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MAINTAINING THE SOLIDARITY OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

An Address by the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell
Sharp, to the North Atlantic Assembly,
Ottawa, September 27, 1971

To Mr. Speaker's warm words of welcome to you all I would like to add mine, both in my personal capacity and as representing the Government of Canada. This is the first time that the North Atlantic Assembly has met here; surely it will not be the last....

The North Atlantic alliance is based on a treaty between sovereign nations as represented by governments. With few exceptions, these are freely-elected governments, responsible to their citizens through powerful elected legislatures. These legislatures are at once an essential support to their governments and an essential check on the exercise of executive power. A treaty organization made up of freely-elected governments must be a voluntary association, held by shared beliefs and shared objectives.

Despite the exceptions, our alliance is a reflection of the people's will expressed in the ballot box. It is this foundation that explains why our countries have banded together for their common defence and it is this foundation which provides the sustaining force that has kept the alliance strong and closely knit for a quarter of a century.

It is governments that have the power to take decisions on NATO issues. Speaking for the Canadian Government, I can say that in the exercise of the decision-making power we recognize the vital importance of the role of individual Members of Parliament and the Legislature itself. Members of Parliament can affect and have affected decisions on foreign policy by their votes on the Government's actions. They are in close contact with people in all walks of life across the country and keep the Government aware of and in touch with changing public views and attitudes. They are extending their knowledge and interest in foreign affairs and their views are increasingly well-informed. In Canada, for example, our Senate and Commons Committees on External Affairs and Defence have developed a considerable degree of expertise and are playing a useful role in the development of policy.