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**Learning To Go Our Own Way:  
Canadian Leaders Depart (At Least Slightly)  
From U.S. Foreign Policy**

To what extent is Canada able to pursue a truly independent foreign policy? It is gratifying to think our leaders are able to make dramatic changes—as political campaigns often imply—but we know that in practice they inherit a set of circumstances which they generally do not control. In the case of foreign policy, there are many countries at least as independent as we are, and we would expect to have to use persuasion in order to get any of them to co-operate in our plans. Canada has one very significant external factor or constraint that applies to Canadian governments of any stripe: we have a powerful friend in the United States, whose government can be counted on to make its interests and views well known to us. Until the post-World War II years, we had a similar position in the British sphere of influence, which often meant being taken for granted by decision-makers there.<sup>1</sup>

Today the Canadian government is unlikely to oppose the U.S. on a large number of issues, or over a long period of time. On the other hand, in a specific crisis or situation requiring a decision, it is difficult to find a Canadian leader who simply “does what the Americans want.” In a situation of tight deadlines and a certain amount of improvisation, there is usually evidence of a thoughtful attempt by Canadians to find our own way.<sup>2</sup> Generalizations may not be particularly helpful, since particular circumstances vary, and pose varying kinds and degrees of threat to a Canadian leader who may want to do something “independently” of others. Whether to pay the price for decision (or indecision) or not is to some extent a judgment call, testing and revealing the character of an individual leader. Our long and intensive military involvement in Afghanistan, now coming to an end, is a good example. In what follows we will discuss this fairly briefly, and then provide some context by looking at some foreign policy “crises” of the years when Lester Pearson and John Diefenbaker played leading roles.

## **Our Recent Adventure: Afghanistan and the World**

In the summer of 2011, Canadian combat operations in Kandahar province in Afghanistan came to an end. 2011 marked the eighth anniversary of Canada's substantial military involvement in Afghanistan, which was announced in February 2003. If the earlier, somewhat different operation in 2002 is included, Canada had been either fighting or on a combat footing in Afghanistan for nine years. This had been such a substantial commitment for our armed forces, there was widespread agreement that it precluded any similar operations in any other area of the world. We seem to have left behind our national identification with UN peacekeeping operations, and entered an era when we want to participate actively in "good wars," possibly achieving some of the humanitarian ends of our former peacekeeping missions by more forceful and effective means. Specifically in Afghanistan, our goal was to protect civilians from the Taliban and other insurgents and perpetrators of violence, while helping a new elected government, more secular and modernizing in various ways, establish itself and its own military force.

Key decisions on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan were made by three prime ministers, of two different political parties. In their book *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang describe how the Canadian commitment was "escalated" in stages:

The government first committed only to a short-term combat mission in 2002, then to a short-term stabilization mission in 2003 to 2004, then to provincial reconstruction, and then, almost imperceptibly, to battle—all for short periods of time.<sup>3</sup>

One of Stephen Harper's first acts as Prime Minister, in May 2006, was to ask Parliament to vote in favour of extending the planned termination of the Afghan mission a further two years: from 2007 to 2009. In March 2008 there was another vote to extend the mission yet again, to 2011.

How did this mission come to take over from all of our possible military commitments, which might also be development or humanitarian missions, around the world? According to

Stein and Lang, all the major decisions up to 2007 were made with the plans and desires of U.S. officials constantly in view. In January, 2002, Canada was hoping to be invited to take part in the European-dominated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Kabul, authorized by the UN. This was “not a combat mission,” but it involved more of a commitment than a peace-keeping role which had become the norm for Canada. The Canadian military was somewhat integrated with the U.S. military, and valued the training opportunities and intelligence that came from the “interoperability” between the two countries. During this time the Canadian military was always more in favour of a combat role than was the government. In the end Canada sent a small force to Kandahar in February 2002.

In February 2003, the Canadian government led by Jean Chrétien announced that the Canadian military would be “returning” to Afghanistan, this time leading (for one year) a European/NATO mission in Kabul as compared to the smaller, earlier mission in Kandahar. In March, a month later, it was announced that Canada would not be taking part in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The two decisions were obviously closely related.<sup>4</sup> Senior officials are quoted to the effect that the Afghanistan mission was understood as a way of “squaring the problem.” “The political problem, of course, was how to support Washington in its ‘War on Terror’ without supporting the war in Iraq.” It would be difficult at best to say “no” to participation in Iraq, while maintaining a good relationship with the U.S.; the Afghanistan mission was supposed to make this awkward time at least somewhat easier.

Canadian troops served in Kabul from 2002 until 2005, with their numbers peaking at close to 2000 in 2004. By 2004 other decisions had to be made, including whether to continue military operations in Afghanistan, and if so, what kind and where? On a separate issue that turned out to be linked to these, one of Paul Martin’s first decisions as Prime Minister, in 2003, was whether to participate in a U.S. program called Ballistic Missile Defence. Martin had publicly committed to joining this program before he became Prime Minister, but when he was briefed he was not persuaded of a clear benefit to Canada from joining. Once he was faced with disagreement from Parliament, from his

own caucus, and especially from Quebec, he decided against doing so.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the merits of that specific decision, there were repeated warnings from various sources, both in Canada and the U.S., that if Canada said “no” on BMD, it would be greatly appreciated if this was followed by a “yes” on some other matter—such as military participation in a dangerous part of Afghanistan. In particular, senior Canadian military officers were convinced that the U.S. was worried about the number of “No’s” they had received from Canada, including the “No” to joining in the invasion of Iraq; it was thought that one more “No” could seriously harm relations between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> After a great deal of discussion, a re-deployment from Kabul to Kandahar began in August 2005.

The Liberal government made a firm decision not to participate either in the invasion of Iraq or in Ballistic Missile Defence, and a somewhat half-hearted decision to escalate its military mission in Afghanistan. Harper seemed to offer a different approach. He said publicly that he supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and claimed to speak for most Canadians outside Quebec in taking that position; he criticized the decision not to participate in BMD, and one of his first major decisions was to extend the mission in Afghanistan. The latter decision might have been a matter of following the logic of what the Liberals had done; since the fighting was more intense than expected, it would do little good to leave in the short time that had been planned. Still, Harper was whole-hearted where the Liberals had been half-hearted; Liberal MPs and party leadership candidates were actually divided in the vote in the House that Harper insisted upon on May 17, 2006. Harper spoke of the necessity that Canada not “cut and run” from Afghanistan, and his Defence Minister suggested that Canadians should continue fighting in Afghanistan until the U.S. was satisfied that “retribution” for the 9/11 attacks had been successfully carried out. Harper differed from Martin in that he was not looking for possible humanitarian missions in a number of countries, such that Afghanistan may or may not have made the list. If Afghanistan needed more troops and other support, he would commit more with no hesitation.

Yet over time, Harper has demonstrated that he is not a “knee jerk pro-American” on Afghanistan and other issues. In September 2008, during the federal election campaign, he pledged that if he were re-elected, Canada would withdraw from Afghanistan completely by 2011—taking the decision by Parliament in March of that year very literally. This was not exactly what U.S. officials and the Canadian military leadership wanted to hear. In a way, both in extending Canada’s commitment to 2011, and in setting a specific date for Canada’s substantial withdrawal, Harper has acted contrary to the advice of the Manley panel, a group he had established. The national security reasons for fighting in Afghanistan—fighting the Taliban for the security of all Western nations, including Canada—have always been interwoven with more strictly humanitarian considerations, and with international law as expressed by the UN.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Suez Crisis (1956)**

The memoirs of Lester B. Pearson, who became Canada’s Minister of External Affairs in 1948, are a valuable guide to the Suez Crisis—his handling of which brought Pearson the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>8</sup> Gamal Abdel Nasser became President of Egypt in June 1956 (having been a member of a kind of junta since 1952, and then Prime Minister). On July 26, as part of a plan to raise money for the Aswan Dam, and as a show of independence, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. On September 23, Britain and France asked for a meeting of the UN Security Council to consider the “situation created by the unilateral action of the Egyptian Government in bringing to an end the system of international operation of the Suez Canal.” On October 13, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution setting out “six principles as a basis for a settlement of the Canal dispute.” Israeli forces invaded Egypt, and moved toward the Canal, on October 29. On October 30 the British and French, presenting themselves as peace-makers protecting access to the canal, set out an ultimatum to both Israel and Egypt, demanding that both sides “agree to a cease-fire, withdraw ten miles from the canal, and stop the fighting.” If this was not agreed to within twelve hours, “Anglo-French forces would have to move in and occupy

key points to keep canal traffic moving.” On October 31 the British and French, with no consultation with anyone else, including the United States, bombed the Canal Zone. Almost incredibly, this took place at the very time when “the Soviets were crushing the two-week-old Hungarian people’s rebellion.” The UN Security Council quickly referred the Suez issue to the General Assembly. Pearson was in his element.<sup>9</sup>

Pearson is at his most diplomatic in describing the role of U.S. officials during this crisis. On September 5, President Eisenhower said in Washington “that it was unthinkable that the United States would support the use of force.” At roughly the same time, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles developed the idea of a Suez Canal Users’ Association (SCUA) which would both include Egypt and, to some extent, take control away from Egypt. Dulles apparently saw this, and presented it to Britain, as a middle ground “between the alternatives of force and capitulation [to Egypt].” On September 12, Sir Anthony Eden suggested a version of this plan at a special session of the British Parliament. Pearson says he thought, and other professionals he talked to thought, that Nasser would never agree, “the new arrangement could hardly be put into operation without some kind of clash,” and therefore “not only would the SCUA scheme not work, but ... it probably was never meant to work.” By suggesting the U.S. plan was “never meant to work,” Pearson implies that the U.S. was actually being disingenuous to Britain specifically, and perhaps to the world.

Dulles himself “in effect, publicly invited Nasser to reject the SCUA scheme at a press conference in Washington on 13 September.” The British took this to mean that no combined U.S./British action was going to be possible. For reasons that were not immediately clear to Pearson and others, in fact, the British were left wondering where exactly the U.S. stood.

We were later told by a British source that at the end of August, Dulles had agreed with Eden and [Foreign Secretary Selwyn] Lloyd that Nasser was an evil and dangerous influence who should be removed from the Middle East political scene. Following this agreed assessment, a secret meeting took place in Washington

between the appropriate British and American officials .... Their agreed report began ... by setting forth explicitly the object of the exercise: the elimination of Colonel Nasser.

On September 13 Dulles said in a press statement that the U.S. had no intention of using force, but would send vessels to the area if “we” were met by force.

The British might well have believed that they were being given contradictory signals. It is plausible, based on Pearson’s account, that Dulles and Eisenhower both thought the British were quite anxious to proceed with force, and hoping for U.S. support in doing so. If the U.S. gave some, ambiguous indications of support, this might be all it would take to ensure the British went ahead, and the U.S. could then step forward as both a peacemaker, and a defender of new nationalist powers against the hated old European colonial powers.

Pearson’s great success followed from his suggestion that the first ever UN peacekeeping force be created and sent to the Canal Zone.<sup>10</sup> Pearson proposed a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to keep the peace in Egypt while a political settlement was worked out. A neutral force had to be created, not involving the major alliances of the time (NATO and the Warsaw Pact). Pearson had his plans in place just before the British and French forces actually invaded Egypt. There was a decision to exclude both British and French forces--which were already on the ground. One sticking point was whether Nasser would allow Canadian forces to take part. In the end Canada played a smaller part in the peacekeeping effort than Pearson had planned or promised. A bigger issue, more ominous for the future of this and similar UN operations, was that of the legal status of any peacekeeping force operating in the territory of a particular sovereign government. “Nasser ... insisted that the UN force should leave Egypt whenever, in the opinion of the Egyptians, their work had been accomplished.” Pearson objected to the inclusion of this condition in UN agreements, predicting that it would cause trouble in the future. In 1967, with no truly international solution to the status of the Canal having been arrived at, Nasser “requested”

that the UNEF leave, and they did so. This of course was the beginning of another round of war between Israel and her Arab neighbours. In any realistic judgment of medium to long-term results, Pearson's efforts must be judged a failure.

Of course Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize has often been regarded as one of Canada's proudest moments. Robert Bothwell has argued that Pearson demonstrated great skill—skill that perhaps only he could have deployed at the time—while also enjoying some strokes of luck. Many British officials wanted to find a way out of the Suez fiasco almost as soon as it was underway—and it was realized that the U.S. would not support the Anglo-French intervention. Anthony Eden himself seems to have believed that the U.S. and others would accept a *fait accompli*, and that he had succeeded in creating the illusion that his actions were authorized by the UN. “Pearson ... knew that the British would accept from him what they would not—or not yet—accept from the Americans.”

Pearson was also fortunate that the basic objective of the US government was the same as his own. It was, after all, a draft American resolution that he moved in order to get UNEF launched. Yet without Pearson's superb tactical sense of the UN, of what was possible and what was not, the American draft might not have worked.... It was important to move now, and it was important that Canada, not the United States, do the moving.<sup>11</sup>

Pearson showed a true diplomat's ability to see and understand the perspective of various participants in a crisis, and to see the difference between public and private positions.

Pearson no doubt thought at the time that he actually had a great deal of freedom to act without deferring to the U.S. For one thing, the Suez was of far less strategic interest to the U.S. than some other hotspots. There is plenty of evidence that the U.S. mainly wanted the issue resolved as quickly as possible, both so as to be able to focus on Central and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and East Asia on the other, and so as to keep Suez out of the U.S. election. Pearson's own account, however, writ-

ten some years later, changes this picture significantly. The U.S. was intervening directly, to a greater extent, and in a different way, than Pearson knew at the time. Apparently, however, Pearson did not know until later that the Brits were being secretly encouraged to use force by the U.S.

In any case, the U.S. got what they wanted; the fact that Pearson also achieved a great deal seems secondary. Pearson could criticize the Brits for being short-sighted in Suez. They could not succeed without getting rid of Nasser; this would be very hard to do; and even if they succeeded, what then? But Pearson's Nobel Prize-winning initiative was also short-sighted. The UN gave Nasser more or less what he wanted; in a few years he joined other Arab states in making war on Israel; the entire Middle East was arguably less stable, not more. Not only were the UN peace-keepers ultimately ineffective in Suez, they also did not establish a precedent for a peaceful resolution of the world's hot spots.

At the end of November 1956 the Canadian House of Commons debated both the Suez and Hungarian crises. John Diefenbaker, candidate for leadership of the Conservative party, took the line that the Soviet Union and Nasser were working together, and should be opposed by "the old alliance between Britain and the Commonwealth, France and the United States." He thereby lent some support to the view that Canada had betrayed both of her "mother countries"—Britain and France. His approach was statesmanlike, but it's not clear he had a good answer to the dilemmas raised by the Suez Crisis, any more than Pearson did.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the battle of slightly more than a decade between Pearson and Diefenbaker had been joined.

## **Bomarc**

In the federal election of Fall 1962, John Diefenbaker's Tories were reduced from a huge majority to a minority government. The crisis-ridden and unstable government only lasted a few months, and there was another election in the Spring of 1963 in which Pearson's Liberals were elected with a minority. One issue that came to the surface and caused a great deal of controversy during those months was that of Bomarc missiles, and

whether they should be armed with nuclear warheads. Diefenbaker had agreed, in 1958, to accept Bomarc missiles from the U.S. on Canadian soil as part of Canada's NORAD obligations. In 1959, when Diefenbaker scrapped the Avro Arrow jet fighter program, one reason he gave was that the Bomarc would render the Arrow unnecessary for Canada's or NATO's defences. Up to this point, as Gordon Donaldson has written, "nobody could accuse Diefenbaker of playing politics with defense. He had taken the politically dangerous step of putting 14,000 men out of work and destroying an industry to fulfil his NORAD commitment."<sup>13</sup> The main rationale for scrapping the Arrow was that the Soviets would no longer have manned bombers, so NATO would not need fighters. Later the Pentagon said that fighters would be needed after all, and Diefenbaker bought 64 Voodoo jets from the U.S., which went into service in the spring of 1962. Canada also acquired Starfighter bombers for use in Europe, and Honest John tactical missiles.

When Canada committed to the use of Bomarcs, it had not been determined whether the Bomarcs in Canada would be nuclear-armed or not. Once again, external events affected American thinking. "On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy confronted Soviet Premier Khrushchev with the demand that he get his offensive missiles out of Cuba.... It took 42 hours for Canada to agree to put its continental air defense units on the same 'ready' status as the American units." Diefenbaker's Cabinet struggled with their decision. Many ministers were convinced that Canada was already committed, by NORAD treaties, to do exactly what Kennedy asked, which included activating nuclear warheads and, at a minimum, allowing U.S. nuclear bombers to fly over Canada. External Affairs Minister Howard Green was one who wanted to draw the line: no American warheads, or Canada would lose its sovereignty. Canada's delay convinced Kennedy that Diefenbaker was a problem to be solved, and he interfered in the 1963 election to an extraordinary extent. Diefenbaker had tried to claim that at a meeting of Kennedy and British Prime Minister Macmillan to which Diefenbaker had invited himself, there was some indication that Canada's nuclear role was open to question, and would have to be decided at a future

NATO meeting. A news release from the Kennedy administration virtually called Diefenbaker a liar.

It would be going too far to say the U.S. interfered in a Canadian election to the extent of causing the defeat of a government. At most the nuclear debate deepened divisions and weaknesses in Diefenbaker's cabinet, and in Diefenbaker's own thinking, that had been apparent before.<sup>14</sup> Still, this was a rare case when deep political questions were right on the surface of a campaign: would Canada contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, while not controlling them, yes or no?; and was it a loss of sovereignty to let the U.S. decide such matters, whether or not there were earlier treaty commitments that seemed binding? For whatever combination of personal reasons, Kennedy singled out Diefenbaker as a leader he could not work with. As English says, Kennedy had proceeded arrogantly with many allies, and had failed to consult Diefenbaker and others as to his plans regarding Cuba. The Dutch, in particular, objected and hesitated much as Diefenbaker's government did. "Diefenbaker's behaviour, however, was neither forgotten nor forgiven, because in American eyes it fitted a pattern that could be identified as anti-American. It also troubled many Canadians and many Conservatives."<sup>15</sup>

How did Pearson react to all this? Somewhat remarkably, by reversing a highly public position against nuclear proliferation anywhere, and urging the government to accept nuclear weapons at home.<sup>16</sup> It seemed that Pearson, who had a reputation as a bit too naïve, perhaps a little too good, for politics, had changed his position expediently to take advantage of Diefenbaker's weakness, and curry favour with the Kennedy Administration. Just as Diefenbaker faced defections over his position, several prominent Liberals, or people who would soon be prominent Liberals including Pierre Trudeau, criticized Pearson over his apparent flip-flop. Pearson emphasized the legalistic position, repeated by English, that Canada should live up to its NORAD treaty commitments, which had been made only a short time earlier by the very same government, and after all were grounded in a sober assessment of the Soviet threat. Secondly, there was no point in accepting machinery for delivering warheads without the

warheads themselves. Thirdly, the Prime Minister should be decisive rather than indecisive.

Neither Pearson in his memoirs, nor English in his biography, show any interest in exploring the question: what exactly were the Americans up to? One simple question, for example, is: was there a non-nuclear way of arming the Bomarc, so that they could be effective? The answer apparently is “yes.” The work on a non-nuclear Bomarc was secret, so officials in the Kennedy Administration could claim ignorance of it, but Diefenbaker obviously knew something about it (and may have told Pearson as well). Another question: did the Pentagon regard the Bomarc, with or without nuclear warheads, as essential to North American defense? The answer apparently is “no.” Seven days before Canada’s election, transcripts were released of six-weeks-old secret testimony about the Bomarc missile, given by Defence Secretary Robert McNamara before a House of Representatives subcommittee. McNamara had admitted that the missile was of very little use, but the Bomarc sites were cheap to maintain and would at least draw enemy fire.

Some obvious questions arise here which are not raised by Pearson or English. Kennedy was too intelligent to believe that Canada was failing in its own defense and the defense of the West if it refused nuclear warheads at this point. Why all the hue and cry from the American perspective? If Kennedy actually believed the West was under threat, and therefore it was necessary for allies to co-operate in using any means necessary, including warheads, then why treat some allies with such contempt? Was this a test of friendship or loyalty, combined with a sense that allies either “got it,” when it came to the Soviet threat, or they didn’t? Did Kennedy take the Cuban missile crisis personally from the beginning, partly because of a sense that Krushchev had taken advantage of him before, and was trying to do so again?

English goes to some lengths to make Pearson appear eminently reasonable here, and to raise questions about Pearson’s critics. The Liberals held a rally in 1961 at which it seemed to be agreed that NORAD forces should not have nuclear weapons unless “they were subject to NATO control and requested by the NATO council.” There had been no serious attempt to say what

NATO control would mean, or how the Americans would be persuaded to give up control. Pearson had adopted the even more ambiguous position that nuclear weapons could be accepted “under NATO collective control,” but “in the light of the facts at our disposal [in opposition], we believe that as a nation Canada should stay out of the nuclear club.”<sup>17</sup> After the Cuban crisis, Pearson issued a statement saying that the Liberals “had opposed the acquisition of most weapons that required nuclear warheads”; this was presumably a way of indicating that he still accepted an obligation “to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.” But the government of Canada had accepted various weapons, Pearson said, and those commitments should be lived up to. A Liberal government would seek to renegotiate all of these issues with the U.S. and NATO—not really that different from what Diefenbaker was saying. Pearson at his worst, it could be argued, was less of a flip-flopper than Diefenbaker, who had agreed as head of government in 1959 that nuclear weapons would be accepted. In the absence of further clarification, this had to mean the weapons were under U.S. control.

Taking a step back, however, it is striking that in five years as Prime Minister, Pearson never did re-negotiate any weapons issues at all, or even attempt to do so. Of course this probably reflects the fact, which neither Diefenbaker nor Pearson admitted in 1962, that with the U.S. showing no interest in re-negotiating, no re-negotiations were likely. English emphasizes that Kennedy got along with Pearson much better than he had with Diefenbaker: “when Mike arrived [as Prime Minister], Kennedy was trying to thaw the Cold War, as Mike had tried to do earlier. Kennedy’s American University address in June [1963] created the warmth that resulted in the nuclear test-ban treaty, approved just before his death. Many believed it was his finest monument.” The juxtaposition of these sentences seems intended to imply that Pearson and Kennedy, together, were anti-nuclear weapons, not pro-, and beyond that were trying to end the Cold War. Even while delivering this up-beat message, however, English admits that nothing was done to reduce the nukes in Canada.

Officials began to talk again, confident of their superiors’ support, and several agreements began to take

form dealing with the Columbia River, automobile trade and production, off-shore rights, and, of course, nuclear weapons, which were accepted for NORAD forces in Canada and Canada's forces in Europe. The promised negotiations to end the commitments that brought nuclear weapons for Canadian forces, however, were not completed until the end of the Trudeau government in 1984.<sup>18</sup>

Surely it is fair to say that once he had used the nuclear issue to hurt Diefenbaker as much as he could, Pearson simply dropped it.<sup>19</sup> In fact Pearson, supposedly the master diplomat before becoming Prime Minister, seems to have accomplished very little in foreign policy once he became Prime Minister. One more dramatic example is the war in Vietnam.

### **Vietnam**

One remarkable fact is that Pearson, supposedly the master diplomat before becoming Prime Minister, seems to have accomplished very little in foreign policy once he became Prime Minister. One dramatic example is a famous speech he gave concerning the war in Vietnam. Any Prime Minister of Canada would have had something to say about the war in Vietnam in the 1960s, and particularly about the U.S. involvement in that war. Although Canada never sent troops to the conflict (in contrast to Korea in 1950-52), we were more than an interested bystander, or even a concerned ally. Canadian industry sold billions of dollars of war-related goods, including munitions and defoliants, to the U.S., with the only proviso being that these would not be shipped directly from Canada to the war zone—and this proviso was commonly violated, in a way that was concealed from Canadians.<sup>20</sup> Tens of thousands of American draft dodgers and deserters settled in Canada, and had a disproportionate influence on Canadian intellectual life, including the debate about Vietnam. A smaller number of Canadians, perhaps 30,000 or more, voluntarily served in the U.S. forces in the Vietnam era.<sup>21</sup>

Pearson's relationship with Lyndon Johnson, sworn in as President in November 1963, was never as good as the one he

enjoyed with JFK earlier. For all the famous informality, LBJ expected to be treated with proper respect. In international relations, he expected allies to keep him informed as to their plans and thinking, and never surprise him on anything important to him. Those who offended him were likely to face his wrath. Pearson knew all this, yet he gave a speech at a university in the United States, criticizing some specific aspects of the U.S. conduct of the war in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> Pearson presents this as his attempt, in April 1965, to answer a question that JFK asked him in May 1963: “he stated that [Vietnam] was ‘the very place where we should like not to be. But how do we get out of there?’ That, of course, was the continuing question.” Two years later, we are led to believe, Pearson “tried to answer the question in a . . . positive fashion.” He had been invited to Temple University in Philadelphia to accept the World Peace Award. Pearson gave a speech in which, while emphasizing that the United States should not “compromise on points of principle,” and there should be no “weakening of resistance to aggression in South Vietnam,” he recommended that the U.S. should “suspend” the bombing in Vietnam “for a limited time.” Violent incidents could then be monitored to see if this magnanimous gesture by the U.S. could be followed by a general cease-fire.

Pearson was not expecting to see LBJ any time soon after the speech, but he had “barely finished the last sentence” of the speech before he was “invited to lunch with President Johnson the next day at Camp David.” As Pearson may have suspected, LBJ was furious. Johnson explained for an hour why the speech was “bad,” Pearson says, “allowing me to get in only a word or two of explanation and justification.” “If there had not been a kind of ‘et tu, Brute’ feeling about the assault, without any personal unpleasantness of any kind, I would have felt almost like Schuschnigg before Hitler at Berchtesgaden!”

No personal unpleasantness? English reports that at one point LBJ said: “You don’t come here and piss on my rug.”<sup>23</sup> Lawrence Martin has added the detail that at one point LBJ grabbed Pearson by the shirt front and lifted him part-way off the floor. Of course one can question Johnson’s manners, but one can also question how Pearson got into this fix. Purely as a matter of

diplomacy—supposedly Pearson’s forte—his actions here were almost unbelievably incompetent. Pearson knew his Temple speech, given with no notice to the White House, would offend LBJ; indeed it is difficult to think of a President who would not have been offended by it. If the U.S. makes war in Vietnam, civilians are likely to suffer; how much worse is bombing compared to other measures? How likely is bombing, as compared to other measures, to provoke anger on the part of the Viet Cong as opposed to a desire for peace? (Johnson did halt the bombing later in 1965, and this did not bring about a negotiated settlement). Why exactly would a Canadian Prime Minister take it on himself to offer advice in this way, in public, on U.S. soil?

In delivering the speech as he did, Pearson acted contrary to the advice of his Foreign Minister and the Canadian ambassador to the U.S. Pearson’s delivery of the speech is even more bizarre when one considers that it flatly contradicted the advice he gave to Canadians only weeks earlier. In a speech in February 1965, Pearson reminded his fellow Canadians that Canada was likely to play a small role in world events compared to the U.S. He warned specifically against criticizing U.S. policy:

... our official doubts about certain U.S. foreign policies should be expressed in private, through the channels of diplomacy, rather than publicly by speeches to Canadian Clubs .... Pulling the eagle’s tail feathers is an easy, but a dangerous way to get a certain temporary popularity, as well as a feeling of self-satisfaction at having annoyed the big bird. It’s a form of indulgence that we should keep strictly under control—for national and international reasons.

Pearson tries to emphasize that the unfortunate episode of LBJ’s anger was exceptional, and that he and Johnson continued to have friendly communications about a range of issues. English reports, however, that because of the Temple speech, Pearson was in the Washington doghouse for quite some time, and in fact in the “Number 1 kennel.” Canada was told virtually nothing about U.S. plans or decisions—at least as long as Johnson was President.<sup>24</sup> Surely no aspect of foreign policy was more

important than relations with the U.S., so one can say the rift over Vietnam made Pearson's foreign policy as Prime Minister a significant failure, regardless of any other initiatives that might have had some success. Diefenbaker had been criticized for letting his incompetence, combined with vanity, sour relations with President Kennedy; surely Pearson's performance was hardly better.

## **Conclusions**

From such different issues or crises, which unfolded in such varied circumstances, we will draw conclusions which are somewhat, as the saying goes, vanilla. Of course circumstances change, and we cannot necessarily apply lessons from the 1950s and 1960s today; but to a remarkable extent, Canada's situation has had certain constant elements for many decades.<sup>25</sup> We have had one powerful friend, with whom we naturally ally on many causes; that friend normally has fairly specific expectations as to how we will respond to particular challenges, and relatively little patience with any divergence from these expectations—or even curiosity as to exactly what we are thinking. Before World War II, Britain was more of a friend and source of concern than anyone else, but the importance of the U.S. was obviously growing. During World War II Britain was surpassed in every way by the U.S., and this fact had at least as much impact on Canada as on anyone else. We could certainly ally ourselves against powerful common enemies in World War II, during the Cold War, and more recently in the War on Terror; but we also have distinctive interests which may be seen differently by our friends, and may require some skill to be defended successfully.

Despite the hopes that often arise in politics, leaders can seldom control events. This is more true in foreign policy than in domestic policy, and this is no doubt one reason why it is so often stated that differences between political parties, and political leaders, are less in foreign policy than in domestic policy; political differences may be substantially muted, if they do not quite disappear or end, "at the water's edge." All leaders have to respond to specific circumstances; often they cannot fall back on a tried and true formula, and must improvise to some extent. The best of them welcome the opportunity to be creative, and find so-

lutions where others might fail to do so. If Canadians think about their foreign policy, they probably fall back on the somewhat self-serving cliché that Canada reacts shrewdly and realistically to its situation as a lesser or middle power by relying more on diplomacy and UN peace-keeping, and less on force, than the U.S. might wish. Even before Afghanistan, the actual episodes in which the two countries have both been involved tell a more complex story. The public support for the Afghanistan mission, at least until recently, seems to indicate an awareness that the use of force may be necessary in conjunction with more strictly humanitarian actions, or even before such actions can be effective. Canadians accept the need to do at least a high proportion of what the U.S. government expects; but we seem to want to avoid joining in the rhetoric, at least, of anything that looks like a crusade.

<sup>1</sup> Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie had an affair for many years with the Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen. In late 1956, commenting on the Suez Crisis, she apparently said to him: “What if we are wrong? If one of my friends made a mistake or committed a crime I would back them up. It is as simple as that”; Ritchie, *Diplomatic Passport* (1981), 13 November, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> I agree with Paquin’s overall point, and his examples, although the examples discussed in what follows are slightly different: “Each time the United States makes a decision involving North American security or expresses its will to intervene abroad to defend its interests, the Canadian government experiences the constraining effects of the asymmetrical nature of its relationship with the United States and reminds itself that its room to manoeuvre is small. Ottawa faced this unpleasant reality, for instance, in 1957 when ... NORAD was created, or in 1962-3 during the heated debate in Ottawa over the nuclearization of Canada’s Bomarc missiles”; “Canadian Foreign and Security Policy,” 99.

<sup>3</sup> Stein and Lang (hereafter S and L), p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> Once again communication from military to military was different from communication between foreign services, and between the Prime Minister and some Presidential appointees. See S and L, pp. 48-50, 69, 77.

<sup>5</sup> S and L 121-129, 160-177, 203-4. BMD differs from the famous “Star Wars” anti-ballistic missile program; “BMD is intended [only] to intercept one or two missiles”; S and L n. 15, p. 315.

<sup>6</sup> On November 30, 2004, George W. Bush publicly expressed the hope, while he was in Ottawa, that Canada would join BMD; S and L p. 163. On the other hand, senior Defence officials saw no problem with this decision; 175-6, 203-4. On more back and forth, see S and L 122-3, 165-8, 170-1. S and L point out that predictions about the U.S. reaction to a Canadian “no,” particularly from the Canadian military, were consistently wrong or over-stated (263). Would decision-makers have made more prudent decisions if they had been briefed more accurately on American thinking? Sometimes the Americans implied that it was Canadian hesitation or what might be seen as dithering over a decision, rather than an actual decision that they regarded as bad, that concerned them; see Paul Cellucci, S and L p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> See the Manley Panel, pp. 11, 22-23, 38; and S and L, pp. 32-3. Of course S and L emphasize that probably no Western country would be fighting in Afghanistan for reasons of human rights alone. “The Taliban stoned women to death for many years while most of the world looked the other way. Afghanistan drew attention only after September 11 ....” (290). When Osama bin Laden was discovered in Pakistan, this confirmed for many observers that the alleged hunt for al Qaeda has been taking place for years in the wrong country.

<sup>8</sup> The main source for what follows is Pearson’s memoirs: *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson* (University of Toronto Press, 1972). The Suez Crisis is discussed in Vol. II, pp. 225-274. Pearson died before he could complete this work, but he left behind Vol. I, some draft chapters of the other

volumes, and a great deal of “first person” material on crucial events. The editors, John Munro and Alex. Inglis, “hope that ... they have come as close as possible to telling the story as Mr. Pearson would have done.”

<sup>9</sup> Canada was not on the Security Council at this time. As Secretary of State for External Affairs, Pearson appointed himself head of Canada’s delegation to the UN. In 1952-53 Pearson had been President of the General Assembly. In 1953 his election as Secretary-General of the UN was vetoed by the Soviet Union.

<sup>10</sup> This suggestion was to some extent anticipated in a speech by Eden in the British House of Commons on November 1. Once the impending “police action” in Egypt by Anglo-French forces had succeeded in separating the combatants, Eden “claimed to have no objection if the UN took over ‘the physical task of maintaining peace’”; Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 127.

<sup>11</sup> Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 129-20.

<sup>12</sup> Denis Smith is often a bit acid on the subject of Diefenbaker’s judgment, but here he seems to admit that Diefenbaker did a good job of avoiding either praising or condemning “Pearson’s recent achievement,” and succeeded in “play[ing] the statesman”; *Rogue Tory*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>13</sup> Donaldson, *Eighteen Men*, p. 202. Bothwell suggests that the difficulty of this decision, which Bothwell calls “correct,” along with the controversial aftermath, made Diefenbaker and his Cabinet more indecisive than they might otherwise have been; *Canada and the United States*, 74-5, 78. See also *Alliance and Illusion*: “The Arrow decision was good public policy, badly managed .... [because of this decision, Diefenbaker] veered into obfuscation and postponement whenever he scented the possibility of controversy”; 142.

<sup>14</sup> Among other things Diefenbaker’s Minister of Defence, Douglas Harkness, was strongly in favour of deploying the warheads, whereas the Minister of External Affairs, Howard Green, was strongly opposed. Bothwell helpfully explains the role of the undersecretary for external affairs, “one of Pearson’s oldest friends, Norman Robertson”; “By 1960, Robertson had come to believe that the West’s best course was unilateral nuclear disarmament; and his minister [Green] agreed with him.” *Canada and the United States*, 77; see generally 77-85. In *Alliance and Illusion*, Bothwell makes it even more clear that some senior officials in both Canada and the U.S. were convinced that any employment of nuclear weapons would amount to “global suicide”; 162-3.

<sup>15</sup> English p. 248. Bothwell helpfully points out that Canada was especially important to U.S. plans because of the vulnerability to an attack via the Arctic; *Canada and the United States*, 83

<sup>16</sup> Pearson’s fairly brief treatment is in Volume III of his memoirs, pp. 69-75.

<sup>17</sup> English p. 246, 249. Diefenbaker quotes Pearson in the House of Commons, August 1960, saying “we should get out of the whole SAGE-Bomarc operation”; *One Canada*, Vol. 3, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> English p. 270. Of course Diefenbaker also suggests that his hesitation to do as Kennedy wished had to do with a desire to contribute to international nuclear disarmament; *One Canada*, Vol. 3, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Pearson says that once he became PM, “we moved immediately to conclude a bilateral agreement with the United States covering the acquisition of nuclear warheads...,” and “we also established a non-partisan House of Commons Committee to review the whole structure of Canadian defence policies.” Then the kicker, slightly softened compared to the earlier campaign rhetoric: “we were also pledged to negotiate a non-nuclear role for Canada in NATO and NORAD, *if that seemed best for our future*” (emphasis added). Pearson III, p. 116; contrast on the commitment to negotiate p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> These shipments peaked in the Pearson-Trudeau years, as U.S. combat operations in Vietnam escalated.

<sup>21</sup> Canada was also chosen in 1954 to serve on the “International Control Commission,” intended somehow to bring peace to Vietnam (and, via parallel Commissions, to Cambodia and Laos). Over a period of years, Canadian foreign service officers in Vietnam—identified closely with Pearson—came to live notoriously decadent lives while not notably contributing to the welfare of the local people. The Canadian mission in Vietnam was investigated in 1964; many of the abuses happened on Diefenbaker’s watch.

<sup>22</sup> Pearson’s account is in Volume III of his memoirs, pp. 137-144.

<sup>23</sup> English p. 364. Bothwell has a slightly different version; *Alliance and Illusion*, 226.

<sup>24</sup> English pp. 367-8, 369, and generally 362-370. Bothwell does not go so far, saying that at most, “after 1965, [Johnson] did not go out of his way to help Pearson politically”; *Alliance and Illusion*, 226.

<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the Diefenbaker and Pearson “problems” with the U.S. on matters of national security during the Cold War support or anticipate Christopher Sands’ observation about the period since 9/11: “The goal of independence in national security policy in an interdependent world characterized by globalization and transnational terrorist networks is attainable only in perception and dreams”; Sands, “An Independent Security Policy,” p. 116. Sands says both the U.S. and Canada are “pretending to have independent security policies.”

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