

Secondly, I wonder if the Soviet and Eastern European leaders have not come increasingly to regard NATO as a stabilizing force in Europe. They may well look to NATO -- and the Warsaw Pact for that matter -- to prevent the emergence of nationalist elements in Europe. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this approach appeared in some Yugoslav and Polish journals last year, when there was speculation that French action in NATO might lead to its break-up. These journals wrote apprehensively of such a development, showing concern that the countries of Western Europe would in such a circumstance develop their own national forces, which would not be subject to the constraints of international command. This would indicate, in spite of some continuing Soviet propaganda against NATO, that the Soviet and East European leaders increasingly regard NATO as a force for stability in a divided Europe. Nothing which the Soviet or Polish leaders said -- or did not say -- during my recent visit to Eastern Europe would contradict this impression. While emphasizing our interest in détente, I deliberately made clear to them our view that NATO had an essential role to play and that Canada would continue to contribute forces to it.

Thirdly, NATO has helped to restore the confidence of the peoples and governments of Western Europe which had been shattered by the experience of the Second World War. This has been achieved in spite of continuing dependence on the United States deterrent force which is fully admitted -- even by France. The extent of this revived self-confidence was well demonstrated by the remarkable speed and effectiveness of the adjustment within the alliance to the French decision last year to withdraw from the integrated military structure.

But the situation in Germany, in particular because of its geographic location and the division of its territory, remains difficult. It is increasingly accepted and acknowledged within Germany that the Government must eventually reach understandings with its Eastern Communist neighbours. This will involve the German Government, now and in the future, in taking some difficult decisions. Obviously, the German Government cannot be forced into agreements with the countries of Eastern Europe. They must take the necessary decisions themselves. But is it not important, particularly at a time when there is a German Government which is prepared to act, that that Government should not be inhibited or restrained by concern for its future security? And will such action not be better understood and appreciated in Western Europe if Germany is acting within the framework of an alliance?

Finally, NATO has provided an effective framework for consultation and, if necessary, common action. This, of course, does not prevent bilateral activity by the members of the alliance. It does ensure that such action is understood and taken into account by one's allies. Thus my trip to Eastern Europe last autumn was undertaken for Canadian reasons. But I was conscious, at the same time, of playing a Canadian part in a larger effort to improve East-West relations.

We should not forget that NATO is an organization in which, over the years, 15 countries, spanning the Atlantic Ocean, have increasingly learned to consult together. This, in itself, is a significant achievement. The alliance is proving to be a flexible instrument capable of adjusting to the requirements of the times. Its raison d'être may change and broaden, as the political tasks assume priority. But the Organization has shown itself capable of making the necessary adjustment. Does this not merit consideration in our assessment of the continuing value of this alliance?