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Donaghy, G., & Carroll, M. (Eds.). (2011). In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909-2009. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary Press.

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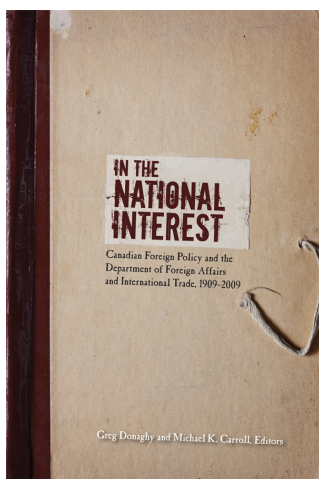
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## IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

**Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909-2009**

Greg Donaghy and Michael K. Carroll, Editors

ISBN 978-1-55238-561-6

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**NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE  
AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST.  
O.D. SKELTON'S DEPARTMENT  
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
IN THE 1920S**

Norman Hillmer

The national interest is a slippery beast ☒ frequently invoked, seldom defined, adjustable to shifts of circumstance and differences of perspective.<sup>1</sup> Yet O.D. Skelton was confident that he knew precisely what Canada's interests in foreign policy were, and just as sure that the service of those interests must underpin the state's conduct. Skelton's three-decade-long crusade for independence from Britain, first as a professor and then as a public servant, was linked to his conviction that Canada's international policies could only be right if they were based on a fully autonomous and objective stock-taking of "the real interests of one's own country."<sup>2</sup> When he was named the permanent head of the Department of External Affairs half way through the 1920s, Skelton embraced the opportunity, turning his efforts to the building of an institution of independence capable of projecting national interests out into the world. The results were mixed.

Oscar Skelton wrote the prologue to his service in External Affairs in January 1922, with a much-publicized address to the Canadian Club in Ottawa.<sup>3</sup> Six weeks earlier, a federal election had brought W. L. Mackenzie King's Liberals to power; the prime minister was in the audience, along with other members of the government.<sup>4</sup> As he unwrapped his argument, the Queen's University professor insisted that the country's national

interests resided in Canada and nearby, not in a revived and highly centralized British Empire run by and for the British alone. Canada was liberal, flexible, constantly evolving, like the empire when it was at its best — had been inching towards the ultimate goal of unfettered self-government for decades. As a first principle, Skelton declared, Canadians must maintain the steady trajectory to freedom. It would not be easy. He warned that Britain's leaders, alive to the fragility of their empire, were intent on drawing Canada into the imperialist web. Furthermore, they had the power to do so, abetted by Anglo-Canadians whose loyalties were divided between the Mother Country and Canada, or belonged entirely to Britain. The British would have that clout as long as the Canadian condition fell short of independence.

Sovereignty was Skelton's precondition of the capacity to act in the national interest. More than that, it was an interest in itself, the supreme interest that made the successful mobilization of all other interests possible. Skelton did not often explicitly invoke the notion of national independence because that remained highly controversial in the Canada of the 1920s. "Autonomy" was the term of choice, the safe middle ground preferred by contemporaries, shuttling Canada between liberty of movement and the comfort of the British connection, as the occasion demanded. Independence, however, was what Skelton wanted and thought necessary.

Proceeding from self-determination, Skelton put the emphasis on the core responsibilities of all national governments: to ensure security and stability, and to establish the conditions for prosperity. These were interests shared by the foreign and domestic realms of government activity, rightly he thought, since they were inseparable from one another as aspects of policy. What was foreign policy, he asked his Canadian Club listeners, but "simply an extension of domestic policy,"<sup>5</sup> an argument that allowed him to make the case for as much control of external affairs as Canadians had painstakingly established in their internal affairs.

Next in the inventory of interests came the working out of relationships, problems, and modalities on the North American continent. The foreign affairs of every country, Skelton told the Canadian Club, took place mainly at the fence lines that separated it from its neighbours, and largely arose from everyday matters of trade and economics. This assertion served two of Skelton's purposes. First, it gave prominence to his belief

that in foreign policy geography was destiny. The United States could not be ignored as a factor in Canada's future: North America was where, he had believed since he was a young man, the country's "lasting community of interest" was situated.<sup>6</sup> Second, Skelton's North Americanism diverted attention from Canada's deeply entrenched British connection. By stipulating that foreign policy ought to concentrate on the United States, he was divorcing Canada's prime national interests from Britain's. Unlike King and so many other Canadians of the time, Skelton thought that the strict separation of Canadian interests from British interests was possible and, if Canada was to seize control of its future, imperative.

Last, and deliberately last in the Canadian Club catalogue of interests, Canada's connection to the world beyond North America had to be accounted for and attended to, although its responsibilities in that direction had to be kept limited for the time being. Co-operation with Britain was not out of the question, but it should take place only on the basis that the two countries were distinct entities and when it could be demonstrated that interests were held in common. Nevertheless, Skelton maintained, the country was "in the world and must be of it."<sup>7</sup> At bottom, he was convinced that in the long run the way ahead for the national interest lay in measured engagement with the international community. For now, though, Canadians had to find their own way to maturity, coherence, and freedom.

In the folklore of Canadian foreign policy, a straight line is drawn between the Canadian Club speech and Skelton's appointment three years later as under-secretary of state for external affairs. The staying power of this account of events is understandable enough. "Skelton's address would make an excellent foundation for Canadian policy on External Affairs," King wrote in his diary after hearing the talk, "and Skelton himself would make an excellent man for that department." He "certainly has the knowledge & the right point of view."<sup>8</sup> Years later, Skelton's wife Isabel scribbled in her scrapbook beside an account of the speech that it was this occasion "which really brought Oscar to Ottawa."<sup>9</sup>

But Skelton's ambition had a much longer pedigree. He had been on the road to the Department of External Affairs since its inception in 1909, when he told a colleague that he coveted the position of under-secretary ☒ the departmental chief, or deputy minister, in today's terminology.<sup>10</sup> He had been a close observer of every important political event of the last

generation, and an active participant in many of them. He was a leading Liberal nationalist voice on external policy, a frequent commentator in the press, and an advocate on the public platform. He had courted King, and advised him informally, from the moment he became leader of the Liberal party in 1919. He was anything but an unknown quantity. His transition from Queen's to External Affairs was natural, and many years in the making, even though it was difficult to leave the university that he loved.

At the Canadian Club, Skelton folded the Department of External Affairs into his contention that Canadians already had the basic outlines of the machinery to deal with the world outside. The department, he said, had not progressed very far in its development, but "so far as it has gone it has been very effective in its personnel."<sup>11</sup> That was without doubt a reference to Loring Christie, who had for a decade been the department's legal advisor and the government's chief external affairs analyst. After Christie, however, External Affairs had only Sir Joseph Pope, the dignified under-secretary, who had held the post since 1909 and was considerably past his prime, and a tiny headquarters staff of thirty-three, more than half of whom dealt with passports.<sup>12</sup>

Christie was soon on his way out, he and Prime Minister King proving incompatible, personally and professionally.<sup>13</sup> When Skelton was enlisted as an advisor to King and the Canadian delegation for the Imperial Conference of 1923, the professor found in the Department of External Affairs (and in the public service) competence and goodwill but not initiative or breadth. Of Pope he wrote in his diary: "perfect Civil Servant, polished, ... prepared to subordinate own views to those of temporary political chief, not now very vigorous & not at all in touch with intimate affairs of office which are in hands of the P.M."<sup>14</sup> So Skelton did all the conference preparations himself, which was his inclination anyway, a fundamental flaw in his makeup that had a considerable impact on his effectiveness as an administrator.

King still had to squeeze Pope out, gently, and to convince Skelton to leave Queen's. This took until April 1925. As soon as he was installed as under-secretary, Skelton set course for an independent (and independence) minded External Affairs that could act as the instrument and expression of Canadian interests as he interpreted them. He was aware of the meagre resources at his disposal, but he set high standards for the first recruit to his

staff, requiring (the terms of reference read) “a law degree or membership in a provincial bar association, two years of post-graduate studies in international affairs, practical experience in legal work, and a good knowledge of both English and French.”<sup>15</sup> Jean Désy, a law professor at the Université de Montréal, was the one candidate who met the requirements, and he was immediately brought into the department. Skelton then acquiesced in the hiring of three officers, without a competition, to staff the new Canadian legation in the United States. One of them was the well-connected Hume Wrong, the grandson of former Liberal national leader Edward Blake. Wrong was supremely qualified, but he had been given his position: he had not won it after being tested against his peers. For Skelton, the arrangement was acceptable as an expedient, in order to get the Washington mission running at a high level of efficiency as quickly as possible. The under-secretary was determined to have a different sort of department, a meritocracy.

Skelton modelled the department on the British Foreign Office, with young professionals recruited by a competitive process and promoted because of their achievements, not their connections. Comprehensive competitive examinations for entry into the department began in 1927. The aim, said the under-secretary, was to locate people “of all-round ability, capable of performing in widely different assignments at short notice, rather than a highly skilled specialist.”<sup>16</sup> Candidates were required to have a university degree or the equivalent, with training in the law, history, political science, or economics particularly favoured, and to possess the sterling characteristics of “undoubted integrity; tact; astuteness; keen perception; good judgment; and good address.”<sup>17</sup> The first hurdle, a written exam, had four sections: a general essay designed to extract the applicant’s view of imperial relations, questions on Canada’s role in international affairs, a segment devoted to candidates’ area of academic expertise, and a précis. Skelton set the papers, marked the results, and usually chaired the board that administered an interview to those who got at least 70 per cent overall on the exam and a pass in each of the four parts. Under the law, he had to give war veterans preference, but he refused to do so until they had satisfied him in the written examination.<sup>18</sup>

Skelton was disappointed by the response to his first competition, which yielded few applicants and only two who met the standard: J. Scott

Macdonald and E. D'Arcy McGreer. The under-secretary redoubled his efforts the next year in 1928, advertising nation-wide, approaching universities in search of candidates, and obtaining permission to hold exams outside the country in order to entice graduate students living abroad. This time there were sixty candidates, six of whom were successful: L. B. Pearson, Norman Robertson, H. L. Keenleyside, Kenneth Kirkwood, Paul-Emile Renaud, and Keith Crowther.<sup>19</sup> Pearson and Robertson, future under-secretaries of the Department of External Affairs, were encouraged to apply by Skelton personally. Robertson he had known since they had sailed across the Atlantic together in 1923, when the Rhodes Scholar on his way to Oxford had taken a violent dislike to Skelton, who was ill at ease with people he did not know, but they had a more relaxed encounter during the summer of 1927.<sup>20</sup> Skelton discovered Pearson, a colleague of Hume Wrong's in the history department at the University of Toronto, at a dinner in Ottawa after the Imperial Conference of 1926. In subsequent correspondence, Pearson learned of the under-secretary's plans for a foreign service governed by ability, where the genial young man, nicknamed "Mike," was assured that he could reasonably look forward "to occupying the highest diplomatic posts without private income or political influence."<sup>21</sup>

Skelton was surrounding himself with his own kind. Five of the six 1928 recruits had graduate degrees from institutions outside Canada and had taught university courses; two, Keenleyside and Renaud, had doctorates. This pattern persisted: a substantial proportion of the staff that Skelton selected during his years as under-secretary came from teaching, and a large number of his choices had post-graduate training. He sometimes contradicted the merit principle, naming officers to positions by order-in-council if some specific or urgent need arose, but that too reinforced the strong ties with the university world that were developing out of the examination system. In 1929, he chose John E. Read, the dean of law at Dalhousie University, as departmental legal adviser, putting through the appointment without advertising the position.<sup>22</sup>

In his employees, the under-secretary looked to Canada's bicultural character, if imperfectly. Although he made nothing of it at his Canadian Club speech, perhaps because he was pitching his message mainly to the likeminded King, Skelton regarded French-English harmony, and the social cohesion that was meant to flow from it, as a fundamental national



interest. Following from his argument that domestic interests and international interests were intertwined, and reinforced by his belief that the French fact was an indispensable part of the Canadian story, his sermons on the importance of national unity were a staple of his speeches and writings on foreign policy. Bilingualism was not a requirement for entry into External Affairs, but Skelton encouraged French representation in the department and, by 1930, 30 per cent of his officers were francophones. Even so, the Montreal intellectual newspaper *Le Devoir* (among others) questioned why there were “si peu des notres dans cette carrière nouvelle” and wondered about the “perspectives d’avancement” for the few there were.<sup>23</sup>

French might be the language of diplomacy, but English was the language of Skelton’s External Affairs. He could speak a rough French, but despite his clear regard for Jean Désy and other francophones, Skelton never seems to have communicated with his francophone officers in their own language or to have taken concrete steps to promote the use of French in the department, beyond beefing up translation services as business increased. Below the level of under-secretary, there was evidence in the late 1920s of what one British official called “bitterness and jockeying” between French and English officers<sup>24</sup> and already the tendency on the part of both language groups to see francophones as most useful and happiest in posts abroad. Out of sight, however, was out of mind, and continual service away from headquarters was apt to marginalize young diplomats and impair opportunities for promotion.<sup>25</sup>

Only men could apply to become foreign service officers, and that remained the practice throughout Skelton’s time at External Affairs. He valued women, however, and a triumvirate of them ruled over the deputy’s central office in the East Block of the Parliament buildings. Each had an importance belied by her title. Skelton’s secretary, Marjorie McKenzie, was at the heart of everything, controlling access and the flow of information to the under-secretary, watching over his confidential records and drafting materials for his signature. She was competent in French, German, and Spanish, and in 1930 demonstrated her ability and determination when she insisted on taking the foreign service officer exam, even though she was not eligible for appointment. She tied for first place in a tough competition. Accountant Agnes McCloskey, energetic and often acerbic, was in effect the department’s chief administrative officer; she scrutinized the finances

and enforced regulations in a manner many found autocratic and inflexible. Hugh Keenleyside recalled in his memoirs that Skelton “was alternately amused, grateful, or impressed, and he trusted her, although not necessarily her judgement, completely.”<sup>26</sup> Grace Hart, a graduate of Queen’s and McGill hired in 1928 to organize the library, completed the group of indispensable women. Although she and her little empire had a chaotic appearance, they gave the department the professional research function Skelton realized was a vital component of an independent foreign office.<sup>27</sup>

The powerful McKenzie and McCloskey sat in Skelton’s inner office, only a few feet from the under-secretary. The junior foreign service officers were exiled to the attic of the East Block, where they walked the corridors in darkness and fought for space with the bats.<sup>28</sup> When Mike Pearson won the first secretary competition in 1928, at a salary of \$3,450 (a modest raise over his university salary), he rushed to Ottawa in response to a message to start work immediately, only to find there was nothing much to do. His initial job was to prepare routine background for a League of Nations conference on the causes of death, followed by requests for a list of British Empire treaties affecting Canada and materials relating to lighthouses in the Red Sea, international tariffs on cement, and the protection of women artists living abroad.<sup>29</sup> Pearson’s companion in a cramped and depressing room under the eaves was Keenleyside, assigned in the beginning to re-organizing and filing documents, a task for which he was discovered to have some flair. Their typing was done by an inefficient but kindly secretary on a crank-handled machine, which Keenleyside recalled was “even older than herself.”<sup>30</sup>

Paradoxically, having shaping his department around highly trained minds with the capacity for independent thought and action, Skelton showed no inclination to employ them systematically. External had the unrushed, ramshackle air of a university campus, and it was growing without any clear organizational direction. Skelton was no administrator, and he was certainly no sharer of responsibility. He ran the department as a benign dictator sensitive to others but intent on having his own way. He understood his shortcomings as a manager and administrator, and the way office routine was absorbing so much of “my nights & days.”<sup>31</sup> Yet he was too busy and preoccupied to stick to the rough parcelling out of duties that he knew was in the best interests of efficiency, and his “young men,” as they

were called, were given work that overlapped and went far beyond their areas of assignment. All were directly accountable to the under-secretary, who reviewed every scrap of paper written in the department and every communication that entered or went out of headquarters.<sup>32</sup> The prime minister might interview top candidates during the recruiting process, but he was only dimly aware of them after they were hired. Every memorandum or recommendation he saw came from Skelton.<sup>33</sup> The department was Skelton, and he wanted it that way, whether he would have admitted it or not.

His employees complained about Skelton's weak commitment to matters of administration and delegation. They found him tightlipped and tightfisted, retiring and even distant. Only Keenleyside of the early recruits believed that they became friends, and he was almost certainly wrong about that.<sup>34</sup> Most of them, with Wrong as a notable exception, revered "Dr. Skelton" for his command of language and international affairs, for his immense political influence, for his unselfishness and high principle.<sup>35</sup> They shared his rock-solid nationalism — the examinations and interviews were designed to show that — and his disdain for the showiness and hierarchy of high diplomacy. He gently improved their drafts, suffered their practical jokes without complaint, and tolerated a diversity of views on social, economic, and political questions.<sup>36</sup> Everyone was treated equally and with respect, whatever their rank.<sup>37</sup> When Keenleyside had been in the department for only a few days, Skelton arranged travel to Vancouver on business so that the new man could help with his family's move to Ottawa. A short time later, the under-secretary took Keenleyside to a Canadian-American smuggling conference, keeping him carefully under control but offering an early taste of raw diplomacy. It was Keenleyside's first intimate glimpse of Skelton — quiet and diffident, but also astute, easy to underestimate, and far harder on the Americans than his reputation suggested. He was "at least as strongly opposed to the neo-imperialism of Washington as he was to the remnants of colonialism in London."<sup>38</sup>

The growth of the department in Ottawa was paralleled by the beginnings of a foreign service abroad. In 1927 Vincent Massey took up his post as Canada's minister in the United States, the first diplomatic representative in a foreign country. There was trouble between him and Skelton from the beginning, generated in some part by their differing attitudes about what diplomacy meant and was meant to achieve. Massey wanted to

purchase a luxuriously furnished Washington mansion at 1746 Massachusetts Avenue, with a price tag of \$500,000, to serve both as a residence and chancery. Skelton opposed the idea as extravagant and politically risky, instead suggesting that the patrician Masseys live in and work out of a hotel until something suitable was found.<sup>39</sup>

Skelton acknowledged that diplomatic prestige demanded a good front, especially for a new player on the international scene. Some of the expenditure could be justified on the grounds of national advertising and, just as banks tried to do with their palatial quarters, providing assurances of stability. Long-established traditions and standards could not easily be set aside. Diplomats were dined and wined, “and must retaliate in kind.” But discreetly: Canadians in Washington ought to keep in mind that their national interests in the United States were limited and specific, and so was their target audience. Their aim had to be squarely at influential politicians in Washington, not the American public at large and certainly not foreigners. As to contacts with the diplomats of other countries, Skelton sniffed: “Our jobs in Washington are our own and call for little of that daily hobnobbing with other legations which is inevitable in European capitals where everyone is playing the same game — how to tilt the balance of power a little more his own way — and is interested in every move and intrigue of every other representative.”<sup>40</sup>

With King’s help, Massey got his mansion. That did not change Skelton’s view that the purchase had handed ammunition to the many domestic critics of representation in foreign capitals and seriously prejudiced the Washington experiment “in the eyes of a great part of the country.”<sup>41</sup> Skelton and Massey then extended their battle over resources to expenses for the Washington legation staff, causing the under-secretary to apologize for a fit of temper over the telephone: “I have been brought up in a thrifty school and sky high estimates of living needs irritate me.”<sup>42</sup> Skelton said that he was open to convincing, and he was soon proposing salary increases for Canadian diplomats. Miserly wages meant that only wealthy men could take on such work. “That unduly restricts the choice of men and involves serious political dangers. The state should foot its own bills . . . : it should provide as much for a rich man as for a poor man.”<sup>43</sup> Massey, a very rich man himself, probably would have seen those words as part of the war

against him, although he too believed that diplomats with fewer advantages than his own ought to get jobs at the top, even if only a few of them.<sup>44</sup>

Skelton loathed pomp. Massey adored it. When Skelton told Massey that his American counterpart, William Phillips, was about to be welcomed to Ottawa as minister “quite informally,” Massey protested to the prime minister, after tattling to the United States State Department, that it would be “distinctly unfortunate” if the reception was any less grand or dignified than the one he had been given in Washington.<sup>45</sup> Skelton responded angrily, reminding Massey that the suggestion had come from the governor general, not the Department of External Affairs, and that, even if the State Department was unwilling to trust Ottawa to do right by Phillips, the under-secretary might have hoped that Massey would take it for granted. As for the Americans, “personally I wish more of their time might be given to such questions of diplomatic procedure as remembering that His Majesty’s Government in Canada is not a branch of His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain.”<sup>46</sup>

Skelton and Massey also clashed on the giving of British honours and titles, which the King government had discontinued, and on the wearing of diplomatic uniforms. His tone laced with sarcasm, Skelton asked the minister in Washington what ought to be done about the question of formal dress for Canada’s fledgling diplomatic service: “Do you think we should seek some sartorial genius to devise a new one, or vary the British with some distinctive Canadian feature? Or should we try the frock coat of the American gentleman, or the overalls of modern democracy?”<sup>47</sup> Massey replied that British diplomatic uniforms could be easily adapted with some maple leaves and Canadian buttons.<sup>48</sup> Skelton’s own preference was clear. He favoured the overalls.<sup>49</sup> Skelton had contempt for Massey’s aristocratic pretensions and condescension, and his anglophilia made it worse. The under-secretary’s project was a democratic, independent, modern country, alive to its own separate interests and determined to step away from Britain’s influences, the very antithesis of the Canada for which he imagined Massey stood.

The establishment of the legation at Washington was followed by an announcement early in 1928 that Paris and Tokyo would be next.<sup>50</sup> Action in this field was part of Skelton’s grand but gradualist scheme of national independence, which he characterized as the natural outgrowth of evolving

self-government. As the country grew in population, industrial development, and foreign trade, and as the progress of science increased contact with the world outside, the national interest demanded that Canadians begin to make provision for their distinct requirements abroad. Representation in three major capital cities was only a start, but it was important in both symbolic and real terms, setting the seal on Canada's international standing and allowing important work to be done on the spot. To those, notably in the Conservative party, who predicted that Canadian diplomats running amok in foreign capitals would damage the British and their empire, Skelton replied that disintegration had been prophesied at every step forward since responsible government had been achieved in the nineteenth century. The British Empire, in one of his favourite phrases, was "still doing business."<sup>51</sup>

For public consumption, Skelton put an elegant geographical gloss on the decision to locate legations in the United States, France, and Japan. Canada's position was "that of the centre of a sort of world amphitheatre, surrounded as we are, on three sides, by these great powers, our frontiers are completely exposed of necessity. In friendship and good-will ... lies our security." Each of those states, moreover, had a significant relationship with the United Kingdom. It was Canada's role to foster goodwill between the British Empire and the three big powers where the country would have a resident diplomat.<sup>52</sup>

Skelton's real motives were elsewhere. He saw the diplomacy of a new nation in more concrete and down-to-earth terms — the interests of the everyday, the commonplace. At the Canadian Club, tying North America to his conception of the national interest, he had given precise Canada–United States examples of interaction, drawn from the nitty gritty of trade, fuel, fish, and shared waterways, all to make the point that foreign policy was usually about the relatively small things, that they were concentrated in the economic sphere, and that most of them took place close to home.<sup>53</sup> After the Washington legation's first year of operation, Skelton noted that it had helped him deal with specific problems, including immigration, radio broadcasting, aviation, smuggling, extradition, and fisheries, as well as the more general protection of the interests of Canadian citizens in matters ranging from business enquiries to claims against the United States

government. Based on the Washington experience, the \$80,000 additional cost of the Paris and Tokyo legations was bound to be a good investment.<sup>54</sup>

Paris needed little justification in terms of the national interest. The decision to mount a legation there spoke to Canada's substantial French population and the country's economic concerns. France, Skelton said, was the other of "our Mother Countries," and there was an already existing foundation for representation in the commissioner general of Canada's office, which had been in the French capital in one form or another since 1882. The French capital could also function as a European base for trade promotion and a convenient headquarters for participation in various international conferences.<sup>55</sup>

In justifying the establishment of a mission in Japan, Skelton again concentrated on the practical interests of an independent diplomacy, where internal Canadian forces met external opportunities. He pointed out to the prime minister, and asked him to point out to the critics of the Tokyo choice, that the Pacific was on the rise as an area of "increasing and decisive importance" in world development and that the commercial possibilities were great. Moreover, a legation in Tokyo would help, as Skelton delicately put it, in the "constructive regulation" of the immigration question that had been dividing the two countries for years. This was a contentious political issue, particularly in British Columbia, where there was a longstanding demand for a "white Canada" policy and a complete ban on Japanese immigrants to Canada. Skelton had more liberal views than some of his colleagues in the public service, many of whom were out-and-out exclusionists, but he was a realist. As an essential part of the exchange of diplomatic representatives, he was a tough negotiator of an agreement with the Japanese government limiting immigration from that country on a mutually agreeable basis.<sup>56</sup>

The strengthening of the Department of External Affairs and the establishment of missions abroad fit precisely with Skelton's understanding of the national interest, beginning with state autonomy and moving through Canadian unity, security, and economic progress to North American solidarity and, when feasible and necessary, international cooperation. Each of these interests was promoted and advanced by representation in foreign capitals, in the United States particularly, and by a foreign office in Ottawa that was run by Canadians for Canadians. At the core of it all,

Skelton believed, must be people and policies that were “stoutly Canada First.”<sup>57</sup> Where King wanted external relationships that Canadians could *feel* were their own, Skelton stipulated that they *must* be his country’s own. As he told the Canadian Club in 1922, “in all matters of foreign relationship the stand that Canada is to take must be decided in Canada by Canada’s elected representatives ☐ by men responsible to the people of Canada.”<sup>58</sup>

During the 1920s, Skelton pushed for expanded resources for the conduct of external affairs, while campaigning for the removal of every vestige of Canadian dependence on Britain. He had some success on both fronts, but Skelton’s vision of national interests tied to national independence had further to go than he realized. Part of the problem was of Skelton’s own making: utterly dominating his Department of External Affairs, he was unwilling to employ it to anything like its full capacity or potential. King meanwhile had no intention of creating more foreign missions and did not do so for another decade, partly on the grounds of expense but also because his diplomats might find trouble abroad, getting him into trouble at home. Nor, more fundamentally, would the prime minister take the steps that were needed to separate Canada once and for all from Britain and its interests. When Canada eased into war alongside Britain in 1939, as if there was no choice, Skelton would be left wondering if his lifelong pursuit of national independence and the national interest had been a chimera.<sup>59</sup>



## NOTES

- 1 See Norman Hillmer, "Foreign Policy and the National Interest: Why Skelton Matters" (Fourteenth O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture, 17 December 2008). I am indebted to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Marston LaFrance Fellowship for support of my research, and to Stephen Azzi, Greg Donaghy, J. L. Granatstein, John Hilliker, Philippe Lagassé, H. Blair Neatby, and Susan B. Whitney for their comments and criticisms.
- 2 O.D. Skelton, *Our Generation: Its Gains and Losses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 46.
- 3 O.D. Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," in *The Canadian Club Year Book, 1921-1922* (Ottawa: Canadian Club, 1922), 58-69.
- 4 "Sir Robt. Borden's Washington Status," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 January 1922, Isabel Skelton Papers, Scrapbook, Queen's University Archives (QUA).
- 5 Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," 60.
- 6 Norman Hillmer, "O.D. Skelton and the North American Mind," *International Journal* 60 (2004-5): 96.
- 7 Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," 66.
- 8 W.L.M. King Diary, 21 January 1922, King Papers, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).
- 9 Annotation to a clipping of "Sir Robt. Borden's Washington Status," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 January 1922, Isabel Skelton Scrapbook, QUA.
- 10 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 52.
- 11 Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," 61.
- 12 John Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, I: The Early Years, 1909-1946* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 88.
- 13 Robert Bothwell, *Loring Christie: The Failure of Bureaucratic Imperialism* (New York: Garland, 1988), 324-33.
- 14 O.D. Skelton Diary, 1923, folio 17, Skelton Papers, LAC.
- 15 Quoted in Hector Mackenzie, "Recruiting Tomorrow's Ambassadors: Examination and Selection for the Foreign Service of Canada, 1925-1997," in *Diplomatic Missions: The Ambassador in Canadian Foreign Policy*, ed. Robert Wolfe (Kingston, ON: School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, 1998), 102.
- 16 Quoted in Gilles Lalonde, *The Department of External Affairs and Biculturalism* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), 36.
- 17 Quoted in J. L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft, 1929-1968* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1981), 25.
- 18 Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 119-20.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 20 Granatstein, *A Man of Influence*, 10, 21.
- 21 L. B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, I: 1897-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 59.
- 22 Lalonde, *The Department of External Affairs and Biculturalism*, 77, 81; Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 123.
- 23 *Le Devoir*, 12 April 1929.
- 24 Whiskard to Hadow, 30 April 1929, Records of the Foreign Office (FO) 627/11/U291, The National Archives, Kew, England.
- 25 Interviews with Jean Chapdelaine, 25 May 1983, and Charles Ritchie, 24 May 1990; Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 121-22.
- 26 H. L. Keenleyside, *Memoirs of Hugh L. Keenleyside, I: Hammer the Golden Day* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), 230.

- 27 Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 83, 103-4, 124, 142, 243-44; Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 229-31; Margaret K. Weiers, *Envoy Extraordinary: Women of the Canadian Foreign Service* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1994), 13-34.
- 28 Pearson, *Mike*, 71; Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 217.
- 29 Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 233; John English, *Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson, I: 1897-1948* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989), 140, 150.
- 30 Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 217-18.
- 31 Skelton Diary, 4 March 1926, Skelton Papers, LAC.
- 32 Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 127; compare 123.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 127.
- 34 Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 215.
- 35 Pearson, *Mike*, 70-71; Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 215-18, 233-44.
- 36 Interview with J. W. Pickersgill, 20 September 1985; Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 231-32.
- 37 Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 119, 122-23, 127.
- 38 Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 233-34, 241-44.
- 39 Vincent Massey, *What's Past is Prologue: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), 129-34.
- 40 O.D. Skelton, "Notes on the Washington Legation Appropriations," n.d. [1927], King Papers, J4, vol. 59, file 380, C45711-14.
- 41 Skelton to Massey, 16 April 1927, in Massey, *What's Past is Prologue*, 132-34.
- 42 Skelton to Massey, 8 February 1927, Massey Papers, box B-12, University of Toronto Archives.
- 43 Skelton, "Notes on the Washington Legation Appropriations."
- 44 Massey to Skelton, 1 November 1928, in Massey, *What's Past is Prologue*, 137.
- 45 Massey to King, 21 May 1927, in *ibid.*, 135-36.
- 46 Skelton to Massey, 23 May 1927, in *ibid.*, 136-37.
- 47 Skelton to Massey, 13 August 1928, in *ibid.*, 139.
- 48 Massey to Skelton, 15 August 1928, in *ibid.*
- 49 See Massey, *What's Past is Prologue*, 251-52.
- 50 Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 125-27.
- 51 O.D. Skelton, "Notes on Legations," n.d. King Papers, J4, vol. 114, file 815, C84216-24.
- 52 W.L.M. King, "Canada's Legations Abroad," *Canadian Nation* 2 (1929): 5-7, 24-26, an article that beyond any doubt was written by Skelton.
- 53 Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," 61.
- 54 Skelton, "Notes on Legations."
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 *Ibid.*; Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 31 January, 11 June 1928; Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 83-88; and, generally, Tou Chu Dou Lynhiavu, "Canada's Window on Asia: The Establishment of the Tokyo Legation in 1928-1931," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31 (1996-97): 97-123.
- 57 Skelton Diary, 1923, folio 17, Skelton Papers, LAC.
- 58 Skelton, "Canada and Foreign Policy," 66.
- 59 For details, see Hillmer, "Foreign Policy and the National Interest."