

In April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington, giving birth to the Atlantic Alliance — a unique association of 15 countries that has come to be known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Canada played a leading role in the formation of NATO, which was designed primarily to ensure the preservation of peace and the security of its members through a collective approach to defence. Despite a variety of crises since then — such as the Berlin, Hungary, Cuba and Czechoslovakia crises — and the persistence of local wars in other parts of the world, peace has prevailed in the NATO area for the past quarter-century. This success has assisted its members in attaining a high degree of prosperity and well-being.

In looking back over the profound changes that have occurred in the circumstances facing the Atlantic Alliance, the capacity it has demonstrated to respond effectively to new challenges is striking. Besides keeping the peace, NATO has developed into a major forum for the exchange of information and the harmonization of views on issues of common concern to its members that range from *détente* to science and the environment. The process of continuing consultation on a wide range of shared problems is of particular value to smaller NATO members such as Canada because it provides them with direct access to the thinking of their allies and an opportunity to make their own views known.

Origins of the alliance

NATO was formed in response to concern about Soviet expansionary aims in Europe after the Second World War and as a result of the impasse that had developed in the United Nations. By the use of its veto in the Security Council, the U.S.S.R. opposed efforts by many member nations to implement the collective-security measures of the