

Canada Ties to the U.S. Empire: Lester Pearson and the Myth of Canada as “Peaceable Kingdom”

Part I

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[T]here are two sides whose composition cuts across national and even community boundaries. The issues ... can be described as freedom vs. slavery.... [T]wo powerful leaders of these opposed sides have emerged—the United States of America and the USSR.

We are faced now with a situation similar in some respects to that which confronted our forefathers in early colonial days when they ploughed the land with a rifle slung on the shoulder. If they stuck to the plough and left the rifle at home, they would have been easy victims for any savages lurking in the woods. ”

As Canada’s Minister of External Affairs, **Lester Pearson** delivered the above statements in his speech entitled [“Canadian Foreign Policy in a Two Power World”](#) to a joint meeting of the Empire Club of Canada and Canadian Club of Toronto. (April 10, 1951)

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For centuries, self-righteous state myths have depicted the imperial Canadian project as a victory for democracy and human rights. Despite Canada’s long record of genocide, land plunder, and war profiteering, official narratives about noble “Canadian values” still reign in this imagined “peaceable kingdom.”

Canada’s ethnonationalist propaganda demonized First Nations as hostile sub-humans to be enslaved, imprisoned on reservations and made Christian in residential schools. This White-Power racism served imperialist containment policies designed to turn “Red Indian” enemies into captive nations.

By the early 1950s, then-external affairs minister Lester Pearson was pioneering a new containment policy. During the transition to the new world order of the Cold War, he rallied his powerful allies in Canada’s racist old-boys’ clubs.

Pearson’s status as a national hero was consolidated when he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his role in helping to establish a UN peacekeeping force.

But Pearson was far from a progressive. In 1951, he compared the new Red Menace of

communism to what he called “savages lurking in the woods.” These “savages,” he declared, had violently threatened the peaceful lives of innocent white Europeans whom he lovingly called “our forefathers.”

By conjuring unsettling images of a Red-Indian bogeyman, Pearson helped manufacture consent for a new, politically Red enemy to meet the needs of NATO’s capitalist powers.

On the home front, Pearson’s fierce anticommunism justified Canada’s systematic abuses of civil rights. As Ian MacKay and Jamie Swift note in *Warrior Nation*: “Pearson enthusiastically supported a Cold War against any Canadians suspected of viewing the world outside the newly hegemonic framework of the American imperium.”^[1]

Where to Find It
100th Year. No. 20,000. Metropolitan Edition * TORONTO, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1946. 2 Cents Per Copy 28 PAGES

The Globe and Mail Fair and Cold
Recent Weather Report on Page 2

FBI JOINS OTTAWA SPY HUNT

Investigation Now Focused On Munitions Department

Documents Included In Roundup

Investigation of Spy Ring In Canada Started Last Fall

Secrecy Is Maintained By Officials

Headline in Toronto newspaper pointing to repressive political environment in the early Cold War.

[Source: opentext.bc.ca]

Targeted for abuse by Canada’s Cold War elites were “peaceniks,” radical unionists and anyone branded as too leftwing. “Pearson had become an ever-more-aggressive accomplice,” said MacKay and Swift, “in government attacks on dissidents.”^[2]

To Pearson and other Cold Warriors, the world was torn. As chief architect of Canada’s postwar anti-Red foreign policy, Pearson demonized the Soviet Union as the epicenter of evil. The USSR was still reeling after 27 million of its citizens had been killed by Hitler’s anti-communist crusade.



This is the cover of the [Canadian edition](#) (1947) of a U.S. comic by the [Catechetical Guild Educational Society](#). [Source: [coat.ncf.ca](#)]



Anti-communist propaganda which Pearson echoed. [Source: coat.ncf.ca]

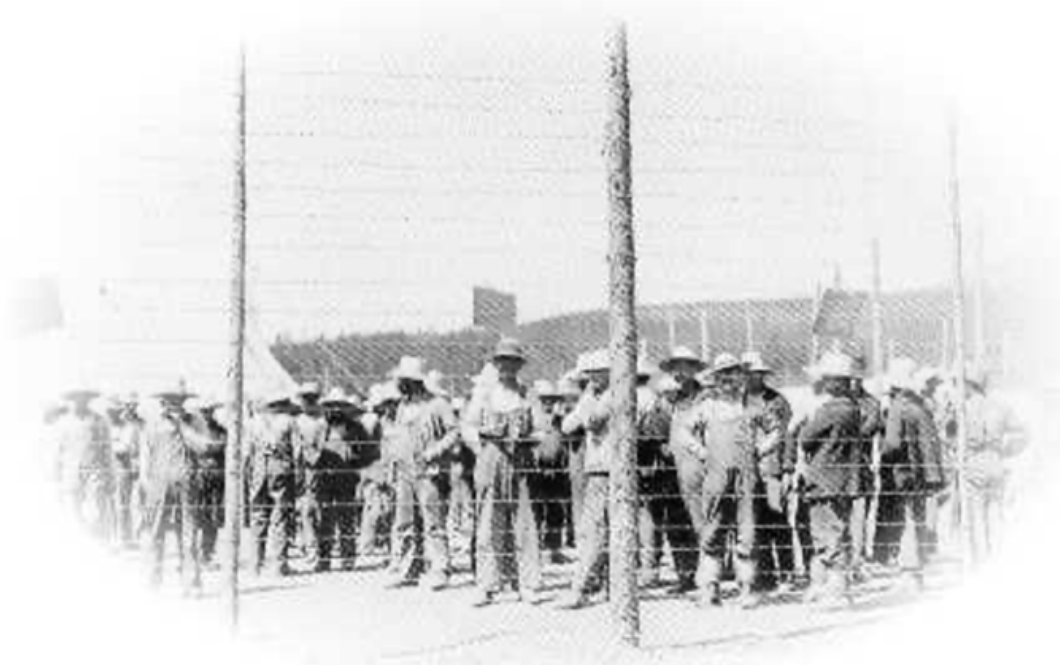
After the Red Army liberated Eastern Europe and led Germany's defeat, the U.S. replaced the Nazis as global leaders in the war on communism. NATO efforts to destroy the USSR used Cold-War "containment" strategies: surrounding the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons, isolating it with political and economic sanctions, and vilifying it with propaganda. Pearson had a central role in this new phase of the West's war on communism.



Lester Pearson, far right, with Halvard Lange of Norway and Gaetano Martino of Italy. They were known

as the “Three Wise Men” who were ardent in supporting NATO. [Source: nato.int]

The Red Scare had been going on for decades. In Pearson’s youth during WWI and the First Red Scare (1914-20), Canada ran slave-labor, concentration camps that interned thousands of single immigrant men, mostly Ukrainians, who had been laid off from rural work camps. Elites feared their growing protests in urban centers might spark a socialist revolution.^[3]



Ukrainians interned during World War I and the First Red Scare. [Source: infoukes]

And, in 1919, Canada was among thirteen countries that invaded newborn Soviet Russia with 150,000 troops to intervene in its civil war and reverse its revolution. Canada’s allies in the war, led by Admiral Alexander Vasilevich Kolchak, killed at least 100 civilians for every one killed by the Bolshevik Red Army, according to General William S. Graves, who headed the U.S. contingent.^[4]



Members of the Canadian Army's 67th Battery pose for a photo following the Battle of Tulgas, Russia, on November 11, 1918. [Source: ipolitics.ca]

During the Depression, when Pearson was a bureaucrat working closely with Canada's prime minister, some 170,000 single, unemployed men were forced into remote work camps to prevent a potential revolution.^[5]

One means of dismantling Canada's prevailing peace mythology is to examine this country's support for U.S. militarism throughout the Cold War. This study leads to the conclusion that little if anything has changed.



Plaque commemorating Pearson and Truman and signing of original NATO treaty in 1949. [Source: tcd.com]

Always a stalwart NATO warrior giving solid allegiance to U.S.-led military, political, economic and propaganda warfare, Canada has taken leading roles in a new Cold War being waged by the American empire.



Lester Pearson at West Germany's accession to NATO in 1955. [Source: [nato.int](https://www.nato.int)]

Facing Canada's history of duplicity is especially difficult because it means challenging the villainous hypocrisy of some of this nation's most-beloved leaders. It also means confronting the powerful, political descendants of Canada's much-glorified peace cult heroes, and debunking pernicious narratives that are still perpetuated, even by many mainstream progressives.

Pearson As Peace-Cult Hero and Cold-War Hatemonger

While state-sponsored myths have helped to create an institutionalized cult around Pearson, Canada's beloved Nobel Peace Prize winner was actually a vociferous Cold Warrior. Besides using hateful anti-Red rhetoric to whitewash U.S.-backed wars, Pearson rallied support for various covert actions that squashed anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Canada's largest political, corporate, religious and media institutions shared with their Western allies a fierce loathing for anyone who could be labelled communist. Their global crusade maligned all individuals, groups, parties, movements and governments that dared to threaten the freewheeling reign of predatory corporations. In Lester Pearson, these fear-mongering elites found a believable voice whose skilful devotion to Cold War tropes served their shared, vested interests.

Pearson was useful to British and American power elites because he leveraged Canada's well-crafted reputation as a neutral "middle power" to cheerlead their neocolonial adventures. This included lending Canada's respected voice to the ousting of elected, socialist-friendly governments that tried to limit the exploits of foreign corporations.

As Canada's most influential confidence man, Pearson exuded faith in America's supposed devotion to peace. "It is inconceivable to me that the United States would ever initiate an aggressive war," said Pearson in 1955, and "it is also inconceivable that Canada would ever take part in such a war."^[6]

Captivated by the era's extreme anti-communism, Pearson ignored Western war crimes. In fact, he artfully glorified these crimes with phobic narratives that painted assaults on democracy as if they were part of a noble, god-inspired plan to wipe communist evil off the face of the earth.

Before examining Pearson's key role in leading Canada's support for these American adventures, it is worth examining the cultural influences in his early life that helped create his pious devotion to Cold War causes.

The Early Origins of Pearson's "Muscular Christianity"

That Pearson slipped so easily into sermonizing about the Red Menace can be explained largely by his ultrareligious upbringing. His father, and both grandfathers, were Methodist ministers. [NOTE: Not sure what a "staunch" Methodist minister is.]

Methodism, which was then Canada's largest Protestant denomination, was central to the imperial project of spreading "Christian values" at home and abroad.

This religious exercise, to build the moral muscles of a global Anglo-based civilization, fixated on the Social Gospel movement. Its mission was to take up the "white man's burden" and uplift atheist heathens and inferior races through such genocidal institutions as Indian Residential Schools.^[7]

Pearson describes his maternal grandfather, Rev. Thomas Bowles, as "a pillar of the church and the Liberal party." He had been elected county warden three times, township reeve (mayor) ten times, and was appointed first sheriff of Dufferin County, Ontario. Pearson notes that his paternal grandfather Rev. Marmaduke L. Pearson, one of the Methodist "church's most distinguished divines," was a devoted Tory who seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about and playing baseball, lawn-bowling and cricket.

This obsession was passed on to his sons, including Lester's father, Rev. Edwin A. Pearson. He was described by historian John English, as "a strong imperialist" whose "three boys shared his enthusiasm for sports and the empire."^[8]



Lester Pearson (bottom left), at home in Hamilton, 1913, with brothers, parents and grandfather. His father and grandfather were both Methodist ministers who zealously supported British imperialism.

[Source: coat.ncf.ca]

Pearson's memoir also reveals the great influence of certain novels he found in his Sunday School library. "From its shelves I learned of life and adventure," said Pearson, "through Horatio Alger, G.A. Henty and similar heroic books."^[9] Alger, a disgraced Unitarian minister who became one of the most popular novelists of the late 1800s, is best known for perpetuating the American dream's "rags-to-riches" myth.

George A. Henty though, revealed Pearson, was "the author whom I knew the best among all English writers before I went to college."^[10] As a British war correspondent, Henty's travels across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, were always sure to promote British imperialism. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, his work epitomized that blatantly jingoistic literary genre known as "imperial adventure fiction."

Henty's books embodied the spirit of so-called "Muscular Christianity." This Victorian movement glorified the pious athleticism and virile masculinity of tough, white saviors who would happily knock heads together (and kill if need be) for the glory of god, king, country and empire.

Always ready to save the brutish, lower-class savages from themselves, Henty's heroes enthralled impressionable juveniles, like Pearson, who lapped up this macho vision of a

missionizing, tough-love fundamentalism that was hopped up on just wars and imperial steroids.^[11] “To be a true hero,” explained Henty when interviewed, “you must be a true Christian.”^[12]

Henty’s 122 novels were riddled with white supremacist heroes who spouted the era’s outrageously popular racist, sexist and anti-semitic beliefs. His books also targeted left-wing, cartoon villains from the ruthless labour leaders of striking English coal miners^[13] to the eroticized socialist women who ran loose in the 1871 “Paris Commune.”^[14]

Considering his class and the strong religious leanings of his family and community, it is not surprising that Pearson would be so captivated by Henty’s writings. While Pearson’s 1972 memoir offers no critique of Henty, it praises the author’s historical fiction for having provided a knowledge of the world that informed and inspired him throughout his political career:

“His exciting stories based on history’s more romantic episodes stirred my imagination mightily and, I suspect, had much to do with my liking for and concentration on history in my educational progress. When years later I traveled extensively abroad as Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs, there was hardly a place I visited which I had not known through that prolific but now almost forgotten writer of adventure stories for boys.”^[15]

Pearson’s exceedingly sheltered childhood kept him cozy in the warmth of positive feelings for imperialism. “[T]he parish was my world,” he confessed. “As for the rest of the world, I thought about it ... largely in terms of the British Empire which was looking after the ‘lesser breeds’ and keeping the French and Germans under control.”^[16]

Admitting that his was “an absorbing mind rather than a questioning mind,” Pearson also disclosed that he had “a rather superficial approach to life.” His “limited” world, Pearson says, “did not broaden much” until 1913 when, at age 16, he entered Toronto’s Victoria College.^[17]

Named for Queen Victoria, and founded by the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1836, this was no breeding ground for radical thought; it was a hotbed of imperialist education.

Rather than freeing Pearson’s mind from its fetters, college life further narrowed Pearson’s “limited” worldview. And, it was here that Pearson first made contact with influential men who led him along the political path to power.

Victoria College was where he began what he called his “long and ... rewarding association”^[18] with Vincent Massey, a history lecturer and dean of the residence building which his family had built and furnished. Massey’s Methodist father, owning one of Toronto’s biggest industrial concerns, had close links to the highest echelons of the Liberal Party. Massey was already a good friend of Mackenzie King, who became Canada’s longest-standing prime minister.

Massey became one of Pearson’s most important Methodist mentors. His deeds included being a leader of Toronto’s Cecil Rhodes-inspired Round Table Society (1911-18); marrying Alice Parkin, daughter of Sir George Parkin, secretary of The Rhodes Trust (1915); being

appointed to Prime Minister Mackenzie King's cabinet war committee (1918) and to the Liberal cabinet (1925); being appointed Canada's first envoy to the U.S. (1926-30) and its high commissioner to Britain (1930, 1935-46); being president of England and Wales' National Liberal Federation (1932-35); being made Canada's delegate to the League of Nations (1936) and being appointed to represent the Queen as Canada's governor general (1952-59).^[19]

Massey, who Pearson notes was "personal friends of the Royal Family, and ... seemed to know every duke by his first name,"^[20] was able to open doors for Pearson throughout his career. This included funding Pearson's BA and MA studies at Oxford (1923-25).^[21]

Pearson's subservience to the moneyed interests of empire helped ensure his rise through the Department of External Affairs. He joined that bureaucracy in 1928, during the King government, but when Conservative Prime Minister Richard "Iron Heel" Bennett took power in 1930, "Pearson was a beneficiary."^[22]

Bennett, who was also a devout Methodist, earned his nickname after an inflammatory 1932 speech in which he said:

"What do these so-called groups of Socialists and Communists offer you? They are sowing their seeds everywhere.... [T]hroughout Canada this propaganda is being put forward by organizations from foreign lands that seek to destroy our institutions. And we ask that every man and woman put the iron heel of ruthlessness against a thing of that kind."^[23]

Crushing communism was clearly the order of the day, and Pearson was ambitious and eager to comply.

Talent-spotted by Bennett, Pearson was soon appointed to two royal commissions on economic issues. As journalism professor Andrew Cohen noted: "Pearson liked Bennett who treated him as a protégé."

In early 1935, Pearson accompanied Bennett to London where they took part in the Jubilee to celebrate King George V's 25-year reign. During their lavish sea voyage with its sumptuous cuisine, Pearson learned he would receive the Order of the British Empire and asked Bennett for a raise of \$25 per week.^[24]

This increase boosted Pearson's salary by an extra \$25,000 per year in today's dollars. This was distasteful considering all those who were hungry for food and justice during the Great Depression.

Unmentioned by Cohen or Pearson is that, between 1932 and 1935, Bennett's government rounded up 170,000 single, unemployed, urban men and forced them into slavery in army-run "Relief Camps."



Army-run relief camp during Great Depression, designed to remove “red” agitators from the cities.

[Source: sutori.com]

General Andrew McNaughton’s internment plan makes it clear why. “In their ragged platoons,” he explained to the cabinet, “here are the prospective members of what Marx called the ‘industrial reserve army, the storm troopers of the revolution.’”^[25]

General McNaughton further told Bennett that “[b]y taking the men out ... of the cities” and forcing them into remote work camps, “we were removing the active elements on which the ‘red’ agitators could play.”^[26]

In 1935, Bennett approved Pearson’s posting to Canada’s High Commission in London. When Bennett was replaced by King, Pearson’s move was confirmed and he continued his climb, becoming second in command under High Commissioner Vincent Massey (1939-42).

In 1940, Pearson was recruited by Sir William Stephenson to be a “King’s messenger” carrying secret documents to Europe. Nicknamed “the Quiet Canadian,” Stephenson was the Canadian intelligence agent, codenamed “Intrepid,”^[27] who inspired Ian Fleming’s fictional, anti-communist superspy, 007.^[28]

James Bond was also the violently racist and sexist Cold War equivalent of the Victorian era’s manly, white, imperial adventure heroes, so admired by Pearson.

From London, Pearson was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he was Canada’s ambassador and envoy extraordinaire to the U.S. (1942-46).

After returning to Ottawa, he was appointed foreign minister for the last few months of Prime Minister King’s time in office (1948). When King’s protégé, Louis St. Laurent, took over, he retained Pearson as foreign minister (1948-57).

Pearson’s early decades of pliable innocence were over. Having been moulded and mentored into form by family, church, schools and government, he had thoroughly internalized the deceitful scripts of elite institutions.

But though he became a manager and manipulator in his own right, Pearson’s role on the

global stage was still directed by external forces in Washington and London. While just following his social orders, Pearson's acts of complicity in Cold War coups, wars, invasions and occupations cannot be excused. He was culpable for the criminality in which he willfully engaged. Let's look at a few examples.

The Korean War and Its Planning, 1947-1953

Pearson was a strong supporter of the Korean War (1950-1953), which devastated the Korean peninsula and left a legacy of conflict and division that persists to this day.

Pearson considered the war part of a moral crusade against communism.

His understanding overlooked the fact that the northern communist regime, led by Kim Il-Sung, had led the fight against Japanese colonialism. By contrast, the southern regime, led by Syngman Rhee and dominated by Japanese colonial collaborators, killed over 100,000 of its own citizens and launched raids into the north, all of which provoked the onset of the war.



Image from Pyongyang museum of American war crimes depicting U.S. soldiers brutalizing North Koreans. [Source: peacehistory-usfp.org]

Pearson's hawkish position contrasted with Prime Minister Mackenzie King's, who said that "Canada should not automatically support the United States in all its endeavors."^[29]

Pearson also clashed with Defense Minister Brooke Claxton who opposed sending Canadian troops to Korea presciently because the U.S. was "getting [Canada] into something to which there is really no end."^[30]

When Pearson was dispatched to Washington to meet with President Harry S. Truman in 1948, he conspired behind the scenes with Truman to undermine King's direct orders

regarding the pursuit of an independent Canadian foreign policy, and assisted U.S. State Department officials in crafting a letter that urged King to support the Korean War.^[31]

King's successor, Louis St. Laurent, assisted the war effort by deploying a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) squadron of transport planes to airlift U.S. troops, weapons and other materiel across the Pacific.



Canadian soldiers playing ice hockey, the national sport, on a rink they built in South Korea. [Source: bardown.com]

Military historian David Bercusson,^[32] who continues to spread official narratives promoting this and other wars, wrote:

“Pearson was correct about what the Korean War meant in the global confrontation between Soviet Communism and the Western democratic powers and correct too in believing that Canada could not sit out the war if the Americans insisted that Canadian troops were needed. He was far wiser than Claxton in knowing this. With Pearson leading the way, Claxton came on board.”^[33]

Pearson told St. Laurent that he supported troop deployments based on his anti-communist views about “the menace which faces us, ... the expression of that menace in Korea, and the necessity of defeating it there by United Nations action.” Pearson’s efforts paid off. “St. Laurent came around,” said Bercusson, because “he and the nation really had little choice.”^[34]

The speech St. Laurent gave over the radio announcing Canada’s commitment to the war was probably crafted in part by Pearson. It was deep in Orwellian newspeak:

“The action of the United Nations in Korea,” St. Laurent intoned, “is not war; it is police action intended to prevent war by discouraging aggression.” Since “the war to end all wars” had already come and gone 30 years hence, the

Korean War was framed as “important to all of us who want to avoid another world war.” The need to “defeat the Communist aggressors in Korea,” said St. Laurent, was like fighting “fascist aggression” in WWII. He concluded his deceit with “We owe it to ourselves, to each other, to our children, and each other’s children ... to prevent the disasters of a third world war.”^[35]

This launched Canada’s four-year collaboration—under the UN’s respectable cover—in a barrage of napalm-saturated bombings that slaughtered some three or four million Koreans.

This supposed non-war, also caused “six to seven million” more to be “rendered refugees,” says historian Jeremy Kuzmarov, who also notes that the onslaught destroyed “8,500 factories, 5,000 schools, 1,000 hospitals, and 600,000 homes.”^[36]



Canadian troops marching in North Korea during a brutal 40-day U.S.-UN occupation. [Source: thecanadianencyclopedia.ca]

To aid and abet this mayhem, Canada supplied its good name, plus more than 20,000 troops (516 of whom died), numerous war planes, eight destroyers and a wealth of strategic minerals and military hardware.



Canadian troops after the Battle of Kapyong in April 1951. [Source: veterans.gc.ca]

In return, the St. Laurent government exploited the war as an excuse to vastly expand Canada's army, navy and air force and to accelerate the production of jet fighters, jet engines, naval vessels, weapons, ammunition, radar and more.

"We are working in the closest co-operation with the United States," said St. Laurent, so "that our joint resources and facilities are put to the most effective use in the common defence [sic] effort." The government, he went on, was also "looking forward confidently to an acceleration and an intensification of our joint [military] production efforts" through the "U.S.-Canada industrial mobilization planning committee."^[37]

While devastating Korea itself, the Korean War sparked the blossoming of Canada's military-industrial complex, which fueled its complicity in Cold War adventures for decades to come.

Similarly, anti-communism was harnessed by Western governments to repress the civil liberties of anti-war activists. Quebec's "Padlock Law" (1937-57) made it illegal to copy, publish or distribute anything deemed pro-communist. Although the King and St. Laurent governments could have struck down this law, they didn't. It was used against peace activists opposing the Korean War.

In May 1951, an "anti-subversion squad" raided a Montreal home where about thirty labor and civil rights activists were meeting with James Endicott, president of the Canadian Peace Congress. Literature was seized and male police invasively searched activists, including the women, who lodged a complaint to Pearson's office, which did nothing.^[38]

In January 1952, Endicott denounced the "Padlock Law" at a meeting in London, England. "Under American pressure," he reported, Canada's treason act had been amended "so that a cabinet committee can order secret arrests and hold people indefinitely and incommunicado without trial. They are doing that against peace workers."^[39]

Coup in Iran, 1953

Pearson's foreign ministry supported the coup that installed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as Iran's dictator in 1953.

This CIA/MI5-led coup ousted Mohammad Mosaddegh's elected government after it dared to nationalize Iran's UK-owned oil industry in March 1951. Although not a socialist, Mosaddegh worked with Iran's communist party, Tudeh, which had played a key role in Iran's struggle to gain control of its own oil resources.

As revealed by anti-war writer Yves Engler, Pearson "was not happy with the Iranian's move":

In May 1951 External Minister Lester Pearson told the House of Commons the "problem can be settled" only if the Iranians keep in mind the "legitimate interests of other people who have ministered to the well-being of Iran in administering the oil industry of that country which they have been instrumental in developing."^[40]

Mossaddegh's duly-elected government also angered Pearson. "In their anxiety to gain full control of their affairs by the elimination of foreign influence," he told parliament, Iran had exposed itself "to the menace of communist penetration and absorption—absorption into the Soviet sphere."^[41]

As Engler notes, "Pearson did not protest the overthrow of Iran's first elected prime minister" and three days after the coup, Canada's ambassador expressed concern with what he called the "disturbing factor" of "the continued strength of the Tudeh party."^[42]

In response, the Shah's CIA-trained secret police (SAVAK) quickly began arresting thousands of Tudeh members. By 1958, SAVAK torture and assassination campaigns had decimated Tudeh and other popular, democratic forces.^[43] This "progress" allowed Canada to begin diplomatic relations with Iran in 1955.

By May 1965, when deposed Prime Minister Mossaddegh was still under arrest, Pearson was prime minister and hosted the Shah's state visit to Canada.

Upon his arrival in Ottawa, aboard a Canadian military plane, the Shah was greeted by Pearson, Foreign Minister Paul Martin, Sr., and Governor General George Vanier, who literally gave him the red-carpet treatment.

Vanier intoned "I greet Your Imperial Majesty as an able and valiant head of state and as a great leader with progressive policies,"^[44] while Pearson said the Shah "had given outstanding leadership in bringing his country forward into the modern world."^[45]

During his eight-day visit to five cities, the Shah attended top-government meetings, inspected an honor guard, waved to the public, laid a wreath, spoke at press conferences and elite clubs, was feted at gala luncheons and black-tie dinners, dined privately at Pearson's home, was honored at a state banquet and reception by Vanier in his palatial mansion, and was regaled by Canada's mass media. Pahlavi and his Empress were a hit.^[46]

Special police precautions were taken for fear of Iranian student protests, which the Shah "dismissed ... as the work of communists."^[47]

Summing up the visit, Pearson said it had "brought our two countries even closer together in

our approach to problems of peace and the United Nations.”^[48]

Coup in Guatemala, 1954

A CIA-led coup toppled Guatemala’s elected government and ushered in decades of dictatorships that killed about 200,000 people.



Diego Rivera painting, *Glorious Victory*, which depicts Secretary of State John Foster Dulles shaking hands over a pile of dead corpses with Castillo Armas who deposed Guatemala’s left-leaning president Jacobo Arbenz. CIA Director Allen Dulles stands next to the pair, his satchel full of cash, while Dwight Eisenhower’s face is pictured in a bomb. [Source: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diego_Rivera%27s_Glorious_Victory)]

As a U.S. State Department official said, Guatemala’s elected President Jacobo Arbenz—the target of the coup—had a “broad social program” to aid “workers and peasants in a victorious struggle against the upper classes and large foreign enterprises.”

This, he admitted, had “strong appeal to the populations of Central America.”^[49] Arbenz was not allowed to pose the threat of a good example.

Even before Arbenz’s 1950 election, Ottawa’s trade commissioner in Guatemala had characterized him as “unscrupulous, daring and ruthless, and not one to be allayed in his aims by bloodshed or killing.”^[50]

Prior to the coup, Arbenz’s Foreign Minister Guillermo Toriello asked Canada to allow embassies to open in their two countries.

Pearson’s department refused. “At external affairs and in Canadian board rooms,” said reporter Peter McFarlane, “the coup was chalked up as another victory of the Free World against the [Red] Menace.”^[51]

Afterwards, U.S.-led counter-insurgency operations directed against left-wing rebels who sought to restore Arbenz’s political program benefited from the use of Canadian military hardware. The key U.S. warplanes used in this CIA operation were P-47 and F-47N fighter planes and C-47 and C-54 cargo planes. Owned and operated by the CIA, they were flown by American pilots.^[52]

These aircraft in the CIA's "Liberation Air Force" were powered by Wasp-series engines built in Montreal, Quebec, by Pratt & Whitney Canada (PWC).^[53]

Throughout the 1980s, when the Guatemalan air force attacked villages, they employed U.S. Bell 212 and 412 helicopters—made famous in the Vietnam War—that were powered by PWC's PT6T engines.^[54]

PWC has long been one of the highest government-subsidized war industries in Canada. For example, between 1982 and 2006 it was Canada's top corporate welfare recipient, raking in about \$1.5 billion.^[55]

Vietnam War, 1952-1974

From the beginning, Pearson was a gung-ho supporter of the Vietnam War. When France initiated the first Indochina War (1946-1954) in an attempt to reclaim its former colony, Pearson led Canadian efforts to supply weapons for use by French forces in Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia).^[56]

This was done under the radar through NATO's Mutual Aid Program. Between 1950 and 1954 alone, about \$650 million (in 2021 dollars) worth of Canadian "armaments, ammunition, aircraft, and engines were transferred ... to the Indochina war theatre."^[57]

In 1952, Pearson "okayed the deal" to allow Canadian arms, sold to France for use in Europe only, to be diverted to Indochina. This materiel included "antitank and anti-aircraft guns, ammunition, rangefinders and telescopic sights." Behind the cabinet's back, Pearson decided that arming France's Indochina War was lawful because it "help[ed] assure the preservation of peace."^[58]

In one of Pearson's many 1951 tirades affirming his support for that war, he suggested that if the independence of Indochina were to fail, "all of South-East Asia, including Burma, Malaya and Indonesia, with their important resources of rubber, rice and tin, might well come under communist control."^[59]

Pearson at the same time was claiming in the early 1950s that the "'Soviet colonial authority in Indochina' appeared to be stronger than that of France." Considering that there was "not a Russian anywhere in the neighborhood," Noam Chomsky wrote, "[o]ne has to search pretty far to find more fervent devotion to imperial crimes than Pearson's declarations."^[60]

Pearson's collaboration in the Vietnam War included his backing of Canadian government collaboration in "spying, weapons sales, and complicity in the bombing of the North."^[61]

Many Canadians believe the myth today that Pearson helped keep Canada out of the Vietnam War. However, 40,000 Canadians joined the U.S. armed forces during the war.^[62] This was 50% more than the 26,000 Canadian soldiers who had served in Korea.

In 1954, when Pearson was minister of external affairs, he helped gain American backing for Canada's bid for a seat on the International Control Commission (ICC)—whose purpose was

to enforce the 1954 Geneva accords.

Pearson served as the handler of Canada's ambassador to the U.S., Arnold Heeney, who forged an agreement with U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert Murphy, that Canada would illegally supply the U.S. with secret intelligence obtained through its involvement in the ICC mission.^[63]

Canada's best-known ICC spy was Blair Seaborn, a long-time friend of America's ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. In late April 1964, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk met Prime Minister Pearson and External Affairs Minister Paul Martin, Sr., to discuss the "Seaborn Mission." A month later Pearson conveyed to Johnson his "willingness to lend Canadian good offices to this endeavour."

The Pentagon Papers later revealed that Pearson told Johnson at this meeting that, although he "would have great reservations about the use of nuclear weapons," in Vietnam, America's "punitive striking" with "iron bomb attacks" (i.e., unguided, air-dropped conventional munitions) was fine.^[64]

Seaborn conveyed U.S. threats to the North Vietnamese that, unless they surrendered, the U.S. would unleash massive military attacks.

Seaborn also "gathered intelligence for U.S. authorities" on many strategic issues that aided and abetted America's war. The Pentagon Papers showed that the U.S. informed Canada, seven months in advance, of closely guarded U.S. plans for a major bombing campaign against the north in December 1964.^[65]

Victor Levant's groundbreaking book, *Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War* (1986), reveals that Pearson's government (he was prime minister from 1963 to 1968) was aiding and abetting domestic war industries to cash in on the bonanza.

This was despite the fact that, as a member of the ICC, one of Canada's duties was "to restrict the entry of arms into Vietnam from anywhere."^[66] But, said Levant, "[f]ar from trying to curtail U.S. purchases of Canadian military equipment, the government in Ottawa actively encouraged the process" with grants to so-called "defense industries" between 1964 and 1968, that were worth just over \$1 billion in 2021 dollars.^[67]

This investment of taxpayers' money paid off, at least for Canadian corporations that received over \$2.16 billion (in 2021 dollars) "in 1965 [alone] by making military equipment, ranging from green berets to airplanes, for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam."^[68]

Prime Minister Pearson tried to absolve himself and the government of complicity in this war profiteering by claiming in 1967 that Canada could not determine the whereabouts of military equipment purchased in Canada by the U.S., though he conceded that a "small percentage of Canadian arms could be reaching the battlefield in Vietnam."^[69]

While cheered by virulently anti-communist groups, Pearson became a main target of the anti-war protesters who carried banners that read "End Canadian complicity in Viet Nam War," "Pearson accomplice in genocide" and "Accomplice in mass murder." A chant that was familiar in those days, was "Pearson, Martin, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?"^[70]

On the nation's 100th anniversary (July 1, 1967) in Montreal, when thousands marched to protest Canada's role in the Vietnam War, French chants included "Johnson assassin. Pearson Complice."^[71] The fact that Pearson was an accomplice to mass murder in Vietnam was then well known to the peace movement. This institutional memory has now been all but erased.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

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Notes

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[5] Richard Sanders, "Left-Right Camps: A Century of Ukrainian Canadian Internment," *Captive Canada, op. cit.*, pp. 40-55. https://coat.ncf.ca/P4C/68/68_40-55.htm

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[8] John English, "Pearson, Lester Bowles," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 2003- <http://bit.ly/EdwinP>

[9] Lester Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol.1, 1972, p. 10.

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 15

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[19] Claude Bissell, *The Young Vincent Massey*, 1981, *passim*.

[20] Pearson 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[22] Andrew Cohen, *Lester B. Pearson*, 2008.

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[23] Thomas Green, "Bennett Raps Socialism, Communism," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, Nov. 10, 1932, p. 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/508724453>

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[25] *Canada: A People's History, Vol. 2*, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=2fcXAAAAYAAJ>

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[27] *A Man Called Intrepid: The Incredible True Story of the Master Spy Who Helped Win WWII*, 1976, pp. 191, 216.

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[28] Guy F. Burnett, "Ian Fleming's Coldest Warrior: The Anticommunist Origins of James Bond," *Dissident*, Nov. 17, 2015. <http://bit.ly/antiRedBond>

(The above archived article, from the anti-communist, "Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation" website, celebrates both Fleming and his Bond character as those "who fought to save the world from tyranny and oppression.")

[29] Pearson 1972, p. 139.

[30] David Jay Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War*, 1999, pp. 31-32. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=eCizi80V1M0C>

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[32] Bercuson is a director of two right-wing, Calgary-based think tanks, the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (funded by the Canadian war department's "Security and Defence Forum"), and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (which has accepted funding from General Dynamics and publicly promoted the company's exports of major Canadian-made weapons systems, such as LAVs, to Saudi Arabia.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] "St. Laurent Text on Resisting Reds," *Windsor Daily Star*, August 8, 1950, p. 14.

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[38] See author's collection of seven newsclips, May 25-28, 1951.

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[39] "Says working for peace in America hard," *Ottawa Citizen*, Jan. 10, 1952, p. 10.

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[46] "Shah has busy schedule here," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 17, 1965, p. 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73524704/the-ottawa-citizen/>

"Shah of Persia in Canada, 1965." <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/shah-of-persia-in-canada>

(Note: These film clips from the Shah's visit include footage of the state dinner with Governor General

Vanier at Rideau Hall.)

[47] "Shah in capital," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 19, 1965, p. 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73534362/the-ottawa-citizen/>

[48] "Royal Visits Top News Events," *Brandon Sun*, May 31, 1965, p. 12. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73525463/the-brandon-sun/>

[49] Cited by Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, 1991, p. 419. <http://bit.ly/Chomsky1991>

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[51] Peter McFarlane, *Northern Shadows: Canadians in Central America*, 1989, pp. 98, 100, cited by Engler *op. cit.*, p. 79.

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[53] Pratt & Whitney Canada ; <http://bit.ly/PWC-WASP>; Republic P-47 Thunderbolt

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[56] Levant, *op. cit.*, p. 42

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 43

[58] Levant, *op. cit.*, p. 43 [NOTE: I believe "Idem." in italics would be appropriate here.]

[59] Chomsky 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

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[62] Ryan Goldsworthy, "The Canadian Way: The Case of Canadian Vietnam War Veterans,"

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[64] Levant, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 178

[66] Harry Trimborn, "Canada-US Tieup? Some Other Time!" *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 23, 1966, p. 82. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73697853/the-los-angeles-times/>

[67] Levant, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[68] Trimborn, *op. cit.*

(Note: The article noted a figure of \$260 million, which the Bank of Canada, when corrected for inflation, says is worth \$2,164,578,313.25 in 2021 dollars.)

[69] Lester Pearson, *Statements and Speeches*, March 10, 1967, Levant, *ibid.*

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Peter Loudon, "Like French Revolution Some Feast Others Chant," *Times Colonist*, Apr. 1, 1967, p. 2. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73616904/times-colonist/>

(Note: This article, covering a protest the next day outside a gala banquet attended by Pearson, notes the same "Pearson, Martin, LBJ..." chant. The reporter mocked the protesters' appearance, and said they were "denouncing Canada's *alleged* support of the US in Vietnam." Emphasis added.)

[71] Nick Auf der Maur, "Vietnam Protesters March Through City," *Montreal Gazette*, July 3, 1967, p. 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/73067312/the-gazette/>

Featured image: Former Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs (1948-1957), Lester B. Pearson, at his desk in Ottawa. As leader of Canada's Liberal Party, he served from 1958 to 1968. [Source: journal.forces.gc.ca]

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