

The times in Europe then were both bleak and ominous: Soviet-instigated civil war in Greece; the Berlin blockade; the steady disappearance of fledgling democracy in Eastern Europe. It was against that stark backdrop that Canada, the United States and our Western European allies joined together to form this mutual self-defence arrangement. One of its principal European proponents, incidentally, had been a Labour government in Great Britain. NATO was not an American initiative: rather, its inspiration was far more Anglo-Canadian, its intent to ensure that history would not repeat itself after this great war through another American retreat into isolation.

Why did we join? Why did we stay? Why are we still there?

The answer to each question is the same. We are in NATO because a strong North Atlantic alliance serves the best interests of Canada. Obviously, the world has changed enormously since that western alliance was first put in place. But many of the conditions which led to the creation of NATO are the same today as they were in 1949. Europe is still divided between societies that are free and societies that are not. Canada is still vitally interested in protecting freedom, and advancing it, in Europe. The alliance across the Atlantic is still a powerful instrument to resist American instincts to isolation, and to encourage American cooperation with other free nations. So does it encourage cooperation within Europe, and cooperation by Europe with North America.

One thing that has changed is that the direct threat to Canada is more terrible now, with strategic missiles. We are in the path between the superpowers. Changing our policy does not change our geography and, since we can't wish missiles away, we owe it to our own safety to maintain institutions which control them, or which bring their numbers down.

I ask you to consider Canada's interests.

No other Western nation shares our unique geographic circumstances: a country huge in land mass but sparsely populated; exposure to three of the world's great oceans, to the west, the east, and in our Arctic north; sandwiched directly between the two great nuclear superpowers. To defend and protect that territory, all by ourselves, would involve an immense financial cost. To decline to defend or protect it would be to invite other nations to steadily erode Canadian sovereignty. Those are realities for this country, whose land mass is the second largest in the world.