

Fourthly, to take every opportunity to examine with our allies possibilities for developing improvements to the NATO structure and to consider the future of the alliance in the long run.

With regard to France, the Government will:

First, negotiate with France, either bilaterally or multilaterally as appropriate, fair and reasonable arrangements for those adjustments which may be required as a result of French withdrawal from NATO's integrated defence arrangements.

Secondly, leave the door open for the eventual return of France to full participation in the collective activities of the alliance, should France so decide.

Thirdly, continue, notwithstanding NATO differences and with the co-operation of the French authorities, to develop our bilateral relations with France.

Around the French decisions and the reactions of their allies a good deal of debate has centred. I have no doubt that this debate will continue for some time as the full nature of French intentions becomes clearer and as all the complex rearrangements of a political, military, financial and organizational nature required by the French moves are carried out.

We must ask ourselves first of all what are the fundamental objectives which NATO is intended to serve. Last December, I described the Organization "not only as an assurance of security and as an avenue to peace but as an essential instrument of partnership among the Atlantic nations". We have entered into that partnership for the defence of an Atlantic and Western European community of nations and with the intention of achieving certain long-range objectives beneficial to all of Europe.

The alliance aimed first of all to achieve among member states the most efficient means of common defence against an aggressor. The defence system, in turn, encouraged a return of confidence and provided a shield for economic recovery. By committing important resources to a common defence effort and by entering into a degree of military integration which demanded mutual confidence, the nations concerned took a major step towards overcoming older nationalist rivalries. The NATO system has also provided the framework for the reintegration of Germans and German armed forces into European life.

What have been its functions and objectives in a wider European sense? In spite of their own propaganda, the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states have learned that the NATO alliance did not enter into any military adventurism. Its member states have made their influence felt in Eastern Europe in much saner ways -- by the appeal of trade, prosperity, political freedom and cultural diversity. At the same time, the alliance has made it clear that