

Political commentary of the highest calibre

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When Pierre Elliott Trudeau became Prime Minister of Canada in the spring of 1968, the foreign policy of the previous 20 years came under intensive review.

The new prime minister made it clear that the changed circumstances of the world in the late sixties called for a “fresh look at the fundamentals of Canadian foreign policy” to determine how the government might “serve more effectively Canada’s current interests, objectives and priorities.”

To this end the Canadian government undertook, between May 1968 and June 1970, an extensive reassessment of all aspects of its foreign and defence policies

The result was the publication of a document entitled “Foreign Policy for Canadians” which outlined a new framework for Canada’s future foreign relations including that of Canada’s relationship with the United States and its role in the United Nations.

Henceforth, Canada was to think in terms of achieving well-defined national objectives as the primary goal of its foreign policy, taking priority over the internationalistic approach of the previous two decades which had focused on contributing to the peace and security of the world.

Bruce Thordarson’s book studies the evolution of these new foreign and defence policies – and particularly the ways in which these political decisions were actually made.

It will come as no surprise to Canadians that Trudeau himself emerges as the major influence in the decisions reached by the Canadian government during this period.

Thordarson’s examination of the background of the review as well as the Prime Minister’s political philosophy, the foreign policy papers themselves and the author’s assessment of their impact on decision-making, is an absorbing and finely-drawn study of Trudeau’s own very individual style of government.

Without the benefit of hindsight, and labouring under the disadvantage of a lack of written material – Thordarson relied heavily on interviews with government officials –he has produced an incisive book on a controversial subject which represents political commentary of the highest calibre.