

Another Anniversary: Mackenzie King, the Royal Wedding and Canada's Cold War Policies, 1947–48¹

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Abstract

Canada's international relations were arguably transformed in the early years of the cold war (or the aftermath of the second world war), during the last term of William Lyon Mackenzie King as Prime Minister. King has often been written out of the script on Canadian foreign policy in the post-war years, or assigned a cameo role, especially after he had relinquished the portfolio of Secretary of State for External Affairs in September 1946. That lessening of his administrative burden in favour of his eventual successor as leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent, has been seen as a manifestation of his supposed overall decline in authority, responsibility and direction in the Canadian government. However, King was still Prime Minister for two more years after he gave up the portfolio of external affairs and he played a critical—often decisive—role in the making of Canada's international policies until his retirement in November 1948. This examination of a series of decisions in his final year in office demonstrates King's abiding influence on Canadian foreign policy across a number of cold war issues, before he finally stepped down as Canada's longest-serving Prime Minister.

November 20th 2007 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Royal Wedding—the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten. While the connection between the Royal Wedding and Canada's policies in the early cold war may not seem obvious at first, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate that link and to demonstrate the impact of King's presence in London for that wonderful ceremony on his government's subsequent attitudes and actions. Before that, however, it may be worth recalling the setting and the event six decades ago that provided the occasion for British influence on a shift in the conduct of Canada's international relations.

As Keith Middlemas has observed, 1947 was “a year in which scarcely anything went right.” The weather was awful—“the worst winter in living

memory” as he put it—which aggravated a fuel crisis. Recovery from the destruction and dislocation of the war was much slower than anticipated, as Britons confronted acute housing shortages, more bread rationing, higher taxes, persistent unemployment and rapid depletion of Britain’s vital dollar credits from the United States and Canada.² Nor was the news from abroad likely to lift spirits, as the division of the world in the cold war deepened and memories of the victorious wartime alliance faded. “I do wish one could see a glimmer of a bright spot anywhere in world affairs,” King George VI wrote in September 1947. “Never in the whole history of mankind have things looked gloomier than they do now,” His Majesty continued with forgivable hyperbole, “and one feels so powerless to do anything to help.”³

Nonetheless, an announcement from Buckingham Palace in early July had promised some light amidst the darkness and a distraction from the otherwise dismal prospect of another dreary autumn. “A flash of colour,” former Prime Minister Winston Churchill described it, “on the hard road we have to travel.”⁴ Princess Elizabeth was betrothed to Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, son of the late Prince Andrew of Greece, with the Royal Wedding to take place on 20 November 1947 at Westminster Abbey. The ceremony would be attended by European royalty—an increasing proportion of whom were living in exile—and the British elite as well as by the political leaders of the Dominions and the colonial empire, along with foreign dignitaries. This would be the first major occasion for pageantry since the Coronation of King George VI in May 1937. An Imperial Conference had coincided with the Coronation and the British government floated the notion of an equivalent assembly.

At least in Mackenzie King’s mind, there was never any question about who would represent Canada at the Royal Wedding. Nor was there any doubt that the Canadian Prime Minister would discourage anything resembling another imperial conference. After all, the Dominion Prime Ministers had met in a series of sessions as recently as the spring of 1946—though there had been no meeting attended by all—and two years before that for the only wartime meeting of the leaders of the Commonwealth. Whenever King attended such gatherings, he did so warily and reluctantly, so that he was glad to have the excuse in this instance that the peculiar consultations in stages in 1946 obviated the necessity for a formal conference in 1947.⁵ Even the alternative proposed by British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, of “a brief and informal meeting of Prime Ministers at which it would be possible to have an exchange of views on the general world situation, political and economic,” was parsed carefully for evidence of imperial centralism, as were subsequent messages from London on this theme. That wariness was simply reinforced when Attlee speculated

that the leaders might also be able to “dispose of certain outstanding questions” which were best discussed personally and directly rather than by cable or letter.⁶ King’s anxieties were rekindled by reports of a speech by British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin which emphasised the advantages for the United Kingdom of “closer association between Commonwealth countries,” by the text of a British memorandum which he received in late September which implied concerted policies, and by newspaper stories that exaggerated the likely impact of the anticipated discussions.⁷ King made his own preferences emphatically known and he was undoubtedly relieved when the British government finally abandoned the notion of formal consultations.⁸ As a result, the talks which did take place on the margins of the royal gala were carefully arranged so as to avoid any semblance of formality, such as agendas or agreed minutes, let alone any untoward hints of common action or agreed decisions.

On the other hand, King was delighted at the prospect of attending the wedding, especially as he would be able to combine that journey with one to northwestern Europe, where he was destined to receive a warm welcome and several honorary degrees. Though he was often perceived and depicted as more (North) American in outlook, King’s personal and political view of the world was largely shaped by his dealings with the United Kingdom. King’s relationships with Britain and with the British were complicated and idiosyncratic, with loyal sentimentality often offset by miffed outrage at perceived slights, presumptions or guiles. Though he frequently groused privately about aristocratic privileges and pretensions, King’s attitude to the Crown and to the Royal Family was distinct, personal and positive. As his personal diary attests quite persuasively, King was devoted to the Windsors. Though he would often recall his rebel ancestry—as the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the 1837 rebellion in Upper Canada—that was usually for the purpose of indicating how far he had come from that background, without any suggestion that his grandfather had been wrong (or necessarily disloyal). Moreover, these recollections were usually self-administered antidotes to especially fulsome expressions of his fond regard for one or more of the members of the Royal Family.

King had a particularly favourable view of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, who had responded so well to the unexpected and unwelcome call of duty a decade earlier. As for their daughters, King’s attention to them was akin to the attitude of a doting, if distant, relative who was delighted at their development and pleased with their youthful company. In other words, King’s visit to London and his attendance at the Royal Wedding were seen by him as highly personal involvements. However much he might (and would) fuss

about protocol and ceremony, including appropriate attire, King was determined to occupy his assigned seat in Westminster Abbey and to take advantage of his time in the imperial capital not only to consult the British government but also to renew old friendships—among the living and the dead (more about the latter later).

Before King left Canada, he received word of an exceptional honour that the King proposed to confer on him, the Order of Merit. That award had been created by King Edward VII and it was limited to the sovereign and 24 members from the British Empire or Commonwealth, with some honorary foreign recipients as well, all selected by the monarch. According to the original criteria, it had been intended to recognize those who “may have rendered exceptionally meritorious service in Our Navy and Our Army or towards the advancement of Art, Literature, and Science” and King understood that it was “perhaps the most distinguished of all the Honours in the British Empire.” That intended distinction prompted nearly three days of anxious tribulations by the Canadian Prime Minister, which are faithfully and copiously recorded in his diary, before he finally decided that it was his duty to accept. That decision was evidently eased by his personal conviction that he owed its acceptance “to the memory of my grand-father and my father and mother” as well as to the fact “that a mark of this kind would bring distinction to Canada.” Of course, it would also have the incidental benefit of “silencing the Tory slanders” about his supposed “partiality” for the United States and disloyalty.⁹

Never a keen flier, King planned to travel by ocean liner. On the way over, he had a suite aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*. However, his return was brought forward by Canada’s American dollar crisis and the consequent need to summon Parliament in early December, so that he returned on the *SS Nieuw Amsterdam*. All told, he was away from Ottawa for five weeks, including two weeks travelling, eight days in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and two stays in London and vicinity totalling nearly a fortnight. As we shall see, he was not pleased with all of the decisions taken by the Canadian government in his absence, but the time away from Ottawa was unquestionably good for his spirits, as it were. For those who may regard King in his final years as Prime Minister as a doddering old man, one glance at his calendar of official and personal engagements would contradict that impression. As always, King fretted about the expectations of his various hosts, the demands upon his time, his tiredness and signs of ill health, as well as the inadequacies of his long-suffering and oft-maligned staff, yet he played his part as elder statesman and distinguished visitor well.¹⁰

King was especially pleased to be able to present Princess Elizabeth personally with gifts from the government and people of Canada, as well as from the Canadian Legion—though these apparently could not compare with Trinidad's distinctive offering of a lunatic asylum. In a private audience, King George VI presented the rebel's grandson with the Order of Merit, whose recipients included Churchill and Prime Minister Jan Smuts of South Africa. Prior to a luncheon at Buckingham Palace, King was introduced to the Queen of the Hellenes and her nephew. "I was most favourably impressed with his appearance and manner," King reflected after meeting Lieutenant Mountbatten.¹¹

At Westminster Abbey, King had an excellent view of the proceedings, next to "the corner of the transept facing the Altar" and he was able to hear clearly the exchange of vows by the bride and groom as well as "the address by the Archbishop of York." Though King thoroughly enjoyed the ceremony, the occasion prompted a curious reflection on what seemed to him to be the passing of an age. "There was a series of lovely tableaux but one felt that all this pomp was a demonstration of power and ceremonial—something that is really helping to foment the unrest of the day, and that in the nature of things would not last long. It will some day be swept away in a great class struggle." King shared these thoughts with his diary, but mercifully not with those seated nearby! There were, of course, numerous other events associated with the royal marriage, of which King recorded his impressions at length, including his observation: "what a marvellous family the Royal family really is." At dinner with the Attlees and others that evening, however, the conversation shifted to the topic which would have the greatest impact on King's international outlook in the coming weeks and months, the imminent meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) in London, the likelihood of its break-up in discord, and the implications of that possibility for world affairs, all considered against the backdrop of the precarious social, economic and political situation in western Europe.¹² For King, however, the critical talks were yet to come.

After a weekend spent with mediums in London and then with the Attlees at Chequers, King—along with Smuts, several British cabinet ministers and their advisers as well as Commonwealth High Commissioners—attended the most important briefing, which was chaired by Attlee at No. 10 Downing Street on the afternoon of Monday, 24 November, and highlighted by an impressive if disturbing review of the international situation by Bevin. On the morning of the meeting, a paper prepared by the Foreign Office had been circulated which illuminated the frequent conflicts in interests and policies between the West and the Soviet Union, with particular emphasis on fundamental clashes at the UN, at the CFM, throughout Europe and at various points around the world,

from Trieste to Korea, where the former allies could not agree. From the British perspective, the most conspicuous trends in bilateral relations had been “a growing deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations,” increasingly marked by strident and offensive rhetoric, and the greater “sense” in the United States “of the value of the United Kingdom as a reliable friend, and if need be ally, whose economic and military health and strength nevertheless give rise to anxiety.” With the stiffening of American resolve to counter Soviet policy and the evident willingness of the United States to play a greater role generally in overseas affairs, the bi-polar division of the world was daily more profound.¹³

That *tour d’horizon* may have heightened some concerns—though its contents were familiar, the pervasive tone of confrontation and risk of escalation certainly made for sombre reading—but the exposition by the British foreign secretary made a much greater impression on his audience, particularly King. As Bevin’s views would be invoked frequently by King thereafter in decision-making about Canada’s international relations, his remarks merit consideration at length. According to Alan Bullock, Bevin “never believed that the Soviet Government would risk starting another war; but he did believe in the summer and autumn of 1947 that, before Marshall aid could be made available, fear and want might combine to weaken resistance to the point where the Communists could secure power by a variety of devices which stayed well this side of war as traditionally understood.”¹⁴ In that overall reckoning, the greatest dangers arose from opportunistic challenges, misjudgments of reactions or accidental clashes. On this specific occasion, however, Bevin’s assessment was considerably more glum.

After reciting the litany of failures of the UN, as well as the frustrated efforts of the former allies to make peace in Europe, Bevin shifted his focus to the circumstances and prospects for the meeting of the CFM, which would begin on the following day at Lancaster House. France and Italy were beset by unrest and political instability fomented by the Communists which might lead to “civil war” in both countries. “At the present conference, the Russians might make it impossible to get a settlement—a peace settlement with either Austria or as regards Germany.” Bevin, King recorded, “felt more pessimistic than he had felt at any time in his life.” The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was worried that the Russians might block western access to Berlin within the next few weeks, which he linked to a Soviet intent “to eliminate the social democratic parties in Western Europe. No one could foresee,” the British minutes of the meeting paraphrase Bevin, “how far this policy would be carried; but, in view of the recent hardening of the United States attitude towards Russia,

there was a risk that the Soviet government might go so far as to be unable to retreat and that open hostilities might follow.”

In the ensuing discussion, Smuts stressed the importance of Anglo-American unity and Bevin insisted that there would be no “appeasement” of the Soviet Union by the western allies. When King asked about earlier assumptions that the USSR would not be ready for war for five years, Bevin pointed out that “these matters are not governed by army plans” but rather by “human action” which may involve “people acting in a certain way under certain stresses.” According to King’s account, Bevin “stressed again that the war would not begin intentionally but replied that he himself had to admit that he feared that that is what was coming.”¹⁵ In a corner of the room after the meeting adjourned, Attlee and the Minister of Defence, A. V. Alexander, spoke with King and Norman Robertson, the Canadian High Commissioner. Alexander warned that “there were very strong evidences” that the USSR “was preparing for war and that, soon.”

Unquestionably, this meeting had an immediate and profound impact on King. The following passage in his diary attests to its chilling effect: “Robertson and I drove away together after the meeting. We each agreed it was the most serious situation that we could possible [sic] have imagined and indeed was altogether beyond anything I had hitherto thought possible. In a word, it came down to this: that within 3 weeks, there may be another world war. This world war will grow out of the unwillingness of the Russians to make any peace settlement with respect to Germany at this time, and their determination to go on fomenting unrest in all countries.”¹⁶ Though Robertson later suggested to Pearson that there were “grounds for taking a rather more hopeful view of the prospect of peace this winter than the Prime Minister and I took away from the meeting at Downing Street,” his initial report accurately reflected “the Foreign Secretary’s appreciation of the present European diplomatic position” and echoed King’s anxiety “about the risk to peace that might develop very quickly during the next critical weeks or months.”¹⁷

King’s fear was certainly not assuaged by further discussions with Churchill later that day. “I can see as clearly as can be,” he wrote, “that if that stand [against the USSR] is not taken within the next few weeks, that within 5 years or a much shorter time, there will be another world war in which we shall all be finished.” On the following day, Bevin spoke privately with King and added some information about the situation in the Near and Far East which he had hesitated to disclose in the presence of the Indian representatives. His remarks referred, among other things, to “trouble” for the Americans in

Manchuria and Korea, as well as the difficulties over peace with Japan. At luncheon on Tuesday, Churchill “felt that the next three weeks might, in some ways, be the most critical of any, in that, they would show how far America was prepared to stand up against Russia.” The personification of anti-appeasement compared the situation with that when “Hitler threatened to go into the Ruhr.”¹⁸ Needless to say, this was not how King had anticipated beginning his final year in office.

While re-crossing the Atlantic, the Canadian Prime Minister was able to review the papers prepared by the Foreign Office and the British Chiefs of Staff¹⁹ as well as notes of the meeting in Downing Street and his own record of other discussions. “I confess I am extremely anxious about what may happen in Europe,” King reflected. “There seems little doubt that the unrest which is fomented relates itself to Russian intrigue. Determination to force a class war at this time. The war is on already as regards making progress on the part of free nations, impossible. It may lead to actual war in the very near future. The world has never been in such a plight.”²⁰

On the afternoon of his return to Ottawa, King briefed his Cabinet on what he had learned and its implications. The Prime Minister “reported his impressions of European conditions as he had found them,” along with his talks with “leading statesmen” in Europe, as well as “conditions in the United Kingdom” and “his appreciation of the international situation generally, in the light of information and opinions obtained” from his talks with Attlee, Bevin and other British leaders. “His own impression and the consensus of opinion of those in the best position to know were that the current position was exceedingly grave” politically and economically. “I could see what I said had a very sobering effect upon all the members,” King recorded. “They were not surprised about conditions in France, but they seemed stunned at the thought of a possible conflict coming on immediately between Russia and the other nations. It is just too terrible to contemplate, but it does look to me increasingly as if the men at the head of affairs in Russia have got into their minds that they can conquer the world. What they may have in the way of secret weapons and poisons, no one knows.”²¹ Later the Governor-General agreed with King that “the situation was very dangerous. He had not been expecting a possible outbreak of hostilities until next summer.”²²

In mid-December, the adjournment of the Council of Foreign Ministers, without agreement on the future of Austria or Germany, simply added to King’s unease. “We have now reached the point that Bevin feared might lead to war. It is clear that the United Kingdom, the United States and France intend to

work together to save Western Europe and to further her recovery under the Marshall plan. It is equally clear that Russia intends to hold all her satellite powers together to seek to become the Master of Europe.” The most likely *casus belli* would be a Russian attempt to deny Western access to West Berlin “by threat of arms.”²³ By this time, King’s apprehension about a third world war had already influenced his outlook on international questions and deliberations in the Canadian Cabinet. The lingering impact of what King had learned in London was pervasive.

One notorious episode, which flared up not long after King returned, has received considerable attention from participants, commentators and scholars, though it has often been misrepresented. King vehemently objected to the nomination of a Canadian representative, at American behest, to the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK).²⁴ What had first appeared on the Cabinet’s agenda as a routine appointment was transformed into a serious misunderstanding that ultimately prompted threats or mutterings of resignation by King, St. Laurent, Pearson and others.²⁵ For a bizarre interval, it also complicated the Canadian government’s dealings with the Truman Administration. Ultimately, the differences were overcome by a compromise, though the outcome has usually been depicted as a triumph for the ascendant figures in the government—St. Laurent and Pearson—over the departing leader.²⁶

Various factors certainly influenced King’s reaction—the original decision to participate in UNTCOK had been taken in his absence and without informing or consulting him (which may or may not have been linked to the fact that he was nearing his retirement); King believed that his former department was overly involved in international questions, particularly at the UN, about which, he was sure, Canada and its diplomats were relatively ignorant; and, there may have been some resentment at American presumption that the Canadian government would simply play its assigned part. In fact, King was notoriously cautious about foreign entanglements and highly sceptical about the United Nations. More exotic explanations have also been offered—notably posthumous alerts about danger in Korea from the shade of Franklin Roosevelt or more generalised advice from beyond.²⁷ However, it is worth recalling that this matter arose in the aftermath of King’s visit to London, where he had received sufficient warnings from the living to make him chary of avoidable involvement in a commission which owed its existence to the bi-polar division of the world and whose deliberations might well stoke a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. After all, Korea was, in King’s words, “the really dangerous part between the Americans and the Russians.”²⁸

Whether or not his response demonstrated an incomplete conversion to international engagement for Canada, as some have suggested, King's stance was definitely affected by his understandable concerns about the imminence of a third world war. In fact, the first reference in his diary to the Cabinet discussion of an appointment to UNTCOK was preceded by observations about Bevin's role in the current confrontation between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. King insisted to his colleagues that "a great mistake was being made by Canada being brought into situations in Asia and Europe of which she knew nothing whatever, of interfering with Great Powers without realizing what consequences might be."²⁹ That fundamental attitude helps to explain why King held so tenaciously to his view that Canada should decline to serve on UNTCOK and why the political compromise on the issue eventually reached privately with St. Laurent and Pearson at King's home underlined that Canadian participation was assured only so long as UNTCOK had access to all of Korea, thus effectively requiring Soviet cooperation with the commission, already seen as an unlikely prospect.³⁰

King himself drew the explicit connection between his fear of global conflict and an uncharacteristic personal intervention in bilateral economic bargaining. Negotiations in Ottawa between a British delegation and Canadian officials over the relationship between continuation of British contracts for supplies of food from Canada and additional drawings on the Canadian credit to the United Kingdom had led to an impasse in early December. Essentially, the British government wanted to keep an advantageous contract for supply of Canadian wheat, but eliminate or significantly cut back its expenditures on other foodstuffs from Canada. At the same time, it sought larger releases of Canadian dollars from the reconstruction loan of March 1946 in order to ease its exchange difficulties. However, the Canadian government was confronted by its own crisis in relation to its balance of payments with the United States and it was also reluctant to reconsider its agricultural policies, which had been premised on sales in the British market. Those tense discussions are considered in detail elsewhere, but King's role in the eventual outcome merits some attention in this study of the aftermath and implications of Bevin's evaluation of the prospects of war.³¹

There was a short hiatus in the bargaining as King was briefed on the situation. The Canadian Cabinet then reviewed a British proposal and considered counter-proposals, the incompatibility of which demonstrated how far apart the two sides remained. At first, King professed that he was "shocked and disgusted at the British attitude" and that he was sympathetic to the views that all of the contracts should be retained or none at all and that Canada had reached its

financial limit in assisting Britain.³² That had certainly been the advice from the Department of Finance and the Bank of Canada, which insisted that the Canadian government could not afford to underwrite Canadian exports to the United Kingdom and apparently regarded the current talks as an opportunity to educate the cabinet about Canada's precarious financial position and its implications.³³

For a few days, which were marked by a "fantastic" and unacceptable offer put forward by St. Laurent, which was promptly rejected by the British government, the negotiations teetered on the precipice of rancorous failure.³⁴ One member of the British bargaining team was sent home to prepare his government for the worst, while the frustrated head of the delegation, Sir Percivale Liesching, only delayed his own departure with the faint hope that there might be a favourable development as the principals stared into the abyss. What followed surprised not only Liesching but also the leading members of the Canadian government and their key advisers. On Saturday, 13 December, at the insistence of their Prime Minister, a group of Canadian ministers and officials worked all day to salvage something from the wreckage. Late in the day, King returned to Ottawa from his retreat at Kingsmere in the Gatineau Hills, to meet with the ministers of finance and external affairs as well as with Pearson, who later informed Liesching of the "intense activity" that had taken place.³⁵ None of the participants doubted that the Prime Minister's intervention had been decisive.

Although King muttered predictably about the folly of Canada's excessive post-war generosity and the ingratitude of the British government, he was largely responsible for an interim compromise so that "the Russians would not be able to say that there is a break between the United Kingdom and the Dominion." To make that deal and to retain the semblance of western unity, King was prepared to loosen the purse strings, an unfamiliar action indeed for him. "I, myself, would not agree to go beyond what he [the Minister of Finance Douglas Abbott] had suggested," King explained to the British High Commissioner and Liesching, "except for the talks I had had while in England with Attlee and Bevin and the condition which I felt the United Kingdom and ourselves were facing as a possible result of failure of the conference of Foreign Ministers." That short-term arrangement, for continuation of the food contracts for another year and drawings of \$45 million from the credit over the next three months, would also, it was hoped, bridge the financial gap until Congress appropriated funds for the Marshall Plan.³⁶ As Liesching reported to London, King had spoken "of his conversations with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary in London and his firm conviction that the next three

months in Europe were a crucial period during which either definite improvement or deterioration in the international situation would be seen.” In that context, King had “gone to the limit in offering this solution” and Liesching advised his government to accept the Canadian proposal, not only on its merits but also in light of “the serious effect upon the Prime Minister here if we fail to find a basis on which we can issue a joint statement meeting the wider political considerations which he has so firmly in his mind.”³⁷ Unquestionably, the briefing by Bevin at No. 10 Downing Street had been the most important factor in motivating King to intervene so decisively.

While these decisions were the most obvious examples of the impact of what King had heard in London, there is considerable evidence that his interpretation of that information swayed him on other issues as well. Not surprisingly, intermittent reports of tension and potential conflict in Berlin tended to remind King of the dire predictions in November 1947. Throughout the winter and spring, the Canadian Prime Minister worried about the international situation and especially about the possibility of a deadly clash over the fate of Berlin.³⁸ “I cannot see how the world will escape a third great war,” he wrote on 1 April 1948. A few days later, after speaking with President Harry Truman and reading more in the press about troop movements, King was worried that the pessimistic forecasts were about to come true. “If all this had not been foreseen some 5 or 6 months ago, and prophesied for this time, I would feel differently, but everything has come about completely according to what was foreseen at Downing Street, that I do believe the danger of the situation cannot be exaggerated.”³⁹ Thus, King was already nervous when the renewed crisis that prompted the Soviet blockade of West Berlin and the allied airlift in response arose in late June.

His odd reaction then may have been heightened by his brooding about the specific issue and the general prospects for so long. King had recorded his concerns about the threat of war as tensions escalated in June.⁴⁰ When the subject was first discussed by the Cabinet, he reminded his colleagues of what he had said at their meeting in the previous December and about how “some Ministers in the U.K. had thought that if the crisis did not come at Easter, it would probably come in June.” King then read a series of telegrams that had been received from Robertson in London, including one that recounted a meeting between Bevin and the Commonwealth High Commissioners. During that encounter, Bevin had pointedly but informally appealed for help from the Dominions, with a meaningful glance at the Canadian representative, to relieve West Berlin by air. Unfortunately that request for assistance, stripped of its setting and its informality, had been divulged to the *Evening Standard*,

so that the question of an appropriate Canadian response had been raised in the House of Commons by a member of the Opposition even before the cabinet had had an opportunity to assess the situation.⁴¹ That ill-advised leak perhaps predictably distorted the consideration of the issue by the Canadian government, and especially the reaction of the Prime Minister.

To King, that attempt to generate pressure for co-operation through the press was reminiscent of the “Chanak Affair” of 1922, when he had refused to be hurried into support of an unwise jingoistic scheme to defend a threatened British garrison in Turkey with “imperial” forces. The fact that his hesitation then over making a commitment had been borne out by events simply reinforced King’s caution thereafter.⁴² This obscure reference to an episode near the beginning of his first term in office may have mystified some around the table, but King patiently explained the history and the analogy. For him, it had been a formative experience in his leadership of the country and in his participation in world affairs. The lessons learned by King had included an enhanced scepticism about the notion of an imperial foreign policy, and especially concerning any British attempts to rush decisions or to use the press to sway Canadian opinion and thereby increase the pressure on the Canadian government to act in concert with Britain and the other Dominions. At the time, it had reinforced King’s determination to further Canada’s autonomy in international affairs as well as to steer his own course in external relations. The fact that the tempest in Turkey had blown over had also undermined the new Prime Minister’s confidence in the information-gathering and analysis of the Foreign Office and British diplomats, though the crisis was later understood to have been orchestrated by politicians without regard to official advice. Needless to say, a reminder of Chanak prompted King to respond less positively and to question the motivation of those who had made the request as well as those, including St. Laurent, Pearson and the Department of External Affairs, who had so promptly recommended a Canadian contribution of air crew or aircraft.

Although this unhelpful attitude is invariably and justifiably associated with King and attributed to his peculiar personality as well as his chronic aversion to overseas entanglements, the prime minister received critical support throughout these deliberations from the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton. Indeed, it was Claxton who suggested that the British government should be asked not to make a formal request and consequently not to put the Canadian government in the awkward position of refusing to assist its ally. Claxton’s contention that Canada should “stay out” of the crisis and that the “whole business was much too dangerous” apparently was received sympa-

thetically by other members of the Cabinet, though few spoke. The defence minister argued that the Royal Canadian Air Force could spare neither personnel nor suitable aircraft and that Canada's position in international law, in the event of an incident involving Canadians, was questionable as Canada was not an occupying power. Of course, that stance on participation in the airlift did not mean that Canada would remain aloof should the clash over access to West Berlin escalate. All at the meeting evidently agreed with King "that if war broke out, between the 3 great powers and Russia, Canada would wish to come in instantly."⁴³ When the fact that the Canadian government was currently negotiating its involvement in a military alliance to defend Western Europe is also taken into account, the determination to steer clear of involvement in the Berlin airlift seems even more anomalous. In spite of contributions from other Dominions more remote from the conflict and less directly implicated in the security concerns of the North Atlantic, the Canadian government clung to its dubious assertion that no formal request for aid had been received until after King had retired.⁴⁴

As this episode demonstrates, the effect on King's attitudes and actions of what he had heard in London and read since then was neither consistent nor predictable. At times, this dread of world war revived King's pre-war disposition to avoid commitments or simply to duck controversies. Though Canada's overall posture in world affairs was not in doubt and its capacity for influence and action was considerable after its significant wartime contribution to victory, King remained nervous about overseas entanglements, which might simply divide Canadians without necessarily making a difference to the rest of the world. That tentative outlook certainly influenced the reluctance of the Canadian government to take controversial stands or to play a more active role in the settlement of disputes during Canada's first year on the Security Council of the United Nations (UNSC).⁴⁵ Soviet involvement in the overthrow of the government of Czechoslovakia was condemned by the West, but the Canadian government's initial reaction was conditioned by an anxiety about the implications of UN involvement in the internal affairs of a member state. Only when it became clear that the USSR would not stress Western colonialism in reply did the Canadian representative emerge from the shadows to join the chorus of condemnation.⁴⁶ Much to the irritation of Australia, Canada took a conciliatory approach in dealing with its ally the Netherlands rather than align itself with rebels in Indonesia.⁴⁷

For his part, King never wanted to become entangled in an Anglo-American dispute and he was generally unenthusiastic about the United Nations—those factors, when combined with a chronic aversion to diplomatic engagements

concerning overseas hot-spots and a specific recollection of what had troubled Bevin in November, foredoomed any notion that others in the Canadian government may have had about playing a more positive role in avoiding conflict in Palestine. On the contrary, King consistently regarded the apparent willingness of St. Laurent, Pearson and the Department of External Affairs to involve Canada in the Middle East as errant folly and from time to time that supposedly quixotic tendency undermined his confidence in all three. Most often King sympathised with the British predicament and respected their experience and understanding of the region—though that sympathy never prompted him to declare openly his support for British policy or conduct, particularly when their position clashed with the American assessment of the situation or the Truman Administration’s policies, most notably with respect to the new State of Israel and its hostile neighbours.⁴⁸ On this matter, his traditional wariness about Canadian commitments, especially those remote from the country’s immediate expertise and interests, buttressed the Canadian Prime Minister’s aversion to providing any evidence of disunity in the western alliance and consequent opportunities for Soviet meddling or gain. For all of his caution, however, the global circumstances in his final year in office undoubtedly swayed King to support a more coherent and comprehensive association of his country with its closest allies, as well as with other states which were seen as vulnerable.

King’s apprehension of the Soviet challenge arguably prompted a decision with significant long-term implications for the development of the western alliance and for Canada’s role in the world. When King was first approached by the British government about a military pact to counter the Soviet threat to Western Europe, he was wary of any implication of consolidating the Commonwealth.⁴⁹ However, likely because his awareness of the “Russian Menace” had been heightened by Bevin’s briefing, King was more sympathetic to the fundamental purpose of the initiative when an offending phrase was disregarded. King authorised Canadian participation in the so-called “ABC” talks involving the United States, Britain and Canada, in March 1948, which sketched the principal elements of the North Atlantic Treaty. When the more elaborate negotiations involving western European representatives began in June 1948, King endorsed that involvement as well. Though the treaty was not signed until after his retirement, King had committed the Canadian government to an alignment and an alliance that would shape its policy choices for the next generation.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, King’s conviction that Canada must collaborate with its neighbour and other countries in the defence of North America and Western Europe

did not trump his political sense that a proposal for free trade with the United States could cost his party the next election and ruin his own reputation. In the wake of the difficult financial and trade negotiations with the United Kingdom, the successful conclusion of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the Canadian exchange crisis with the United States, King had initially looked favourably on official talks with the United States about a continental trade deal when he was briefed by the Minister of Finance.⁵¹ However, his tentative authorisation of efforts to elaborate a bilateral agreement was soon qualified by his preoccupation with a busy parliamentary schedule following his announcement of his retirement.⁵² Before the end of March 1948—less than three weeks after another briefing from Abbott about progress and prospects—King had scuttled the possible pact.

Not surprisingly, most accounts feature the colourful account of this reversal in King's diary. Therein he attributed a reminder from his morning reading about the political perils of his mentor Sir Wilfrid Laurier over an earlier proposed trade accord with the United States to "perfect evidence of guidance from Beyond" and reflected that he did not want to identify himself and his political legacy with any scheme for "commercial union" or with repudiation of "the whole relationship with Britain and the Commonwealth." Those had been the characterisations of the Laurier government's approach to the Reciprocity Agreement with the United States that had contributed to the Liberal Party's defeat in 1911. To revive such a scheme near the end of his career summoned that spectre for King. A free trade deal with the United States would be depicted by the Tories as confirmation of King's supposed commitment to "annexation" and his "anti-British" outlook. That reflection prompted a memorable expression of the unlikelihood that he would make such a commitment to closer continental economic relations in his final year in office. "I would no more think of it at my time of life and at this stage of my career, attempting any movement of the kind than I would of flying to the South pole."⁵³

On the following day, King told St. Laurent "that while it might be sound economically, I believed it would be fatal politically." Moreover, it would introduce a highly controversial issue at a time of international tension and when the Liberal Party was about to choose a new leader. King's heir apparent indicated that he had thought that "the proposal was hardly likely to be feasible," however much it had appeared to offer a way out of Canada's foreign exchange difficulties and a possible plank for a revised party platform.⁵⁴ In a discussion with Pearson, shortly before King left for a visit to the United States, the Prime Minister firmly opposed the initiative, particularly stressing the political risks associated with it and the likelihood that the proposal and

its implications would become controversial in both countries.⁵⁵ When the Canadian negotiators sought authority to proceed further, in a meeting with King and key ministers on 21 April 1948, that request was turned down and the initiative was effectively killed.⁵⁶ Further reflection simply heightened King's sense that such a move, without sufficient preparation and public education, "might throw the Liberal Party of Canada into oblivion."⁵⁷ As the consideration of this notion coincided with the escalation of global tensions and the start of negotiations that ultimately led to the North Atlantic Treaty, King's conviction that it was not an opportune occasion to add another controversial item to the political agenda was understandable. Throughout this period, he was preoccupied with ominous indications that Bevin's profound pessimism in November 1947 may have been justified. As the handling of the issue of free trade with the United States demonstrates, understanding that King was disturbed by the appreciations of the international situation which he received while in London for the Royal Wedding still does not make it simple to understand or to assess, let alone to predict, his subsequent decisions.

As mentioned earlier, King did not limit his consultations when he was in London to the living. On Saturday, 22 November 1947, before he left to stay with the Attlees at Chequers, he met with two spiritualists. These "interviews" as King described them, were arranged by Miss Mercy Phillimore of the London Spiritualist Alliance. We know less about the morning session, with a Mrs. Sharplin, than we do about the one in the afternoon, with Miss Geraldine Cummins. Cummins recalled in a memoir that, among other visitors, the late American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt tried to warn King (and through him the world) about "danger" in "Asia" and "the Far East." According to Cummins, this was an obvious reference to what later happened on the Korean peninsula! Though Denis Stairs took great delight in recounting this version of events in a lengthy footnote to his magisterial study of Canadian policy in relation to the Korean War—and lecturers on the history of Canada's international relations since then, desperate for lighter fare, have retold it frequently—Charles Stacey later debunked it rather effectively by referring to the original notes kept by Miss Cummins of this extraordinary encounter.⁵⁸ In fact, FDR spent most of his time urging King not to retire—advice which King chose to ignore, thus demonstrating the limits of the influence of the dearly departed on his decisions.

On a more serious note, there are certain lessons that we can learn from this episode in the life of Canada's most successful politician and the longest-serving Prime Minister in the British Empire and Commonwealth.

1. the consideration of these various questions demonstrates the continuing and often decisive influence of the Prime Minister on questions of Canada's international relations, even after he gave up the portfolio of Secretary of State for External Affairs;
2. there is also ample evidence of the continuing importance and impact of British ministers and officials on Canada's policies in world affairs; and,
3. the deliberations show how Canada reacted to unfolding events abroad very much within the context of its traditional alliances, whether or not it decided ultimately to share the burden of that response in all instances.

As for the principal reason for King's presence in the imperial capital, there is one final observation which may be pertinent in 2007. As we approach the Diamond Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, it is worth noting that the royal marriage significantly out-last-ed the cold war—for which we may be grateful in both respects.

Endnotes

- ¹ A version of this text was presented in July 2007 at "War and Peace in Canadian History: A Conference to Commemorate the 90th Anniversary of Vimy Ridge," which was organised by Dr. Tony McCulloch and hosted by the Canadian High Commission. I would like to thank Dr. McCulloch and Canada House. This paper was inspired by one of many conversations with Professor Norman Hillmer, a friend and colleague who has generously and wisely advised and assisted on this and many other projects. Neither those scholars nor my employer, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, bears any responsibility for the views expressed in this paper, which are my own.
- ² Keith Middlemas, *The Life and Times of George VI* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 166.
- ³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- ⁴ Quoted in Robert Lacey, *Majesty: Elizabeth II and the House of Windsor* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), p. 162.
- ⁵ King also resented that he had been "cross-examined and lectured" by British ministers, as he put it to the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, at the sessions which he attended in 1946. Clutterbuck to Machtig, 8 October 1947, National Archives of the United Kingdom (UKNA), Records of the Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office (DO 127), volume 70.

- ⁶ High Commissioner of United Kingdom [UKHC(C)] to Prime Minister of Canada [PM(C)], 6 August 1947, in Norman Hillmer and Donald Page, eds., *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER], Volume 13, 1947* (Ottawa: External Affairs and International Trade Canada, 1993), pp. 1226–7. UKHC(C) to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations [SSCR], No. 715, 8 August 1947; SSCR to UKHC(C), No. 681, 11 August 1947; UKHC(C) to SSCR, No. 729, 11 August 1947; DO 127/70. The British High Commissioner, Sir Alexander Clutterbuck attributed King's caution to "nervousness about the Australians." For King's meeting with Clutterbuck and his emphasis on informality, see: King Diary, 8 August 1947, Library and Archives Canada [LAC], Papers of W. L. M. King, Diary (MG26 J13).
- ⁷ Ambassador of Canada in France to Secretary of State for External Affairs [SSEA], Telegram 471, 9 September 1947 (Robertson to Pearson), *DCER, 13*, pp. 1229–30. King Diary: 30 September 1947.
- ⁸ Clutterbuck to Machtig, 8 October 1947. DO 127/70. SSEA to High Commissioner of Canada in the United Kingdom [CHC(UK)], No. 1453, 13 September 1947 (Pearson to Holmes); SSEA to Acting CHC(UK), No. 1548, 4 October 1947 (Robertson to Holmes). LAC, Records of the Department of External Affairs (RG25) [DEA], volume 5798, file 270(s).
- ⁹ King Diary: 21–3 October 1947.
- ¹⁰ See the account of his trip drawn from the diaries in J. W. Pickersgill and D. F. Forster, eds., *The Mackenzie King Record, Volume 4, 1947–1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 19??), 93–119.
- ¹¹ King Diary: 17 November 1947.
- ¹² King Diary: 20 November 1947.
- ¹³ Commonwealth Liaison Department (Foreign Office), "Notes on Outstanding Questions Now Affecting the International Relations of the United Kingdom," 19 November 1947. UKNA, Records of the Foreign Office, FO 371, Volume 65593, File W7944.
- ¹⁴ Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary 1945–1951* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1983), 486.
- ¹⁵ [Sir Norman Brook], Meeting of Commonwealth Representatives, 24 November 1947. FO371, Volume 65589, File W8399. In a covering minute to Bevin on the same file (dated 4 December 1947), Brook notes: "Some of the High Commissioners who were present have, however, sent to their Governments their own accounts of that discussion, and we have reason to believe that some of those accounts are more alarming than the record which I made." For that reason, this document, which had been prepared

for British ministers only, was sent to all of those who attended the briefing.

¹⁶ King Diary: 24 November 1947.

¹⁷ Robertson to Pearson, 6 December 1947, DEA/5798/270(s). Robertson cited subsequent developments as well as an interview between a member of his staff and Sir Oliver Harvey, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who was about to replace Duff Cooper as British Ambassador to France. J. L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft 1929–68* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1981), p. 234.

¹⁸ King Diary: 24–5 November 1947.

¹⁹ Report by the Chiefs of Staff, “Review of the World Strategic Situation,” 17 November 1947. DO 127/70. A copy of this report was enclosed with a letter from Clutterbuck to Pearson, 5 December 1947 [on DEA/5798/273(s)], in which the British High Commissioner indicates that the study was prepared “as background information for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers who attended the Royal Wedding” and that a copy was given to King in London. Its contention that the UN “provides no security against war between the Great Powers” and that “the only effective deterrent to a potential aggressor is tangible evidence of our intention and ability to withstand attack and to hit back immediately,” in alliance with sympathetic nations, certainly matched his assessment of the international organisation and its role in world affairs.

²⁰ King Diary: 29–30 November 1947.

²¹ Cabinet Conclusions, 4 December 1947; King Diary: 4 December 1947.

²² King Diary: 4 December 1947. As evident from this and other entries, King respected Viscount Alexander’s military experience. Not only did the prime minister take the Governor-General into his confidence about his various consultations on defence and foreign policy questions, but he often treated him as a special adviser on these subjects.

²³ King Diary: 15 December 1947. Two days later, at Robertson’s request, Bevin conveyed his impressions of the breakdown and its implications so that these could be passed on to King. Bevin spoke expansively of “an informal western federation with no written constitution” as an aim in order to counteract and ultimately to stop “propaganda and intimidation” from the USSR. Roberts, Minutes, 17 December 1947, FO371/70174/W20. On the following day, Bevin spoke to the House of Commons about the adjournment of the CFM and less than three weeks later he had secured the approval of the British Cabinet for “some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas and the

- Dominions.” CP(48)6. SSFA, “The First Aim of British Foreign Policy,” 4 January 1948, CAB 129/23. CM 2(48)5, 8 January 1948, CAB 128/12.
- ²⁴ King Diary: 18 December 1947. Cabinet Conclusions: 18 December 1947. The best account of Canada’s involvement in UNTCOK (and one that questions the representation of the episode by Pearson and others) makes effective use of the files of the Department of External Affairs, which were not available to some earlier analysts. John Price, “The ‘Cat’s Paw’: Canada and the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, 85, 2 (June 2004), 297–324. The controversy in the Cabinet was reported in the press not long afterward, apparently as a result of a leak from a Cabinet minister to reporter Ken Wilson of the *Financial Post*. Pearson to Robertson, 5 February 1948. Pearson Papers/N1/9.
- ²⁵ Among those not directly involved in the clash who threatened to resign (and who drafted a letter to that effect) was the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton, who believed that his own intervention with King had persuaded the prime minister of the seriousness of the situation and ultimately prompted him to back down from an open split with St. Laurent. David Bercuson, *True Patriot: The Life of Brooke Claxton, 1898–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 190–2, which relies on Claxton’s unpublished memoirs.
- ²⁶ Some of the accounts may have taken their cue from Pearson, who insisted privately at the time that “the compromise represents a very definite withdrawal by the Prime Minister from his earlier position, and in that respect is a victory for Mr. St. Laurent.” L B Pearson, “Mission to Washington on the Korean Commission, January 1–6, 1948,” 10 January 1948, in Hector Mackenzie, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations, 14, 1948 [DCER 14]* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1994), pp. 136–41. This memorandum was located in Pearson’s private papers, not the records of the Department of External Affairs. That judgment by Pearson has been the interpretation of the episode in most assessments of King and surveys of Canadian foreign policy since Bruce Hutchison, *The Incredible Canadian* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1952), pp. 432–4. See also: James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Peacemaking and Deterrence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 6–7.; C. P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, A History of Canadian External Policies, Volume 2: 1921–1948, The Mackenzie King Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 414–5; John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943–1957, Volume 2* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 65–7; Norman Hillmer and J. L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire, Canada and the World to the 1990s* (To-

ronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), pp. 207–9; Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), pp. 80–81. The first major study on Canadian policy in dealing with the Korean War treats the episode more simply as a question of differences in overall outlook on Canada's international relations and assessment of the appropriate response to the specific question. Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War, and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 6–18. Price's more recent account stresses that the purpose of the compromise was to patch over the differences between King and St. Laurent for political reasons and that its content (rather than the later reversal on UNTCOK) was consistent with King's stance to the extent that it presumed correctly that UNTCOK would not be able to fulfil its original mandate. Price, "Cat's Paw," 310–1.

²⁷ Stairs, *Diplomacy of Constraint*, p. 10, fn 18. Geraldine Cummins, *Unseen Adventures: An Autobiography Covering 34 Years of Psychic Research* (London: Rider and Company, 1951), Appendix ["Reminiscences of a British Commonwealth Statesman"]; Geraldine Cummins, *Mind in Life and Death: Review of Recent Evidence of the Survival of Franklin Roosevelt and Others* (London: Aquarian Press, 1956), p. 109. King's interest in spiritualism was public knowledge not long after his death. Blair Fraser, "The Secret Life of Mackenzie King, Spiritualist," *Maclean's Magazine*, 15 December 1951. This subject is discussed in C. P. Stacey, *A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), pp. 208–15.

²⁸ King Diary: 6 December 1947. This observation was made in the context of a talk with the Belgian Ambassador and a reflection about the tendency of Pearson and the Department of External Affairs to get involved too greatly in UN deliberations on questions such as Palestine. In a later meeting with the American Ambassador, Ray Atherton, when Canadian representation on UNTCOK was still an open question, King compared the situation on the Korean peninsula with the confrontation over Berlin. King Diary: 27 December 1947.

²⁹ King Diary: 18 December 1947.

³⁰ Eventually, UNTCOK's mandate was amended by the UN to permit it to supervise elections in those parts of the peninsula to which it had access, which effectively meant only South Korea. That led to some confusion about the participation and appropriate response of the Canadian representative, though ultimately the Canadian government acquiesced in this change. By then, King was more concerned about other matters. After the formation of the Republic of Korea under UN supervision and the super-

- ceding of UNTCOK by a more permanent body, Canada withdrew from the commission. Stairs, *Diplomacy of Constraint*, pp. 18–28.
- ³¹ There is a more complete account of this subject in "Chaff with the Wheat: the Anglo-Canadian Wheat Contract in its North Atlantic Setting," a paper presented at a conference of the Transatlantic Studies Association in Cork, Ireland, in July 2007. A revised version of that presentation will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*.
- ³² King Diary: 9 December 1947. UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1179, 5 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan), MAF 97/555.
- ³³ UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1129, 1 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan); UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1174, 4 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan); Draft Report to Sir Stafford Cripps, n.d. [22 December 1947—marked "V. Provisional. Liesching has not seen"], MAF 97/555. UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1202, 10 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan), MAF 97/556.
- ³⁴ UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1233, 13 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan); UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1241, 13 December 1947 (Liesching to Chancellor of Exchequer), MAF 97/556.
- ³⁵ UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1242, 15 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan), MAF 97/556.
- ³⁶ King Diary: 13 December 1947. UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1242, 15 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan), MAF 97/556.
- ³⁷ UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1241, 13 December 1947 (Liesching to Chancellor of Exchequer); UKHC(C) to SSDA, No. 1242, 15 December 1947 (Liesching to Rowan), MAF 97/556.
- ³⁸ For example, see King Diary: 29 December 1947; 11 March 1948; 13 March 1948; 15 March 1948. At the same time, King wondered whether a confrontation over Berlin might serve as a distraction to cover Soviet moves or designs elsewhere.
- ³⁹ King Diary: 4 April 1948.
- ⁴⁰ King Diary: 17 June 1948 and 26 June 1948.
- ⁴¹ King Diary: 30 June 1948. The leak was later attributed privately by Canada House to the Australian High Commission in London. The situation was aggravated by the sensationalist framing by Canadian Press of the *Evening Standard's* story and a subsequent statement from the Foreign Office. Memorandum from USSEA to PM(C), 30 June 1948; SSEA to UKHC(C), No. 1013, 30 June 1948; CHC(UK) to SSEA, No. 1007, 1 July 1948; CHC(UK) to SSEA, No. 1033, 5 July 1948, *DCER*, 14, 794–8.
- ⁴² Leigh Sarty, "The Limits of Internationalism: Canada and the Soviet Blockade of Berlin, 1948–1949," in J. L. Black and Norman Hillmer, eds., *Nearly Neighbours, Canada and the Soviet Union: from Cold War to Détente and*

- Beyond* (Kingston: Ronald P. Frye & Company, 1989), pp. 56–74, remains the definitive account of this topic. On the Chanak Crisis and its implications for Canada’s relationship with Britain, see: Philip G. Wigley, *Canada and the transition to Commonwealth: British-Canadian Relations 1917–1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 160–72; Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, 2, pp. 17–27.
- ⁴³ King Diary: 30 June 1948. Cabinet Conclusions: 30 June 1948. The only individuals cited in the minutes are King, St. Laurent and Claxton. On Claxton’s position, see the excellent account in Bercuson, *True Patriot*, pp. 195–8. The principal arguments for and against Canadian participation can be found in a sequence of memoranda and letters. Memorandum from USSEA to SSEA, 29 June 1948; Memorandum from USSEA to SSEA, 30 June 1948; Minister of National Defence [MND] to SSEA, 30 June 1948; USSEA to MND, 14 July 1948. *DCER 14*, pp. 787–8, 789–90, 793–4, 800–1. Pearson especially regretted that the request for assistance, which he regarded as reasonable, had been conveyed “in an inept way” and that it had been presented as one from Britain to the Commonwealth rather than as an appeal from the Western occupying powers, including the United States and France as well as the United Kingdom, to “a number of democratic countries, including Canada,” with particular emphasis on the determination of the “North Atlantic democratic states” to withstand Soviet pressure to abandon West Berlin.
- ⁴⁴ Sarty, “Limits of Internationalism,” pp. 63–9. Robert A Spencer, *Canada in World Affairs, From UN to NATO 1946–1949* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 266–8. The “situation in Berlin” was discussed at three meetings of the Cabinet in July, but there was no change in the Canadian position. Cabinet Conclusions: 7 July 1948; 20 July 1948; 27 July 1948.
- ⁴⁵ This theme is examined in my unpublished paper, “Knight Errant, Cold Warrior or Cautious Ally? Canada on the United Nations Security Council, 1948–49.” See also Hector Mackenzie, “Canada’s Nationalist Internationalism: From the League of Nations to the United Nations,” in Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick, eds., *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), pp. 89–109, especially pp. 103–4.
- ⁴⁶ The Canadian diplomatic reports on the coup in Czechoslovakia and the exchanges on how to respond to the question at the United Nations are documented in *DCER 14*, pp. 1732–51 and 324–8 respectively.
- ⁴⁷ The tensions between Australia and Canada over the latter’s position on Indonesia are discussed in the unpublished paper cited in note 45 above.

- ⁴⁸ Anne Trowell Hillmer, “‘Here I am in the Middle’: Lester Pearson and the Origins of Canada’s Diplomatic Involvement in the Middle East,” in David Taras and David H. Goldberg, eds., *The Diplomatic Battleground: Canada and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), pp. 125–43. John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace, Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943–1957, Volume 2* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 63–5.
- ⁴⁹ Prime Minister of United Kingdom [PM(UK)] to PM(C), 14 January, 1948; Memorandum from USSEA to SSEA, 17 January 1948; Memorandum from USSEA to PM(C), 17 January 1948 (with enclosed Draft Reply from PM(C) to PM(UK), 17 January 1948); Pearson to Wrong, 29 January 1948, *DCER 14*, pp. 400–5. King Diary: 14 January 1948. King objected to a reference to “the power and resources of the Commonwealth to be devoted to the defence of civilization,” to which he objected as vaguely worded and because of “the use of the word Commonwealth as though it was one entity instead of several nations.”
- ⁵⁰ Escott Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope: the Making of the North Atlantic Treaty 1947–1949* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Growing Up Allied* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 3–128; Hector Mackenzie, “Canada, the Cold War and the Negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty,” in John Hilliker and Mary Halloran, eds., *Diplomatic Documents and Their Users* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1995), pp. 145–73; Hector Mackenzie, “The North Atlantic Triangle and North Atlantic Treaty: A Canadian Perspective on the ABC Security Conversations of March–April 1948,” *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 20 (2004/2005), 77–99.
- ⁵¹ King Diary: 6 March 1948. R. D. Cuff and J. L. Granatstein, *American Dollars—Canadian Prosperity: Canadian-American Economic Relations 1945–1950* (Toronto: Samuel-Stevens, 1978), pp. 64–82; J. L. Granatstein, *How Britain’s Weakness Forced Canada Into the Arms of the United States [the 1988 Joanne Goodman Lectures]* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989),
- ⁵² King made a speech to the National Liberal Federation on 20 January 1948 in which he disclosed this plan to step down as Liberal leader in August, when a party convention would elect his successor. The diary thereafter contains frequent references to the need to make progress on matters before Parliament, which would have to be dealt with before a significant initiative or treaty could be presented for approval. Of course, it was also an election year in the United States, so that speculation about the timetable for American consideration of a proposed pact was highly problematic.

- ⁵³ King Diary: 24 March 1948. Later that day, King spoke with a reporter from the *Financial Post*. As he put it, he “gave him nothing in a final way but gave him to understand that I would not favour such a thing as commercial union, etc.”
- ⁵⁴ King Diary: 25 March 1948.
- ⁵⁵ King Diary: 29 March 1948.
- ⁵⁶ King Diary: 21 April 1948. Pearson to Robertson, 22 April 1948, in *DCER*, 14, pp. 1061–4.
- ⁵⁷ King Diary: 6 May 1948.
- ⁵⁸ “Saturday afternoon, November 22nd, 1947” and “Oct 23, 1948. Dorchester Hotel.” in Geraldine Cummins Papers, Cork City and County Archives [folder: “Roosevelt Message to Mr Mackenzie King”]. The only references to “Asia”—which are no more specific than that—occur in the later session, long after the clash over Canadian representation on UNTCOK. Though it would appear that Stacey was correct, there is still a glimmer of hope for those who want to believe in guidance from beyond. After all, according to King’s diary, “Roosevelt took up most of the morning,” when the medium was not Miss Cummins, but Mrs. Sharplin. As yet, I have not seen a record of what King learned from her and what messages she passed on to him. Thus it is still possible that Roosevelt gave better advice to King after he was dead than many advisers from the Department of External Affairs gave to him when they were alive. In any event, it does suggest that there could be a further talk or article about this aspect of King’s visit to London—perhaps entitled, with apologies to Marshall McLuhan: “The Mediums and the Messages.” It may also be worth noting that, whatever the explanation, Miss Cummins recorded names which it would require some knowledge of Canadian history to link to King.