

This would indicate in spite of some continuing Soviet propaganda against NATO, that the Soviet and East European leaders increasingly regard NATO as a force for stability in a divided Europe. Nothing which the Soviet or Polish leaders said – or did not say – during my recent visit to Eastern Europe would contradict this impression. While emphasizing our interest in *détente*, I deliberately made clear to them our view that NATO had an essential role to play and that Canada would continue to contribute forces to it.

Thirdly, NATO has helped to restore the confidence of the peoples and governments of Western Europe which had been shattered by the experience of the Second World War. This has been achieved in spite of continuing dependence on the United States deterrent force which is fully admitted – even by France. The extent of this revived self-confidence was well demonstrated by the remarkable speed and effectiveness of the adjustment within the alliance to the French decision last year to withdraw from the integrated military structure.

SITUATION IN GERMANY

But the situation in Germany, in particular because of its geographic location and the division of its territory, remains difficult. It is increasingly accepted and acknowledged within Germany that the Government must eventually reach understandings with its Eastern Communist neighbours. This will involve the German Government now and in the future in taking some difficult decisions. Obviously the German Government cannot be forced into agreements with the countries of Eastern Europe. They must take the necessary decisions themselves. But is it not important, particularly at a time when there is a German Government which is prepared to act, that that Government should not be inhibited or restrained by concern for its future security? And will such action not be better understood and appreciated in Western Europe if Germany is acting within the framework of an alliance?

Finally, NATO has provided an effective framework for consultation and, if necessary, common action. This of course does not prevent bilateral activity by the members of the alliance. It does ensure that such action is understood and taken into account by one's allies. Thus my trip to Eastern Europe last autumn was undertaken for Canadian reasons. But I was conscious at the same time of playing a Canadian part in a larger effort to improve East-West relations.

We should not forget that NATO is an organization in which over the years 15 countries, spanning the Atlantic Ocean, have increasingly learned to consult together. This, in itself, is a significant achievement. The alliance is proving to be a flexible instrument capable of adjusting to the requirements of the times. Its *raison d'être* may change and broaden, as the political tasks assume priority. But the organization has shown itself capable of making the necessary adjustment. Does this not merit consideration in our assessment of the continuing value of this alliance?

POLITICAL STAKE IN EUROPE

There is another consideration which is often overlooked. NATO has, over the years, served in a tangible way to strengthen our connections with the countries of Western Europe. As a North American nation in a world moving toward continentalism, is it not in our national interest to develop every reasonable link – political, economic, military, social and cultural – with the countries beyond the Atlantic?

We had hopes when NATO was established that the alliance would become the nucleus of a political community linking Canada with the United States and with Europe. Had this happened, NATO might have served as the instrument for balancing our major international relationships. But this has not so far happened; and there is no evidence that any member of the alliance is ready to submerge national sovereignty in any supra-national political authority which would represent a true Atlantic community. In this circumstance, where our national interest calls for the greatest possible links with the countries of Western Europe, are we not furthering this policy through active participation in NATO?...

REASON FOR FORCES IN EUROPE

Another line of argument which has recently gained some support in Canada is that Canadian military forces in Western Europe no longer have military significance and should, therefore, be withdrawn. It is certainly true that the European nations have built up their armed forces to the level where our contribution is relatively less important militarily than it was ten years ago. But does it follow that we could withdraw forces without provoking unintended consequences?

The North Atlantic Treaty and associated agreements provide that member states will not significantly reduce their assigned forces without the agreement of their allies. The allies recognize that members of the alliance may, at some time or other, have no alternative to reducing their commitments. But in Canada's case the normal arguments for a withdrawal of forces would not be persuasive. It is a major requirement for our forces. Our total defence budget as a percentage of gross national product is, in fact, one of the lowest in NATO countries. The number of men in our armed forces as a percentage of population is likewise one of the lowest among NATO countries.

It would, of course, remain open to Canada to act unilaterally. But a unilateral decision to withdraw forces could have significant political consequences. It could start a chain reaction by exerting pressure for similar action on the governments of the other members of the alliance, which are just as concerned with the cost of providing defence forces. It could do harm to Canada's good name with its allies. It could cause our allies to ask themselves whether we were making a respectable contribution to maintaining security in the world.

I do not say that these considerations are necessarily of lasting validity. The Government is not insensitive to the argument that Canada's contribution be made from bases in Canada. Indeed