



ALLIANCE *and* ILLUSION





INTRODUCTION

Canada, an old saw goes, is a country with too little history and too much geography. Readers of this book may be tempted to think otherwise. And yet this book covers only a fragment of Canada's human history, the history of Canadian foreign affairs in the period since 1945, more specifically from the beginning of the Cold War to the end of the Trudeau era in 1984.

Canada has a history that is political, economic, military, social, and intellectual. But it has its roots in geography. Canada is of course a vast land, spreading more than 3,000 miles from coast to coast. At almost 10 million square kilometres, Canada is the second-largest political jurisdiction on earth. It is also one of the emptiest. With 32 million people in 2005, Canada is middling in numbers, but 90 percent of those millions snuggle within 250 kilometres of the US border, leaving most of the country empty, if not untouched. The notion of Canada as a northern country is thus true only in part – some might say in very small part. Fragmented on its north-south axis, Canada is also fragmented east-west, with its major regions – British Columbia, the Prairies, central Canada, and the Atlantic provinces – divided from each other by stretches of scenic rock and lakes.

Canada is also fragmented historically. Waves of occupation in both historic and prehistoric times left layers of language and cultures on the geography. Clashes of cultures produced wars that spilled across the divide between prehistory and history and that marked the contacts between Aboriginal North Americans and the European settlers who flooded the land in the wake of explorers and empires. Canada began to take

its modern shape only in the aftermath of a series of wars in the middle of the eighteenth century that left the British briefly in occupation of most of the continent.

And so Canada was, to begin with, a fragment of the British Empire. Its design, its boundaries, even its ethnic makeup suited imperial purposes and tied Canada not only to the imperial motherland, Great Britain, but to the former British (and English-speaking) colonies to the south. Canada enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with both Great Britain and the United States. Some Canadians doubted that Canada, by itself, was a complete nation. Others saw the country suspended between two poles, the great republic to the south and the imperial British mother across the Atlantic. An uncertain national identity has been, and remains, a major theme of Canadian history and has been reflected in Canada's foreign relations.

The fortunes of war had left the British Empire in North America with two main ethnic groups – people from the British Isles and those from France. The latter, who were left over from the collapse of an even earlier empire, were concentrated in Quebec. Unlike both Great Britain and the United States, Canada was a compromise between two languages, and its politics therefore had an extra complication that reflected Canada's binational fact.

In 1945 Canada had only recently become a sovereign state, and it had taken Canadians some time and considerable mental effort to get used to the fact. As a recent former colony, Canada prized the acquisition of sovereignty even as it explored what sovereignty might, in fact, mean. Not surprisingly, Canadian governments in 1945 and after kept a jealous eye on Canada's independence and worried endlessly over any hint that this independence might be compromised or overridden.

If Canada was an independent country, it was also a minor country. That had not mattered a great deal before 1939 or even during the war. Canada was part of the British Empire – part ally and part subordinate imperial associate. Relations were primarily with the imperial centre, Great Britain; association with other parts of the empire like Australia or India mattered much less, if at all. Imperial relationships were primarily bilateral relationships. There was also a bilateral relationship with the United States, though without the benefit of a constitutional linkage. Nevertheless, similarity and proximity, not to mention economic ties, counted for much in maintaining links between Canada and its southern neighbour.

The character of a relationship is also important. English Canadians prized their affinity for and resemblance to other English-speaking nations, especially Great Britain and the United States. In 1945 a Canadian historian published a book on the subject of Canada's relationships with its two larger partners – *The North Atlantic Triangle*.¹ Two sides of the triangle were larger, older, and more important than Canada, but Canadians believed that there was still a place in Anglo-Saxon geometry for their country, and they liked the British and Americans to understand that Canada was close to them

politically, perhaps even that Canada was their best friend. In return, Canadians expected to be noticed, to be thanked. If Canada was expected to contribute to some common enterprise, Canadians expected to be asked first. In some senses, Canadians had two identities – national and collective, neither complete without the other.

This dual identity was a legacy from Canada's colonial past. Canadians were local and imperial, Canadian and British, with a strong American accent. Being British meant that Canadians had rights as well as duties to Britain and the empire. The most important right was to be asked. Not to be asked was to be taken for granted. Canada's history in the British Empire was rife with moments when the imperial government had assumed rather than asked for Canadian assistance. Sometimes the Canadian government had made the best of it and gone along, as the government of Wilfrid Laurier had in an imperial war in South Africa in 1899. Sometimes Ottawa had refused to cooperate, as when the British asked for Canadian troops to reinforce a British garrison in Turkey in 1922, in what Prime Minister Mackenzie King considered to be a minor and pointless adventure.

On larger questions, however, Canadian and British interests were assumed by English Canadians, especially, to be much the same. As Mackenzie King put it in 1923, "if the great and clear call of duty comes," Canada would be at Britain's side.² This proved to be the case in 1939, and throughout the war that followed the Canadian government generally (if sometimes grudgingly) accepted Britain's lead. Canada needed to be in an alliance, and it needed and accepted the direction of its senior partner, the British. But the Canadians were not alone in the empire with the British, and by the 1940s a system of regular consultation among its component parts had come to exist. The empire, in other words, was not simply a bilateral Anglo-Canadian axis, but a multilateral alliance, in form and in effect.

If Canadian relations with Great Britain had some of the characteristics of a formal alliance, and had accumulated a practical history that guided the British and Canadian governments in their contacts, the same was not quite true of relations with the United States. Canadian relations with its southern neighbour were much broader than with Britain. Fads, fashions, opinions, ideologies, and organizations had a habit of slopping over the border. The United States was not thousands of miles away, but right next door. Canadians and Americans could walk right across the line. Individual Canadians and Americans were hard to tell apart – this was true even of French Canadians, if one inquired on both sides of the borders between Canada and adjacent parts of New England, where French Canadians were plentiful.

Canadians looking south – at least as far south as the Ohio River, the frontier between North and South – could see themselves in the patterns and assumptions of US daily life. The Americans were more plentiful and more various, and richer too, but from highway signs to architecture to comic strips there was a marked resemblance. If

official Canada resembled Great Britain, unofficial Canada, the English-speaking part, looked like the United States.

In the interwar years Canadians endlessly debated whether they were more British or American. (As a later, 1957, musical put it, this left them no time to be themselves.³) Of course, the reality was that they were distinct from both, but it was useful for Canadians to be able to use their imperial connection to distance themselves from the Americans, and their physical and cultural proximity to the Americans to distance themselves from Great Britain.

The connections to, rather than the distinctions from, both countries were reinforced during the crisis of the Second World War. Just before the war, in 1938, Mackenzie King and the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, exchanged public promises of military support in case of foreign invasion, and this was supplemented in 1940 by the establishment of a joint military board to oversee the common defence. Most of Canada's military activity during the war took place far from Canadian shores, and under British command. Canada reflexively accepted that in a world war Canada's task was to follow rather than lead.

This pattern of following a greater power's lead continued after 1945, although the United States took on the part previously played by Great Britain. The dramatic circumstances of the Cold War – the onset of the confrontation with communism – allowed the recent past to be submerged and almost forgotten. The Cold War defined intellectual and political currency, and for more than forty years all things were new under the sun. In his own lifetime Mackenzie King became an anachronism, an embarrassing remnant of the colonial past in which the true colonial used autonomy to escape the responsibilities that fell on the older, larger relatives. Yet when the occasion arose, as it was bound to do, his successors from St Laurent to Trudeau mimicked his behaviour as, largely unconsciously, they followed his policies. Over Suez in 1956, nuclear warheads in 1963, Vietnam in the 1960s, NATO garrisons in 1969, energy supplies in the 1970s and 1980s, Canadian governments declined to follow where their more senior allies wished them to go.

Older patterns therefore persisted. Canadians had a collective identification with their allies that saw the country into – and eventually through – the Cold War. In return, they expected that their allies, meaning mostly the Americans, would not tread indelicately on Canadian toes. Most of the time, the allies obliged.

Foreign relations are, of course, reciprocal. Great Britain and the United States usually kept their powder dry in dealings with Canada. All things considered, there were remarkably few explosions in British and American relations with Canada over time, although, as the British link dwindled, the British appreciation for the consequences of bad manners or antagonistic policies dwindled too, as Canadian governments under Diefenbaker, Trudeau, and Mulroney learned to their surprise and cost.

As David Haglund has observed, the notion of a what a “triangle” was or what it did could change over time. The North Atlantic Triangle differentiated as well as unified its participants. If one side of the triangle grew too large or too pressing, there was always the other for some counterbalance. Great Britain came to exchange Canada, and the rest of the Commonwealth, for Europe. “Europe” thus became a surrogate part of the triangle, but without ever fully supplanting Britain. From at least the 1950s on, Canadian governments talked of Europe rather than Britain and proclaimed an “Atlantic” destiny. (This concept was inevitably labelled “Atlanticism.”⁴) Some Canadians, in but also outside government, invoked worlds beyond Europe – sometimes Japan, or “the Pacific,” or the Third World, seeking to substitute one form of collective identification, historical and traditional, for another. The most notable example of these tendencies occurred in the 1970s, when the Trudeau government sought a “Third Option,” attempting to balance close relations with the United States with significant relations with Europe and Japan. In the 1970s and 1980s other Canadians sought to pursue the underdeveloped world, attempting to match Canada’s long-term interest in correcting global imbalances and disharmonies with a short-term rapprochement with countries that most Canadians found strange and sometimes even repugnant. As a result, Canadian foreign relations became more diffuse, sometimes in a predominantly Cold War context, sometimes not.

Economics mirrored politics throughout the Cold War. Considerable time could be spent debating whether economics or politics came first in the development of Canada’s foreign relations or the elaboration of Canadian foreign policy. It is sufficient to observe that in both politics and economics, cultural similarities continued to count. American investors, like earlier generations of British investors, found Canada culturally compatible and institutionally familiar; like British investors, they were sometimes disappointed in the return on their money. Canadian investors returned the compliment, though on a lesser scale and perhaps with greater profit, when it came to the United States. As far as trade was concerned, Canada was and remained throughout the forty-five years of the Cold War the United States’ leading trade partner. It was an inescapable and sometimes useful fact, for the Americans noticed economic Canada even when political Canada dipped beneath the horizon of American policy.⁵

Another consideration in the development of Canadian foreign policy is the moralism that sometimes suffused Canada’s approach after 1945. It may have been merely the consequence of a Canadian search for distinctiveness, but it may also have derived from a well-established moralizing tradition common to most countries in Western culture but especially obvious in the English-speaking world – and resented outside. The moralizing Briton or American is a stock figure in non-Anglo-Saxon complaints about the “hypocrisy” of the foreign policy of these two countries. It is no surprise that Canada too contributed to the genre, most notoriously when Senator Raoul Dandurand,

a member of Mackenzie King's Cabinet, called attention in a speech at the League of Nations to the superiority of Canada's North American location, "a fireproof house," far from the "inflammable materials" piled around Europe.

Norman Hillmer has used the term "moral superpower" to describe some Canadians' self-conception. As he notes, it is not unique to Canada – indeed it was applied first to Sweden, which throughout the Cold War was ostentatiously neutral, standing between but apart from the contending international blocs – in public at least.⁶ Canada was part of one of the blocs, but despite that fact it from time to time irritated its more "realistic" allies – France over Algeria, Britain over Suez and later over South Africa, and the United States over Vietnam.

Sometimes Canadians invoked – incredibly but honestly – their country's lack of a colonial past to justify a special mission to commune with the Third World. In their defence, Canadian politicians and diplomats claimed enlightened self-interest – the need for Canada and for the West in general to be a trusted "honest broker." This idea sometimes prevailed over the shorter-term advantages of alliance solidarity, though not always. Disappointment only fed the appetite of the supporters of the "honest broker" or "helpful fixer" role and helped confuse the notion of Canada as a "middle power," another defining phrase much used to describe Canada's "special" place in the world.⁷

No account of Canadian foreign relations is complete without reference to the requirements of Canada's domestic situation. Foreign policy almost tore the country apart along linguistic lines – in war in 1917 and 1944, and possibly again in peace during the 1960s and 1970s. On imperial issues French Canada had different views from English Canada. Of course, English and French Canadians also differed among themselves as to what policies their common country should follow.

The Cold War was for a time a useful sedative for Canadian internal quarrels: it was one issue where the elites of English and French Canada could and did agree. Nevertheless, the directors of Canadian foreign policy could never entirely forget that French-speaking citizens might well have different impressions than their English-speaking counterparts of the bona fides of the federal government in managing relations with France or French Africa. From that considerable difficulty there flowed such policies as the anxious recruitment of bilingual staff and the pursuit of a French-speaking commonwealth – la Francophonie – in the 1970s. Indeed for periods in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s Canadian foreign policy, like all other policies of the central government, had to pass political scrutiny in terms of its potential impact of the larger question of whether Quebec would or would not remain in Canada and, by extension, whether Canada would continue to exist. In the quest for friends and allies, even some of the government's most cherished priorities – nationalist policies designed to ward off American investment, for example – suddenly became unimportant.

Canadian foreign relations, as contemplated in the pages that follow, cannot be neatly compartmentalized or categorized. They have been the creature of internal as well as external circumstance. They have been shaped by the peculiarities of the Canadian national character in both its English and French versions. They have not been the product of Canadian circumstance alone, but of much larger international trends. They are the product of economics as well as politics – world economic trends and American and British politics in addition to the Canadian variety. And in the end they return to geography and society.



CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION: CANADA IN 1945

In 1945 Canadians celebrated victory in war. The Second World War did not officially come to an end until 2 September, when the allied powers, including Canada, accepted Japan's surrender on board an American battleship in Tokyo Bay, but as far as most Canadians were concerned the real war finished in Europe in May with the surrender of Germany.

In May – as they would later in September – crowds surged onto Parliament Hill in Ottawa and main streets across the country. Citizens clustered around their radios for the latest news: Hitler was dead, and the occupied countries of Europe liberated. It was Germany's turn to be defeated, devastated, and occupied. Over the air waves Prime Minister Mackenzie King gave thanks in English and Justice Minister Louis St Laurent did the same in French.

There was much to be thankful for. Nazi Germany proved to be worse in fact than the propagandists had imagined. The toll of Nazi atrocities mounted as allied troops discovered and entered German death camps: the evil nature of the Nazi government and the providential nature of its defeat could no longer be doubted. Canadian casualties during the last eleven months of the war had been heavy, but over six years the military dead numbered only 42,000. This out of armed forces that had enlisted over a million men and women – one in twelve Canadians. Now the troops would be coming home.

Superficially, Canada looked much the same as it had in 1939: civilian society had lived on its existing resources for most of the war, repairing rather than replacing, doubling up in scarce accommodations, stretching the civilian economy to make room

for military supplies. It was a worn and weary Canada that met the eye of the visitor; yet the appearance was deceptive. Statistics showed a growing economy – up 50 per cent over 1939. More people were working than ever before. Canadians were making more money than in 1939, though they were spending less, for there was not very much to spend it on. Canadians also paid more taxes than in 1939, more than Americans did and almost as much as the beleaguered British. In terms of gross national product, as far as such things could be measured in the chaotic conditions of 1945, Canada ranked fifth or sixth in the world – \$11,863,000,000 in the dollars of the day, or not quite \$1,000 per person. Such wealth helped pay for a navy of 362 ships of all kinds, an army of 750,000 troops, and an air force of 1,000 or more aircraft.¹

It was a real, though temporary, eminence. No one thought that Canada's hundreds of thousands of military could possibly be permanent. Factories producing military supplies were already being converted to peacetime production. Within a few months of the end of the war, unused aircraft were being incinerated, while ships were mothballed or, if possible, sold off. The troops were coming home as fast as shipping could be found and, on arrival, were demobilized and handed a package of veterans' benefits. Soldiers who had been fighting in the Netherlands in May could find themselves enrolled in university by September. Many more were to follow.

For the first time in six years, Canada's priorities were domestic. Foreign events continued to fascinate readers of newspapers and viewers of newsreels, but after May 1945, and certainly after the Japanese surrender, they were no longer a life-and-death issue for Canadians. Citizens instead worried about "security," defined as security of income and security of employment – issues that looked back to the economic depression of the 1930s, when both commodities were in short supply. There was enough to keep Canada preoccupied with domestic affairs, starting with a national election in June. By a narrow margin and with only 41 per cent of the votes, the existing, wartime government remained in office.

POLITICS AND THE PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King may have been the most successful politician ever to hold the office in Canada. Certainly he held it the longest – twenty-two years, spread over three decades, before he quit in November 1948. In 1945 King was seventy, with a political life that stretched back to 1908, when he had first won a seat in Parliament. He was a Liberal by conviction and heredity, the descendant of an unsuccessful liberal revolutionary of the 1830s. Revolutionary fires burned low in Mackenzie King: he far preferred the orderly, almost dull rhythm of Canadian politics. But he used politics to express liberal themes that would have been familiar anywhere in the English-speaking world. He championed self-determination, favoured lower tariffs and open economies, and hesitated in the face of too much or too forceful government

intervention in society. He deplored tyranny abroad, while seeking signs that such tyranny was not so dark or so deep as to make war or the use of force inevitable.²

King feared war and disliked force; by the same token, he loved order and orderly procedures. In 1935 he used the slogan “King or Chaos” to defeat his Conservative rival, R.B. Bennett; it was a juxtaposition that appealed to King and may have actually defined his domestic policies. He did not want to overturn society or the social order, though he hoped, by stages, to ameliorate them. Radical, violent change was for romantics, and, as far as domestic politics was concerned, King despised romanticism and drama. (He was far from despising them in the private realm, as his collection of ruins at his Kingsmere estate made clear.)

King applied the same caution to foreign affairs. Born into late Victorian Canada at a time when his country was little more than a large and almost vacant colony of the British Empire, he viewed foreign affairs through the same prism as his mentor, the turn-of-the-century prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier – that is, as a dangerous nuisance. Yet, unlike Laurier, King understood the balance of international force in the first part of the twentieth century. Canadian politics taught him a second lesson, that English Canadians were firmly attached to the British Empire and, if pushed to make a choice, would opt to remain in the empire and to sustain it in war. He understood that French Canadians did not feel the same way, but they were a minority in Canada – a bit less than a third of the population, in the census of 1941. During the First World War, English-Canadian fervour and French-Canadian reluctance had imperilled Canada’s political structure, causing King to place an even higher value on “national unity” and to view foreign affairs with even greater suspicion. During the 1920s he sought and achieved a greater formal distance between Canada and Great Britain, shoring up his country’s position as an independent but still loyal part of the British Empire. King promised Britain that, in a crisis, Canada would be at its side. And it was: indeed, in recognition of the fact, King entitled a volume of his wartime speeches *At Britain’s Side*. He knew his English-speaking compatriots would understand and approve.

Then there was the United States. Friendly and familiar, but at the same time foreign, the United States could not be ignored. The great republic had been, ever since 1776, an example and a reproach to Canadians. They had sometimes flowed over a border that was usually wide open to citizens of either country. Rather less often, Americans repaid the compliment. The Canadian standard of living was, after all, less than theirs, and their own country was so large and various that it made Canada seem small, or irrelevant, or invisible. Yet there were many similarities between the two nations. Canadians spoke with something approaching American, not British, accents, and an American accent was more easily accepted than a British one in Canada. American styles and fads usually found a ready echo in Canada, and Canadians and Americans

assumed that a similarity of geography led to a similarity of interest – in everything but politics.

Politics had, however, made the difference. In 1911 the Canadian electorate had repudiated the Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier – and with it his youngest minister, Mackenzie King, who had lost his seat in the House of Commons – over the issue of relations with the United States. Laurier had signed a trade agreement with the Americans, mightily offending Canadian economic nationalists and the many interests who benefited, or thought they benefited, from a high Canadian tariff wall. King never forgot – nor for that matter did those Americans who had watched the election unfold. The rhetoric employed by the Conservative opposition during the election was extreme, but they found the results politically gratifying. If Laurier won and let down Canada's tariffs, Canadian society would be undermined – rampant divorce, political corruption, and finally outright annexation would follow. Enough Canadians seem to have believed it. It was a warning of what might happen should a Canadian government appear to get too close to the United States.

King, who had lived some years as a student in the United States and had a Harvard PhD, once told an American diplomat that in Canada he was known as “the American” and that consequently he had to watch his step, politically speaking. King may have understood the United States better than any other Canadian politician in his generation, and at bottom he had few doubts about American political values. He and the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose time in office overlapped to a large extent with King's hold on power in the 1930s and during the war, shared much the same political culture and many of the same attitudes about the world; King moved easily in Roosevelt's shadow.

King understood that the United States had become steadily more powerful, economically and militarily, throughout his lifetime. British power, on the other hand, had gradually faded until in February 1941, in the middle of the war, the Canadian prime minister confided to his diary the latest news, that Great Britain was “a bankrupt country.” Great Britain did not go bankrupt, of course: American aid and Canadian credits helped sustain it through the war, but the fact was that the British unaided could no longer maintain their position in the world.

For the duration of the war, the Canadian government did whatever it could to help. By 1945 it had provided Britain with over \$3 billion in gifts and loans. Canada assisted on programs like air training and housed the British atomic bomb project – operations that could not be accommodated in the narrow and exposed British Isles. Militarily, Canadian soldiers, sailors, and aircrew, wearing British uniforms with a “Canada” patch on the shoulder, served under ultimate British command. Their presence as part of Britain's armed forces enhanced British military and diplomatic standing, at

least for the duration of the war. In the eyes of English-speaking Canadians, it added to Canada's own importance and standing, which was inextricably – to French Canadians, inexplicably – bound up in the fortunes of the British Empire.

Politically, the Canadian government did not seek to intervene in high policy during the war, which, King understood, must be shared between his two senior partners, the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Useful and impressive as Canada's contribution to the war effort was, it was dwarfed in most categories by that of the British and Americans. Yet Roosevelt and Churchill scrupulously cultivated King's own political interest, making it symbolically clear in photos, newsreels, and newspapers that he was an esteemed colleague. Practically, however, King limited any demands he might have on his allies to Canadian interests, strictly defined. He did not attempt to pronounce on bombing Germany or invading Italy or any of the other great strategic issues that Roosevelt and Churchill considered to be their province, and theirs alone.

The results could be both positive and negative. On the positive side, King hosted two Anglo-American conferences in Quebec City in 1943 and 1944, and appeared at social functions and in photos with Roosevelt and Churchill. He then retired from the scene and busied himself being a good host. The photos lingered and could be reproduced whenever the opposition questioned King's proximity to the councils of the great. Liberal propaganda praised King as a great international statesman, based on his acquaintance with Churchill and Roosevelt. There was, after all, irrefutable photographic evidence of their many meetings. Some Canadians surmised that King could not have said very much to his senior partners, and, on the great issues of the direction of the war, they would have been right. But that was not what most Canadians saw, or expected. They wanted to know that their leader got along with the Americans and the British.

After the war the prime minister learned that a Canadian carillon in a park on the Niagara River was to be dedicated to "Our great wartime leaders," Roosevelt and Churchill, and not to King himself. The prime minister's protests were unavailing. It was the paradox of Canada's position, King might have reflected: Canada's representatives must be seen by Canadians, but not heard by their allies, at great international events.

Nor did King protest when the charmed circle of the allied supreme command expanded to admit the Soviet Union. In 1941 Hitler attacked the USSR, his erstwhile ally. It was a fatal mistake. The Soviet Union and its leader, Joseph Stalin, were crucial to the Allied victory; without the Red Army and its stunning victories over the Nazis, the war might never have been won or might have lasted years longer. Yet the Soviet Union was not merely an ally, but the headquarters of international communism, the only country with a communist regime before and during the war. As such, it was a focus of hope and admiration for Canadian and other communists around the world.

Communist cooperation smoothed labour relations through communist-leaning unions (a minority of the trade union movement), and the communists did not hesitate to cooperate politically. Politically, however, the Canadian Communist Party had little to offer to the citizenry, and soon it would have even less.

Relations with the Soviet Union were relatively less important and more distant than relations with Great Britain and the United States. Canada had not been represented in Moscow before the war, and it was only in 1943 that a Canadian mission was sent to the Soviet Union. King had no personal history with Stalin as he did with Roosevelt and Churchill, nor did any issues arise that demanded his intervention. The Soviets for their part found Canada a minor convenience, good for munitions and credits, but little better than a pawn in the global competition between the two principal capitalist states, the United States and Great Britain.³ There was objectively no need for King to pay attention to the Soviet Union, nor, until 1945, did he. Even in relations with the British and Americans, King husbanded his energies, leaving the details, even important details, to his subordinates.

THE DEPARTMENT

In 1939 Mackenzie King carefully manoeuvred a declaration of war through the Canadian Parliament, thereby asserting Canada's autonomy as a self-governing component of the British Empire. He did not mean by that action to engage Parliament seriously in the oversight of foreign affairs. In Parliament, the majority ruled, and the majority in the Parliaments elected in 1935 and 1940 – and 1945 for that matter – was Liberal. The majority followed its leader, and the Cabinet chosen by the leader. The Cabinet, led by the prime minister, governed the House of Commons, not the other way round. The Canadian party system made no allowance for personal idiosyncrasies on the part of ordinary members of Parliament. Party loyalty was highly prized and sometimes rewarded; disloyalty was almost invariably punished.

Nor was the Mackenzie King Cabinet an assembly of equals. King was very much the senior minister, and after 1940 his authority, reinforced by a smashing election victory, was essentially unchallenged. He was not only prime minister but secretary of state for external affairs, so he combined oversight with departmental and policy responsibility in that area. Admittedly, foreign affairs spilled over into the responsibilities of other ministers, especially the minister of finance and the minister of munitions and supply; yet even in those cases it was the prime minister who determined the shape of things and modified policy according to his judgment of the political scene. But King was a careful leader: he tried to anticipate his ministers' preferences and policies, especially if they impinged on the overriding issue of national unity. English and French Canada had a tendency to wander off in different political directions. It was King's job to prevent this, and thereby to preserve the country. Twice during the war King averted

– or, if he did not avert, skilfully managed – major political clashes between English and French Canada over the issue of conscription for overseas military service. To his colleagues’ amazement, he was successful, and his success made him seem even more essential to the future of the Cabinet and the Liberal Party.

Technically, responsibility for the conduct of international relations lay with the Department of External Affairs, Canada’s foreign office. In fact, “the Department,” as it liked to call itself, handled mostly political affairs rather than economic foreign policy, and it was far from autonomous. King kept a close eye on “his” department from an office just down the hall in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings.

The department only slightly predated King. Established in 1909, it was designed to be a large filing bureau, to bring order to the chaotic state of Canadian relations with the outside world, especially the United States. In 1912 External Affairs was brought directly under the prime minister, and there it had stayed through governments Liberal and Conservative. King had expanded the department during the 1920s and professionalized it, appointing a university professor as undersecretary (deputy minister) and, through him, a staff of diplomats. Because the prime minister’s own office was tiny, King and his predecessors drew on External Affairs for advice and help, sometimes on problems quite unrelated to foreign policy.

The department was closely modelled on its British and American counterparts. For officers, it hired male university graduates, often if not usually with advanced degrees taken abroad – people who might otherwise have become university professors. Educated in Great Britain or the United States, they usually had British or American friends and made new friends easily among their British and American colleagues. In terms of general culture and liberal politics, they were not very different from other Anglo-American diplomats aside from the national obligations their respective posts imposed.

Because diplomatic pay scales were generous, certainly as compared to those at universities, and because diplomacy promised a life and career out of the Canadian norm, its intake was, on average, highly qualified and highly intelligent.⁴ There were indeed foreign postings – London, Washington, and Paris to begin with, Tokyo and The Hague later, and during the war the Soviet Union, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and much of Latin America. Young anglophones joined, and so did a limited number of francophones. More than other departments in Ottawa, External Affairs had some bilingual potential.

The department’s first undersecretary lasted fifteen years in the job, and the second seventeen, until he died from overwork in 1941. The third, Norman Robertson, was blessed with youth and stamina, and an ability alternately to shrug off and to satisfy Mackenzie King’s carping demands.⁵ During the 1920s and 1930s King had kept External Affairs on a very short leash, instructing his delegates to say nothing if possible, and

very little if not. One Canadian diplomat, Hume Wrong, fantasized that the perfect Canadian representative would not really exist – business cards, an office, and luggage would suffice.

Robertson changed things. The greater powers, he believed, were used to having things their own way but were sometimes unprepared in discussions or conferences, or disagreed among themselves. Robertson permitted his clever young men to prepare for conferences, preparing positions and proposals as if they indeed represented great powers. At an aviation conference in Chicago in 1944, to take one particularly influential example, the Canadians were ready with demands for autonomy and the rights of smaller countries (music to King's ears, if he ever heard it) but also with practical proposals and a draft treaty. The Chicago conference became a model for future Canadian efforts. As the war drew to a close, Canadian civil servants prepared position papers and proposals for a future international organization designed to replace the moribund League of Nations. The Canadians might not prevail in international discussions weighted heavily in favour of the great powers, but they would not fail from ignorance or lack of preparation. The department was happy to compare itself – and Canada – to other, less prepared, less favoured, less competent nations. Professionalism, according to the professionals, was one of the attributes that made Canada a “middle power.”⁶

Mackenzie King had always feared the intrusion of the great powers' priorities in Canadian politics. Canadians were prone to look abroad for their opinions, and sometimes their allegiances too. He knew it was unavoidable; the outbreak of the Second World War and Canada's prompt participation in it had proven that proposition. At least Canada should be able to offer its consent, as it had when it declared war on its own in 1939, rather than simply accepting the British declaration of war on Germany. Nevertheless Canadian politicians and civil servants were painfully aware that Canada's role in the war was simply to produce soldiers, munitions, and other supplies, without any say in how they would be used or any voice in the larger Allied strategies that would consume them. They may have suspected – public opinion polls would have told them so – that Canadians expected and wanted little more than to be useful, and to be appreciated.

This public complacency was not an easy proposition for Ottawa to swallow. National self-determination, if not self-respect, demanded something more; but political realism and practicality suggested the contrary. The country was doing very well out of the war, and Canadians were pleased with the way the government was handling it – including the apparently trouble-free relations with Canada's principal allies.

King's staff provided a formula for Canadian participation in an international system that was largely beyond Ottawa's control and even influence. A British political scientist, David Mitrany,⁷ had come up with the notion that nations should take on

international roles for which they were best suited and should enjoy influence proportionate to their contributions. Application of this principle would allow international cooperation to function most effectively. This doctrine Mitrany called the functional principle or functionalism.⁸ King, heavily scripted by his staff, expounded the functional principle in Parliament in 1943. Armed with this principle, the Canadian government justified its elaborate preparation for the uncertainties of peace. Canada's busyness, King told the House of Commons, "arose from our recognition of the needs of humanity."⁹ Functionalism also contributed to Canada's self-image as a middle power. But would anyone listen when Canada spoke?

The Second World War made it apparent that the international system, as it existed before 1939, had failed. It had to be replaced, presumably by something better and more reliable – a higher internationalism. Yet there was a contradiction at the heart of this diagnosis: between international cooperation and sovereignty, with its attendant nationalism. Unbridled nationalism, in the form of Nazism or Fascism or Japanese imperialism, had spun out of control in the 1930s. At great cost, other nations had combined to defeat the aggression. Clearly cooperation among nations, concerted international action, was necessary for victory. The label given the wartime Grand Alliance – the United Nations – conveyed the idea. It was nevertheless a difficult idea, for how could sovereign nations be genuinely united for very long?

In Allied capitals, planners got busy. Those who did the planning had, almost invariably, experience with the failures of the 1930s either as participants or as close observers. Sometimes these planners – intellectuals, diplomats, and other civil servants – knew each other, from university or conferences or diplomatic assignment in the bad old days of the 1930s. And perhaps, left to themselves and equipped with unlimited authority, they might have devised a more perfect world. But serving as they did their various national and sovereign governments, they were bound to come up with proposals that respected national sovereignty and closely mirrored the international institutions of the interwar period.

The Canadian government was no exception. King might rhetorically embrace the service of humanity, but he knew that it was his task to represent only the Canadian section thereof. King and his Liberals and most other Canadians accepted the international state system as it was. They were devoted to the principle of Canadian autonomy and refused to contemplate any arrangements that would treat their country as less than formally equal to every other independent state. The prewar League of Nations (King sarcastically called it "the League of Notions") had failed, in the Canadian prime minister's view, because it had tried to do too much, not because it had tried to do too little. The league had had too few members, with the absence of the United States and most of the Americas, as well as, from time to time, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Yet the League had its good points too, one of them being the sovereign

equality of all its members. On this point there was no division between the prime minister and his colleagues, political and diplomatic: national sovereignty should be the foundation of any future international organization. Canada was interested in new institutions for the world, not a new world altogether.

CREATING THE UNITED NATIONS

Ironically, the model for the United Nations was the institution it was intended to replace, the League of Nations. Indeed, the League was not even dead, merely dormant, its organs scattered between Switzerland and the United States, although the old institution stimulated so many negative memories that it seemed best that it be decently buried as soon as possible. Yet the designers of the League had created a practical institution. All its members belonged to its assembly, which before 1939 had met once a year in Geneva in a symbolic affirmation of their sovereign equality. Sovereignty and autonomy were the basis of the League, not its antithesis. The Canadian government had no quarrel with this, nor did any other sovereign government. Supervising the day-to-day business of the League was a council comprising the more important members, which had permanent status, plus a number of other states elected for fixed terms by the assembly. This model reflected the balance of power among League members and gave those states with enlarged responsibilities a suitably enlarged status. If the assembly was the League's soul, the council was its brain and, it was hoped, its muscle.

The greater Allied powers – the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union – agreed among themselves to try to design a postwar international security organization. Meeting in the summer of 1944 at Dumbarton Oaks, an estate in Washington DC, they concocted a plan for a world organization that bore a marked resemblance to the League of Nations. Canadian diplomats hung about on the fringes of the conference, gleaning titbits to send home for the preparation of an eventual Canadian response. There would be a general assembly, and a council that would include the great powers – Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China – on a permanent basis. The great powers would each have a veto over United Nations actions; without such a guarantee that their interests would be protected, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would have joined. The veto was in effect an antidote to the fragmentary and incomplete membership of the League of Nations, which the United States had never joined. Protected by the veto from infringements on its absolute sovereignty, the United States would join the United Nations.

From a Canadian point of view, a universal United Nations organization was highly desirable.¹⁰ If the price was the veto, so be it: “Better to take the organization we can get,” Robertson noted in the spring of 1945, than to make “perfectionist speeches” in favour of universal equality.¹¹ There were other things to be thankful for as well. The UN would be a single, worldwide body rather than a loose confederation of regional

assemblies, each dominated by its respective great power. For Canada, struggling to establish an identity and interests distinct from both Great Britain and the United States, this development was highly desirable.

Equally fortunate from the Canadian government's point of view was Franklin Roosevelt's decision to abandon his inclination to give Brazil privileged status in the new organization. Canadians might just swallow an unequal organization constructed along traditional lines, with the customary great powers; they would choke on rewarding Brazil. It was a country with a larger population than Canada, true, but with a smaller economy, and a much smaller participation in the war that was entering its final months. Brazil was also on the fringes of the world, as most Canadians saw it, unfamiliar and exceedingly distant to all but a few Canadian investors. Latin America, Brazil included, was a caricature of democracy, governed more by dictators than by civilian politicians, its societies remote and incomprehensible.

Mackenzie King, while conceding the form of the United Nations, hoped that it would act differently from the old League. In this respect, he had to some extent changed his opinion. Back in the 1930s he had identified the problem of the League not as its unwillingness to use force, but as its predisposition to "coercion, sanctions, etc." The war modified his views, to the point where he conceded that force might be used as "the ultimate sanction," but he remained sceptical as to how, or whether, the United Nations could be persuaded to apply it.¹²

Before such items could be worked out, the United Nations had to be founded. The great powers scheduled a conference in San Francisco for April 1945. Organized by the United States, it proved to be the first challenge to Harry Truman, who succeeded to the presidency on the death of Roosevelt just as the conference was convening. King decided he must personally represent Canada, and he headed for San Francisco at the head of a large delegation. The UN was not the only item on his agenda: the mandate of the Canadian Parliament was about to expire and, rather than extend it, as the constitution allowed, King decided to face the electorate in June.¹³ King knew that his conspicuous presence at the conference would reinforce his carefully cultivated image at home as an international statesman – the only one Canada had. On the other hand, he carefully balanced the Canadian delegation, taking the leading French Canadian in the Cabinet, Louis St Laurent, minister of justice, as his second in command, as well as representatives of the opposition parties in the House of Commons.

The Canadian delegation had two principal objectives. John Holmes summarized one as "no taxation without representation," while the other sought preference in representation for countries that, like Canada, could afford to participate in a broad range of United Nations activities.¹⁴ These two points were a projection of the functional principle. The Canadians also had another objective, expressed as a matter of tactics:

the Canadian delegation would be determined rather than loud in the pursuit of its goals. It would get what it could, but not at the price of offending the great powers, meaning the Americans and the British.

As a result, the Canadians played to what they saw as their strengths – professional caution and an understanding of the process of international conferences. As a prerequisite for what was to follow, the Canadians sought the smooth functioning of the conference. Then they took care of Canada's own desiderata. They secured an amendment (article 43) to the draft Charter of the United Nations that allowed members whose forces were being demanded for UN use to participate in the decision to use them. The Canadian delegation also secured a reference to proper qualifications for non-permanent members of the future Security Council that would take the place of the League of Nations Council (article 23). On regionalism, the Latin Americans prevailed, inserting references to regional security agencies (articles 51 and 53). The Canadians, though distinctly unenthusiastic, acquiesced.

The Canadian delegation avoided becoming involved in an Australian campaign against the great power veto. The noise made by the Australians was, the Canadians believed, at best pointless and at worst upsetting to the fragile agreement among the great powers on the structure and nature of the United Nations. With a certain sense of superiority, the Canadians intervened with the Australians, and between the Australians and the distinctly irritated British and American delegations. They could take comfort in the fact that the Australian objections were futile: the veto sailed through. Pragmatism, not idealism, ruled at San Francisco.

Human rights were not so much a casualty of the San Francisco conference as a simple non-event. The United Nations was a coalition of sovereign states, consulting and combining for specific and limited purposes. Interference in domestic affairs from a notional world body was not welcomed by anyone, and Canada was no exception. The United Nations' job was to prevent war, not meddle in its members' affairs, a point King explicitly made to his delegation. Subjects such as human rights, immigration, and education in Canada were nobody's business outside the country. Not all members of the delegation agreed with the prime minister, but they knew better than to contradict him.¹⁵

The founders of the UN broadly agreed on the desirability of human rights and the possibility of human betterment. That was so even though three of the great powers, Great Britain, France, and the United States, maintained formal colonial empires while the other two, the Soviet Union and China, vigorously suppressed the claims to independence of various nationalities inside their boundaries. The United States, it was true, soon gave up its largest colony, the Philippines, in 1946, while the British granted independence to India and Pakistan in 1947. Many, perhaps most, Americans did not

think of their country as an imperial power but as the world's prime example of a successful former colony; it was a sentiment that Canadians broadly shared. "Politicians and officials in Ottawa did believe in the liberating force of self-government," as the Canadian diplomat John Holmes put it, and were not shy about sharing their views with the representatives of the remaining imperial powers, especially the British and French. This Canadian "smugness" (Holmes's word again) would prove a constant irritant in relations with those powers at the UN until, in the 1960s, they granted independence to almost all of their remaining colonies.¹⁶ The same anti-colonial smugness played well in other quarters, especially among representatives of the most recently independent countries. It would be a mitigating factor in the generally harmonious relations between Canada and the other liberal democracies of Western Europe; in a slightly different form it would even affect relations with the United States.

The United Nations was only a part, though an important part, of Canada's world in 1945. In the spring and summer of 1945, most Canadians, like their prime minister, looked inward, picking up their lives where they had dropped them in 1939. In voting for the Liberals in the 1945 election, Canadians accepted a political agenda that promised security – job security, economic security – through an active, but not too active, government. Facing in, King's fellow citizens cast occasional glances over their shoulders at a world too uncertain to be as orderly or safely predictable as their life at home promised to be. Craving security at home, Canadians knew it must be associated with security abroad, and security abroad must involve a common effort – in other words, collective security.¹⁷

LIFE BEYOND GOVERNMENTS

Of course, not every Canadian was interested in international affairs. Those who were might be said to have an interest or interests that frequently went beyond the national aspirations of the Canadian government.¹⁸ That the Canadian government should further their interests was both acceptable and desirable, but the world they sought was more than a loose association of states.

Canada's churches were transnational in origin and practice and were highly predisposed to associations and activities that went beyond mere nationality. That had always been so, as far back as the seventeenth century. By the nineteenth century the churches were active in sending missionaries abroad and in raising funds to support them and their missions. As the connection between state and church disappeared, the churches were free to do what they pleased in foreign parts – in effect, to conduct their own foreign policies and to construct a world view separate from that of the secular society at home.¹⁹

Clergy as well as lawyers, doctors, and other professionals either belonged to international bodies or participated as individuals in transnational activities. The international

interests of business had always been recognized, even in colonial Canada in the nineteenth century. Groups with similar interests began to communicate and confer. The Canadian Red Cross Society (incorporated in 1909) belonged to the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863 and headquartered in neutral Switzerland. The Canadian Olympic Committee was part of the international Olympic movement, promoting peaceable competition in sports. The National Council of Women belonged to the International Council of Women, founded in 1888. Between the First and Second World Wars there had been a League of Nations Society, in furtherance of the aims and purposes of the League.²⁰ After the Second World War, there would be a Canadian United Nations Association (founded in 1946), in support of the League's successor. There was also a Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA), founded in 1928, with links to other international institutes and foreign affairs councils. An elite group, it brought together business and academics (and, eventually, a number of retired diplomats). The Department of External Affairs paid close attention to the CIIA and sometimes used it as a sounding board for its ideas.

Internationally minded Canadians were a point of contact, and a point of reference, for Canadian politicians and diplomats as they tried to secure a place for Canada in the postwar world. Human rights were a natural concern for such individuals, and for similarly minded individuals elsewhere, but they were not the only issue they wished their government, and other governments, to confront. The influence of the internationalists in Canada, in their various societies and leagues and associations, was seldom concentrated, and, on any given issue, and at any given time, their impact on government and diplomacy might be negligible. But as a species, and as individuals who were often leaders or at least notables in their communities, they had an impact that could be very great. Governments might find them a nuisance, but they ignored them at their peril. In the short term, internationally minded people were an electoral force to be reckoned with. In the longer term, if national governments, individually or collectively, were found insufficient or, worse, obstructive, they might be replaced. In 1945 there was as yet no word to describe the phenomenon, but as Akira Iriye writes, "Globalization, as a state of mind and as an international expression, was dawning."²¹



IN 1945 CANADIANS DID NOT EXPECT OR SEEK a radical revision of domestic politics or international relations. The two items were connected. The war had been won by a massive mobilization of national resources, by the cooperation of various social groups, and by collective sacrifice. The English-speaking democracies, especially Great Britain and the United States, the nations closest to Canada, shared what was broadly the same experience. Under government direction, it had proved possible to secure full employment, a rise in living standards, and a modernization of industry. Yet these changes

were accomplished without doing violence to Canada's parliamentary political system and without changing the private ownership or control of most of the economy. All of Canada's political parties agreed that a proper balance had been achieved; and when they looked abroad they saw their experience repeated and confirmed in Great Britain and the United States.

Canadians expected the same kind of incremental change in foreign relations. They plumped for the familiar: the international system as they knew it had gone wrong in the 1930s, but it had been fixed rather than transformed by the war. Canadians' world was a familiar one – the world of 1945 was not all that distant from the world of 1939. Identifying closely with the British and Americans, Canadians found it natural that their government should pursue policies similar to those of their senior allies and expected that British and American policies would be broadly appropriate for Canada too.