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Introduction by David Webster, University of Regina

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Contents

Introduction by David Webster, University of Regina	2
Review by Andrew Burtch, Canadian War Museum.....	6
Review by Michael K. Carroll, Grant MacEwan University	11
Review by Alan K. Henrikson, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. 14	
Review by Bruce Muirhead, University of Waterloo	17
Review by Kim Richard Nossal, Queen's University, Kingston Canada	21
Response by Adam Chapnick	24

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Introduction by David Webster, University of Regina

Political biography is very much on the agenda in Canadian history. The Canadian Historical Association held a political biography panel at its 2010 annual conference, when it also accepted a new Political History Group as an affiliated committee. One book being talked about is Adam Chapnick's account of the life of John W. Holmes – a “wonderfully traditional biography,” as Alan Henrikson writes in this round-table.

Holmes was an influential diplomat at the Department of External Affairs (as Canada's foreign ministry was known for most of its history) from 1943 to 1959, head of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs from 1960 to 1973, and an adjunct professor and prominent commentator on Canadian international relations until his death in 1988. He also played a central role in debates on Canada's place in the world that shaped much of the subsequent historiographical understanding.

Historians of Canadian foreign relations are much concerned with debunking myths about Canada's self-proclaimed mission as a mediating middleman between, well, almost anyone in conflict with anyone else. It's become almost a scholarly consensus to tarnish the “golden age” interpretation. Holmes took on the myth himself in the 1980s. Yet it still holds strong, an invented tradition that Canadians tell themselves about themselves. Canadians believe certain things about their place in the world. Those beliefs underpinned a losing 2010 Security Council bid, discussed by Kim Nossal in this round table. The bid essentially sought support based on an image Canadian policymakers hold about Canada's international record, one not necessarily held by the rest of the world.

If Canadians think of their country as one with a mediating mission, one that offers helpful solutions to tricky international troubles, the reason may lie in the generation of “golden-agers” who moved between the diplomatic service and the study and publicizing of foreign affairs in Canada. A dominant figure in this group was John Holmes, the subject of *Canada's Voice*. Holmes was successively diplomat, scholar and teacher, combining those roles to spell out a particular version of Canada's international place. Though never at the pinnacle of policymaking, he was arguably Canada's best-known public intellectual on international affairs for several decades starting in the 1950s. The picture of Canada's place in the world he painted did not merely describe; it also proscribed a role as helpful purveyor of answers and “responsible” global actor.

Few would claim that Holmes painted this picture alone. Fewer still would dispute his place as one of the shapers of this diplomatic self-image. No graduate student of Canada's foreign relations history will be able to avoid his two-volume book *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*. Most also notice the way the book shaped subsequent views of the postwar years. And no one looking at the archives of the postwar period will be able to miss the initials JWH on one memorandum or another. Even Noam Chomsky has quoted from Holmes in order to criticize Canadian diplomatic smugness.

The contributors to this round-table comprise three established scholars who knew Holmes as student or colleague, and two younger scholars who, like Chapnick, know him only as author of books and articles and as a name on archival documents.

The reviewers have high praise for Chapnick's depth of research and ability to tell a story. As Bruce Muirhead writes: "Surely this itemization includes all documents, books, articles and newspaper commentary about or by the man, as well as anyone who had even a passing thought about him.... What is remarkable is that Chapnick manages to interpret and synthesize his material to make it compelling reading, clearly an ability of an accomplished historian." Although Muirhead finds the latter half of the book "almost anti-climactic" and Andrew Burtch finds it "thin" in places for a biography, none of the reviewers can fault Chapnick's machine-like ability to process the entire Holmes oeuvre and materials in 20 archives, 16 private collections, and some 150 interviews.

There are historiographical issues that come up for debate. The first relates to an assertion made in the title and throughout the book, that John Holmes was "Canada's voice," personifying the ideals of Canadian foreign policy. Mike Carroll is persuaded that in his careers as diplomat, CIIA leader, teacher, and prolific author, Holmes did indeed become "Canada's voice." So too is Nossal, who sees the book title as "aptly chosen." Nossal goes on to lament the lack of a Holmes-like figure today, and sees in this one reason for Canada's declining international role. On the other hand, Muirhead and Burtch dispute the centrality of Holmes. Both of these more critical reviewers turn, as scholars in this field so often do, to the Suez crisis. There, it is believed by some, Canadian "invented" the idea of peacekeeping, thereby winning for External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson a Nobel Peace Prize. (Carroll's book on Canada and Suez was the subject of a recent H-Diplo roundtable.¹) Both take issue with Chapnick's claim that Holmes may have been the key figure in Suez peacemaking, using this as an example of the larger criticism that Holmes' role is generally over-stated.

From outside Canada, Henrikson offers this take on the issue: Holmes' "quiet influence" mirrored that of Canada and "embodied Canadian reason." Holmes "led from the middle—a moderate voice, of intermediate rank, from a middle power (a concept whose very meaning he, more than any other, defined), and usually from within 'the system' rather than outside. Like his country, he was modest in ambition and in claim to status or sway."

Another issue that engages the reviewers is the issue of Holmes' effective dismissal from External Affairs in 1959. Whether generated domestically or the result of currents within the United States, there was heat on diplomats seen as "pink" in the 1950s. Those accused of communist sympathies may have been defended, up to a point, from McCarthyist attacks by Pearson and top External Affairs officials. Men who had sex with men were not. Holmes, one of this latter group, saw his position in government become untenable amidst Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigations, "fruit machines" designed to test sexual response, and the routine homophobia of the time. In avoiding "salacious detail" on this

¹ <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-15.pdf>

episode, Carroll feels Chapnick's telling may be overly tactful and miss part of the story. Burtch also wants the curtain drawn aside, and sees the lack of engagement with the context of a cold war national security state impinging on personal lives as the book's biggest missed opportunity. But Muirhead, while critical in other areas, writes that "Chapnick handles this part of Holmes' life with tact, discretion and insight, while providing the reader with a real sense of the terror of that age for those living outside the Canadian mainstream."

Three reviewers note that one of Dr. Chapnick's contributions is to produce a history of the CIIA (now the Canadian International Council). Nossal suggests that it is there that Holmes truly made his mark in articulating for the public the work of diplomats. Burtch echoes this point, seeing Holmes' influence increasing after he left government. Carroll, too, points to the contribution to a CIIA institutional history, and the ways in which Holmes overshadowed his employer.

There may be differences in approach underpinning all this. While three reviewers broadly accept Chapnick's arguments that Holmes was vitally influential, two others dispute the case. Without calling Holmes a "great man," the issue perhaps comes down to asking how important certain individuals are in forming policy and in reproducing a discourse that explains and justifies that policy, passing it to future generations and the imagination of internationally-engaged citizens. Holmes played a role in that. How big a role remains a matter of debate.

Participants:

Adam Chapnick is the deputy director of education at the Canadian Forces College and an associate professor of defence studies at the Royal Military College of Canada. He is the author of *The Middle Power Project: Canada and the Founding of the United Nations* (2005) and *Canada's Voice: The Public Life of John Wendell Holmes* (2009). His next book will consider the history of Canadian conduct on the United Nations Security Council.

David Webster is Assistant Professor of International Studies at the University of Regina. Previous posts were at the University of San Francisco's Center for the Pacific Rim and the University of Toronto. He earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of British Columbia in 2005. Webster's book *Fire and the Full Moon: Canada and Indonesia in a Decolonizing World* was published by UBC Press in 2009. He was also collection editor of *East Timor Testimony* (Between the Lines, 2004) and has published in journals including *Diplomatic History*, *Pacific Affairs*, and *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*. He is currently at work on two projects: a study of diplomatic campaigns by Pacific Rim independence movements, and an examination of Canadian development advisors in Southeast Asia from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Andrew Burtch (PhD, Carleton University), the Canadian War Museum's post-1945 historian, is responsible for historical content in Gallery 4, *A Violent Peace: The Cold War, Peacekeeping, and Recent Conflicts, 1945 to the Present*. His research and writing focuses on the Cold War home front, with a focus on civil defence. Dr. Burtch is currently working on

major special exhibition projects, including military medicine and the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia.

Michael Carroll received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Toronto and is an assistant professor of history in the Department of Humanities at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. He is the author of *Pearson's Peacekeepers: Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-1967* (University of British Columbia Press, 2009). A co-edited volume with Greg Donaghy, entitled *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909-2009*, is forthcoming from the University of Calgary Press. He is currently working on a study of Canada's involvement in Indochina from 1954 to 1973.

Alan K. Henrikson is Fulbright-Schuman Chair in U.S.-EU Relations at the College of Europe in Bruges, for the academic year 2010-2011, and Director of Diplomatic Studies at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University where he teaches U.S. diplomatic history, political geography, and the theory and practice of diplomacy. His recent publications include "FDR and the 'World-Wide Arena,'" in *FDR's World: War, Peace, and Legacies*, ed. David B. Woolner, Warren F. Kimball, and David Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); "The Washington Diplomatic Corps: The Place, the Professionals, and their Performance," in *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*, ed. Paul Sharp and Geoffrey Wiseman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and "Niche Diplomacy in the World Public Arena: The Global 'Corners' of Canada and Norway," in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). In Belgium he is teaching "European diplomacy" and researching the current diplomacy of the U.S.-EU relationship.

Bruce Muirhead is a professor in the department of History and associate dean of arts, graduate studies, and research at the University of Waterloo, having graduated many years ago with a PhD in History from York University in Toronto. He has written extensively on Canadian trade negotiations since the Second World War, as well as Canadian politics, diplomacy and economic development. Muirhead is currently working on several projects focusing on Canadian development assistance, including a SSHRC-funded history of Canadian official development assistance from 1945 to 1984. Along with Ron Harpelle, he is the author of *IDRC: 40 Years of Ideas, Innovation and Impact* (2010). He is also the co-editor, with Ron Harpelle, of *Long-Term Solutions for a Short-Term World: Canada and Research for Development* (2011). Muirhead is currently working on a project, "Back to the Future? Policy responses to increasing food prices and climate change in the new millennium," funded by the Norwegian Research Council and including researchers from Denmark, Norway, Germany, New Zealand and Scotland.

Kim Richard Nossal is Sir Edward Peacock Professor of International Relations at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He is the author, with Stéphane Roussel and Stéphane Paquin, of *International Policy and Politics in Canada* (2011) and is currently working on a book on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. John W. Holmes was the supervisor of his doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto in the mid-1970s.

Adam Chapnick's study of the life of John Wendell Holmes, diplomat, public advocate, and educator, fits into the small but growing body of scholarly works of political biography examining the lives and work of senior Canadian civil service mandarins involved in the formation of public and international policy during the Cold War.¹ An examination of Holmes's work is perhaps overdue: as a key contributor to many aspects of post-war foreign policy, as the dean of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA), and as a renowned professor and mentor of many of Canada's foremost scholars on the subject matter, Holmes published much but, unlike many of his contemporaries at the Department of External Affairs (DEA), left no memoirs. Perhaps less well-known are the circumstances of Holmes's departure from the DEA. Like many other homosexual civil servants, Holmes was identified as a possible security risk and quietly removed from government service, a casualty of the Cold War security state. Chapnick's work seeks to delve into the public life of a prominent public servant and commentator on Canadian foreign affairs.

Chapnick is well-placed to offer an examination of Holmes's work. His past scholarship touches on the diplomat's key contributions at critical points in Canada's post-war policy formulation, including the formation of the United Nations. Many popular studies of Canada's international affairs have helped to cement a national myth about a "Golden Age" in its foreign policy, painting an image of a virtuous middle power, caught between East and West, using the United Nations to craft a peaceful balance based on mediation and compromise.² Chapnick has successfully argued, along with other historians, for a more dispassionate, evidence-based assessment of the successes and failures of Canadian foreign policy during the Cold War.³ It is therefore fitting that he examines Holmes, who tirelessly promoted Canada's international involvement, but readily recognized the limits of diplomacy and the futility of moral posturing (191).

¹ Not including memoirs, many of the pioneering historical works in this field were completed in the 1980s and early 1990s, so we may be seeing a second wave of biography. Few reach beyond the period of the early Cold War, however. See J.L. Granatstein's *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft, 1929-1968* (Ottawa: Denau, 1981), and his *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982); John English, *The Shadow of Heaven: The Biography of Lester Pearson* (Toronto: 1989, 1993). For more recent works, see Greg Donaghy and Stephane Roussel, eds. *Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Charles Ruud, *The Constant Diplomat: Robert Ford in Moscow* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

² See Andrew Cohen, *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* (Toronto: McClelland, 2004).

³ Adam Chapnick, *The Middle Power Project: Canada and the Founding of the United Nations* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2005). An interesting analysis of the roots of the public myth of the "Golden Age" can be found in Robert Bothwell's "The Canadian Isolationist Tradition," *International Journal* 54:1 (Winter 1998): 76-87.

Chapnick's ambitious work seeks to reveal the many contributions made by Holmes in his work at the DEA, CIIA, and University of Toronto. He argues that in these three professions, Holmes became "Canada's voice" in the process shaping foreign policy, and changed Canadians' perceptions of themselves in the world (x-xi). Unlike many biographical works, Chapnick's study does not seek to delve too deeply into its subject's private life, confining the scope of the research largely to Holmes's publications, professional relationships, and public advocacy. The rationale offered by the author is that Holmes, though outwardly charismatic, was ultimately a very private man who kept his personal life strictly segregated from his work. With mixed results, out of respect for his subject the author leaves much of Holmes's experience outside the office off the table.

The author's first assertion, that Holmes helped to shape how Canadians in government circles thought about foreign policy, is well-proven in the work. Based on a formidable number of interviews, extensive research in a wide variety of archival, corporate, and personal fonds, Chapnick sheds light on Holmes's high-profile engagements, such as his work in establishing the Indochina Commissions, and the more frequent behind-the-scenes work in support of Canadian foreign policy objectives, such as Lester Pearson's successful lobbying at the United Nations for the creation of an emergency force to help resolve the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 (89-91). The author also takes the time to highlight elements of Holmes's work such as his review of diplomatic correspondence, a task that, though seemingly mundane, appeared to have had an impact on the training of young diplomats and the efficiency of the department's operations as a whole. Chapnick efficiently demonstrates that Holmes's influence on the DEA's outlook on international affairs increased after his unexpected departure from the department in 1959, largely as a result of his publishing and public speaking through the CIIA, and through the DEA's outreach to academe.

One of the strengths of this biography is that it also offers a history of the CIIA. Established in 1946, the Institute developed into a venerable forum for Canadian scholars and diplomats on matters of international affairs and discussion of directions in foreign policy. The history of the CIIA has not yet received much scholarly attention.⁴ Holmes's difficult relationship with the Institute takes up most of the second half of the work. Chapnick draws needed attention to Holmes's role in shaping the activities, finances, and public profile of the CIIA during his over twenty years of involvement in different roles. In the process he draws out interesting findings about factional disputes within the CIIA, and the lingering disconnect between the CIIA's Toronto headquarters and many of the local and regional branches that struggled constantly to maintain membership and public interest. Chapnick's exploration of the complex relationship between Holmes and the Institute shows how Holmes used the CIIA as a platform to advance the study of international affairs. Through Holmes, who was frequently sought out by the press for his opinion on international affairs, the Institute gained in public profile. In private, Holmes and the CIIA often clashed over resources and the direction of research and publishing, with the

⁴ Most of the histories of the CIIA emerge from the Institute's *International Journal*. See J.L. Granatstein, "The Journal at Fifty: Then and Now," *International Journal* 50: 1 (Winter 1995): 140-162.

Institute occasionally charging (with some reason) that under Holmes the CIIA cleaved too closely to official Ottawa and spent too little time educating the public about foreign affairs (176, 208). Chapnick also convincingly shows Holmes's central role in expanding the activities of the CIIA into Quebec and onto university campuses. This was a leap of faith by Holmes, and remarkable given the DEA's own problems with recruiting and retaining French Canadian expertise. As Chapnick shows, the move into Quebec was a wise investment done well (188-190).

However prolific Holmes was, Chapnick's assertion that he was the "public representative of all things Canadian," or, in other words, "Canada's Voice," is an exaggeration of the former diplomat's influence over the public discourse surrounding the country's place in the world (130). Given the repeated laments by commentators (including Holmes) that Canadians do not care about international affairs in general and foreign policy in particular, it is difficult to see the basis for Chapnick's conclusion that Holmes was a popular figure, let alone one of the "universally appealing heroic figures ... so prominent in the early Cold War era." (xi). Visible and popular are two different things. Canadians did not "turn to John Holmes" en masse; certainly his former colleagues did, as did the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and a small community of scholars, but not the public as a whole. Similar statements, made throughout the work (usually in transition sentences) are rarely backed up with substantive evidence. To demonstrate Holmes's importance in various diplomatic or academic fields, Chapnick occasionally substitutes analysis with an extract from Holmes's busy itinerary, or an inventory of his former students who went on to successful academic careers (155-156, 194-196). These lists would perhaps have been better placed in a footnote, as they intrude on or supplant Chapnick's line of argument and divert the reader's attention.

On issues that one might imagine would occupy more of a biography's content – such as Holmes's role in the creation of the Indochina Commissions or stick-handling the UNEF concept at the United Nations in 1956, Chapnick's treatment is all too rushed. These issues could have been stand-alone chapters in Holmes's biography. This would at least have given the author room to present more evidence and analysis. In the case of Suez, Chapnick suggests that it was Holmes, not Pearson, who deserved most of the credit for the creation of the UN force, even though he was one of several young aides working the halls. This assessment is based on interviews and personal papers, but that Holmes's role is not better recognized is ultimately left to a largely unsupported statement that Holmes wanted it that way. In any case, the story of the Suez crisis is dealt with in a mere three pages, and not in nearly enough detail for an event that, in the author's own words, represented the pinnacle of Holmes's diplomatic career (88-91). In chapters describing his policy activism after leaving the DEA, Holmes's influence over international affairs is often declared, but not proven conclusively (131). Greater use of the DEA's archival papers might have shed more light on the department's formal and informal connections with Holmes, and the extent of its outreach to other scholars through the tumultuous 1960s.

For a biography, Chapnick's work is very lean. At 345 pages, including notes and references, it seeks to cover a great deal of ground, and does not leave the author much flexibility to explore episodes like Suez in great depth. Missed opportunities abound, not

the least of which is Holmes's problematic relationship, late in his career, with James Eayrs, another giant in the study of Canadian external affairs. An episode that would have been particularly ripe for more detailed treatment was Holmes's reaction to Eayrs's controversial work *The Roots of Complicity*, which harshly criticized the Canadian government's early Indochina policy and Holmes personally. The matter is briefly raised in Chapnick's work, but one feels that the author could have used his knowledge about his subject and the surrounding scholarship to respond to Eayrs's charges, even if Holmes did not rise to the occasion himself (222-224).

The greatest missed opportunity in this work revolves around the author's decision to exclude Holmes's private life from scrutiny. Even if historians studying Canada's Cold War are not familiar with every aspect of Holmes's contribution to policy-making, they may be familiar with the controversy surrounding his departure from the Department of External Affairs.

Chapnick's treatment of this episode will be required reading for those interested in the history of the department during the early Cold War. It is also one of the rare occasions that Chapnick extends the scope of his biography beyond Holmes's professional activities into his private life. As with homosexuals in the military and other departments of the public service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police determined that Holmes's sexual preference constituted a risk to national security.⁵ In Holmes's case, their charge was based largely on a rumour that he may have been compromised by his associations with men during his time in Moscow, and was possibly subject to blackmail. Accounts of the Security Panel's zeal during the 1950s and early 1960s are by no means new, but Chapnick's work makes clear the distaste that many in the DEA, and particularly Norman Robertson, had for the policy. The most important point derived from the chapter is how civilized Holmes's departure was made to seem. Norman Robertson prepared a soft landing outside the DEA, but Holmes transitioned almost seamlessly back to the CIIA.

The chapter is an unsatisfying investigation, however. The accusations against Holmes are repeated and dismissed, with little analysis of the charges against him or how he came to the RCMP's attention.⁶ Even Holmes's interrogators in the RCMP could not produce a shred of evidence to suggest he had been in any way disloyal during his posting to Moscow in 1947-1948.⁷ In fact, we learn less about Holmes than we do about the possible entrapment of John Watkins, a retired Canadian ambassador to the Soviet Union, also homosexual, who died of a heart attack during a 1964 RCMP interrogation. There is a rich literature that would provide the basis for a more detailed critique of anticommunism, homophobia, and

⁵ Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, "The queer career of homosexual security vetting in Cold War Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 75 (1994): 319-345.

⁶ Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2010), 94, 136-138.

⁷ Hector Mackenzie, "Purged... from Memory: The Department of External Affairs and John Holmes," *International Journal* 59 (Spring, 2004): 382.

the national security state in North America in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸ Groundbreaking and recent work by Reg Whitaker, Steve Hewitt, Gary Kinsman, and Patrizia Gentile, to name a few of the Canadian authors, have charted out the extent of state surveillance of citizens, and purges of the public service, yet Chapnick does not use Holmes's case to address this discourse. Perhaps this is asking too much, since his subject is Holmes, not the investigative practices of the RCMP or state surveillance, but given the number of prominent DEA personnel who resigned or were forced out because of their sexual preference, a more thorough examination of Holmes's experience might have been warranted. Chapnick deserves credit, however, for presenting a balanced account of a difficult subject, where he could have engaged in harsher condemnation of the RCMP and Robertson, on whose shoulders the task eventually fell to remove one of his senior staff members from public service, without any evidence of disloyalty. Yet one suspects that the small parting of the curtain into Holmes's private life, only a short 17 pages, will leave many readers wanting more, about Holmes, his colleagues who were similarly discarded, and about the state of cooperation and confrontation that existed between DEA and RCMP in these years. Hector Mackenzie has described the purges as a terrible personal trauma which "tested friendships, curtailed careers, and shattered lives."⁹ Holmes's capacity to divorce his personal life from the professional must truly have been Herculean if his transition to CIIA was as seamless as Chapnick's account describes.

Holmes's dismissal also calls into question one of the central components of Chapnick's problematic approach to the biography, that his work is a study of the "public life" of a public figure. Notwithstanding Holmes's notorious privacy, is it not the duty of the biographer to peel back the veneer and explore the interaction of the private and the public subject? Holmes's private life appeared to weigh quite heavily on the course of his public life, if not determining it completely. More discussion of his life outside the office, and his private circle of supporters, could only have enriched our understanding of Holmes's professional development and his thinking on Canada's foreign policy. It may be that the sources are insufficient to provide us with a better view of Holmes's private life, indeed, Chapnick argues that Holmes did much to hide his private affairs from scrutiny. Yet Chapnick occasionally makes brief reference to Holmes's private challenges and relationships that could have been incorporated into the work, and still produce a compelling narrative of an important figure in the formation and study of Canada's approach to the world.

⁸ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse's *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: University Press, 1994); see also Richard Cavell, ed. *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War* (Toronto: University Press, 2004). American studies of the "security state" include: Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), and Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry Truman and the National Security State* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000).

⁹ Mackenzie, 383.

The name John Wendell Holmes is familiar to anyone who has studied Canadian foreign policy in the period between the 1950s and the 1980s. During the 1960s and 1970s Holmes was well-known as a frequent media commentator but for more modern audiences Adam Chapnick has done a tremendous job showing us, and in some cases reminding us, how and why John Holmes mattered. Whether it was as a diplomat, an analyst and commentator, or as a teacher, it is remarkable that in one lifetime John Holmes was able to excel in three different careers. From his meteoric rise through the ranks of the Department of External Affairs, to his leadership as the president of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs (CIIA), and in his role as a mentor and teacher to innumerable students, Holmes made an important impact on many facets of Canadian life. Due to his intelligence, charm, wit, and humility he was in many ways able to be “Canada’s voice.”

The book is well researched, in numerous archives in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, and it also benefits from the insight of over 150 interviews with Holmes’ former colleagues and students. In part because it is well-written, and in part because of the engaging subject matter, it is easy to see why *Canada’s Voice* was shortlisted for the 2010 Dafoe Book Prize and listed as one of the *Hill Times* Best Books of 2009.

In this sympathetic biography Holmes comes across as one of those people who was the quintessential dinner guest, or the favorite uncle, or the beloved teacher – the kind of person who made the world a better place and whom you were better for knowing. One also gets the sense that it was difficult not to like John Holmes. This is not to say, however, that Chapnick is uncritical of Holmes’ performance. Holmes’ analysis of Soviet intentions in Germany in 1948 was “wrong” (62); when examining the Department of External Affairs’ oversight of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) agreement, Holmes should have been firmer (98); and in the 1980s some of Holmes’ views were “confusing and obscure” (269). Chapnick would also have liked to have seen more initiative by Holmes and finds it “disappointing” that he did not exert more influence on Canadian policy during his tenure as CIIA President – but stemming from his days as a loyal civil servant Holmes was “never comfortable as the ultimate arbiter or decision maker.” (153) Holmes was not perfect, but despite these momentary lapses it is clear that he possessed uncommonly sound common sense and was a voice of reason in uncertain times.

Canada’s Voice runs chronologically through Holmes’ life in fourteen chapters, but is perhaps better understood chronicling four main periods: his early years as a student, a high school teacher, and an initial stint with the CIIA, his notable tenure with the Department of External Affairs throughout the 1940s and 1950s, his return to the CIIA in 1960 as the president, later to be called director-general, which includes his active role as a political commentator and analyst, and his final incarnation in the 1970s and 1980s as a university professor and scholar. Throughout Chapnick also does a good job of contextualizing as he sets Holmes’ life alongside the international events with which Canada and Holmes were so inextricably linked.

Holmes joined the Department of External Affairs in 1943 as a special wartime assistant, and what was initially to be a short-term contract became a sixteen year career. By all accounts the 1940s and 1950s were an exciting time to work in the East Block. Staffed by Canada's "best and brightest," Holmes worked alongside the likes of Mike Pearson, Norman Robertson, Hume Wrong, Marcel Cadieux, Charles Ritchie, and Arnold Heeney to name but a few. Holmes rose quickly through the ranks, becoming a trusted source of advice, and played key roles in Ottawa, London, Moscow, and New York. It was during this time that Holmes developed his view of, and helped shape, Canada's role as a middle power, and came to truly understand what Canada should, and could, accomplish on the world stage.

Chapnick deals tactfully with sensitive issues, perhaps at times too much so, but he is careful not get bogged down in the salacious details of Holmes' departure from the Department of External Affairs, when he was drummed out by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police due to an alleged tryst with a Russian man during Holmes' posting to Moscow in the 1940s. Leaving External Affairs may not have been of Holmes design, but it may well have been the best thing for him. While the foreign service team was doing important work, it certainly took its toll. Holmes was exhausted towards the end of his time in the East Block, and had he not been compelled to leave when he did, he may well have worked himself to an early grave as was the case with more than one of his colleagues.

Carefully able to manage the optics of his transition from government service to the public sphere, after a brief stint as a scholar-in-residence at Duke University, Holmes returned to Canada to take the helm of the CIIA. The growth and success of the CIIA under Holmes' leadership is undeniable. Chapnick, however, provides an interesting and valuable institutional history of the CIIA which in many ways became the victim of Holmes' success. Almost immediately Holmes was looked upon as the authoritative voice on Canadian international relations and the CIIA benefited immensely. Holmes, ever the workaholic, maintained a grueling schedule of meetings, speeches, public commentaries, and publications. Membership in the CIIA blossomed and bold initiatives expanded the organization in many directions – the move to include Quebec and francophone scholars in the foreign policy debate was important and successful; an attempt to develop an expertise in defence studies was less so. Holmes was able to move the CIIA in exciting directions, but the CIIA's ledger was all too often in the red and it became apparent that without Holmes, however able his successor may be, continued expansion was untenable.

While never able, or willing, to completely sever ties with the CIIA, in the final stage of his life Holmes embarked on a career in academia, though as was customary of his humility and modesty, he did so with some trepidation. Holmes' concerns, however, were ill-founded, as his publications alone – well over 100 by the time of his death in 1988 – are enough to make even the most prolific academic envious. While not a spellbinding lecturer, Holmes challenged his students to discuss and analyze the complexities of international relations. Well-known and influential diplomats and policymakers – Holmes' friends – were frequent guests in his seminars. He was generous with his time and inspired a new generation of scholars and policy makers. Many of his students at York University and the University of Toronto went on to achieve great things and their names have commonly been associated with debates on Canadian foreign policy over the past three decades. That

some of his former doctoral students, led by Kim Richard Nossal, published in 1982, *An Acceptance of Paradox: Essays on Canadian Diplomacy in Honour of John W. Holmes*, speaks volumes. It also is clear that Holmes was reciprocally inspired by teaching, and by his students.

If there is a fault to find with this book, it stems from a desire to know even more about Holmes. As the subtitle of the book identifies, and is clearly explained in the preface, the primary aim of the book is to look at Holmes' "public life." There are some limitations with this approach, though Chapnick does give some hints as to the private side of Holmes' life. Early in the book, however, Chapnick offers an intriguing and astute observation: "He was a man whom everyone felt they knew well until they thought about it and realized that, while they admired him immensely, they hardly knew him at all." (5) Holmes certainly valued his privacy and compartmentalized his private life in such a manner that one begins to wonder whether it is even possible to know the complete John Holmes.

Chapnick's book is a strong addition to the literature on Canadian diplomatic history making it valuable to academics and practitioners, while at the same time being accessible to the public at large. One can only hope that it will inspire others to continue on this research path. There are a number of Holmes' colleagues from the East Block who are also deserving of biographies and whose roles on the international stage would make equally valuable contributions to our understanding of Canada's place in the world during the middle power years.

It is uncanny how Adam Chapnick who, as he indicates in the preface of this fine, well-researched book, is “too young to have met Mr. Holmes” (xi) has evoked the spirit and the distinctive “voice” of a man who represented the very best in the tradition of Canadian internationalism—in diplomacy as well as in scholarship, teaching, and public discussion of foreign policy issues. John Holmes was perhaps, most of all, an educator: he drew out the best in others, and guided their thinking with his acute intellect, wealth of knowledge, delightful conversation, and his alert presence, for he was an excellent listener as well as talker and writer.

He attended to youth as well as to the seasoned and the elderly. “I am not an old fogey,” he insisted to the rising young Lloyd Axworthy, a future Canadian external affairs minister. “I am by temperament and experience a gap closer.” (171) Indeed he was—across generations, between parties, and among nations. It is not surprising that Chapnick should have been attracted to him as a historical subject, for there was something ever-young about “Jack” Holmes, as he was known as a boy. He was a man for all ages—not just of the fabled Golden Age of Canadian diplomacy, whose mores and even literary style this wonderfully traditional biography captures so well. Holmes—“Uncle John” to his relatives, and in the affection of many others—was younger than his biography, if not his biographer!

John Wendell Holmes was not a leader, but yet he was. He led from the middle—a moderate voice, of intermediate rank, from a middle power (a concept whose very meaning he, more than any other, defined), and usually from within “the system” rather than outside. Like his country, he was modest in ambition and in claim to status or sway. Yet he could not have been unaware of the considerable influence that he—and Canada—had throughout the world, through the Commonwealth, through the United Nations, and upon his country’s stronger neighbor, the United States. The importance for Canada of its “permanent” relationship with the great American Republic in the geopolitical and diplomatic thinking of John Holmes is duly emphasized by Chapnick, who, however, does not fully explore the content of Holmes’ lifelong analysis of the continental connection.

While Holmes always thought of himself as “a good Canadian nationalist” (221), he was at the same time a close friend of the United States and of Americans, and he did not hesitate to say so out loud—especially when it mattered. Chapnick quotes Holmes’ response to the question, posed to an audience at Bowling Green University at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, “Are Canadians really friends of the United States?” “Yes, a thousand times yes,” Holmes declared. (149) His vocal and implicit friendship surely was reciprocated by the innumerable Americans who met him during his many trips southward.

It would be a profound misunderstanding of Holmes’ North Americanism to construe his view of the United States mechanically, as a mere fulcrum against which Canada could gain leverage in the world—or, to use Holmes’ own term, against which “counterweights” were needed. Chapnick does not fall into this politico-physicalist trap. He does stress the point, however, that Holmes believed “the greatest way to expand Ottawa’s influence on the

world stage was in fact to preserve American hegemony.” Canada’s influence depended on American influence. At the same time, Holmes hated being invited overseas “to participate as a representative from North America.” (220)

John Holmes was a Canadian liberal imperialist of a now-rare kind: one who saw empire as a form of world order, an evolving, liberalizing, globalizing, and ultimately planetary order, an altruistic and even ecologically conscious domain. He called this “the right kind of imperialism.” (76) Within such a structured and yet fluid centralized space, individual nations—large, small, and middle-sized—could find room to live and to interact, freely, widely, and without obligatory or constant reference to the mother country or the currently predominant power. The opposition to the United States of some Canadian nationalists seemed to him just such a narrow fixation. “Canadians were too introspective, too focused on the national and regional levels of foreign policy,” as Chapnick describes Holmes’ opinion. (220)

Nonetheless, Holmes was willing to engage such geographically pinched thinking—if only to counter it. By understanding the interests and goals behind North American “continentalism,” which were not always just those of Yankee greed or glory, he could penetrate, disassemble, and hope to disperse it, diffusing it in a broader international comity. I encountered his intellectual method, as well as his amity and legendary hospitality, when invited to speak in his seminar at the University of Toronto’s Centre for International Studies. American professors William T.R. Fox and Annette Baker Fox, in residence at the university at the time, also were present and participated in the discussion. My subject was “The Rediscovery of North America,” a topic prompted by the proposal advanced by Ronald Reagan, in announcing his candidacy for the U.S. presidency, of a “North American Accord”—the germ of an idea that resulted a decade later in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Holmes, whose political orientation was pro-Liberal and who as a historian was well versed in the troubled record of Canadian-American commercial reciprocity, opposed the North American free trade initiative, though he did not say so publicly. (270) In fact, Chapnick considers it “quite likely” that he voted for the free trade proposal’s eventual political sponsor in Canada—the Progressive Conservative Party—in the 1979 election. (254) One can imagine that his reasoning was complex, combining a Liberal preference for multilateralism over bilateralism in trade matters with an openness to new leadership and fresh thinking. His hope remained that Canada would adhere to its internationalist tradition, and he continued to exert his quiet influence in that direction.

If there is one major lesson I learned from Adam Chapnick’s analysis of Holmes’ public philosophy it is that of the importance of anti-regionalism in internationalist thought. For Holmes, opposition to regional consolidation, and the resulting risk of regional self-enclosure, was a constant concern. “Continental” communities of *any* kind—North American, Western Hemispheric, and European too—he simply did not like. In this, I believe, his international political and economic vision was limited. A multi-continental association such as the Commonwealth—Holmes’ ideal grouping because of its British heritage and common institutions bridging diverse cultures—lacked the cohesiveness

necessary to achieve major goals. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which Holmes' senior colleagues and mentors, Escott Reid and Lester Pearson, initially conceived as an "Atlantic Community," could not develop beyond a certain stage, however successful its military planning and defense function. Euro-Atlanticism could not compete with continentalist thinking and development, in the New World or especially in the Old.

European integration, in particular, was a subject on which Holmes seems to have had almost a blind spot. What would be bad for North America, he perhaps could not help but assume, must be bad for Europe too. Through his "North American" lenses, he could not see the vital need and rational merit of European consolidation—as he should have been able to do. In a letter written to his sister from Italy in 1946, following a violent incident he experienced there, he registered "the passions that are seething in this bewildered and frightening continent." (48) The unification of Europe—the European Union, with all of its imperfections—was surely an answer to the question of Europeans' fraught postwar geopsychology. It remains a valid answer to the present day.

As Chapnick observes, Holmes was disturbed by "the international trend towards greater formalized regionalism," perhaps especially on the European continent. "We are in danger of losing sight of the fact that the promotion of unity within regions does not serve the cause of world order if it exaggerates disunity between regions," Holmes warned. "I find myself more and more drifting into a kind of philosophical anarchism," as he confessed to Escott Reid. "I am sure peace is better preserved by a multiplicity of alliances and inter-related associations. God save us from the absolutism of Europe." (141)

Holmes might be called an anti-absolutist, opposed to any kind of super-sovereign dictation, whether by royal edict (within an empire) or majority vote (within a supranational organization). His negative reflexes are perhaps as important in explaining his intellectual make-up as are his positive philosophical principles. His Canadian vision of world order was anti-rigid. Of course, it was not really "anarchical." It was evolutionary, yet consistently progressive. It allowed for difference, for gradualness of change, and for the natural emergence of newness.

Conflicts, whether in the Middle East or southern Africa or in North America, were, in his historically informed judgment, generally best resolved by negotiation. John Holmes never abandoned his youthful conviction that "the fundamental basis of liberal democracy is the ultimate power of reasonable persuasion rather than force." (20) He was an embodiment of Canadian reason, as Adam Chapnick persuasively shows, and his voice was an instrument of its force.

This is a difficult book to review, not because of its prose or its phrasing or research, which are all excellent, but because of the subject and the title. I can agree with Adam Chapnick that John Holmes was *an* important foreign policy figure for Canada over the 35 years from 1945, but not *the* seminal man that the author suggests he was. That the subject was competent, caring, humble, and self-effacing is true, as is the fact that he had opinions that he was never reluctant to air. (False modesty is such a bourgeois value.) As well, that he taught a bevy of future academics and foreign policy practitioners is unquestionable. That he could have had some influence on their development is also true. However, for the author to claim that Canadians' "attachment to the Canadian idea was deeper than they had realized" as the country's 100th birthday celebrations were joined from coast to coast, and that this was "in no small part because of [Holmes] own writing and speaking," is surely a bit of a stretch. (185)

John Holmes came from a certain time and place, growing up in the 1920s in London, Ontario, the son of a Methodist (later United Church of Canada) bookseller. As Chapnick notes, this was similar to most other foreign policy practitioners of the 1940s and '50s – Lester Pearson, Hume Wrong and Norman Robertson all hailed from similar places. That gave him an inside track in external affairs. Ironically, his first office-mate following his appointment was Marcel Cadieux, a francophone island in a sea of Anglo-Saxon officialdom. That Cadieux was able to convey to Holmes some sense of what it was to be a Francophone in 1940s Canada – to be the "Other" – was to Holmes' benefit as he moved up the ranks. That did help, but Holmes was also a product of his place and times. For example, Chapnick notes that "He ... never lost faith in the Commonwealth." (33) Why not? It was an organization that had lost steam by the later 1950s, and seemed moribund into the following decade. The Indians actively debated in their Lok Sabha leaving the Commonwealth in the mid-1960s given British activity during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War. However, for a white Anglo-Saxon protestant like Holmes, it remained a touchstone. Chapnick does point to some of these attitudes as, for example, when he notes that "Holmes had a well-meaning but at times paternalistic view of developing societies." (77) He thought it important in the early 1950s that the British remain in the Middle East and Africa in order to convey the supposed benefits of British culture, politics and society.

This said, he was also outside the Canadian foreign policy consensus on a number of issues, and many of his positions have stood the test of time. He had insight into the Middle East situation that some of his contemporaries, and especially Americans, lacked, perhaps a result of his immersion in that file at the United Nations in the late 1940s. Indeed, Chapnick claims that his subject played a key role in the resolution of the Suez Crisis of late 1956, given his insight and interest. I have heard the same thing said about Canada's ambassador to Egypt, Herbert Norman, who soon after jumped to his death, hounded onto the roof of his embassy in Cairo by wild and destructive probing by a U.S. Congressional committee. Perhaps what might be claimed is that a team of dedicated external officers worked with Lester Pearson to come up with the UN peacekeeping solution that earned their political boss the Nobel Peace Prize. Similarly, he was quietly persistent when advocating, of course to no avail, that Canada recognize the People's

Republic of China in the 1950s.¹ The undersecretary of state for external affairs, Norman Robertson, was the one to shut him down on that occasion. Arguably, most Canadians would have supported the official position. Later, Chapnick tells us that Holmes believed Beijing was “far more moderate than the Soviets, or even the Americans, in [its] approach to the Cold War.” (154) While that is undoubtedly true, it would have put Holmes out of step with his countrymen; he was far in advance of their thinking. Perhaps he had insight into the way the world would be shaped, or at least that such a significant power should not be excluded from polite discourse by American whim. As well, Holmes was not entirely comfortable with the United States and its actions abroad which, by the 1960s, put him in the vanguard of much Canadian opinion. While not a part of the “angry young men” movement of the mid-1960s, (so described by J. King Gordon²), he was a bit of a fellow traveler, and tasked himself with trying to bridge the gap between those “radicals” and his old colleagues. (168) While he might not have been successful there, he did subscribe to the new ethic, driven by Pierre Trudeau’s government following April 1968, that animated the development of Canada’s foreign relations and which focused more critically on Canadian interests.³ Indeed, with the luxury of hindsight, Holmes seemed to be on the “right” side of many issues from the response to decolonization, to the Middle East, to the United Nations, to Canadian attitudes toward the U.S. That does not necessarily make him the “Voice” as he was as often as not figuratively shouting when few were listening – just a prescient and engaged man, of which there were many in Canada.

Chapnick devotes a whole chapter, as he should, to Holmes’ premature departure from the DEA. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was hot on his tail as rumours of his homosexuality circulated. In the Canadian public service of the 1950s and into the 1960s, that was forbidden and the federal police enforced that edict. Their concern was the possibility of Soviet control of Canadian officials to the country’s detriment given that the Soviets were equally as assiduous in attempting to determine who was homosexual. There was also a general concern over the immorality of homosexuality. The RCMP had funded a project, nicknamed “the fruit machine”, undertaken by Carleton University Psychology professor Frank Robert Wake, to “out” homosexuals. While the money was wasted on a ridiculous exercise and the project was eventually shut down, the purges continued. As Chapnick notes, Holmes was not one to make a fuss, leaving quietly. Indeed, he seemed to live in fear of anyone discovering his sexual orientation and was ill-equipped to make a stand denouncing this inquisition. Nor was Norman Robertson reluctant to let him go. The whole sordid business demonstrates the idiocy of that particular campaign. Much intellectual muscle was lost due to the interference of the RCMP, whose members often had barely finished high school in the 1950s and ‘60s. With their narrow and blinkered vision, they were the perfect ideological warriors. Chapnick handles this part of

¹ Holmes was not the only influential figure to advocate this, however. Ivan Head, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s foreign policy advisor, took just such a step in the early 1960s. See Bruce Muirhead and Ronald Harpelle, *IDRC: 40 Years of Ideas, Innovation and Impact*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010) 141.

² J. King Gordon, “Foreward,” in *Canada’s Role as a Middle Power*, ed. J. King Gordon, (Toronto: CIIA, 1966).

³ See *Foreign Policy for Canadians*, (Ottawa, Department of External Affairs, 1970).

Holmes' life with tact, discretion and insight, while providing the reader with a real sense of the terror of that age for those living outside the Canadian mainstream.

The rest of *Canada's Voice* is almost anti-climatic, following Holmes through his time as president/director-general of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and its troubles with finance and membership. While he was an effective director-general for a number of years, the burden of senior office in a voluntary and membership-based organization, and the administrative headaches that followed, made it increasingly difficult for him to focus. Indeed, Chapnick suggests that by the late 1960s, Holmes had outlived his usefulness at the CIIA, especially as the organization seemed stale: "Holmes recognized the problem, and knew that significant change was required, but refused to take a leadership role in devising a comprehensive solution." (209) Increasingly, he moved into teaching, at both the University of Toronto and at York's Glendon campus. He was never a full-time faculty member – we are never told why the University of Western Ontario flatly rejected his overtures – but rather what might be termed today a continuing lecturer. Certainly, he had success especially given the roster of future academics and policy-makers that passed through his classes. As for students, some subscribed to his ideas while others clearly did not, making his voice rather fractured. For example, Daniel Drache, a University of Toronto graduate student in Holmes' first class in 1967-68, obviously fell into the latter category.⁴

The focus on their subject to the exclusion of much else is often the fate of biographers; John Holmes or Louis Rasminsky or Norman Robertson become all-consuming as they fill in the narrative, with the subject perhaps assuming a preternatural significance.⁵ Surely this is obvious when the author writes that "For students and practitioners of international affairs at home and around the world, [Holmes] was Canada's voice." (x) Clearly, *some* students and practitioners knew and admired Holmes but I dispute the notion that he came to mind first or that he was Canada's voice. I have been politically engaged since the later 1960s and attended universities from 1973 to 1985 and would be hard-pressed to cite anyone over that period who would have told me that John Holmes was *essential* to the practice of Canadian statecraft. Had Chapnick claimed that his subject might have been *one* of Canada's voices, and an important one at that, deserving of a biography, I could have agreed. What of the voice and influence of Lester Pearson, Louis Rasminsky, Norman Robertson, Escott Reid, or Paul Martin, Sr., to name but five. Indeed, what of Pierre Trudeau and Ivan Head? Further, an over-abundance of Department of External Affairs people seemed to have been Rhodes Scholars in the 1940s and 1950s, which meant that, at least in terms of intelligence, Holmes did not necessarily stand head and shoulders above.

⁴ Daniel Drache went on to a brilliant career at York University in Toronto.

⁵ See, for example, Bruce Muirhead, *Against the Odds: The Public Life and Times of Louis Rasminsky* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and J.L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft, 1929-1968* (Toronto: Deneau, 1981).

However, the book is certainly well-written and organized; the prose was such that I wanted to continue reading. It is also based on an enormous amount of research. Chapnick notes that he began to think about a Holmes biography while a doctoral candidate in the 1990s. It shows: there are approximately 175 secondary sources listed in his bibliography as well as about six pages of Holmes' own work. This is on top of 66 magazines, periodicals and newspapers, an incredible number of archival sources and 151 interviews. Surely this itemization includes all documents, books, articles and newspaper commentary about or by the man, as well as anyone who had even a passing thought about him. The variety and sheer number of sources is ably demonstrated in the attention to detail and the very complete public story the author tells about his subject. What is remarkable is that Chapnick manages to interpret and synthesize his material to make it compelling reading, clearly an ability of an accomplished historian.

Canada's Voice is an excellent resource, regardless of what one thinks of the role of the main character in the development and presentation of the country's foreign policy. There were a number of things I learned – like Canadian involvement in 1947 and 1948 in the Middle East file or the (admittedly) minor issue of the Polish treasures case. Still, this book remains frustrating – not because of how it was written, the clear scholarship that went into its research, or the obvious respect the author has for Holmes, but because of the man himself. I know I found myself wishing on occasion that he would bust out and do something authentic, or less guarded. Anything. Maybe even to throw “caution,” a word Chapnick uses a lot to describe Holmes, to the wind. But perhaps that was the author's purpose – to show a man tightly wound and extremely private, yet sensitive and intelligent who played a role in post-war Canada, first in the public service then as president/director-general of the CIIA and, later still, as a committed teacher of undergraduate and graduate students and as the author of books on foreign policy.

On 12 October 2010, before the third round of voting was even completed, the Canadian government withdrew its bid for one of the non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. On the first ballot Canada had secured 113 votes, third behind Germany and Portugal; in the second ballot, it received just 78 votes. The embarrassing collapse of support prompted considerable debate in Canada over how the country's long run of decennial bids for a Security Council seat – it had been elected to the Council in 1948-49, 1958-59, 1967-68, 1977-78, 1989-90, and 1999-2000 – had come to an end.

For its part, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper blamed Michael Ignatieff, the Liberal leader of the opposition, who before the vote had publicly expressed doubt about whether Canada deserved to win. Others suggested that the failure could be more accurately be attributed to the long list of countries that had all manner of reasons for voting for Portugal: Canada's support for Israel, its refusal to embrace robust policies to address climate change, its ham-fisted visa policies, its reductions of development assistance to African countries, or its refusal to support the idea of expanding the number of permanent Security Council seats. Others still faulted the Harper government for starting to campaign too late. Some even suggested that Ottawa's refusal to engage in the vote-buying that is so much part of Security Council elections was responsible, noting that the little bottles of maple syrup distributed by the Canadians could not possibly compete with the vacations in the Azores offered to UN ambassadors by Portugal.

But few Canadians wondered if other governments might have been asking themselves a perhaps more pertinent question: what would Canada use its Security Council seat for in 2011-2012? What value would Canada add? Could it be that too few governments believed that Canada would make a difference to the Council?

If that were indeed a widespread calculus among the 191 government-voters in 2010, it would have been a marked historical departure. For from the 1940s to the 1980s, the Canadian government was seen as an attractive candidate for election to the Security Council by other governments: Canada was an engaged multilateralist, a committed supporter of the United Nations, a promoter of ideas, and a country inclined to engage in acts of good international citizenship (to use the memorable phrase of Gareth Evans, Australia's foreign minister from 1988 to 1996). By contrast, beginning in the mid 1990s, governments in Ottawa, both Liberal and Conservative, increasingly abandoned the middle power proclivities of that earlier era. Indeed, it could be argued that Canada's last successful run at the Security Council seat, in the late 1990s, was a last hurrah, propelled in part by memory and habit, and in part by the extraordinary activism of the foreign minister at the time, Lloyd Axworthy.

But Axworthy's activism – his support for human security, the International Criminal Court, a global ban on anti-personnel landmines, and a reconfiguration of sovereignty – tended to hide a deeper reality: Canada was no longer as engaged an internationalist as it had been in

the past. Not only was the government of which Axworthy a member spending less and less on international engagement; once Axworthy left politics, there was little vision, and few novel entrepreneurial ideas. Most importantly, there was little voice given to internationalist engagement. By 2005, Canada's foreign policy voice tended to be dominated by self-referential ear candy, such as Prime Minister Paul Martin's assurances to Canadians that Canada was a model for the world. Stephen Harper and the Conservatives took office in February 2006 committed to abandoning such embarrassing self-flattery. But while the Harper government was more grounded and more realistic, it has been both unwilling and unable to articulate a vision of Canada as an engaged and committed global actor that is compelling to other governments.

Adam Chapnick's biography of John W. Holmes reminds us that there is an intimate relationship between the policy behavior of states, the capacity to give compelling voice to that behavior, and the perceptions of other actors in the international system. In Canada's case, Holmes was an important contributor to the dynamic that kept Canada an attractive candidate for election to the Security Council for so long. Chapnick's title was aptly chosen: Holmes was indeed "Canada's voice," articulating a particular perspective of the country on the world stage. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, as a member of the Department of External Affairs, Holmes helped frame Canada's diplomatic voice on a variety of global issues. And in the nearly three decades between his departure from External Affairs in 1960 and his death in 1988, he provided a different kind of voice – as commentator, analyst, and professor.

In these latter roles, he helped articulate for a wider public what he and his colleagues in Canada's foreign ministry had practiced in the 1950s. In his collections of essays,¹ in his public lectures, and in his classes at the University of Toronto and York University, he articulated not only a vision of Canada as an engaged internationalist, but a rationale for that vision, one that he located firmly in the national interest.

For Holmes, diplomacy by middle powers like Canada was a crucial tool for grappling with the conflicts of interest that would always mark the interactions of states. Middle powers, he argued, sought resolution to conflicts that might escalate into great-power war; they searched for compromise; they devoted energy and resources for the maintenance of global peace and order; they sought new ways of institutionalizing conflict resolution. Most importantly, middle power diplomacy – or, as he termed it, "middlepowermanship" – was *voluntary*: such behavior was not coerced or determined by others.

As Chapnick notes, John Holmes "solidified Canada's image as a middle power at home and abroad" (179). And through his teaching and graduate supervision he extended and prolonged his voice, through those of his doctoral students like myself, who went on to teach and write about Canadian foreign policy, in the process reproducing the discourse of middlepowermanship.

¹ John W. Holmes, *The Better Part of Valour: Essays in Canadian Diplomacy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970); *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

There is a certain irony in the durability of the middle power trope that Holmes did so much to promote. For we have tended to forget that Holmes first used the term middlepowermanship in the mid-1960s at a conference not as analytical tool but as an ironic critique.² By the mid-1960s, Holmes was increasingly worried about “the glorification and formalization of a kind of diplomacy that was really just commonsensical and not as unique as we were hinting.”³ Perhaps not surprisingly given his sense of humour, Holmes chose middlepowermanship as an ironic counter to a term that had commonly been used in the mid-1950s to criticize a particular style of diplomacy in the United States. Inspired by the writings of British humorist Stephen Potter, whose satirical books on “one-upmanship” and “lifemanship” had appeared in the early 1950s, James Reston of the *New York Times* had coined the term “brinkmanship” to criticize the diplomacy of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State in the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, that sought to bring the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of war. So, if an appropriate way to critique American foreign policy was to call it “brinkmanship,” Holmes reckoned that “middlepowermanship” was an equally good word to critique the tendency of Canadians to overglorify their foreign policy as though it was unique.

But what had begun as a tongue-in-cheek jab at Canadian diplomacy developed into something far more serious than he had originally intended. Holmes admitted that he should have realized that what had happened to “brinkmanship” might also happen to “middlepowermanship.” Brinkmanship had started as a critical journalistic characterization of a particular style of diplomacy; but it started to be used by the very officials it had been coined to criticize. As importantly, brinkmanship was also appropriated by the academic community and turned into an analytical category to analyze international crises, in the process stripping it of its original critical and ironic connotation. Exactly the same thing happened to middlepowermanship: the word did indeed enter the discourse of Canadian foreign policy, but without its original irony or critical intent.

However, even though middlepowermanship assumed a seriousness that Holmes had not intended, and even though, as Chapnick notes, Holmes came to question the very term he helped make so popular (237-38), it can be argued that his celebration of a particular style of diplomacy for Canada played no small part in contributing to the kind of positive view of Canada among other governments that led to six successful elections to the Security Council. But by the same token, the progressive decline of the Canadian commitment to internationalism over the last decade and a half – and the lack of a commentator like Holmes to act as “Canada’s voice” – might provide a more compelling explanation for Canada’s failure to secure election to the Security Council in 2010.

² John W. Holmes, “Is There a Future for Middlepowermanship?” in J. King Gordon, ed., *Canada’s Role as a Middle Power* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1966), 13–28.

³ John W. Holmes, “Most Safely in the Middle,” *International Journal* 39:2 (Spring 1984), 368.

Response by Adam Chapnick

Responding to these reviews in this forum is a humbling experience. As a Canadianist who studies foreign affairs, it is rare to have the opportunity to discuss my research with an audience that extends south of the 49th parallel. I therefore thank Thomas Maddux for selecting my book for review and David Webster and others who have worked so hard to bring greater Canadian content to H-Diplo more generally. I am also grateful to all five reviewers who took the time to read my book with care, and who provide thoughtful, pointed comments on its strengths and weaknesses.

I am both flattered and delighted by the readers' response to the quality of my prose. I wrote this book the way that I think Mr. Holmes would have wanted: with sufficient attention to scholarly conventions so as to please the majority within the academy and yet in a style that would make it suitable for a more general audience. It appears that my goal at this level has been achieved. I also appreciate the praise for the quality and quantity of the research that formed the basis of my analysis. Biographies are demanding projects, particularly when one's subject enjoys three complete careers (as diplomat, NGO president / public intellectual, and university educator), all of which were documented extensively. The reviewers acknowledge a number of contributions to the scholarly literature, from new insights into the history of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, to understandings of the strong anti-regionalist sentiment underlying *Holmesian*, if not Canadian, internationalism, to the relationship between the capacity of states to explain their policies in public and the perceptions of those policies by members of the international community.

The reviewers also provide two significant criticisms, both of which can be traced at least in part back to the title, *Canada's Voice: The Public Life of John Wendell Holmes*. Professor Muirhead is the least convinced of my claim that Mr. Holmes was the leading interpreter of Canada and Canadians to public officials abroad, and the driving force shaping official and popular understandings of Canada at home. Both Professor Muirhead and Dr. Burch point fairly to elements of the text where, in my effort to make this book accessible to a general audience, I seem to have allowed my prose to venture too close to hyperbole. I certainly cannot prove conclusively that Canadians turned to Mr. Holmes en masse, or that international opinions of foreign policy decisions made in Ottawa were shaped largely by Mr. Holmes' writings and speeches. What I can suggest with confidence is that for much of the Cold War, an image of Canada as concerned internationalist power dominated popular and oftentimes a official thinking. This view of so-called middlepowermanship might not have been entirely accurate – as I myself have suggested in a previous book¹ – but it was there, and no individual did more to popularize it than John Wendell Holmes. The overwhelming lists of Holmes' students and public appearances that Dr. Burch suggests might have been relegated to footnotes are included as evidence of how Mr. Holmes' ideas could become so much a part of the public and official landscapes.

¹ *The Middle Power Project: Canada and the Founding of the United Nations* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2005).

I do not mean to suggest that every Canadian who viewed Ottawa as a responsible global citizen did so because they had spoken to, or read the work of, Mr. Holmes. Rather, I argue that thanks to his diplomatic connections, his leadership of the CIIA, his popular writings and speeches, and his teaching, Mr. Holmes and his thinking became ubiquitous. In Canada and abroad, the Holmesian view of the world – one which I explore in detail throughout my book – was internalized as the Canadian view both at the official level and in the public narrative. It did not matter whether one knew Mr. Holmes personally, or even knew of him, to have been affected by his writing and thinking.

Professor Muirhead notes that Mr. Holmes certainly was not *his* voice, nor was he the voice of others, like the former Holmes student, Daniel Drache. This is a point that I cannot dispute. Indeed I interviewed Professor Drache and recall quite distinctly his insistence that Mr. Holmes' importance to the development, implementation, and understanding of Canadian foreign policy had been profoundly exaggerated over the years. It was James Eayrs, he told me, who deserved the sort of biographical treatment that I was giving Holmes. And while I respect Professor Drache's opinion, the very fact that he criticized the extent to which Holmes' ideas in particular have been recognized suggests to me that even those who disagreed with the Holmesian view could not help but accept its dominant position in Canadian thinking. The 'angry young men' to which Muirhead refers were rebels; they rebelled against the standard understanding of Canadian foreign policy, and that understanding was profoundly Holmesian. John Holmes does not have to be Professor Muirhead's voice, nor does he have to be the voice of Professor Muirhead's colleagues, to validate my contention. Rather, I have attempted to argue – perhaps not clearly enough – that Holmes' voice was the dominant one of his generation. In retrospect, alternative titles that I had been considering (and had rejected largely because of their lack of cross-over appeal), including "Professional Internationalist," and "Canadian Internationalist" might well have negated some of the criticisms here.

A number of reviewers note their concerns with my emphasis on Mr. Holmes' public life. It is perhaps therefore necessary to explain why I decided to approach the book the way that I did. My reasoning was based on a combination of my sense of the story that deserved to be told, a pragmatic assessment of how I might benefit the most from my oral history interviews, and the material that I eventually uncovered. To me, while the private John Holmes might well have had interesting life experiences, it was the public Holmes whose impact was sufficiently critical to the development and understanding of Canada's place in the world so as to merit book-length scholarly treatment. I therefore chose to focus in detail on Mr. Holmes' private life only when I could demonstrate reasonably specific connections to his public activities. While Mr. Holmes' forced departure from the Department of External Affairs is the most obvious example of when his private life could not be neglected, it is not the only time that I mention personal issues relating to family and friends. In each case, however, I do so to illuminate an element of the public life that would not be clear otherwise.

My experience conducting interviews for this book, particularly with members of Mr. Holmes' family and others who were particularly close with him, also led me to focus on the

public elements of the Holmes story. Although my biography of John Holmes is the first to have reached publication, it was not the first attempt. As I began interviewing, it became quite clear that a number of former colleagues and family members had been rather put off by questions about Mr. Holmes' personal life (largely, I suspect, because such questions had forced them to realize how little they actually knew about someone whom they had considered such a close friend or relative). By assuring my subjects that I was most interested in Mr. Holmes' public life and achievements – which I was – I am confident that I was able to learn more, through both the interviews and through unexpected access to personal letters, than I would have been able to otherwise. In the end, the trust that was built up during the interviews often led to discussions about what my subjects knew about Mr. Holmes' private life (although in most cases it was very little).

Finally, this book focused on Mr. Holmes' public life in part because, in spite of having explored what Professor Muirhead calls generously “all documents, books, articles, and newspaper commentary about or by the man, as well as anyone who had even a passing thought about him,” I discovered very little more about Mr. Holmes' private life than what my book revealed. This might not convince Dr. Burtch, who suggests that, for such a statement to be true, “Holmes' capacity to divorce his personal life from the professional must have been truly Herculean,” but I remind him, and others who might feel similarly, that John Holmes managed to keep a fifteen-year intimate, heterosexual, relationship secret from his entire family, not to mention from his closest colleagues, up to and beyond his death. To the best of my knowledge, only Patrick Lane, a poet who he met at the age of 75, knew for certain that Mr. Holmes had been seeing someone who lived in his building and Mr. Lane was unable to add to the material that I found in his private letters. I am confident that the late Douglas LePan could have revealed more about Mr. Holmes' personal life, but he passed away years before this project began and neither his two sons nor his personal papers could add more to the story that I have told. Certainly, some might suggest that I was too cautious in leaving out the name of the individual who was suspected to have had the affair with Mr. Holmes in Moscow, or not mentioning that Holmes was likely of no interest to the University of Western Ontario in 1960 because he hadn't earned a Ph.D., or not revealing the name of his girlfriend of so many years, but the former details would have been based on uncorroborated speculation, and the latter would have added nothing to my story. To summarize, then, had I excluded the word ‘public’ from the title of this book, the text would hardly have read differently. Mr. Holmes was indeed the private a man that I have portrayed him to be.

Dr. Burtch's other criticisms point to something much larger: his review provides a fairly rigid interpretation of biography and judges my study to have been as much a series of missed opportunities as it is a comprehensive assessment of Mr. Holmes' life. Dr. Burtch and I will have to agree to disagree on whether there is a place in the academy, and in literature more generally, for public biographies. I believe strongly that there is, yet I respect the argument that the best biographies generally reveal not only the character and achievements of the subject, but also something new about the times in which the subject lived. And therefore while I appreciate Professor Carroll's kind words about my efforts to contextualize Mr. Holmes' life alongside relevant international developments, I certainly

acknowledge that establishing the historical context has never come easily for me, and that I am never surprised when readers suggest that I could have included more.

Nevertheless, I take issue with the majority of Dr. Burtch's suggestions of missed opportunities. As I make clear in the chapters that transition John Holmes from his experiences as a Canadian diplomat to his life as a public intellectual and university educator, there is no doubt that his impact was far greater during his second and third careers. John Holmes left the Department of External Affairs as one of a number of assistant under-secretaries of state for external affairs (today referred to as assistant deputy ministers). He was never the under-secretary of state for external affairs², nor did he ever enter politics and serve in Cabinet. His limited role in Indochina was therefore insufficient to justify lengthy treatment in a book about his life; moreover, the story of Canada and Indochina is too complex to merit just chapter-length treatment. Indeed, Professor Carroll is currently hard at work producing a book-length analysis of that very topic. Similarly, the Suez story has been told, and told well, by Professor Carroll and a number of others. My research suggested that "Holmes was an indispensable part of the Canadian team that brought a temporary ceasefire to the conflict in the Middle East," (90), not that Mr. Holmes deserved more credit than Lester Pearson for the eventual result. And finally, as per the additional information that Kinsman and Gentile were able to provide about Holmes' departure from External Affairs, I agree that, had their book not been published after mine, there were details that might have been incorporated in to my story. I note, however, that those details were based on confidential interviews conducted in the early 1990s, with subjects who are long since deceased. Professor Kinsman was very generous in sharing some of his research with me in advance of his publication, and I used what I could. To suggest that I might have done more is indeed, as Dr. Burtch suspects "asking too much." I did not intend to write a history of Canadian foreign policy, a history of the RCMP purges, or a critique of "anticommunism, homophobia, and the national security state in North American in the 1950s and 1960s," and I am not sure that it is fair to criticize this book for having failed to do so.

In concluding, I recall a conversation that I had with one Michael Gendron, a high school teacher who taught me American history in grade 11. Widely respected by the students and the staff of the school, and well-regarded in the Faculty of Education where he was known as one of the university's most demanding, and effective, teacher trainers, Mr. Gendron announced at the end of my grade 11 year that he was taking early retirement. When I realized that I would not have the opportunity to learn from him in the classroom again, I asked why he was leaving a profession that he clearly loved and in which he obviously excelled. He answered by comparing the careers of two Hall of Fame Canadian hockey players, one of whom had retired in his prime, and another who ended his career as a second-rate player with declining skills. 'It's much better to leave while you're still wanted,' he told me. If the greatest criticism of this book is that it leaves its audience

² He did serve as the acting undersecretary of state for external affairs briefly in 1957, and that experience was profoundly negative for all of those involved.

wanting just a bit more, I can conclude this experience satisfied that Mr. Holmes has largely received the treatment that he deserves.

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