

Détente calls for continuing attempts by members of the alliance - both individually and collectively - to improve relations with the states of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. Obviously, this policy depends on some reciprocation from the other side. The aim is to reduce tensions and replace them with an atmosphere of confidence and stability. In such an environment, it is hoped that both sides would be able to develop and respond to initiatives designed to produce durable solutions that would make the existence of armed blocs unnecessary. In this sense, NATO's avowed objective is to create circumstances in which the alliance would become redundant.

The pursuit of détente will be a slow process, probably bedevilled by setbacks such as that which occurred in Czechoslovakia last year. Its success will be the sum total of the various individual and collective activities of the members of the alliance. Much of the progress will necessarily have to be made through bilateral relations between individual NATO members and members of the Warsaw Pact. In this process NATO has an important function to perform in providing the machinery for co-ordinating the activities of its members. What one does could have important implications for the others, and close consultation is therefore essential. There is also scope for collective initiatives and the alliance is already at work in this area. A specific example of such a collective initiative now being examined in NATO is the proposal for balanced force reductions. This calls for negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, designed to achieve agreement on the progressive lowering of military forces on both sides. The relative balance of military strength in Europe, which now permits a reasonable degree of stability, would be maintained at progressively lower levels. Early last summer, NATO proposed to the Warsaw Pact that discussions on this idea be initiated and, although the events in Czechoslovakia intervened, the matter has not been dropped.

Whatever Canada may decide, the alliance will continue to be the mechanism through which peace in Europe is maintained and decisions are taken on the issues affecting the evolution of East-West relations and the solution of European political problems. We must decide if these matters are of real concern to us and, if so, whether we have a better chance of influencing them in a favourable direction through continued membership in the alliance or by withdrawing.

I appreciate that there are differing points of view as to the importance of developments in Europe for Canada and our ability to influence them. Because of this, I think the open debate we are having is highly desirable. For my part, I cannot escape the conclusion that what happens in Europe matters very much to Canada. Our interests there cover many areas - history, culture, trade and finance, to mention only a few. Perhaps the most fundamental of all, however, relates to the fact that it is in Europe that the vital interests of the super-powers are in starkest confrontation, so that there is the greatest chance of a conflict escalating into a nuclear war. Because of Canada's geographic position between the two super-powers, this war would be fought out above our very heads. This is why Canada has a direct, selfish interest in the prevention of war.

I am not suggesting here that we ignore our interests in other parts of the world, but simply that, in terms of priority, Europe and developments there must continue to have a major claim on our energy and attention for some time to come.