. to Sec. of State for Atomic Energy & Outer Space, General Records Relating to Atomic Energy Matters, 1948–1962, box 46, folder “Canada e. General, 1945–1952 [1 of 3],” US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
- 6 City of Elliot Lake, “Local History,” <https://www.elliottlake.ca/en/recreation-and-culture/local-history.aspx?hdnContent=>.
- 7 Robert Bothwell, *The Big Chill: Canada and the Cold War* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1998), 19.
- 8 NORAD was renamed North American Aerospace Defense Command in 1981.
- 9 For detailed treatments of Canada's defence relations with the United States in the early Cold War, see Richard Evan Goette, *Sovereignty and Command in Canada-US Continental Air Defence, 1940–57* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018); Joseph T. Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs: Canada, the United States, and the Origins of North American Air Defence, 1945–1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987); Andrew Richter, *Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons, 1950–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001).
- 10 Lysyshyn to Maté, June 5, 1989, box 140019, folder “Canadian Association of Municipal Nuclear Weapons Free Zones,” City of Toronto Archives (CTA).
- 11 External Affairs to London, “Cdn Policy on Nuclear Wpns,” October 18, 1982, RG 25, vol. 12587, file 27-11-1, pt. 4, LAC. On the “strategy of suffocation,” see Paul Meyer, “Pierre Trudeau and the ‘Suffocation’ of the Nuclear Arms Race,” *International Journal* 71, 3 (September 2016): 393–408.
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- 13 Simon Rosenblum, *Misguided Missiles: Canada, Cruise and Star Wars* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1985), 143–44.
- 14 Mark Leeming, “The Creation of Radicalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism in Nova Scotia, c. 1972–1979,” *Canadian Historical Review* 95, 2 (June 2014): 217–41.
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- 16 On Canada's civil defence structures, see Andrew Burtch, *Give Me Shelter: The Failure of Canada's Cold War Civil Defence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012). For discussions of anti-nuclear activism in Canada, see, for example, Tarah Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts: Canadian Women, Child Safety, and Global Insecurity* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), esp. 51–100; Mark Andrew Eaton, “Canadians, Nuclear Weapons, and the Cold War Security Dilemma” (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2007).

- 17 See, for example, David Elijah Bell and Marissa Zappora Bell, “Port Hope Burning: The Trail of Eldorado, the Uranium Medical Research Centre, and Community Tension over Scientific Uncertainty,” in *Nuclear Portraits: Communities, the Environment, and Public Policy*, ed. Laurel Sefton Macdowell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 238–74; Robynne Mellor, “Wildly Nuclear: Elliot Lake and Canada’s Nuclear Legacy,” *Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE)*, June 15, 2016, <http://niche-canada.org/2016/06/15/wildly-nuclear-elliott-lake-and-canadas-nuclear-legacy/>. For a comparative history of Canada’s uranium extraction throughout the Cold War, see Robynne Mellor, “The Cold War Underground: An Environmental History of Uranium Mining in the United States, Canada, and the Soviet Union, 1945–1991” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2018).
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Part 1

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

CHAPTER 1

VERY CLOSE TOGETHER

Balancing Canadian Interests on Atomic Energy Control, 1945–46

Katie Davis

The early days of the atomic age were filled with great hope for a future fuelled by atomic energy, coupled with intense anxiety about postwar peace. The October 1945 edition of *Maclean's* described the contributions atomic energy would make to Canadian society in areas like medicine, agriculture, and power. Indeed, the lead story predicted, “the coming of atomic power . . . may prove to be the most important single event in the whole history of mankind.” But the significance of atomic energy was underscored by its duality: “Its possibilities for evil are tremendous, and its possibilities for good are equally great.”¹ Harnessing the benefits of atomic energy required controlling its destructive potential. Failure to do so would be catastrophic.

There was a way out of this dilemma: international control of atomic energy. In this context, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC), formed in 1946, sought to halt nuclear proliferation before it could begin. Fears of nuclear war were at the heart of its mission to bring atomic energy under the control of the nascent United Nations. Pundits and policy-makers frequently framed the UNAEC's work in life-or-death terms. International control, as one 1946 publication by the Federation of American Scientists put it, was the choice between “one world or none.”² Either the world united to control the atomic bomb or it would perish in nuclear war.

But the developing Cold War challenged this goal from the outset. The Canadian representative to the UNAEC, General A.G.L. McNaughton,

advised Ottawa in late 1946 that “the work of the Atomic Energy Commission must be considered in terms of general relations between the Soviet Union and the Western World.” He advised that “a breakdown in these negotiations might well precipitate a crisis in the entire structure of the United Nations.”³ McNaughton saw atomic energy in an international context shaped by tense superpower relations and concerns about UN viability.

Canada’s UNAEC delegation took the dangers of nuclear war seriously. As they tried to navigate the growing divide between the superpowers, Canadian diplomats prized unanimity. The complicated efforts to secure such unanimity demonstrated the challenges Canadian diplomacy faced during its postwar “golden age.” Canadian diplomatic influence hinged on professionalism and expertise, augmented in the UNAEC by Canada’s wartime participation in the Manhattan Project. But to navigate these earliest days of the Cold War, the Canadian delegation struggled to balance multilateral cooperation and Canada’s bilateral relations with the United States. General McNaughton’s leadership considerably advanced this dual policy, but superpower tensions, as they became increasingly insurmountable by the end of 1946, ultimately pushed Canada firmly into the US-led Western bloc.

While Canada’s Western orientation might seem inevitable in retrospect, the Canadian delegation initially pursued cohesion and universal agreement in the UNAEC. The logic of “one world or none” demanded it. During the fluid period of 1945–46, Canadians had the leeway to maneuver between the superpowers to advance international control negotiations. The overriding importance of the issue combined with the Canadian preference for multilateralism made the UNAEC a key arena for maximizing Canada’s postwar diplomatic influence.

By the end of 1946, however, the Canadians faced rapidly dissolving UNAEC negotiations. With the superpowers in polar opposition, the delegations were unable to agree on the content of the first report to the Security Council. Canada ultimately sided firmly with the United States. The loss of Canada as an important consensus builder in the UNAEC fundamentally changed the dynamics of the commission. By siding with the majority – those who supported the US position on international control – the Canadian delegation helped to strengthen the commission’s

impasse along Cold War lines. This deadlock, enshrined in the UNAEC's first report to the Security Council, ultimately ensured the failure of international control of atomic energy.

ATOMIC FUNCTIONALISM IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

For most of its first year, however, the seemingly existential nature of international control negotiations combined with Canada's expertise on atomic issues gave Canadian diplomats an elevated purpose in the UNAEC. Canada occupied a uniquely influential position. The only permanent member without great power status, Canada gained this position due to its wartime cooperation with the United States and United Kingdom on the production of atomic bombs. As a member of an elite atomic club, Canada had influence with the US delegation, a crucial relationship given the US monopoly on atomic weapons.⁴ Canada's renunciation of its own military nuclear program gave the delegation further diplomatic goodwill.⁵ The country's atomic expertise and peaceful intentions augmented Canada's image as a reliable partner with which to negotiate international control. The Canadian delegation capitalized on this position, and encouraged the Americans to cooperate with the Soviets despite persistent disagreements between the superpowers – a divide that crystallized in the commission's first meetings and defined negotiations. At the same time, Canadian interests limited this influence. Canada could not afford to upset relations with the United States. Should international control negotiations break down, Canada needed strong relations with its southern neighbour. Because Canada had forgone a military atomic program of its own, it might need shelter under a US nuclear umbrella in the future. As Cold War divisions deepened in the late 1940s, this security requirement limited the extent to which Canada could push a middle ground between the superpowers.

Canada's inclusion in early atomic negotiations was a victory for functionalism.⁶ Functionalism dictated that a country's expertise and contribution should determine representation and influence in international affairs. As Timothy Andrews Sayle demonstrates in [Chapter 2](#), functionalism remained a part of Canada's approach to nuclear issues well into the 1970s. Canadians leveraged their professionalism and atomic expertise to make an impact in the new United Nations. Canadian diplomats in these early

years, John English notes, “eschewed idealism and opted for the sensible rather than the sensational.”⁷ This sensibility guided the delegation through often-conflicting priorities, as Canada balanced multilateral and bilateral relations. When Canadian interests conflicted with US goals in the UNAEC, McNaughton trod carefully. He developed creative solutions to keep negotiations from stalling. In this context, functionalism was intimately linked to the life-or-death nature of international control. The importance of the UNAEC’s mission made it essential that negotiations continue.

Throughout the commission’s first year, McNaughton strove to overcome deadlock and create a conciliatory working atmosphere. Indeed, his adviser, George Ignatieff, said that McNaughton “set the hallmark of patience, pragmatism and mediation.”⁸ McNaughton seemed the “obvious choice” to represent Canada in the UNAEC.⁹ An engineer by training and former head of the National Research Council, the scientific organization that later oversaw Canadian atomic research, McNaughton had strong connections to the scientific establishment and a solid understanding of atomic science. He was a wartime military leader and former minister of national defence with a keen understanding of what was at stake in the postwar peace. He aptly combined political, military, and scientific experience to perform his diplomatic role. He was, however, inexperienced as a diplomat. In one early instance, McNaughton chided a member of his own delegation in a commission meeting – a sign of both growing pains as a new diplomat and his confident determination.¹⁰ This confidence proved essential for standing up to Bernard Baruch, the American delegate to the UNAEC, a hard-headed businessman unamenable to compromise. At the same time, McNaughton’s cordial attitude in public meetings both assuaged Baruch’s pride and made a good impression on the Soviets. He had a good working relationship with the Soviet representative, Andrei Gromyko, who found it “so easy to work with the General” because “*he is never rude*” – a tacit dig at the notoriously difficult Baruch.¹¹

McNaughton offered crucial remedies to advance stalled negotiations, and his personality smoothed this tricky process. Although he accepted US leadership on the commission, he proposed resolutions to make US actions more palatable to the Soviets. He worked to quietly assuage US concerns and urge moderation, and his efforts to restrain the US delegation foreshadowed a similar Canadian strategy during the Korean War.¹² With

McNaughton's frequent urging of cooperation, the UNAEC's work progressed throughout 1946. Notably, he proposed a structure of private committee meetings that ensured frank discussion of the technical aspects of international control. At the same time, he was willing to take risks when the US delegation became belligerent, proposing a crucial amendment that made it possible for the commission to adopt its first report in December 1946.

This strategy proved untenable in a difficult international climate. Uniquely positioned to influence negotiations through atomic expertise and good relations with the United States, Canada saw its impact restricted by the growing divide between the superpowers. Despite McNaughton's skilled maneuvering, compromise had reached its limits by the end of the year. The Canadians ultimately deprioritized multilateral cooperation in the UNAEC to preserve good relations with the United States. This shift was considered necessary given Soviet intransigence. If universal agreement was impossible, a majority plan for international control would demonstrate the extent of the Soviets' unwillingness to cooperate – while obscuring the reality that the US position was also deeply intractable.

CANADIAN POLICY FORMATION AND THE BARUCH PLAN

The United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom were among the first to advocate for international control of atomic energy. Atomic cooperation began during the Second World War, when they developed an atomic bomb as the absolute weapon against the Axis powers.¹³ Canadians hosted British and French atomic researchers beginning in late 1942, mined uranium in the Northwest Territories, and established a small research reactor in Chalk River, Ontario. These contributions to the wartime atomic project earned Canada a seat at the table for postwar negotiations on atomic energy. In Washington in November 1945, Canadian prime minister W.L. Mackenzie King, US president Harry Truman, and British prime minister Clement Attlee issued a joint declaration on atomic energy, acknowledging their duty to “consider the possibility of international action” to control atomic energy. The three leaders emphasized that the responsibility “rests not on our nations alone, but upon the whole civilized world,” laying the foundation for international control.¹⁴ The United States and United Kingdom

then gained Soviet support at a Moscow foreign ministers' conference in December 1945. They presented their resolution, embodying the Washington declaration, to the UN General Assembly in January 1946. The resolution passed unanimously and charged the UNAEC with "enquir[ing] into all phases of the problem" of atomic energy control.¹⁵

Preparing for the UNAEC's first meeting in June 1946, Canada developed its international control policy in the Advisory Panel on Atomic Energy.¹⁶ The Advisory Panel lauded the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, the comprehensive study released by the US State Department in April 1946. The report recommended an international authority with ample safeguards to protect against the diversion of atomic materials for weaponized use.¹⁷ The panel advised that Canada should support the US delegation if it adhered to the Acheson-Lilienthal Report in the UNAEC. Not only was the report a sound plan but the panel recognized that "Canada has a very important interest on general political grounds" in preserving cooperation with the United States.¹⁸ The Department of External Affairs clarified these goals in instructions to McNaughton, cautioning that he should not "slavishly follow United States policies" because the Canadian delegation had "constructive suggestions to make of [its] own." However, McNaughton was advised not to push the US delegation beyond what it was willing to accept.¹⁹ Canada could best contribute to the UNAEC by promoting cooperation while working behind the scenes with the US delegation. Keeping this tenuous balance characterized the Canadian delegation's approach throughout 1946.

Bernard Baruch's proposals made this strategy difficult, if not impossible, from the UNAEC's first meeting, which he opened by tabling a comprehensive plan for international control of atomic energy. While based on the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, Baruch's plan greatly strengthened enforcement and punishment measures. He also staunchly opposed using the Security Council's veto power when deciding punishments.²⁰ Baruch's far-reaching proposal was part of a larger strategy to protect the US atomic monopoly until a strong system of international control could be put in place. Only with harsh punishments would it be safe for the United States to give up its strategic advantage.²¹ Though the first to speak in support of the Baruch plan, McNaughton recognized the difficulties inherent in this augmented version of the Acheson-Lilienthal plan. He correctly anticipated Soviet objections to the plan's enhanced enforcement measures, and

reminded his colleagues of the difficult work ahead, noting that “mutual confidence [was] vital.” He suggested that they first work on exchanging scientific information, rather than focusing on complex political questions like the Security Council veto.²²

Underscoring Soviet objections to the Baruch plan, Andrei Gromyko tabled an alternate proposal at the next meeting that contradicted the Baruch plan in nearly every way. Gromyko proposed an international convention outlawing nuclear weapons that would precede all other international control measures. He opposed Baruch’s proposal for comprehensive international inspection, instead suggesting that states pass their own domestic legislation for enforcement and punishment – a recommendation that gutted much of the Baruch plan. Finally, Gromyko opposed altering the Security Council’s veto power. The Baruch plan hinged on removing this power to ensure equitable enforcement of an international control treaty.²³ Concerns about infringement of national sovereignty pervaded the Soviet approach. The Soviets were also unwilling to take the United States at its word. By pushing for a complete disarmament convention as the first step in negotiations, the Soviet delegation sought assurances that the United States was not merely leveraging its nuclear monopoly to secure its own agenda. The US monopoly amplified disagreement, exacerbated by the Gouzenko affair – the revelation of Soviet atomic espionage in Canada in September 1945 – which confirmed Soviet nuclear aspirations.²⁴ Public awareness of the Gouzenko affair by early 1946 hardened the US position, and raised skepticism about Soviet sincerity in international control negotiations.²⁵

FROM CONCILIATION TO ANTAGONISM

With deadlock firmly in place from the UNAEC’s initial meetings in June 1946, McNaughton offered unconventional ways to push negotiations forward. He spoke frankly about the drawbacks of both the US and Soviet control plans. While Canada’s atomic expertise permitted this role, Ottawa cautioned McNaughton to take care that his actions not be perceived by the superpowers as “an irresponsible piece of meddling.”²⁶ McNaughton thus supported the Baruch plan as a sound start but recognized the legitimacy of Soviet critiques. He searched for middle ground when

possible, and sought to moderate some of Baruch's more challenging demands.

The delegates met in plenary sessions throughout June and July, and formed committees to tackle points of disagreement such as the Security Council veto. The Working Committee sought common ground between US and Soviet proposals to determine the necessary powers of an international control agency. Committee 2 developed recommendations for safeguards, studying the technical requirements for atomic materials to be safely held by an international authority. Both committees' discussions involved complex debates over national sovereignty, and they worked with little success in the initial months.

With this slow progress in mind, the UNAEC took up a suggestion made by McNaughton in his first address to the commission months earlier. It resolved to postpone its discussion of political matters in both committees, and instead struck a committee to study the scientific feasibility of international control.²⁷ This Scientific and Technical Committee opted to hold closed-door, informal meetings in the hope of facilitating cooperation between participants. Further, in an international climate hardening into bipolarity, the committee's private meetings enabled frank discussions between atomic scientists and diplomats. Outside the commission, the superpowers clashed over territorial arrangements throughout 1945–46 – over the Soviet refusal to withdraw from Iran and the use of waters between the Soviet Union and Turkey. The Greek Civil War exacerbated tension as the United States feared a potential victory for communist forces there.²⁸ These international disagreements led to stalemates in the Security Council and raised doubts about the United Nations' efficacy. The Scientific and Technical Committee's unanimous report in September 1946 was a notable achievement given the impasse both in and out of the UNAEC.²⁹

This report concluded that effective international control was possible from a scientific standpoint, and laid solid groundwork for the commission to refocus its attention on the far more difficult political tasks still ahead. McNaughton served as chairman when the commission finalized the report. The chairmanship rotated monthly, promoting fresh leadership perspectives during tense negotiations. Both the commission's plenary meetings and committee work were postponed until the scientific report was completed. At this crucial juncture, responsibility fell to McNaughton to restart

negotiations and prevent another stalemate.³⁰ In this spirit, he sought to advance the commission's scientific work without getting bogged down again in political matters. He proposed that Committee 2, the safeguards committee, develop safeguards consistent with the report's conclusions.

McNaughton's plan was unanimously adopted with minor amendments.³¹ At his urging, Committee 2 used informal sessions similar to those of the Scientific and Technical Committee. This method yielded another technical report by the end of the year.³² Crucially, these new meetings fell outside of the standard record-keeping structure of the commission. Meeting transcripts were classified. McNaughton's insistence on informality meant that Committee 2 could proceed with greater frankness than previously possible. His problem solving at this juncture productively advanced commission negotiations, building on a successful phase of work by underscoring the importance of candid cooperation. McNaughton capitalized on a skill that the Canadian delegation was quickly mastering, showing that professionalism and consensus building both maximized Canadian influence and yielded results.

McNaughton's strategy worked well in committee meetings, but plenary sessions were a complicated arena where Baruch presided over the US delegation and sought to reassert his plan for international control. Despite this challenge, McNaughton did not want the spirit of cooperation developed in Committee 2's informal meetings to be lost in tense plenary sessions. He hoped their cordiality would provide a strong foundation for more difficult political discussions to come.³³ At the next plenary session in November, the delegates resolved to submit a progress report to the Security Council by December 31. This task would require substantial cooperation to develop a statement that encompassed the commission's technical and political positions.

Capitalizing on this conciliatory atmosphere, Baruch aimed to secure a report to the Security Council that endorsed his plan for international control. McNaughton counselled caution, concerned that a dramatic move might upset recent progress. Determined to reassert his plan, however, Baruch presented a resolution at a plenary session on December 5.³⁴ Although the resolution largely reiterated Baruch's original plan, McNaughton feared that forcing a vote on it might prompt a breakdown in negotiations. He thought it premature to ask delegates to formally align themselves

with any plan in its entirety as many aspects of international control still required discussion. He worried that requiring the Soviets to take a stand on the issue might cause them to walk out of the negotiations. The Soviet delegation had already objected to Baruch's resolution and sought to prevent a vote altogether. Although McNaughton advised caution, Baruch was adamant "that now was the time for a decision . . . 'for all men to stand up and be counted.'"³⁵ He hoped that this roll call of support would underscore the split between the Soviets and the rest of the commission.

This placed McNaughton in a difficult position. From the beginning, Ottawa's strategy included two goals: to advance the work of the commission and to support the US delegation. At this point, these goals came into serious conflict. McNaughton's first instinct was to counsel caution and restraint, but during this particularly tense moment Baruch was obstinate. Given Baruch's personality, McNaughton altered course, taking on an active role in altering the US position. Supporting Baruch's resolution outright might precipitate a breakdown in negotiations if the commission members could not agree on the Security Council report. To resolve these differences, McNaughton wrote to Ottawa advising a new tactic – support the Baruch plan "in principle" but assert the right of commission members to amend it.³⁶ McNaughton thus sought to constrain US actions by tabling alternatives to Baruch's resolution. This recommendation was well received in Ottawa, prompting McNaughton to propose a Canadian amendment to the Baruch resolution.

At the next plenary session on December 17, McNaughton acted cautiously, reserving the amendment as a bold counter-maneuver should Baruch become intransigent. As he anticipated, Baruch immediately moved to vote on his resolution, declaring that "the time has come to match our words with action." Baruch argued that their work must be hastened by the unanimous disarmament resolution passed by the General Assembly three days earlier.³⁷ Introduced in the General Assembly by Soviet representative Vyacheslav Molotov, the idea of general disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, was part of a Soviet strategy to deprive the United States of its nuclear arsenal and ensure an equal footing for international control negotiations. As the General Assembly's work on disarmament advanced in favour of the Soviet approach, Baruch sought to undercut this progress by formally adopting the US approach in the UNAEC. He hoped

that this move would make it impossible to implement the disarmament resolution.

In response to Baruch's demand for a vote, McNaughton again urged caution, this time in a plenary session – trading his private counsel for public rebuke. McNaughton suggested further discussion of Baruch's proposals in the Working Committee, rather than a formal vote in the plenary session. He recognized that the commission's report must “take full account” of the General Assembly resolution, and that elements of the Baruch plan – especially on the veto – conflicted with it.³⁸ Despite these reservations, McNaughton made clear that his government still agreed with “the principles on which [the Baruch] proposals are based.” He also sought to moderate the significance of a forced vote. He argued that a vote for Baruch's resolution would not bind delegates to its every word, but rather indicated that they supported its principles in spirit. While other members joined McNaughton in supporting the Baruch resolution with this reservation in mind, Gromyko moved to delay voting. He asked for more time to study it in relation to the new General Assembly resolution. Baruch reluctantly supported Gromyko's request, but only for three more days.³⁹

News of McNaughton's stand against Baruch broke in the *Globe and Mail* on December 20, described alongside Canada's contributions to the General Assembly resolution. Although the article emphasized McNaughton's caution in pushing back against Baruch, the subheading “Canadians Fight Hard” drew attention to the Canadian effort.⁴⁰ In Ottawa, however, some grew concerned about public perceptions of growing divisions between Canada and the United States. Indeed, Canadian adviser Escott Reid believed the commission was “on the eve of a very important crisis.” In this context, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester Pearson reiterated McNaughton's intent to support the Baruch plan in principle rather than with a material vote. “If the Americans act stupidly in this matter and force a vote,” Pearson argued, “we might well abstain.”⁴¹ But an abstention was not altogether desirable as it mimicked the Soviet tactic of non-participation. For the Canadian delegation, a critical issue such as international control required active participation, consensus building, and ultimately universal agreement. Concerns about what this split might mean for both Canada-US relations and international control rallied support at External Affairs behind the amendment.

At the same time, the US delegation courted the votes of commission members to pre-empt Canadian action. They called a meeting of several delegations thought to be amenable to the US position, excluding the Canadians. US representatives urged their counterparts to support Baruch's resolution and to ensure that a vote took place with no amendments and – of course – that it passed. The Canadian delegation learned of this meeting when a member of the British delegation approached them, angry that the Americans would try to strong-arm other delegates to get their way. This tactic emboldened the Canadian delegation to move forward with its amendment.⁴² Escott Reid recognized that it seemed the US delegation was “beginning to realize that they [had] put themselves in a very embarrassing position.”⁴³ Baruch's insistence on forcing a vote could precipitate a breakdown in the commission's negotiations. His actions threatened to make Canadian fears come true.

THE CANADIAN AMENDMENT AND THE MAJORITY SHIFT

Fears of a breakdown in UNAEC negotiations were rooted in the commission's vital mission to preserve postwar peace through international control. Although the Canadians knew that the superpowers held opposing views on international control, they resolved to keep negotiations moving for as long as possible. This was no easy task given Baruch's insistence on his views and Gromyko's growing unwillingness to negotiate. To defuse this tense situation, McNaughton tabled an amendment to the Baruch resolution when the commission met again on December 20. He assured Gromyko that his amendment sought to reconcile the views of the United States and Soviet Union, and that there would be opportunities for discussion in the Working Committee. He reiterated that his government supported the underlying intent of the Baruch plan – the inexorable belief that international control of atomic energy was both possible and necessary. He stressed that the entire commission, including the Soviet delegation, agreed with this point. Thus he did not seek to subvert the Baruch resolution, only to make it palatable to everyone. The concise amendment stated that “the Commission approves and accepts the principles on which these findings and recommendations [of the Baruch resolution] are based.” This wording recognized that the Soviets retained serious doubts about some

of Baruch's proposals, but it also sought to enable them to express agreement with the underlying principle that atomic energy must be controlled through an international framework. The amendment also specified that the final report must reconcile the wording of the Baruch plan with the General Assembly's disarmament resolution.⁴⁴ This last piece was crucial, as it mandated that the report to the Security Council must essentially combine the US and Soviet positions.

Baruch immediately supported the Canadian amendment, which Reid described as "face-saving" for the US delegation.⁴⁵ A forced vote on Baruch's resolution would have prompted a complicated plenary debate that some members of the US delegation were now anxious to avoid. The Canadian move moderated Baruch's impetuosity in a way that was not possible from within his own delegation, which was stacked with Baruch's close business associates. Franklin Lindsay of the US delegation later admitted to the Canadians that their amendment had "helped the Commission out of a most difficult situation."⁴⁶

The Canadian amendment was designed to enable the Soviet delegation to express support for Baruch's resolution without agreeing to every aspect of his plan for international control. This would enable the Soviets to vote, as Baruch insisted, while moderating the significance of that vote. It failed to secure Moscow's support, however. The Soviet delegation continued to insist that a vote on the Baruch resolution would be premature, even with the amendment. Gromyko objected to a final vote, but not to the consideration of Baruch's proposals in the Working Committee. The Polish delegation, in support of Soviet concerns, sought to moderate the language of the Canadian amendment. The Polish representative, Oskar Lange, proposed, changing "the Commission *approves and accepts* the principles" to "the Commission *draws attention to* the principles."⁴⁷ As a gesture of goodwill, McNaughton offered to abstain from voting on the Polish amendment and encouraged Lange to do the same for the Canadian one.⁴⁸ A majority rejected the Polish reframing of the amendment, supporting instead a vote on the original Canadian motion. Gromyko, in line with his earlier requests for more time, refused to vote. As a result, the vote on the Canadian amendment was 10–0 with Poland abstaining. No vote for the Soviet delegation was recorded, which functioned as an informal abstention.⁴⁹

Although the Canadian amendment failed to secure Moscow's support, it preserved cordial relations within the commission – a hallmark of the Canadian approach. McNaughton recalled that Gromyko spoke “in a most conciliatory manner” during the meeting. Rather than objecting to any of the proceedings, he simply asked for more time. Similarly, McNaughton observed that the Polish delegation sought to preserve the commission's cooperation. According to him, Lange “begged that we should not now . . . create an atmosphere of disagreement.” Though the Polish amendment was not accepted, McNaughton's suggestion that Lange abstain from voting enabled the Canadian amendment to pass with no votes against it. Otherwise, the Polish delegation might have cast a vote against the amendment to show its support for the Soviet position. McNaughton observed that Lange abstained due to the “spirit of conciliation shown by the Canadian delegation.”⁵⁰ McNaughton's painstaking concentration on preserving UNAEC cooperation at this crucial juncture prevented a breakdown in negotiations without upsetting relations with the United States.

The danger of a complete breakdown was not over, however. The delegates still needed to adopt a report to be referred to the Security Council. The Working Committee met a week later to draft the report. The meeting was arduous, and became more intense when delegates turned to a discussion of the veto. Although the Canadians were never fond of the Security Council veto, McNaughton recognized the contentious nature of Baruch's desire to remove this power when deciding punishments for nuclear violations. As such, he sought to omit references to the veto in the report, both to bring it in line with the General Assembly resolution on disarmament and to placate the Soviets. By this point, however, Baruch had grown tired of these attempts to moderate his position, and he laid down his final view on the issue. Throughout the meeting, Ferdinand Eberstadt represented the US delegation, but when the subject turned to the veto, Baruch burst into the room. He proceeded to pontificate about the veto, ending with an ultimatum:

Gentlemen, it is either – or. Either you agree that a criminal should have this right [to the veto] by voting against our [the US] position (or you fail to take a stand on the question by refraining from voting), or you vote for this sound and basic principle of enduring justice and plain common sense.⁵¹

Once again, Baruch demanded a vote, and in so doing he finally made clear his approach to UNAEC negotiations – either the commission’s members would support the US position or the negotiations must end.

Even with the Canadian amendment, McNaughton never strayed from his careful strategy to promote progress through cordiality and respect. But when Baruch laid down this ultimatum, McNaughton shifted course. Rather than affirming the importance of cooperation, he stated that his chief aim at this juncture was to achieve a report, unanimous or otherwise. Canada would “conform to the views of the majority” on the text related to the veto, hoping to finalize a report by the deadline. Although he claimed that “the Canadian delegation takes an objective view,” this emphasis on majority, rather than unanimous, decision making was a stark reversal of earlier tactics aimed at conciliation.⁵²

Why did McNaughton alter his position at this crucial juncture? The failure to secure Soviet approval of the Canadian amendment signalled the difficulty of ever achieving unanimous agreement. The Canadian amendment sought to mediate between the superpowers’ positions, but the Soviet abstention suggested that this might be impossible. During the Working Committee debates over the veto, Gromyko maintained his silence, refusing to discuss the issue. McNaughton noted Gromyko’s continued abstention and recognized doubts raised by other delegations. In the same breath, however, he tacitly observed that the United States had enough support to win a majority regardless of some delegates’ reservations.⁵³ At the same time, Baruch’s ultimatum risked the dissolution of the UNAEC. If the Canadian delegation continued to press for unanimous agreement, it seemed unlikely that negotiations could ever progress beyond this point.

McNaughton’s altered approach reflected a shift in Mackenzie King’s thinking about the Soviets. After the failure of the Canadian amendment and Gromyko’s persistent refusal to clearly state his views, King became convinced of Soviet insincerity. In his typical style, he reflected on this decision by recounting a dream: “It was President Roosevelt standing at full length but needing someone to support him. He beckoned me to give him my arms . . . and seemed anxious that others should see that we were very close together.” King mused that this dream reinforced his confidence in his decision.⁵⁴ With growing doubts about the Soviet commitment to international control, the prime minister halted the Canadian delegation’s

attempts to omit the veto issue in the final report. “The fact that Russia is unwilling to include mention of the veto,” he said, “specifically is the strongest reason why” it must be included.⁵⁵ McNaughton’s shift in the Working Committee to conform with the majority instead of seeking unanimity illustrated this new approach.

The Canadian shift pushed the commission toward a report to the Security Council with majority, rather than unanimous, support. This shift toward majority rule shaped the tenor of all future negotiations, as the commission’s majority grew increasingly hostile to the Soviet position. The Canadian delegation’s role in precipitating this change was significant, beginning in the tenth plenary session on December 30. At this meeting, Gromyko once again asked for more time to consider the Baruch proposals. This time, McNaughton challenged the Soviet request, moving from painstaking conciliation to a firm stand alongside the United States. He pointed out that the Working Committee “had full opportunity to discuss, consider and revise the [Baruch] proposals.” He noted that the committee had made revisions, and that if anyone failed to take advantage of this opportunity, “that is their misfortune, and ours too. This should not, however, prevent us from coming to a decision now.”⁵⁶ Although the Canadian delegation retained some reservations about the report’s content, McNaughton noted that “the present text is the one which will command the greatest measure of agreement” – an implicit reference to majority rule.

As McNaughton came down on the side of the majority, the Polish representative interjected with an appeal for cooperation reminiscent of his earlier attempt to alter the Canadian amendment. “We have obtained agreement basically on eighty-nine pages of the report,” Lange noted, “with points of disagreement, maybe, running into a rather small number of sentences.” He recommended that they refer the report to the Security Council without a vote attached to it.⁵⁷ Baruch, still bent on ensuring that every delegate “stand up and be counted,” ignored Lange’s recommendation and called for a vote. No one challenged him on this move. Lange stated that if that was the will of the commission, he would abstain. Gromyko maintained his earlier non-participation strategy and also abstained. The first report to the Security Council was thus adopted in a 10–0 vote with the Soviet Union and Poland abstaining. Unlike the vote on the Canadian amendment, these abstentions were not a mark of successful conciliation

but rather underscored the divide between the superpowers. As the Polish delegate noted, disagreement on a few sentences stymied unanimity. But those disagreements, centred on the veto, were rooted in a jockeying for international influence that extended far beyond UNAEC negotiations.

REFLECTIONS ON CANADIAN ATOMIC DIPLOMACY

Canada and the UNAEC's majority delegations honed their approach in negotiations as the divide with the Soviet Union deepened. The Soviet Union, Poland, and later Ukraine were publicly contrasted with "the majority," and blamed for lack of agreement. Canada's ability in 1946 to push for a strong, unanimous international control plan was due to its own nuclear capacity and continuing cooperation with the United States on atomic issues. This elevated atomic position gave Ottawa greater freedom to moderate the US approach, but it also demonstrated the limits of functionalism. While McNaughton persisted for months in balancing Ottawa's dual policies of commission cohesion and relations with the United States, this position was ultimately unsustainable. As the Cold War divide between the superpowers deepened, Canada had to fall in line – ultimately dashing hopes for UN unity on the dangerous problem of the atomic bomb.

Twelve years later, McNaughton reflected positively on his work in the UNAEC. The majority plan took shape beginning in January 1947 as the commission refined Baruch's proposals. "I was satisfied," McNaughton recalled, "that [the majority's] proposals . . . [were] an effective plan and I still think that this is true." But the impasse that developed in June 1946 never dissipated, and the UNAEC never fulfilled its central mission. In hindsight, McNaughton questioned the sincerity of the United States. He believed the US delegation was willing to "concede nothing which might compromise the [US atomic] technological advantage."⁵⁸ And he later derided the Baruch plan as "insincerity from beginning to end."⁵⁹ Canada's difficulties during the UNAEC's first year did not stem chiefly from Soviet opposition, but rather from US intransigence under Baruch's leadership. In Baruch's mind, his plan represented the only possible path to international control. He was unwilling to consider alternatives, seeing concessions on key issues like the veto as dangerous, even criminal.

In this context, McNaughton balanced a conflicting strategy based on advancing negotiations through consensus while supporting the US position in principle. On the ground, he saw the difficulty of balancing these two goals in a tense international climate. He offered policy recommendations to Ottawa while using his personal diplomatic skill to assuage US concerns. The prime minister supported this position to its breaking point, giving McNaughton considerable leeway to shape the Canadian approach for much of the year. But when the UNAEC conflict reached its height in late December, Ottawa chose the cautious path to preserve relations with its closest neighbour. Harboured no illusions about Baruch's sincerity, the Canadian delegation saw Gromyko's persistent refusal in late December to take a stance as evidence that the Soviets had also dug in their heels. The Soviet refusal to give up the veto was the best evidence to suggest that their intentions were insincere. Indeed, the Soviets were well on their way to developing an atomic bomb of their own.

This episode in early Canadian nuclear diplomacy demonstrated the limits of functionalism. Expertise, professionalism, and personal relationships elevated Canada's role on the UNAEC, but these qualities could not overcome a hardening divide between the superpowers. Baruch's unwillingness to consider Soviet critiques exacerbated this conflict. Escott Reid bitterly remembered this limitation, recalling Baruch "doing his best to sabotage whatever slight possibility there might be of agreement."⁶⁰ Despite Reid's regrets, the shift to majority rule in the UNAEC was warmly received by the US delegation. Baruch reflected "that they owed more to Canada than to any of the other countries for having brought everything into line."⁶¹

As Reid rightly noted, however, the first report to the Security Council was a bittersweet success. The UNAEC's first year was the only period when cooperation with the Soviet Union on atomic energy might have been feasible. By the end of 1946, positions on both sides of the Iron Curtain hardened into an impasse that made agreement on a delicate issue like international control impossible. While the Canadian delegation worked to facilitate this agreement to a point, they re-evaluated their goals in this tense international climate and prioritized relations with the United States. Although there is no evidence to suggest that General McNaughton regretted this decision, his adviser, George Ignatieff, longingly reflected in hindsight on what the Canadians lost with it. "I've always regretted that we did

not take Escott Reid's advice [to push Bernard Baruch to compromise] more seriously," he noted forty years later, "because in fact we never really recovered the ground that could have been made before proliferation of weapons began."⁶²

NOTES

- 1 Bruce Bliven, "Atomic Dawn: What's It Mean?" *Maclean's*, October 1, 1945, 5, 60, 62.
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- 47 Emphasis added.
- 48 Oskar Lange’s background facilitated his rapport with the Anglo delegations. He was an economist whose theories merged Marxism with market economics. He worked extensively in the United Kingdom and United States, eventually becoming an American citizen. He later renounced his US citizenship to serve as the first ambassador of the Polish People’s Republic to the United States. See “Dr. Lange Again Becoming a Pole to Be Envoy Here,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1945.
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