

John W. Holmes

# The unquiet diplomat—Lester B. Pearson

*Edited and introduced by Adam Chapnick*

*In 1973 John Holmes permanently relinquished his position as director-general of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) and assumed the somewhat less onerous role of counsellor. It was a busy time for Holmes: his Killam research grant—meant to support a two or three volume history of Canadian external relations during the 1940s and 1950s—had just been renewed and he was in the midst of drafting the official proposal for what later became The Shaping of Peace for the University of Toronto Press. In September he began to teach a course at Glendon College on international organization to complement his already popular class in Canadian foreign policy, and around the same time agreed to accept senior undergraduates into his graduate-level seminar in Canadian foreign policy at the University of Toronto. He also remained an active participant on a number of academic and nongovernmental boards and councils and continued to deliver well over four public lectures or conference presentations each academic month.*

*When Holmes received a request from Andrew Kerekes of the Journal*

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of Canadian Studies (JCS) to write a 5000-word essay on Lester Pearson in January 1974, he was, not surprisingly, reluctant. He liked the journal and was a deep admirer of his recently deceased former colleague and mentor in the Department of External Affairs, but the pressure of writing a book that was already a year late and the all of the new teaching responsibilities seemed overwhelming. He clearly could not say yes, but his interest in composing a reflective paper on Pearsonian diplomacy that might promote interest in and respect for his close friend's accomplishments as a civil servant and then as prime minister kept Holmes from turning Kerekes down completely. Instead, he suggested that if the staff at the journal were still interested in a contribution from him in the fall, they might contact him again.<sup>1</sup>

The publisher of the JCS, Ian Collins, followed up with the man then known to many as the dean of Canadian external relations that autumn. September 1974, however, marked the beginning of a new academic year, and Holmes's courses at Glendon had become so popular that he had decided to split each one into two sections. This meant that along with the class at Toronto, he was now teaching five seminars per week. His university obligations, he explained to Collins, along with a still incomplete manuscript, meant that he could not commit to even attempt to draft an essay until the following spring. Holmes likely suspected that this second delay would cause the JCS to seek out someone else to write the paper, but the publisher replied that he was willing to wait.

Just days after he had mailed his letter to Collins, Holmes received a note from an old friend and former colleague then teaching at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), Peyton Lyon. It was a form letter, addressed to 54 of Lester Pearson's closest living associates. Lyon hoped that the invitees would contribute to a compilation that he planned to call *For the Love of Mike*. Although *International Journal* had published a special issue devoted to Pearson in the winter of 1973-74 and NPSIA was about to publish a series of essays in his memory,<sup>2</sup> Lyon suggested that neither work represented the thoughts of his closest friends and colleagues specifically as they related to Pearson's philosophy or career.

1 The information for this introduction is drawn largely from the Holmes papers. See the John Holmes papers, box 20, file 9 (book chapters [in *For the Love of Mike*]), Trinity College Archives, Toronto.

2 Michael G. Fry, ed., *Freedom and Change: Essays in Honour of Lester B. Pearson* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975).

*This was not to be an extended tribute. “As Pearson himself would have wished,” wrote Lyon, “we should discuss his failings and disappointments as well as his talents and triumphs.”*<sup>3</sup>

Arnold Smith, another former Pearson colleague and the forthcoming Lester B. Pearson Chair of International Affairs at Carleton, as well as Holmes, Wynne Plumptre, and Pearson’s son Geoffrey would help coordinate the project, and any royalties from the book would be directed to a scholarship in conflict resolution named after the former prime minister.<sup>4</sup> Lyon was vague on the length and style of the pieces, suggesting that they could be as short as two pages or as long as 40.

The request was one that Holmes couldn’t refuse. “I am tempted to try...to write, in as hard-boiled terms as possible an argument about the great practical benefits of nice-guy diplomacy as an attack on the current cynical school,” he wrote back. “It is hard to do that without falling into the traditional eulogistic clichés but it might be possible. I could look at some of his failures—the Philadelphia speech for example—and it might be a chance to put that incident in perspective.” The previous commitment to the JCS was a problem, however, and Lyon agreed that it might be best to determine whether the journal would be willing to accept a text that would also be published elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Holmes decided to put his thoughts on paper first and deal with the journal afterwards. Eight months later, in the summer of 1976, he submitted a first draft. Lyon thought that it was certainly appropriate for the collection, but implied that he would be forwarding a series of minor suggested changes to the organization of the piece in time.

Two months later, Lyon wrote to Holmes, “You may be wondering about our proposed volume of essays by associates of Lester Pearson dealing with the man and his work. We have received a dozen contributions, including yours, but only two are more than five pages long, and we are far short of a book. We have promises of a dozen substantial essays and are not letting the promisers forget. Please be patient.”<sup>6</sup> Never one to let his work go unpublished (for good reason), Holmes wrote back to Collins of the JCS, offering him the article that had been requested almost three years earlier. They later spoke on the telephone, and Holmes mailed him a draft to consider.

3 Peyton Lyon to Holmes, 9 October 1975, in Holmes papers, Box 20, File 9.

4 Handwritten at the bottom of Holmes’s copy of the letter was a brief note apologizing for using his name without asking and hoping that he would agree to help out.

5 Holmes to Lyon, 20 October 1975, in *Ibid.*

*The essay never appeared in the Journal of Canadian Studies and Lyon never did manage to complete the book project. Holmes's analysis has therefore remained unpublished among his papers in the archives ever since. Fifty-one years after Pearson's Nobel Prize-winning performance during the Suez Crisis, and in the midst of what have been challenging years for the Canadian-American relationship, it seems appropriate to provide the essay with the audience that it clearly deserves. While admittedly unpolished in its original form, Holmes's study of Pearsonian diplomacy provides firsthand insight into the thinking and actions of one of the most significant personalities in the history of Canadian external relations. His comments specifically on difficulties in dealing with the United States remain as relevant today as they were when they were written.*

*Since Holmes was somewhat sensitive about having his words edited by individuals he did not know, I have chosen to leave the writing almost entirely in tact. Scholars who consult the Holmes papers will find that I have merely eliminated repetition, added headings, inserted the footnotes that Mr. Holmes had not yet added, and reorganized the paper (partially in response to Lyon's implied comments) to make it easier for today's readers to follow. Admirers of John Holmes will certainly still recognize the thoughtfulness, perceptiveness, and generally good writing that characterized all of his work.*

Adam Chapnick

That Mike Pearson was chief sponsor and practitioner of a brand of diplomacy known as “quiet” has become part of the mythology of Canadian foreign policy. As diplomacy has, from time immemorial, been quiet and loud, hot and cold, the critics of Canada’s so-called “quiet diplomacy” provoked confusion. Their real argument was that Canadian governments had suffered under the illusion that they could best influence a great power—one in particular—by using their influence in sweet persuasion behind the scenes. The charge was that they had not thereby succeeded in preventing Americans from buying up Canadian resources or bombing Indochina. The assumption was presumably that these noble ends would have been accomplished by public denunciation. The brute fact that any practicing diplomat has to face is, of course, that neither is likely to succeed, that moving a great power involves a complex strategy, the deft coordination of private representation in advance if there is a case for it, public pressure when that would not be counterproductive, tactful indications that further cooperation or non-cooperation may be at stake, and if at all possible the combination with other powers to multiply the pressure.

Mr. Pearson’s genius was his ability to mastermind this kind of mixed strategy. He had private appeal—in Washington, London, or even Peking—which worked not always but often. He had public appeal, as a speechmaker and especially in international conferences. The reputation and affection he had acquired in the United Nations Assembly, for example, considerably strengthened his quiet diplomacy. Because of his capacity to organize support or opposition for causes dear to the heart of the powers, he was respected and a little feared.

#### THE MASTER TECHNICIAN

Mike Pearson was a technical virtuoso. As an experienced professional he knew, of course, that a diplomat who failed to regard other people’s confidences would be a failed diplomat indeed. He had had a close and vivid experience in Washington of the advantages for Canada in the war and post-war period of working with officials who out of friendship or, more important, an appreciation of the value of the Canadian connection would circumvent the prejudices of congress. On the other hand, he was less secretive than most of his colleagues in External Affairs, genuinely sympathetic to the press, and very much aware of the need to recognize public opinion as a factor not to be ignored in diplomacy. He listened to the good correspondents and knew also how to use them. When a Canadian voice might

not be heard far from the East River, he knew how to fly a kite in the *New York Times* through his friend, Scotty Reston. Whereas in External Affairs there was perhaps excessive scepticism of rhetoric, Mike knew that great causes needed to rouse public emotion.

When the United Nations was launched at the Hot Springs conference in 1943, External Affairs was somewhat dubious. President Roosevelt obviously wanted to use this gathering more as a demonstration of allied solidarity and potency than as a serious discussion of postwar food problems. Mr. Pearson, on the other hand, saw the value at that time in declarations of good intention and threw himself into the Hot Springs conference with a more appropriate mixture of scepticism and enthusiasm, able to see it as an earnest attempt of good intentions and also as an attempt to “combine the Congress of Vienna with a Rotary meeting.”<sup>7</sup> He urged the conference to make a grand declaration, a program for which his colleagues had some distaste. Although he was not a great orator, he spent a good deal of time on moving phrases to stir up support for good causes—and he was exceedingly quotable.

#### THE SUBTLE NEGOTIATOR

Declarations were important, but loud diplomacy was, as argued in the Merchant-Heeney Report, a last resort. There were great tactical advantages in trying to get the agreement of another country before it had stated its position. Confrontation diplomacy might be fun for the citizens of a power on the make, but it was less often effective. There is a typical Pearson comment in his memoirs about the famous article two in NATO, the so-called “Canadian article” that specified the importance for the alliance of working together on economic and social questions. Article two was opposed by the Americans who feared—or who at least thought congress would fear—that it would make the United States a permanent contributor to the European economy. Dean Acheson was particularly vitriolic on the subject, and in his book written many years later he claimed that he had “defused” the Canadian draft by bringing it in line with the objections of the United States senate. In his dealings with the Canadians at the time, Acheson always gave the impression that he was being pressed by the senate, but one is inclined to wonder in retrospect if he was not using the senate to support objections

6 Lyon to Holmes, 18 October 1976, in *Ibid.*

7 Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, vol. 1, 1897-1948 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 247.

which were basically his own. Pearson's comment on this, in his own memoirs, was that "[i]n diplomacy, it is a good result when your victory is also felt by the other side to be a success. I was happy that Dean Acheson could report to the President that he had successfully dealt with the rather tiresome Canadians. In my turn I could report on 9 March to the Cabinet that 'As a result of representations by the Canadian Government Article 2 has been substantially strengthened' over the first draft."<sup>8</sup>

His attitude on article two was incidentally never as fanatical as either his critics or his supporters have often suggested. There were certainly good alliance reasons and good Canadian reasons for pressing it. He realized, however, sooner than some of his colleagues that it was becoming an artificial issue, that forcing a literal interpretation would serve no purpose. His point of view was well expressed in a reply in the house on 1 April 1952 to the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which attacked the government on its failure to get anywhere with article two. After claiming that Canada had done more than any other country to achieve implementation of the article by developing economic and political cooperation in building the Atlantic community, he pointed out that no one country could determine NATO policy on its own. Then he added that if they looked at article two they would find that unlike certain other articles in the treaty it did not provide specifically for any special NATO machinery. Nor did it necessarily entail joint programs of action among member nations, although that might, of course, develop. He described article two as "a rule of conduct which member nations undertake to follow in their internal and external policies generally, and not merely in their policy vis-à-vis one another." He added, "We are not so concerned in NATO with talking about some grandiose or airy Atlantic NATO structure...as we are in laying foundations on which to build the future."<sup>9</sup>

#### THE CAGEY TACTICIAN

It was his lively sense of humour that gave Mike his sense of proportion. He could always see himself as others might see him. His capacity to defuse tense situations with a wisecrack is legendary. He could use it also to score a point—often devastatingly but with a minimum of ill will. Sir Kenneth

<sup>8</sup> Both quotations cited in Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, vol. 2, John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 58.

Younger recalled to me an occasion during the Korean crisis when he was the British representative at a meeting called by US Secretary of State Dean Acheson to consider tactics. It was a time when Mr. Pearson had made very obvious his reservations about American policy in pressing to the borders of China and insisting on declaring China an aggressor just at the time when everyone was desperately anxious to persuade the Chinese to a truce. Acheson made his proposal and then asked the others present individually, mostly representatives of western countries, to state their views. When he concluded by assuming a consensus, Sir Kenneth drew his attention to the fact that he had omitted calling on the Canadian representative. Acheson said, "Oh well, we always count on Canada's being with us." Mr. Pearson smiled but said nothing. About an hour later, however, he introduced a proposal that would clearly not be to Acheson's liking by saying "Now, speaking on behalf of the United States and Canada...."

The issue of declaring China an aggressor at this particular point illustrates another interesting aspect of Pearsonian diplomacy, involving private representation and public statement. What does a country, and particularly a lesser power, do when it cannot get its own way and the world is going to move on in a direction it hadn't wanted? One can sulk. One can issue warnings and imprecations and sometimes no doubt these are justified. Whether one likes it or not, one must accept a decision of the majority or the veto of a great power as a fact of life and live with it.

In the days when Canada was a member of an alliance to which it adhered voluntarily and which in the Canadian view ought, insofar as possible, to present a united front in the interest of all members, especially difficult dilemmas were presented. There were always short- and long-range considerations. Pearson had quickly and loudly made known Canada's disapproval of United Nations forces moving into North Korea, as the security council had called only for the repulsion of aggression. He lost that round, but instead of walking out, he retreated to fall-back positions—a buffer zone, a warning to the Chinese, etc. When the Chinese did intervene he was proved to have been wise. The Americans may not have acknowledged this, but the assembly did, and Delhi and Peking did, so that his later role as an intermediary with the Chinese was set up.

In early 1951, Mr. Pearson thought that what was most needed at the moment of stalemate in the fighting was a truce, as clearly neither side was going to force the other to the point of unconditional surrender. He made public his uncertainty as to whether China was an aggressor or whether it

had not responded in fear to the presence of hostile forces at the Yalu. He argued hard and strong against the American determination, backed by growing fanaticism in congress. He failed to persuade the Americans to give up the project. The Americans were supported by a majority, even though some of the European allies agreed with the Canadian point of view but did not want to take a stand against the United States. There was a good argument for voting against the United States resolution, but there was also an argument for accepting majority opinion and, what seemed more important, indicating that Canada, in these grim circumstances, recognized a responsibility to accept a decision of its allies. The spectacle, of course, of having made public one's opposition and then succumbing, was not pretty.

Having waged some of this battle with the Americans, I felt very uncomfortable. Mr. Pearson used the same technique of an explanation of vote to say, quite frankly, why he had opposed the resolution and why he had voted for it. Candour was required and also an explanation of a position that was not black or white. The purpose was to indicate to the Chinese that there were those in the west who had some understanding of their situation and who would be interested, therefore, in working for a truce, but to make clear also that the Chinese would have to take into consideration the wide support the United States could count on in an ultimate situation. He was shrewd enough to know also, of course, that if he had voted against this United States resolution his chances of having any further influence in Washington would be considerably diminished. As for the Chinese, well, he did, later as the only non-Asian member of a tripartite ceasefire commission, discuss terms with them and later, as president of the general assembly, play a considerable role in moving towards the armistice. In the contacts we had with Chou-en-lai and his colleagues a few years following in Geneva, it was obvious that they had noted the explanation although they could hardly have been expected to approve the vote.

This technique of not accepting a yes/no abstention but rather of spelling out a qualified stance was a subtle use of loud diplomacy for precise ends. At the 1954 Geneva conference to seek the unification of Korea, for example, Canada was a member of the so-called United Nations side in discussion with the Communist powers. Mr. Pearson led a small minority in opposing the rabid positions of the Americans and South Koreans who, without regard to the strategic realities on the ground, preferred to assume that the United Nations could enforce its will in the whole of Korea. In the end Canada was outvoted by a large majority on the UN side. It accepted the

decision of the majority in the conference but made clear that it had not changed its opinion and was, therefore, free to stick to that position when the subject was raised again in subsequent sessions of the general assembly. Korea was not thereby reunited, but some contribution was perhaps made to rationality. The immediate reward for the independent stand was, of course, that Canada was preferred by the Chinese as the western member of the supervisory commissions for Indochina—a tribute to Canadian diplomacy and fair-mindedness that was not exactly a favour. It was never the best way to keep out of trouble.

#### THE GRAND STRATEGIST

As a diplomat, Mike was also a superb quarterback. The performance was usually public. Indeed the appeal to the public was an important element. Because of his talent for sports the comparison is obvious, but I find it unavoidable, particularly when thinking of him in the heat of the game. He was a strategist and tactician with a remarkable capacity for adapting methods and exploiting circumstances, even those that were adverse. As a grand strategist, he always had a vision of the kind of world he wanted to move towards even though he was too astute to tie himself to blueprints. Many men had as inspired a vision as he had. He was not as clear-headed as Hume Wrong or Norman Robertson in perceiving the shape of a possible world order. Few, however, could combine with his vision tactical genius. It was an athletic sense, stimulated by pressure and challenge, the need to take quick decisions with a prospect of the next and then the next step, as well as means of retreating or scoring from a different angle.

To suggest that he was a mere tactician, a deviser of clear plays is, of course, to underestimate his ability. In diplomacy ways and means are integral, particularly for a lesser-power diplomat who must live by his wits rather than his brawn. In the words of Raymond Aron, “Policy, like strategy, is an art in which everything depends on execution.”<sup>10</sup> The new order—which Mr. Pearson sought to build—was not a fixed structure, not a firm constitution, but an adaptable framework within which world politics could be played out in constantly shifting improvisations. Skilful diplomacy, the healing art as well as the capacity to secure national ends, is central to it. Peter Newman put it aptly: “He was not always successful, but his inter-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic: The United States and the World, 1945-1973* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), xii.

ventions somehow seemed to spark a progression of crises that precipitated their own solutions, like thunder clouds that send down the rain to clear a sultry day.”<sup>11</sup> Men like Mike—and there weren’t many—are essential in international organization not only for the causes they sponsor but also for the patterns they establish.

It was during the Suez crisis that his performance as quarterback is best illustrated. It was his crowning achievement and it involved years of training and experience, experimenting with plays and acquiring an intimate knowledge of the other players whether they were associates or antagonists. (No analogy should be pressed too far and the sporting figure breaks down if one thinks in terms of two teams confronting each other, for it was, of course, the essence of Pearsonian diplomacy to evade such confrontation.) Though part of his strength was the geniality, which made him look like an amateur, this was a thoroughly professional job.

In the United Nations he was at his best, because successful UN diplomacy requires, above all, team-manship. It requires a man who can work out a strategy and take command, but he must put together a majority to support him. It requires, to start with at least, the shadow of a plan, in this case the intermediary UN force—an idea that was in the air, not a sudden flash of revelation but one that needed shaping in rapidly evolving circumstances. One could start with the idea of turning the British and French into a UN team in order to persuade them to act under international control. That idea, it was soon clear, would have to be radically adjusted to get a majority vote from people who would convey no such benediction on “aggressors.” So he shifted ground, never forgetting, however, the need to cajole the British without alienating the Arabs and Asians. Pretending that offending members can be forced rather than persuaded and manipulated into changing their policies is the mistaken strategy of the amateur. UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld was another man with the instincts of a quarterback. He had his own strategy but both men worked superbly in tandem.

The Pearson touch was perhaps best illustrated when he reverted to his creative use of the abstention—a posture not much favoured by the advocates of sonorous diplomacy. In addition to the constituencies he had to bear in mind on the assembly front, there were the political consequences

<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Newman, “The heady time of a good and reasonable man: First hand, and superb,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 November 1973, 33.

back home of flatly confronting the British. If he supported them, however, he lost chances for a majority. On the first resolution, an American resolution that called on the British, French, and Israelis to withdraw, he would have to abstain. Although in theory abstention can be a good ground from which to build a compromise proposal because neither side has been alienated, and it had worked for Mr. Pearson in the past, it was nevertheless risky on an issue in which most representatives were passionately committed and didn't like neutrality.

There was a setback to begin with. Mr. Pearson was too late to get on the speaker's list. He adapted his play brilliantly by making an explanation of vote. The image of the passive abstainer was transformed by a speech which regretted that the resolution had not sought to come to grips with the root causes of the trouble. It was accompanied by what everyone wanted, a positive proposal. The ball was caught by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who offered support for a UN force. Although the members of the assembly would not say so, they all knew that the idea was a dud without American support. At the same time, the initiative must, to evade a Cold War line-up, have come from somewhere else and, be it noted, from somebody the assembly knew well from experience was not an agent of the Americans or the British.

There is no need to recall further the various plays which led to UNEF, all of which are recalled in *Mike*, volume 2.<sup>12</sup> As a member of Mike's team I recall being dazzled by his footwork. He was a great team man and listened to all of us, using us expertly in the building of the majority, and listening to our advice. He was always a listener, notably when you reported bad news that he would have to take into consideration. At various times I wasn't sure what he was up to myself, although I had infinite confidence. Mr. Pearson possessed, along with all of the essential diplomatic skills, the equally essential quality of moral conviction. Diplomacy is a great game, but the stakes are such that mere gamesmanship is never enough.

At that point in a diplomatic crisis, as in a game, one mind has to encompass the field. Although he was sick at heart over the whole affair and never lost sight of the tragedy involved, he was in high spirits, wisecracking, passing funny notes, and coping with such extravagances as demands for his personal intervention to get seats in the gallery for old friends. I recall when the pressure was most intense about midnight coming back from the delegates' lounge to give him the grim news from Budapest along with

<sup>12</sup> Pearson, *Mike*, vol. 2, 244-78.

reports I had just had from Polish friends. There would be another special session to deal with Hungary the next day, and he quickly wove that grim fact into his strategy. He was the man of the hour at the assembly, but he was shrewd enough to resist suggestions that he play an active part over Hungary. Not only did he know he had to conserve his strength and resources, but he was also keenly aware of the speed with which hyperactivity by a middle power could curdle a warm reputation.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE OUTSPOKEN CRITIC

There were a number of occasions on which Lester Pearson spoke out in what for him was blunt language—and sometimes in the United States. When he felt it necessary he spoke out even when United States opinion was inflamed. There was, for example, a speech he made, as close to the United States as possible, in Windsor on 15 November 1950. After the victorious Inchon landing the United Nations forces were marching to the northern parts of Korea. He had, along with some other allies, done all he could to persuade the Americans to stop at the old border. Having failed to get a UN majority to support this course, he was seeking all possible means to halt the UN forces before they reached the Chinese border. Quiet diplomacy having failed, there was a strong argument for speaking out—not that one Canadian voice alone would change minds but that it might be added to a chorus that needed leadership.

In Windsor he said, “We cannot entirely rule out the possibility that some genuine fear does play a considerable part in the formulation of the policy of the Soviet Union and its satellites. This possibility should be especially borne in mind...on any occasion when it is necessary to conduct defensive military operations close to the borders of Communist states. Here we should do what we can to reduce those fears to a minimum and to reassure bordering states that their legitimate interests will not be infringed.”<sup>14</sup> The Pearsonian way of uttering heresies was often to suggest they were ideas for consideration rather than firm conviction. In that case again neither quiet nor loud diplomacy got immediate results, but he had, as he intended, made a constructive contribution to the American and the

13 On the Hungarian situation, see John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 362, 370-76.

14 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 50/48, Department of External Affairs, 15 November 1950.

international debate on China policy.

In 1953-54 Mr. Pearson was still exceedingly worried by the excesses of American emotion on Asian questions and also about the obvious split developing between the United States and its European allies over Asian questions. Speaking at Harvard on 11 June 1953 he discussed two approaches to Asian communism and left little doubt as to the one he favoured: "There are some who believe that Asian Communism is an implacable foe, bound hand and foot to Moscow, and that to negotiate with it in any circumstances is futile and perilous.... There are others, however...who feel that Communism in Asia, though it may be far deeper and more sinister than 'agrarian reform,' is a social, economic and political development, growing out of special Asian conditions and one primarily for Asians to deal with; that the only justification for direct western intervention is when Communism expresses itself in military aggression. It is felt that our obligation in this matter is positive, not negative; not to intervene against Asian Communism, an intervention which would be stigmatized in Asia as Western and colonial, but to intervene in favour of democracy and to help Asian governments build up free and stable institutions which will defeat Communism by doing more for the welfare of the under-privileged and under-nourished millions of the East than Communism can ever hope to do."<sup>15</sup> This was a bold speech during the high tide of McCarthyism. The argument at Harvard was made on grounds of the necessity of maintaining a solid front of the alliance in the face of international communism. He was not arguing that the lesser allies should align themselves with the United States, but rather that Americans should recognize that the line they were taking on China was unacceptable to their allies.

It may be significant that these instances of loud diplomacy are concerned with Asia. The NATO alliance did not apply in Asia, although Mr. Pearson always recognized that there was some obligation to support the leader's vital interests wherever he was challenged. In a strict sense, however, Canada was aligned in Europe but not in Asia. It could take intermediary positions without disregarding any specific treaty obligations, although Mr. Pearson would never pretend to be neutral in general as distinct from specific issues. In Europe Mr. Pearson was inclined to accept not United States decisions but the clearly expressed will of NATO in combination.

There were times, however, when he spoke out loud on issues that were closely related to NATO strategy. Most notable was his defiance of John

<sup>15</sup> Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 53/30, 11 June 1953.

Foster Dulles on the theme of “massive retaliation.” Mr. Dulles on 12 January 1954 announced a Washington decision to depend in the future “primarily on a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means, and at places of our choosing.” It was a policy that Mr. Pearson could understand insofar as it was intended to counter what might be a Communist disposition to strike anywhere along the periphery of their great land mass with the western powers off guard. The implication, nevertheless, of threatening “massive retaliation” with nuclear power was very frightening.

So important was the issue that Mr. Pearson ventured a reply on Mr. Dulles’s home ground. In a speech of 15 March to the National Press Club in Washington he referred very specifically to the Dulles speech. He was conciliatory as usual, saying that he was not criticizing the new defence concept, which might turn out to be the best deterrent against aggression. It did, however, make diplomacy not less but even more important, “especially when we contemplate the ‘means’—including atomic—that may have to be used, the occasions when this should be done, and the effect—explosive possibly in more respects than one—it may have. Diplomacy includes two things: first the effort, patient and persistent, to settle differences with those whom we rightly fear, though at times, with a fear that seems to freeze us into diplomatic immobility or fire us, at other times with something almost like panic. Secondly, there is the other kind of diplomacy, now also more important than ever: the search for agreement between friends on policies and tactics and timing, so that ‘our choosing’ will mean an agreed collective decision, without prejudicing speedy and effective action in an emergency. Indeed, such agreement, after consultation and discussion, is, to put it bluntly, necessary, if this policy of preventing aggression by threat of immediate and overwhelming retaliation, is to work collectively.”

There were a few other straightforward comments such as, for example, a reference to the fact that the statement had aroused particular interest, “among those whose territories are only a few hundred miles from those great communist armies who could also act as an instrument of retaliation,” and a plan to work together in any new defence planning and policy “if the great coalition which we have formed for peace is not to be replaced by an entrenched continentalism which, I can assure you, makes no great appeal to your northern neighbour as the best way to prevent war or defeat aggression, and which is not likely to provide a solid basis for good United States-Canadian relations.”<sup>16</sup>

16 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 54/16, 15 March 1954. The Dulles quotation is from the Pearson speech as well.

There would be, of course, at the National Press Club a number of sophisticated American journalists who would like this speech. In the same way he had known that he would find more sympathy at Harvard than elsewhere for his views about China. He would be well aware of the nature of his audience as well as its geographic location. There was not much to be achieved by making a speech of this kind to be greeted with boos, hisses, and excommunication in Phoenix. A danger of this diplomacy, of course, was that it would look to a United States administration like complying with the US opposition and one only has to think in Canadian terms to realize how counterproductive such actions can be.

In these perilous times it was necessary to spell out Canadian policy explicitly. As Mr. Pearson had shown in the cases of Chinese “aggression” and Korean unification, the response to the requirements of alliance was not a simple yes or no. Early in 1955 American commitments to Formosa became such that Mr. Pearson stated publicly on 28 January, “[a]ny obligation which we might have in regard to Formosa could arise only from our responsibilities as a member of the United Nations.” Canada was not committed, he said, by American policies. He repeated an earlier statement that the People’s Republic would have to be a participant in any fruitful UN discussions on the crisis and he described that crisis as “this particular phase of what after all remains...a Chinese civil war.”<sup>17</sup> At this point there was sound reason for some quiet diplomacy as well. Mr. Dulles was not as upset as he might have been with what Mr. Pearson had said because he was trying to persuade Chiang to be cautious at the point. When he indicated privately to Mr. Pearson that he might persuade Chiang to withdraw from Quemoy and Matsu if the Communists refrained from attacking, Mr. Pearson, with Mr. Dulles’ tacit agreement, relayed this information to Nehru, who passed it on to Peking. Peking later acknowledged the message direct to Mr. St. Laurent. One cannot with certainty attribute cause and effect, but at any rate the fighting in that area began to slacken.

It was at about this time that Mr. Pearson made one of his boldest statements. Speaking on 14 March 1955 he said that “the neutrality of either of us [Canada or the United States], if the other were engaged in a major war in which its very existence were at stake, would be unthinkable.”<sup>18</sup> When questioned about this statement he explained in parliament on 24 March,

17 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 55/4, 28 January 1955. The speech was given on the CBC.

18 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 55/8, 14 March 1955.

“I want to reaffirm my view that we could not stand aloof from a major war which threatened the very existence of the people of the United States, but I must add in all frankness that I do not consider a conflict between two Chinese governments for possession of these Chinese coastal islands, Quemoy or the Matsus, to be such a situation, or one requiring any Canadian intervention in support of the Chinese nationalist regime.”<sup>19</sup> He coated this pill, as was his wont, with a tribute to the United States and an acknowledgement of the intractability of their enemies, but his spelling out of the Canadian obligation was loud and clear. It was an attempt to clarify in a particular circumstance the ambiguities which Mr. Pearson knew were inevitable in an alliance with a superpower. It seemed bolder then than it may have sounded later because at that time there was a general assumption that if the United States were at war Canada would be at war regardless.

When the United States did later become involved in a war in Asia—very real though undeclared—Canada did not regard it as one in which it should participate. Whether official Canadian attitudes and policies towards the Vietnam War were as neutral as they should have been is a matter for debate, but the essential point is that, as Mr. Pearson had pointed out in reference to the off-shore islands, the United States could on its own become involved in a war in Asia without Canada feeling obliged to take part as an active belligerent.

Mr. Pearson’s most publicized essay in loud diplomacy has been adjudged a failure. That was his speech in Philadelphia early in 1965 when he suggested that a bombing pause in North Vietnam might be advisable and went on to propose a great development program for the Mekong Valley as a better approach to the future in Indochina. It might have had some effect had it not been that US President Lyndon Johnson was, as later revealed in the Pentagon papers, at that point succumbing to pressure from his own hawks for more bombing. Furthermore, the president thought Mr. Pearson was in league with Senator Fulbright and other of his domestic enemies and that made him very angry. Finally, Johnson had up his sleeve a speech making a similar proposal for the Mekong, which would now look as if it was secondhand.

Mr. Pearson’s speech was, as usual, couched in the language of tribute to the good intentions and the leadership of the United States. His pill was always well-coated. Many Canadians thought he went much too far with the

19 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 55/10, 24 March 1955.

coating and were unimpressed by the seeming mildness of the suggestion. In diplomatic language, however, a suggestion of this kind is not mild. Even unique statesmen like General de Gaulle used guarded language in offering advice to their ally. Judging the success of this kind of diplomacy is difficult. One could hardly expect the president to announce that he had accepted foreign advice. Even Mr. Pearson himself later wrote in his memoirs, "We would have been pretty angry, I suppose, if any member of the American government had spoken, in Canada, on Canadian government policy as I have spoken in Philadelphia."<sup>20</sup> For this reason there is always the danger that foreign advice, if it is expressed publicly, makes it impossible for a government to change its mind. That is no doubt why Canadian Secretary of State Paul Martin opposed the Philadelphia speech. Later, President Ford was wisely advised not to condemn the Canadian government's decision on the Taiwan athletes at the Olympics because that would have made it impossible for the Canadian government to withdraw. Speeches like that in Philadelphia, however, have to be viewed in a broader perspective. The United States is not likely to be dissuaded by the voice of a single ally, but it was certainly affected in the end by the swelling chorus of disapproval abroad—from its closest friends in particular. There was some advantage in putting the Canadian voice on record in 1965 as dissenting from the bombing policy, although the impact may have been partially undermined by the preliminary tributes.

#### CONCLUSION

Life is not very easy for the diplomat who combines a superb sense of gamesmanship with moral convictions. It is not made easier, of course, by the criticism of moral absolutists on the right and left. Mike did sometimes bend too far backwards. Although he was very careful in his Philadelphia speech to praise American intentions rather than their policy and it must be remembered that their Vietnam intervention was on a small scale at that time, nevertheless his anxiety to get a hearing led him to misrepresent his true feelings about Vietnam. His greatest quality, an ability to see the other man's perspective, could sometimes lead him to be too understanding. He could never be trusted by the undersecretary to scold an erring ambassador. There were times, and this may well have been one of them, when his pref-

<sup>20</sup> Pearson, *Mike*, vol. 3, Munro and Inglis, eds. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 141.

erence for agreement over disagreement prevented him from making absolutely clear to a simple-minded president that he opposed the bombing of North Vietnam. No one who had been close to him on the subject of Vietnam could have been in any doubt about his real feelings on the subject. They were not black and white. The Americans were well intentioned, but their intervention on a military scale was a ghastly mistake. He had, after all, tried likewise to understand the Chinese intentions when they “invaded” Korea. Such qualified thinking is more easily expressed quietly than loudly when the public does not see beyond the satisfaction of standing up to be counted. It looks like letting the end justify the means, but when the means, in an atomic age, can cancel all ends, and when issues are rarely as clear-cut as the absolutists would have it, there is much to be said for the nice calculations of diplomacy, quiet and unquiet. He liked to quote with approval Louis Halle’s comment, “in the historical perspective the people identify statesmanship with strategic prudence, however much they abhor it in their moments of ideological excitement.”<sup>21</sup>

21 Pearson, cited in *Statements and Speeches* 56/28, 15 November 1956.