

Central to its recovery from the devastation of the Second World War has been NATO. Europe has become strong because, for the last four decades, it has enjoyed peace and political stability - the longest uninterrupted peace Europe has enjoyed in the twentieth century. Secure and at peace, Western Europe has prospered and grown. That security was assured through the collective assertion of western will through NATO.

Like most other cooperative arrangements in life, the maintenance of unity and resolve in NATO has not been effortless or without strain. We have had to face constant challenges to its integrity from within and outside the alliance.

At times the American commitment to the alliance has been questioned, or was thought to be wavering. Fatigue with its international commitments, or frustration with having to pay a large share of the cost, have, on occasion, tempted some Americans to shrug off the burdens of collective defence, to go it alone, to look out only for number one. Europe worries periodically about the strength of the American commitment. Often there are tensions, which Canada is well placed to resolve.

Of course, I do not raise these questions today in a vacuum. We are in an election period, and the New Democratic Party is committed to the following policy resolution:

"Be it resolved that the New Democratic Party confirms its commitment to peace and disarmament by reaffirming its policy calling for Canadian withdrawal from NATO and other military alliances."

Their leader reiterated that commitment in the debate last week, but argues that withdrawal would not happen immediately. What would happen immediately, under the NDP proposal, is that Canada would begin to withdraw its troops from Europe, and would serve notice of an intention to "... withdraw, ... from NATO and other military alliances."

Either of those actions would send a dangerous message of disunity to our allies, and could encourage the Soviet Union to renew its attempts to divide the West, perhaps at cost to the arms negotiation process. Just as a solid Western alliance led to progress in arms negotiations, a divided Western alliance could remove the incentive to negotiate arms reductions.