

At the outset I should like to add my own word of welcome to all my colleagues who are present today and particularly to those who are with us for the first time. Their presence reflects changes which are in the nature of the political life of our countries, and testifies to the health and vigour of our democratic processes. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General and the international staff for the arrangements they have made for us to make our stay enjoyable. Finally, having noticed snowflakes on my arrival in Brussels, I cannot thank the Belgian government enough for the way in which it always makes us feel at home in Belgium.

In fulfilling this pleasant duty of addressing you at the ceremonial opening of the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, I cannot help recalling the two distinguished Canadians who previously had the same opportunity, "Mike" Pearson and Paul Martin. Mr. Pearson one of the original architects of the Alliance and later was one of the "three wise men" whose recommendations significantly altered the political dimensions of NATO. Mr. Martin worked vigorously to maintain the fundamental role of NATO in Canadian foreign policy. He and his illustrious Belgian colleague of the day initiated a penetrating analysis of the Alliance familiarly known as the Harmel Report. I am personally indebted to Mr. Martin, as predecessor, neighbour, and friend, for the wise counsel he continues to make available to me.

We are meeting today at a critical period in the history of the Alliance. The maintenance of an effective deterrent has never been more important -- yet, significant segments of our publics, particularly young people, have become confused about the necessity for defence and disillusioned with the concept of deterrence. Worse, many of them simply do not believe that NATO is treading the path of peace. Some even believe that a nuclear war would somehow become more likely if the Theatre Nuclear Force (TNF) modernization decision is implemented.

We hear within our countries loud voices in denunciation of NATO's nuclear defences. We see street demonstrations directed against the TNF modernization component of our December 1979 decision. There are demands that NATO should forego its modernization plans regardless of whether the Soviet Union accepts corresponding reductions in its nuclear forces. At the same time there is all too little awareness of the Arms Control Negotiations component of the same decision, or of the awesome nuclear weapons of the East.

It is all too easy to discount this body of opinion as a vocal and bothersome minority. These concerns and apprehensions may be limited to a vocal minority but they are nonetheless serious. The existence of such concerns suggests to