

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FORUM FOR SECURITY COOPERATION: CAN IT ADDRESS EUROPE'S NEW SECURITY CONCERNS? A CANADIAN VIEW

I. INTRODUCTION

At least since World War II, Canada has considered transatlanticism to be a key aspect of its approach to national and international security. This reflects the unhappy experience of the first half of the century when crises in Europe twice drew Canada into major wars. In the years after World War II, Canada shared the concern of other Western democracies regarding potential threats from the USSR and consequently considered the maintenance of balance in Europe to be a vital national interest. Moreover, Canadian policy-makers, like many others, saw the construction and maintenance of institutionalized transatlantic security ties to be a promising way to reassure and to stabilize security relations amongst the Western European states, an essential underpinning to economic recovery and political consolidation in this region. Finally, through much of the Cold War era, multilateral transatlantic security ties also served to dilute somewhat the otherwise overwhelming asymmetry of power in North America favouring the United States.

For much of this period, the most significant institutional aspect of transatlanticism was membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1975, however, there emerged in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) a second institutional basis for Canada's transatlantic security relations. Canada has been an active and committed member of the CSCE/OSCE since 1975. With the passage of time, this institution has arguably become an increasingly important aspect of Canada's transatlantic strategy. This is so for several reasons, not least the changing nature of the security environment and the fact that security challenges in the post-Cold War era require new and different approaches that may be difficult to generate through traditional alliance mechanisms such as NATO (see section VII below).

The end of the Cold War removed one of the principal underpinnings of Canadian involvement in transatlantic security issues (the Soviet threat). None the less, Canada remains closely involved in transatlantic security institutions because of a fundamental interest in stability and cooperation in Europe, because of the emergence of new security issues of concern to Canadians (see below), because of significant residual uncertainties that may have important implications for Canadian security, and because the problem of North American asymmetry in the area of security remains significant, as is eloquently demonstrated in the current debate on National Missile Defence (NMD). The possible emergence of an independent European security identity presents new challenges for Canada's transatlantic security linkages.

The end of the Cold War meanwhile created possibilities for far broader and deeper security co-operation in the transatlantic space. One dimension of this was the potential to create a co-operative security regime, based on substantial reduction of conventional and theatre nuclear weapons, and the elaboration of shared norms and further confidence and security building measures (CSBMs). The CSCE and then Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) played a fundamental role in this construction.