

April 4, 1974, marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and of the unique association of 15 countries to which this gave rise. The occasion provides an opportunity for us in Canada to review NATO's past accomplishments as well as to reflect on its future.

In looking back over the last 25 years one is struck by the profound changes that have occurred in the circumstances facing the Alliance and the capacity it has demonstrated to respond effectively to a threat to their common security. Although considerable progress has been made on the road towards détente, the members of the Alliance, including Canada, remain convinced that, pending more substantive achievements in the field of disarmament or the establishment of an effective world collective security system, their individual interests are best served by their common commitment to mutual assistance under the North Atlantic Treaty. In support of this collective approach to security, Canada continues to contribute forces to the various elements of NATO's defence activities -- the defence of Europe, the defence of the North Atlantic, and the defence of the Alliance's North American region.

In the meantime, NATO has responded regularly to new tasks that have developed. For some time it has been serving as a forum for the exchange of information and for the harmonization of members' views on a wide range of political issues. This process of continuing consultation is of particular value to smaller Alliance members such as Canada because it gives us direct and immediate access to the thinking of our allies and an opportunity to bring our own views to their attention. More recently, NATO has assumed the major new function of co-ordinating the approach of its members to such important East-West negotiations as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Geneva and the force reduction talks in Vienna. All of the allies including Canada share a desire to find practical ways to further détente and are satisfied their individual interests in this area are best served by the close harmonization of positions that NATO makes possible.

The late Lester B. Pearson attached considerable importance to Article II of the North Atlantic Treaty which emphasizes the desirability of co-operation amongst Alliance members in fields outside the traditional politico-military sphere. It is therefore gratifying to note that in addition to its role in this area, NATO is making a regular contribution to the search for solutions to problems in fields such as science and the environment that affect the well-being of its members in quite a different way. The approach, which is low key and pragmatic, is based on the idea that NATO's well-established techniques for co-ordination and consultation can usefully be exploited in any area of common concern to its members.

Looking to the future, it seems clear that for some time to come NATO will continue to have a major role to play in furthering the individual and collective interests of its members across a wide range of subjects. For Canada, however, our membership in the Alliance is likely to assume still another dimension in the period ahead. We welcome and support the efforts of our friends in Europe to develop their political and economic