

to and participate in a collective defence programme. Particularly because of the central geographic position occupied by France in Western Europe, the process of adjustment is complex. However, this task is in hand, although it will take some time to execute.

In the process of carrying out the withdrawals required by France, The Fourteen have decided to make certain changes in the NATO military structure which should add to its efficiency. We need have no fears, therefore, as to the continuing defence and deterrent strength of NATO. NATO will continue to be a stout shield.

In the course of our meeting, it will be necessary to give approval to these changes which are consequent on the French action. But our talk at this meeting of the foreign ministers is larger and more important. The task is really twofold, though the two aspects are interdependent. We have first to take counsel with one another about our evolving relations with the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe against the background of serious and pressing developments elsewhere in the world. Secondly, we must address ourselves to the state of our alliance, particularly in the light of the actions of the French Government.

Before setting about our task, we must see our problems in perspective. NATO has been so successful that it is now being taken for granted. Europe now enjoys a sense of security greater than at any time since the last war. The remarkable fact is that this sense of security exists even though the military strength of Soviet and Eastern European forces located in Eastern Europe is greater than ever. The answer to this paradox is that NATO has contained the Soviet threat and is still doing so.

As this situation persists, there has been a welcome, even if only gradual, evolution in the Soviet attitude toward the West. There has been increasing recognition by the Soviet leaders that nuclear conflict must be avoided. This is a trend which all members of the alliance welcome and wish to encourage. We are all expanding our relations and increasing our contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe. The process has developed so far that what until a few years ago was unusual is now commonplace.

This is all movement in the right direction. For NATO is not only an instrument created for our mutual defence. The North Atlantic Council is an institution through which we collectively work and plan for a peace settlement in Europe. In a period of evolution, unity of purpose is the more necessary if we are to make progress towards that settlement, which is the major objective we all seek.

The North Atlantic Treaty is the manifestation of a transatlantic partnership linking the peoples of Europe and North America in their common search for peace. Now that the danger of attack has been contained and Soviet policy has begun gradually to evolve, we must concentrate increasingly on the search for the solution of