

Indeed, Canada played a key role in the invention of NATO, which both asserts our commitment to freedom and provides the means for ensuring a collective Western approach to fulfilling that commitment. Through NATO, we and others can — and do — influence American policy.

Parenthetically, commentators who regard NATO as a Canadian burden rather than a Canadian invention nurture the notion that Canada is a country without identity or accomplishment.

There is no doubt that an uncontrolled arms race would threaten humanity. All countries have an obligation to reduce that risk, and a country such as Canada can have more influence than many others. We can best exercise that influence by being true to ourselves.

Part of our strength is our reputation for working consistently and constructively where we have expertise or standing — on verification, banning chemical weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, and other issues. Part of our credibility is that we do not pretend to be neutral. Part of our authority is that we do not grandstand.

When events move slowly, and fear and frustration increase, the temptation grows to make dramatic gestures. Regularly, as foreign minister, I am invited to embrace some dramatic extreme in Canada's name, so "our voice will be heard."

International events rarely respond to "voices." Change is almost always undramatic, a product of steadiness, not surprise.

Indeed, dramatic departures are often counterproductive. Dyer suggests that Canada's quitting NATO would inspire Poland to leave the Warsaw Pact. Almost certainly, the opposite would happen. The disarray we would cause in NATO would undoubtedly inspire the Soviet Union to insist on even greater solidarity within the Warsaw Pact.

What is more curious about Dyer's proposal is its timing.

Two years ago the world was worried by both an increase in arms and a decrease in contacts. Now, at least there is contact, between Soviet and American leaders, negotiators and populations.

The movement has been substantial on both sides. There is the real possibility of progress in reducing overall numbers of arms. The two leaders have agreed to meet regularly, and are appearing on one another's televisions. While progress will, inevitably, be slow, there is more hope now than for several years.

Failed to divide

These negotiations are happening, in part, because the Soviet Union was left with no doubt about Western solidarity. Attempts failed to divide NATO over Afghanistan, over missile deployment in Europe, or over the U.S. strategic defence initiative (SDI, or Star Wars). Jeopardizing the unit that led to Geneva could jeopardize Geneva itself.