

## SHAPING CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY, 1968-84

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*Biographical Note:* Educated at the University of Alberta and Harvard, Professor Head left the practice and teaching of law to assume the position of special assistant and senior advisor to Prime Minister Trudeau in 1968. He subsequently served for 13 years as President of IDRC, one of Canada's foremost institutions for advising and assisting the Third World in its economic development. He has recently completed a co-authored book with Pierre Trudeau assessing Canada's foreign policy.

I must begin by saying how pleased I am to have been given the honour of speaking from this distinguished platform for a third time. The occasion this evening is the recent publication of the volume of Canadian foreign policy written by Pierre Trudeau and me (Head and Trudeau, 1995). Our book covers the years 1968-1984, a period so long ago in the eyes of many of my students that it might as well be the middle ages. I trust that no one here tonight will feel offended if I observe that some of you at least will recall events of those years.

This is a weekend that invites reflections on Canada's foreign interests and its stature in the international community; that invites as well comparisons and similarities on then and now. The meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government now underway in Auckland, New Zealand reveals that the years may pass, and the actors may change, but many of the most pertinent issues remain constant even if the flavour is not. In New Zealand, in the congenial atmosphere that marks Commonwealth conferences, Prime Ministers are discussing nuclear tests and circumstances in Nigeria as they have on several occasions in the past.

November 11 adds additional resonance to this discussion. Defence policy is rarely debated in Canada but remains nevertheless a critical element of foreign policy. If Canadians relate all too rarely

and inconsistently to the effect upon their own well being of circumstances beyond our borders, we consider even less frequently those that are composed of military ingredients. In a democratic society it is important to give thought on regular occasions to the costs and burdens of a military role in the international community: of the consequences of lack of readiness, of the price of adequate preparation, and the ambiguity which often blankets the distinction between the two.

I invite you this evening to join with me in looking back at the span of years from 1968 to 1984 during which Pierre Elliott Trudeau, short only a nine month interval in 1979, was Prime Minister of Canada. In contrast to the constancy of Canada's leadership in that decade and a half, the cast of characters elsewhere in the world displayed little of the same longevity. In the United States, in that interval, five Presidents: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. In the United Kingdom: Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, Wilson again, James Callaghan, and Margaret Thatcher. A period of colourful actors, considerable activity, and occasional controversy. There is much to reflect upon, something I'd like to do this evening.

As we discussed whether we should write about Canada's foreign experiences, Pierre Trudeau and I exchanged comments about volumes of memoirs that most appealed to us. One of my favorites was George Kennan's "Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin." Kennan was at Harvard, working on the manuscript for this seminal study, while I was a graduate student there. Once a week for a period of a couple of months he would appear in a large lecture theatre and read from his work in progress, pausing to make alterations as he did so. Kennan's presence was immensely attractive. The lecture theatre would fill up an hour in advance as faculty and students alike seized the opportunity to share with this remarkable statesman and chronicler his recollections and commentary.

Another well-known writer, an influence upon each of Trudeau and me, this time from Yale, was the celebrated political scientist Harold Lasswell. Lasswell and Myres McDougal collaborated on several seminal studies of the international public order. In one of his works Lasswell insisted that international lawyers must

discharge two roles: that of client-server, and as well that of citizen-participant.

These writers, among others, served as models to us as we set about our endeavours. As we did so, we strove consciously to avoid the temptation of which Herodotus wrote: "Very few things happen at the right time," he noted. "And the rest do not happen at all. The conscientious historian will correct these defects."

In the stream of human history, as in the flow of a mighty river, there are stretches of turbulence interspersed with areas of placidity. Unlike rivers, however, human endeavours have no distinct beginnings or conclusions — certainly not issues, circumstances, or historic periods. Every new government inherits a number of events, processes, and limitations. These are assumed, continued, modified, but seldom reversed or over-turned. In that now distant world of 1968, the immediate post World War II hopes of a peaceful world had been cruelly dashed. Happily, however, within Canada there was an unusual euphoria arising from the juncture of centennial events — the nationwide local celebrations, the adoption of a distinctive flag, and the extraordinary success and symbolism of Expo '67.

Outside Canada, 1968 was marked by a staccato of uncertainty, violence and tragedy, so alien to our national mood that these events seemed impossible to relate to. That spring the lengthy riots of French university students came close to toppling the deGaulle government. Coincidentally, in Czechoslovakia, there was the brief but rapturous Czech spring, so cruelly smothered by Bhrezhnev's tank columns. Two assassinations marked the year, that of Martin Luther King in April, followed by the death of Robert Kennedy in June. Britain revived its efforts to join the European Economic Community. In Africa, Rhodesia's earlier unilateral declaration of independence was spawning unexpected consequences. President Lyndon Johnson that year declared his unwillingness to contest the presidential elections because of the agony of the Vietnam War. In contrast to the mood of light heartedness and expectation that was so evident throughout Canada's electoral events in 1968, the Chicago Democratic Party Convention was marked by riots, bullying and police brutality.

In retrospect, Canada in 1968 was an island of calm in a land-

scape of anguish and instability. In the modern world there is no inoculation against infection in such circumstances. We were a mid-sized country geographically located between two super-powers implacably engaged in a cold war marked by nuclear sabre-rattling and surrogate conflicts in many parts of the world. The attitudes of politicians, publics and academics in both countries measured the East-West relationship in zero-sum terms. At the date of the Trudeau election victory — June 25 — there was in place a nuclear limited test ban treaty, and the non-proliferation treaty would be opened for signature 10 days later. Not yet, however, was there either a seabed or an anti-ballistic missile treaty, nor were there in place many of the confidence-building measures which followed much later.

The People's Republic of China, representing one quarter of the population of the world, was still denied a seat in the United Nations. The plight of the developing countries, many of them only recently independent, was becoming evident to Canada and other nations but the volume of official development assistance flowing to them was very limited. From Canada in 1968 it was only 0.19% of GNP, notwithstanding the advocacy of Lester Pearson that 0.7% should be the norm. And despite such far-reaching accidents as the grounding of the *Torrey Canyon* in the English Channel there was still only a vague appreciation of the dangers of environmental degradation.

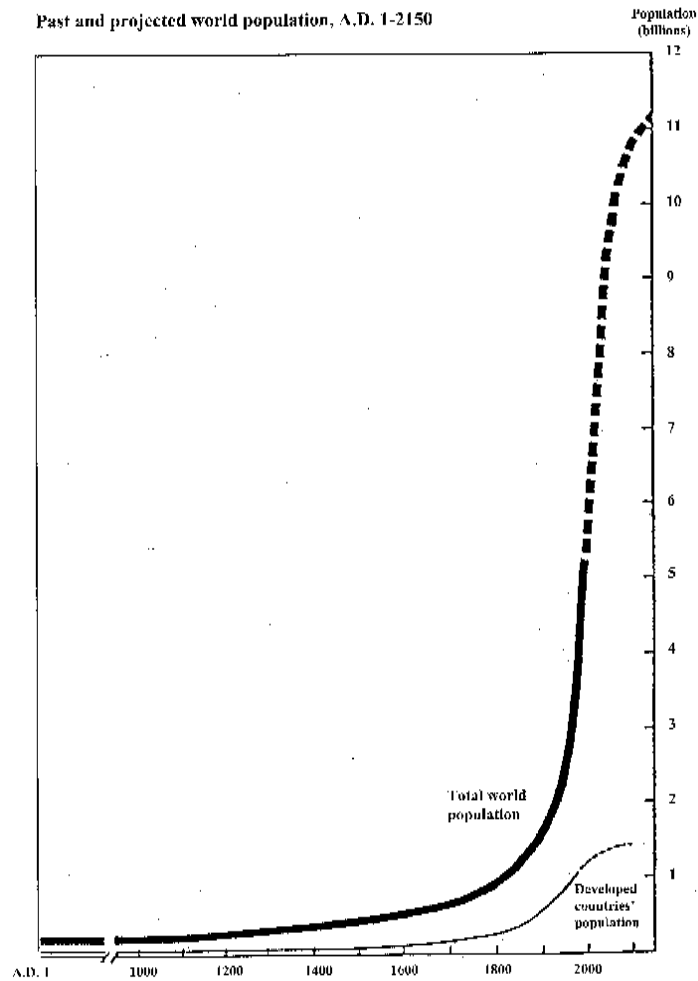
This, then, was the world that Pierre Trudeau faced in 1968 — one very different from the one he departed in 1984; one exceedingly different from the world of November 1995. What role did Canadian foreign policy play in that transformation? It is not an easy question to answer because of the multiplicity of variables. In theory, foreign policy — thoughtfully conceived and carefully designed — anticipates and precedes the conduct of foreign relations. We all know that the theory cannot always be counted upon. The reason, as Winston Churchill would say, is that “history is just one damn thing after another.” And nowhere is that more obvious than in the field of foreign relations: one damn thing after another — from actors, regions, and capitals unfamiliar or unthought of.

In such a world, is constancy possible? Can values be maintained? Can interests be advanced? Is coherence attainable? Should

it be sought? Pierre Trudeau thought so. One of my early recollections from those days in the Prime Minister's Office takes the form of a note in the P.M.'s handwriting addressed to me, scribbled across the corner of a document. "Worth reading," he had written. At a moment when the government was under criticism as a result of the Nigerian civil war, when our Arctic sovereignty was said to be in jeopardy, when we were facing major decisions with respect to NATO policy and nuclear weapons, what document had the Prime Minister read and passed to me with approval? It was the current newsletter of the Harvard Graduate Society for Advanced Study and Research. Side-barred were the remarks of Dean Franklin Ford of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Not the sort of document, you will agree, to capture the attention of most political leaders. The pertinent passage read, "No one who has not been introduced to the world of knowledge and acquainted, if only vicariously, with the complexities of decision making has been given a chance at a real education."

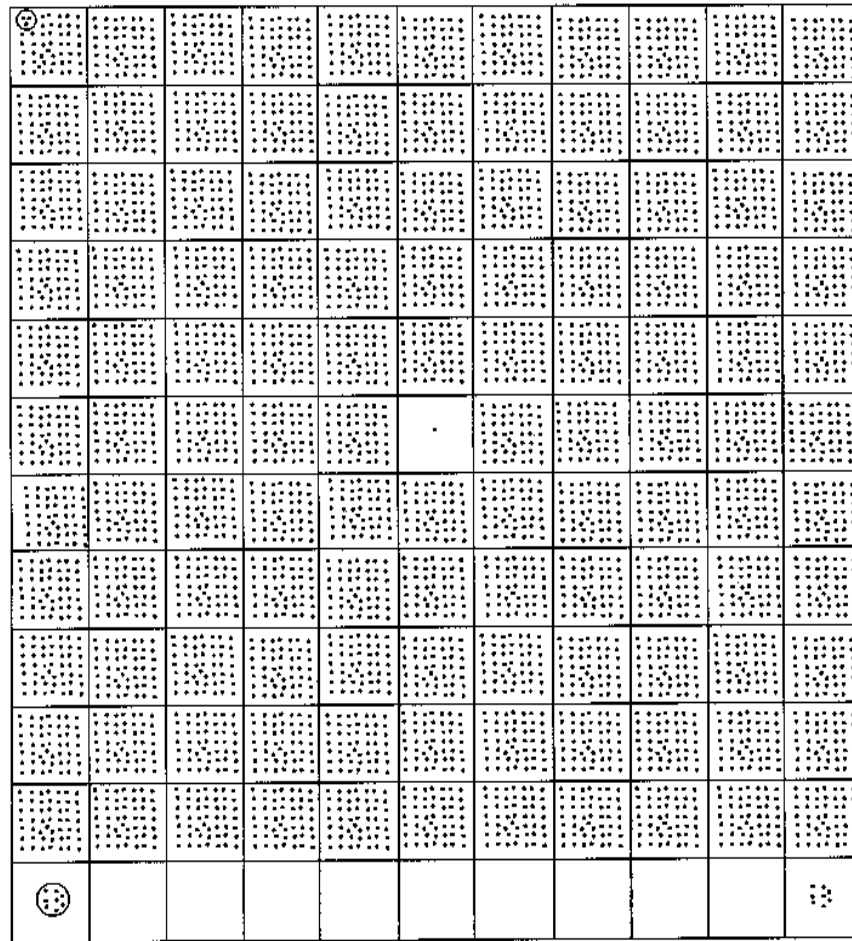
Pierre Trudeau looked upon governance as an opportunity to make a difference. In the field of foreign policy, the standard he employed was effectiveness.

In the earliest years, and throughout, two circumstances that were constantly on our mind were those represented by nuclear weapons and the size of the human species; in each instance, an unprecedented dimension, of a significance to influence overwhelmingly the well-being of every single inhabitant of the planet. These two phenomena represented two of the major tributaries flowing into the mainstream of international events. Each is best illustrated in graphic form. Figure 1 reflects the size, and the rate of growth, of the world's population. Revealed here is the astounding fact that the world's population doubled between 1950 and 1980, far and away the most rapid doubling in human history. Measured against my own life span, the world's population between the year of my birth and the turn of the century will triple. Equally as significant is the composition of that population component. In 1930 the world's population — 2 billion — was evenly divided between those living in the industrialized countries of the North and those living in the developing countries of the South. Conservative United Nations projections now indicate that in 2000, of the then world's population of 6 billion, that

**FIGURE 1**

Source: John D. Durand, "Historical Estimates of World Population: An Evaluation," *Population and Development Review* 3 (3, 1977).

of the North will continue to be 1 billion. The balance — 5 billion — will be in the South. In proportional terms, the composition will have shifted in 70 years from 1 to 1 to 5 to 1, with profound implications for every one of us, but most particularly our children and grandchildren. Figure 2 is quantitative as well, but of a quite different kind. This strange little graphic reveals the explosive power of nuclear

**FIGURE 2**

weapons. The single dot in the centre represents all of the firepower released in all of World War II, including the two atomic bombs exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That firepower totalled three megatons of explosive force. In the upper left hand corner are three dots enclosed in a circle — nine megatons, or three World War IIs. That is the amount of destructive capacity carried on a single United States Poseidon submarine. In the lower left-hand corner, again in a circle, are eight dots — eight World War IIs, 24 megatons, the arma-



ment of a single United States Trident submarine prior to the introduction of the immensely more powerful D-5 missiles. Any two of the other squares — 300 megatons — is sufficient to destroy every single large and medium-sized city in the world. The entire chart, 18,000 megatons, 6,000 World War IIs, represented the nuclear arsenals of the five nuclear weapons states in the world — a chilling reflection of the world of the 1970s, and not substantially different from the world of the 1990s.

It was in this world of swelling populations and swelling nuclear arsenals that I entered the Prime Minister's Office in 1968. Aware as I thought I was at that time of the realities of international life and political vagaries, I quickly found that much would surprise me. One of those surprises came in the form of the first question posed to the new Prime Minister in the House of Commons in October 1968. At the time one of my responsibilities was to assist him in preparing for the daily Question Period. As you know, under Canadian Parliamentary rules, unlike British rules, questions could be posed without notice. The Prime Minister, by Canadian custom, may be questioned every day, again unlike the British system. What would this first question after the election be about? Unemployment? The welfare system? Federal-provincial relations? None of these. The first question was about the Nigerian civil war. It was posed by Robert Stanfield, recently chosen leader of the official opposition, to Pierre Trudeau, the new Prime Minister. The subject matter took us all by surprise. A foreign policy issue, one that would remain with us for many months to come.

Nor would surprises disappear. One other of many took place in the form of a telephone call from Zbigniew Brzezinski, the United States National Security Advisor, a decade later in January of 1978. He was calling to tell me that Cosmos 954, the orbiting Soviet nuclear-powered satellite, had come down in the Northwest Territories. It was not a surprise that it was coming down, the surprise was where it was down. Canada was prepared for a Territories impact but the expectation in the scientific community was that the crash site would more likely be in the South Atlantic. Another surprise was the time of the telephone call — about 7:00 in the morning. I was at home, shaving. Brzezinski was in his White House office, part of the Carter

team that prided itself on its early starts — tennis games and briefings at the crack of dawn. “Ivan,” said Zbig, “it’s down,” quickly giving me the crash site coordinates in minutes and seconds. A response was required of me. Should I tell Brzezinski that he had caught me at home, a razor in one hand, the phone in the other? Canadian pride would not permit such a confession. I asked him to repeat the figures, noting them, then quickly began making my own telephone calls. First to the Operations Officers at National Defence and External Affairs, then — and most tenderly — to awaken my sleeping Prime Minister with the news of what might be, but fortunately was not, a catastrophe of considerable proportions.

Another telephone call with Zbig comes to mind, this one initiated by me. It took place on the eve of a NATO summit in Europe in the Spring of 1977. The Prime Minister had asked me what President Carter’s response might be to a certain expected initiative. I didn’t know but undertook to enquire. I had always wanted to employ the new secure telephone line that had recently been installed, permitting direct calls between the PMO and the White House. Here was a perfect opportunity. I lifted the receiver and instantly heard a voice at the other end of the line: “Marine Master Sergeant John Anderson, Sir.” The military voice prompted me to stand erect. “Ivan Head, Prime Minister’s Office, Ottawa, Sergeant. Please connect me to Zbigniew Brzezinski.” There was a pause, then the Marine’s voice again, this time considerably less confident. “Excuse me, sir. Could you spell that?” So much, I thought, for the saving grace of modern technologies in the nuclear age. If this hot line, in these tranquil circumstances, was so subject to human fallibility, how could the world put faith on so-called “fail-safe” systems under immense pressure.

Throughout these years the challenges assumed varying forms, but in their entirety transformed into a single question. How, over time, does a government deal consistently and effectively with such a variety of circumstances, all the time remaining true to national values? By the late 1960s, the complexities of the international community had led to the creation of a multitude of fora in which international decisions were taken, which sometimes assisted, sometimes confused, the search for solutions. From 1945 onward,

Canada had chosen to pursue its foreign policy objectives in a number of multilateral associations, and wisely so. We were not so powerful as to stand up to the world successfully on our own. As a member of a group of nations we could seek and forge communities of interest. This Canada did, with great success, in the Commonwealth, in the United Nations, in NATO. Canada's skills in these respects had been honed in the productive days at the conclusion of World War II, where our architectural role in the creation of the U.N. and the Bretton Woods institutions was widely, and properly, acclaimed.

Not all foreign policy issues, however, can be addressed multilaterally. Bilateral relations with a multitude of countries are always demanding. Especially so is this the case when dealing with the United States, the elephant that is the single most influential factor in Canada's world. To diminish that influence, multilateral fora can without question often assist. Many, many issues in the sophisticated Canada-US relationship remain bilateral, however, and exceedingly demanding. Creating structures with rules-based processes and dispute-resolution mechanisms is absolutely essential for the well-being of Canada, and all those more than 180 countries that do not enjoy mega-power status as we deal with the powerful countries. Rules and structures contribute to the stability of even bilateral relationships. This factor was essential in the decision to enter into NORAD with the United States. Had we not done so, agreeing to engage cooperatively in the surveillance and defence of our own far-flung territory, with a well-understood division of roles and responsibilities, there is no question but that the United States would have undertaken many of those tasks unilaterally for it would have been in its vital national security interests to do so.

A depth of human talent is required, and a considerable burden of coordination the consequence, when a state pursues an integrated foreign policy in a constructive, responsible fashion. In the international diplomatic environment, as in a modern post-industrial economy, the key to success is a wealth of talented, well-trained people. It is this requirement that is so intimidating to developing countries; it is this expense that is so weighty to national budgets everywhere. When Pierre Trudeau came to office in 1968, Canada was an elected member of the Security Council, as it had been twice

before. It would be re-elected once more during the Trudeau era, in 1977-78, then later still in 1989-90. A two-year term on the Security Council adds a whole new layer of responsibility, of policy and decision making.

As even the seemingly most domestic of issues become internationalized, a competition for policy primacy grows among government departments. This demands a coordination function within the government, sometimes more elusive than the same task on an international plane. When I was a junior foreign service officer, serving in Kuala Lumpur in the early 1960s, I was a member of the Canadian delegation to an international conference organizing the extension of a submarine telephone cable. At that time only one department of government, in addition to External Affairs, was interested in the project. In the result, the coordination challenge was simply met. A decade later, when the *Manhattan* was transiting the Northwest Passage, those departments claiming a major policy role, in addition to External Affairs, were National Defence, Northern Affairs, Fisheries and Oceans, Transport, and Energy, Mines and Resources — each of them insistent upon their own primacy. Under those circumstances deadlock can be avoided, and imaginative policy making made possible, only if there exists strong leadership and a respected mechanism to encourage coherence and cooperation among the competing actors and interests.

In the United States, the office created to play that role was the National Security Council, the lead official of which is the National Security Advisor. This was the mechanism employed to balance the interests, and channel the proposals, of the major foreign policy actors: State, Defence, CIA, etc. From the NSC the President would receive some degree of agreed upon assessment of world circumstances and some range of policy proposals. Understandably, therefore, the National Security Advisor was a powerful figure, especially if — as was not always the case — the incumbent was an intelligent, talented and determined individual. The legendary McGeorge Bundy discharged the role with considerable honour. Later, Henry Kissinger accrued an immense amount of personal influence during his term, leading to his eventual appointment as Secretary of State.

The Westminster system of government followed by Canada utilizes a form of collective, or cabinet, decision-making quite unknown in the United States. The leadership of a Prime Minister depends upon the confidence of his or her cabinet colleagues, and thereafter, of the House of Commons. No non-elected official could possibly occupy a position that challenged the supremacy of responsible ministers. My role as a policy advisor to the Prime Minister — notwithstanding the often imaginative criticism of the press — was never intended to be, and could not have been, other than one of representing the views of the Prime Minister within the government apparatus, and communicating them without. Were my role to diminish the authority of responsible ministers, I would have been a liability.

The need for the communications and consultative role became especially evident once President Nixon began to utilize Henry Kissinger as his intermediary with foreign leaders. Quickly other governments — Canada was far from the only one — realized that in order to be able to communicate with the President through Kissinger, a counterpart position was necessary. For this reason I became one of ever-so-many officials in governments around the world who would communicate and consult with the National Security Advisor and with one another. During my term, there were several successors to Henry Kissinger, with each of whom — as with Henry — I spoke frequently by telephone and in person: Al Haig, later Secretary of State, famed for his “I’m in charge” comment following the attempted assassination of President Reagan, Brent Scowcroft, and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

So novel was this role that the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University launched a faculty research project to determine how various governments employed it. At one point in the mid 1980s I was invited to Cambridge along with my good friends Mac Bundy and Shirley Williams of Britain to participate in discussions and interrogations by the several Harvard professors engaged in this project. A major theme of our discussions, and a task common to all who held this unusual position, was the coordinative function. In the multi-layered structure of modern governments, formal mechanisms are not in every instance best suited to shape policy and

especially not if novel circumstance demanded innovative responses. In this respect I enjoyed one advantage over my counterparts in other capitals, most certainly in Washington, because I had the responsibility of writing all Prime Minister Trudeau's foreign policy speeches. Policy is often initially revealed in Prime Ministerial statements. In the parlance of the craft, he who controls the final draft occupies an influential position. If one controls the first draft as well, as I did, the position is even more enviable.

Earlier this evening I repeated Churchill's "one damn thing after another" comment. When that cascade of activity is combined with Dean Franklin Ford's reference to the "complexities of decision making," one gains some sense of the rigours of Ford's "real education." Before concluding, I should like to offer as example the sequence of major events that cascaded upon us in those first months of government, events that challenged the discipline and the vigour of ministers and officials alike. Among the many unexpected challenges was the reaction of the Canadian public to the sudden outbreak of civil war in Nigeria where the breakaway rebel territory calling itself Biafra skillfully commanded an immense public relations campaign. Much more than any other country in the world, Canadians were seized with the barbarism of this struggle. The subject dominated Question Period for months on end. In January 1969 a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting required preparation and attendance (in London, England). During that first year and a half came the voyage of the *Manhattan*, then, coincidentally, the urgent timetable dictated by NATO for a Canadian alliance commitment, and the brevity of the window of opportunity for a Canadian withdrawal from the counter-productive nuclear strike role in Europe. Coincidental as well was the crisis erupting in Southern Africa consequent upon Britain's decision to supply armaments to the apartheid Republic of South Africa and the Commonwealth appeal to Pierre Trudeau to resolve it. Shortly thereafter President Nixon introduced his damaging policy of "Nixonomics."

In each of these instances, as in those that followed in the years thereafter — both those in response to issues arising elsewhere, and those that took the form of Canadian initiatives — the desire of Canadians to meet challenges constructively and effectively was well

understood by the government, the opposition, and the press. Differences arose, of course, but most often in the choice of policy responses, not in the decision to act. The outcomes overall, I still believe, were constructive and positive.

Sixteen years of activity cannot, of course, be captured in a single lecture. My modest suggestion to those of you wishing to canvas more thoroughly this compelling period is to read the book. Quite properly, it will be left to historians to assess whether our endeavours to function as an effective power were satisfactory. In any catalogue of achievements will be found the inclusion of Canada as a full member into the Western Economic Summit, later to be called the G-7. In many respects this event marked the attainment of a new international plateau for Canada. For the first time ever, Canada became a permanent player in the major leagues.

Before closing, I should like to touch on a theme with which Pierre Trudeau and I conclude our volume, the theme of values. A constant Canadian goal throughout that period, achieved more satisfactorily in some instances than in others, was adherence to ethical standards of conduct and of policies. Our attempt took the form of a dedication to the enhancement of human dignity; our quest was for a world order based upon rules, for a just international society without which there could not be a just domestic society. The elements of a just society, of course, perhaps especially in the international arena, do not remain constant throughout history, nor do the standards of measurement. The current criteria, quite different from those in classical periods, include respect for human dignity and human security, dedication to a wholesome natural environment, abolition of the concept that war can be just, and promotion of democratic forms of governance. Nor are the instruments of influence what they once were. Military might is no longer an effective response nor an effective guarantor of national interest. The new instruments are economic, scientific, cultural, and civil — sectors of activity in which Canada, with its long traditions of decency and fairness, can excel. These instruments will prevail for they are the fibres of the fabric we call community. They are, after all, the true determinants of national interest for they reflect and respect substantive values, not simply the appearance of values.

The historians are yet to be heard from but I suggest that the contemporary international community has already reached judgement about Canada's overall performance. In its annual measurement of human well-being, the United Nations Human Development Report has repeatedly placed Canada, of all nations in the world, in the first or second position overall. Our low-key response as a society to this determination is, I suppose, characteristic and laudatory. I confess, however, that I regard this ranking as the ultimate measure of Canadian accomplishment both domestically and internationally. It is proof, I submit, of the accuracy of Laurier's prediction that "Le vingtième siècle sera le siècle du Canada." (The twentieth century belongs to Canada.)

In conclusion, please permit me to utilize still another quotation, this time the epigraph that we employed for the frontispiece of our book. It is drawn from the work of Hugo Grotius, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutchman often referred to as "the father of international law." The words convey accurately the belief that Pierre Trudeau and I shared as we contributed to the shaping of foreign policy. "... when a certain Spartan king had said 'Happy that republic which has for its boundaries the spear and the sword,' Pompey corrected him, and said, 'Happy rather that which has justice for its boundary.'"

#### REFERENCE:

Ivan L. Head and Pierre Trudeau, *The Canadian Way; Shaping Canada's Foreign Policy 1968-1984*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1995.