In a world of Cold War confrontations, Canada attempts to follow a middle path.

After WWII, Canada and the USA were the two richest nations on earth. Canada had the world’s third largest navy and fourth largest air force, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that had tripled since 1935.

After WWII much of Asia was devastated. In Europe Britain and France were on the brink of bankruptcy and economic ruin.

**Marshall Plan:** The Americans helped fund the recovery of Western Europe, including West Germany. Over $13 billion in aid was supplied by the Americans between 1948 and 1953. *Stalin refused to allow eastern European countries, i.e., communist ‘puppet’ states, to benefit from Marshall Plan aid.*

**The Cold War:** The Cold War was a global confrontation between Communism and Democracy. The Cold War lasted from 1945 until 1989. During the darkest days of the Cold War full-scale nuclear annihilation was a very real possibility. Germany, Korea, Cuba, Viet Nam and Afghanistan were Cold War ‘flash points.’

**Truman Doctrine:** The Truman Doctrine was a foreign policy of the USA. The United States stated that she would help any country faced with Communist attack.

**Mackenzie King:** Mackenzie King, Liberal Party leader, was an isolationist at heart. He was Canada’s Prime Minister from 1935-1948.

In 1949 Canada joined NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). This was strictly a military alliance. The following countries were NATO’s founding members: Canada, USA, Britain, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, France, Italy, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

**Igor Gouzenko:** This Soviet embassy staff member revealed to Canadian authorities in 1945 that Soviet spies had penetrated into high Canadian government places, to learn about Western defence secrets.

**McCarthyism:** American Republican Senator who attracted enormous attention by accusing people of being Communist. His irresponsible tactics hurt many individuals, who were publicly accused without any evidence being brought against them.

**The Iron Curtain:** Term used by British PM Winston Churchill to describe how a ‘wall of silence’ had descended between the Communist East and the Democratic West. The Soviet Union set up puppet regimes throughout Eastern
Europe and ruthlessly crushed democratic movements in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and elsewhere.

The United Nations: Founded in April 1945, with five permanent members (United States, Soviet Union, China, Britain, and France). These members had veto power. Individual countries sit together in the United Nations General Assembly. The UN has ‘moral force’, as embodied in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UNUDHR was drafted by a Canadian, John Humphrey of Hampton, New Brunswick, Canada.

Korea is an example of the United Nations taking pro-active military action against an aggressor. This kind of action is called peace-making. The Korean conflict lasted from 1950-1953. 30,000 Canadians served in Korea, and 516 died. North and South Korea are still technically at war. A cease fire has held the two sides apart since 1953, at the 38th parallel.

In 1956 Egypt seized the Suez Canal. Britain, France, and Israel worked together to try and regain ownership of the Suez Canal Zone. The Suez Canal was a crucial supply route for Arabian oil. The Americans and the Soviets condemned the British/French/Israeli action. Lester Pearson, Canada’s top diplomat at the time, proposed that the world’s first international peace-keeping force be established (the blue helmets). Armed troops would position themselves between the warring factions to impose a ceasefire. Pearson was given the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his invention of United Nations peacemaking.

Mao ZeDong: Led the Chinese Communists to power in 1949 (Chinese Civil War).

Louis St. Laurent: Liberal, Canada’s second French-Canadian Prime Minister, held office from 1948 to 1957.

Louis St. Laurent refused to support Mother Britain in the 1956 Suez crisis (reference is made to Canada’s response to Britain during the 1922 Chanak crisis). This step made it clear that Canada’s first obligation in international affairs was to the United Nations Charter, and not to Britain.

The PineTree Line (along the 50th parallel), the Mid-Canada Line (along the 55th parallel), and the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line (along the 70th parallel in Canada’s Arctic) were built by Canada and the USA to defend against Soviet bombers and Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In 1957 Canada accepted 40,000 Hungarians trying to escape Soviet repression in Hungary. Around 20,000 Hungarians were killed by the Soviets as they crushed the Hungarian up-rising in 1956.

Canada also accepted thousands of people from Czechoslovakia after an attempt to introduce democracy into Czechoslovakia was crushed by Warsaw Pact tanks and troops in 1968.
John Diefenbaker: Conservative, Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963.

Diefenbaker cancelled the Avro Arrow project in 1959. The CF-105 Arrow was a magnificent supersonic jet fighter designed to intercept Soviet bombers over the Arctic. It was also very expensive. As a result of the cancellation, thousands of highly-trained Canadian engineers left Canada for the USA.

Diefenbaker signed the NORAD (North American Air Defence agreement) to integrate Canadian and American air defence systems.

Diefenbaker accepted the American nuclear-capable BOMARC land-based missile, but never equipped them with the nuclear warheads they were designed to carry!

Polaris: The Polaris was a powerful missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. These missiles were carried by American nuclear submarines after 1961. Such submarines were essentially undetectable, and could travel under the ice in the Canadian Arctic. Winning a nuclear ‘first strike’ war was now impossible. The Soviets had their own missile-carrying submarines.

Diefenbaker refused to immediately support the Americans during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most frightening moments in human history. President Kennedy (USA) and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev managed to de-escalate the crisis - Soviet missiles were removed from Cuba.

Bi-lateral relations between the USA and Canada were very poor during the Diefenbaker years.


Pearson allows Canadian BOMARC missiles to be nuclear-equipped.

Pearson tries to improve Canadian-American relations. But after PM Pearson visited the USA in 1965 and criticized American military policy in Viet Nam, Lyndon Johnson “grabbed the Canadian Prime Minister by his shirt collar, twisted it and lifted the shaken Prime Minister by the neck”.1

Note of interest: 10,000 Canadian men went south to join the American military to fight in Viet Nam. 32,000 American draft dodgers and army deserters fled north to Canada.


Trudeau tried to wrestle control of the Canadian economy away from the Americans. Such policies, e.g., Petro Canada, angered the Americans.

CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) was formed in 1968 to boost Canadian foreign aid to developing countries.

Trudeau recognized the communist People’s Republic of China in 1970.

Trudeau removed nuclear weapons from Canadian forces in Europe, reduced the number of Canadian troops stationed in Europe (NATO), and reduced Canada’s defence budget.

The USA and the Soviets signed SALT I treaty (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) in 1972 to reduce the number of nuclear weapons.

Trudeau wants to make Canada a ‘Middle Power’, by building links between East and West and North and South.

Canada accepts thousands of anti-Communist refugees (boat people) who escaped from Viet Nam after American forces left the country (1973) and after North Viet Nam crushed South Viet Nam forces in 1975.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. In response, the USA announced a massive increase in defence spending in 1981, with most of the money to be spent on modernization of the American nuclear arsenal.

The last nuclear warheads were removed from Canadian soil in 1984.


His approach to foreign affairs was opposite to Trudeau’s. Mulroney forged closer links between Canada and the USA. Trudeau wanted to separate Canadian and American interests.

Mulroney dismantled FIRA (Foreign Investment Review Agency). FIRA had been set up by Trudeau to block any foreign investment that was not in Canada’s interest.

Mulroney established the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the USA in 1989.

In 1989 Mikhail Gorbachev realized that the Soviet Union could not afford to continue the arms race with the USA. He introduced the following two policies: perestroika (reconstruction) and glasnost (openness). The USSR withdrew from Afghanistan during this same year. Gorbachev’s reforms signalled an end to the Cold War. The Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991.