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NATO: HOW IT SERVES CANADIAN INTERESTS

Notes for a Talk to the Canadian Parliamentary Association by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Ottawa, April 17, 1973.

In recent years the Government has conducted thorough reviews of its foreign and defence policies. One of the principal conclusions reached was that defence policy should flow from foreign policy and that both should be designed to serve Canadian interests. In a rapidly-evolving world situation, the Government decided that, while pursuing a deliberate program of broadening and diversifying Canada's relations with other states of the world, it should continue to support the organizations to which we already belonged, including NATO. The purpose of my remarks tonight is to outline some of the reasons why we believe participation in NATO serves Canadian interests.

But first a word about NATO itself. It is perhaps a common misconception to think only of Western Europe when NATO is mentioned. It is much more. NATO is shorthand for an association of states stretching from the Pacific coasts of the United States and Canada to Greece and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its members range from the most powerful country in the world today to one of the smallest, Iceland, which possesses no military forces of any kind and relies entirely on the security of the alliance for protection from military attack.

The commitment to assist each other in the event of an attack is enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty, which was signed in 1949, with Canada one of the original signatories. Although France no longer participates actively in the integrated military structure of NATO, it has remained a member of the alliance and its forces engage in exercises and planning for joint military operations. At present we contribute forces to the three major areas of the alliance -- in Europe itself, in the Atlantic, where our maritime forces are earmarked for assignment to SACLANT in the event of an emergency, and in North America, through the NORAD Agreement (although this is not formally part of the North Atlantic Treaty). In all three spheres, our contribution is modest in the overall scale, but well respected because of its high calibre and professional qualities.

These forces of all the members of NATO, including U.S. nuclear strength, constitute the Western component of the present system of balanced mutual deterrence.