

Documents on Canadian External Relations

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Historical Summary

Since the late 1960s, Canada's Department of External Affairs (renamed Foreign Affairs Canada in the fall of 2003) has published its continuing series of documents on the history of Canadian foreign policy. To date, the series, entitled *Documents on Canadian External Relations (DCER)*, includes 24 volumes, covering the period from 1909, when the Department was established, to 1958, as well as two special volumes on relations with Newfoundland in the two decades before it joined Canada in 1949. The *DCER* has reprinted over 20,000 documents so far, totalling almost 35,000 pages of text, and represents one of the largest publishing projects in Canadian history¹.

The only series of its kind in Canada, the *DCER* is intended primarily for senior undergraduate and graduate students, academic researchers, and journalists. Recent volumes, which have appeared more or less annually for the last decade, enjoy a print-run of 875 copies, a sizeable figure by Canadian academic standards. Under the government's depository library program, 125 books are distributed gratis to major research libraries across Canada. Foreign Affairs Canada gives away another 125 volumes to senior scholars in Canada and sends 500 copies to its missions abroad, where they are made available to Canadian Studies centres. The remaining 125 copies, a small but respectable figure in Canadian terms, are sold through the government's publishing arm.

Over time, the series has undergone a steady transformation in response to the evolving expectations of the historical community and the changing nature of foreign policy in the mid- and late- 20th-century. Initially conceived as a permanent record of Canadian achievement, the early volumes tended to focus almost exclusively on documenting final government decisions, discreetly excluding the political and bureaucratic pressures that gave

¹ On the origins of the series, see Greg Donaghy, "Documenting the Diplomats: The Origins and Evolution of *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, *The Public Historian*, Vol 25, No 1, (Winter 2003), pp. 9-28.

rise to those policies. In the mid-1970s, severely criticized by Canadian academics for its secretive approach, the series reviewed its terms of reference, becoming “a comprehensive, self-contained record of the major foreign policy decisions taken by the Government of Canada, and the reasons for taking them.”² Increasingly, the series would reflect the full range of views of officials and politicians. The changes ensured that the making of Canadian foreign policy would be more readily understood as well as more transparent.

More recently, the series has had to wrestle with the expanding foreign policy agenda of the post-war period, a problem that threatens to loom larger as it moves into the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, in the mid-1990s, the Department reduced its program spending sharply as part of the government’s larger struggle against its deficit. As a result, the Historical Section was forced to review the DCER’s principles, purposes and methodologies. Since the revised *DCER* enjoyed strong support from scholars in Canada and abroad, it was quickly decided to maintain the objectives set out in 1974. In order to save space and reduce costs, however, it was decided to tighten up the focus of future volumes and have them concentrate on “Canada’s most important bilateral and institutional relationships, and on the major international crises that directly involved the secretary of state for external affairs, the prime minister or other members of Cabinet.”³ The more tightly organized and smaller volumes that resulted produced sufficient savings to allow future volumes to appear simultaneously in print and on-line.

The first two volumes in the series were published in individual English and French editions, with the documents reproduced in their language of origin (usually English) and footnotes, introductions, indices and other ancillary material appearing in either English or French. Subsequent volumes continued to reprint the documents in their original language but with all supplementary material appearing in both English and French.

Methodology

Volumes are normally divided into a dozen or so chapters, each dealing with one of the main foreign policy topics of the period. Recent editions have included chapters on Canada’s

² David Murray, (ed.) *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 7: 1939-41 Part I* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1974), pp. ix-x.

³ Greg Donaghy, (ed.) *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 20: 1954* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997), p. xxiii.

activities in multilateral organizations (the UN, NATO, and the Commonwealth), as well as geographic chapters on relations with the US, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and North Africa. More limited thematic chapters on such specialized subjects as nuclear strategy, atomic energy, and international economic relations have also recently appeared. Most chapters are sub-divided by event or issue or some other readily apparent organizing principle (i.e. country or region). Within these sub-divisions, the documents are reproduced in chronological order, giving readers quick access to the most important documents of interest to them while allowing users to trace the evolution of Canadian policy. Editors rely on footnotes, cross-references, and the introduction to alert readers to inter-related issues and to give the volumes a thematic unity.

The *DCER* is based primarily on the records of the Department of External Affairs, the Cabinet, and the Privy Council Office. These are supplemented where necessary by the private papers of Cabinet ministers and senior officials, and the files of other government departments with a strong stake in Canada's foreign policy. These often include the departments of National Defence, Finance, Citizenship and Immigration, and Trade and Commerce. In using these various sources, recent editors have tried hard to create volumes which expose readers to the full range of documents used in making Canadian foreign policy. Accordingly, volumes will reproduce material ranging from very brief minutes to summary telegrams and memoranda to much longer and more reflective "think pieces" that place Canadian policy in a broad context. *Series Outline*

The first six volumes of *Documents on Canadian External Relations* trace Canada's early struggle during and after the First World War to become an autonomous dominion. Included in these volumes is material on Canada's evolving place in the British Empire, its role at the Paris Peace Conference and the new League of Nations, and its response to the rise of fascism in Europe and Asia.

Volumes 7 through 11 document Canadian diplomacy during the Second World War as the country grew into a middle power with global interests and responsibilities. Among the topics covered in these volumes are the conduct of war with Germany and Japan, the problems associated with postwar planning, and the creation of the United Nations. Increasing attention is devoted in the wartime volumes to the challenges created for Canada

by the growing international prominence of the United States, its closest neighbour and most important economic partner.

Subsequent volumes, each normally devoted to a single year, follow Canada's diplomatic fortunes into the postwar period. The Cold War provides these volumes, which now stretch into the late 1950s, with a thematic unity. Each volume includes extensive documentation on the conflict with the Soviet Union and records in detail Canada's reaction to the American-led effort to organize the West. The origins of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the conduct of the Korean War, and the developing crisis in Indochina, where Canada served on the commissions overseeing the Geneva Accords, are among the subjects given considerable space. These postwar volumes also document defence relations with the United States, the growing dangers of nuclear diplomacy, and the challenges and opportunities created for Canada by the restoration of Western Europe. Finally, *Documents on Canadian External Relations* includes copious material on Canadian activity at the United Nations, where Lester B. Pearson and Canadian diplomats helped pioneer the concept of international peacekeeping in response to crises in the Middle East and Asia.

Future Status and Looming Challenges

Over the next two years, the Historical Section will publish three additional volumes. The first, Volume 25, was edited by a contract editor, Dr. Michael Stevenson, and will conclude the series's coverage of the first 18 months of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's tenure. Volume 26, edited by a team of contractors headed by the newest member of the Historical Section, Dr. Janice Cavell, will follow with material on 1959. Dr. Cavell is also at work on Volume 27, which will cover the events of 1960. It should appear in 2007.

The move into the Diefenbaker period has not been without its problems. Many of the documents printed in the series have traditionally been drawn from the files of the Privy Council Office and the records of various Cabinet Committees. While declassification of this material has always been a slow and time-consuming exercise, it has not normally been a substantial barrier to publication. There are signs, however, that this is changing. The heightened security that has accompanied the war on terrorism has resulted in exceptional caution in dealing with declassification requests. At the same time, the problems of North American defence that Prime Minister Diefenbaker faced in the late 1950s closely resemble those confronted by the current government, increasing watchfulness in an already politically sensitive branch of government. The result has been a worrying escalation in the number and range of documents that we have been denied permission to print.

Finally, it is worth noting that budgetary pressures continue to have an adverse impact the work of the Historical Section. Although the vacant editor's position was filled last year with the hiring of Dr. Cavell, a PhD from Carleton University, the Historical Section will again be reduced to only three people when Ted Kelly, its long-time researcher and the assistant editor of Volume 20, retires next fall. This staff reduction will force the Section to reduce its rate of production to one volume every other year.