

CANADA AND NATO

In a manner each member's position within the Alliance is unique, but the Canadian position may be characterized as being "more unique" than that of others. Our hybrid position derives from the fact that geostrategically we form an integral part of the North American continent and thus share the same defence needs as the United States, while in terms of power we bear closer affinity to the smaller allies than to our immediate neighbour. With the smaller allies Canada shares the frustrations of restricted influence and the concern with inadequate consultation -- the desire for more consultation on subjects lying beyond the NATO area has been balanced by Canadian opposition to the extension of NATO authority and commitments to other areas --, together with a natural aversion to great power directorates. Our strategic vulnerability, however, like that of the United States is restricted to nuclear weapons of intercontinental range, without being exposed to the threat of destruction by conventional arms, tactical nuclear weapons, or nuclear MRBMs, all of which threaten our European allies. Furthermore, the validity of the American nuclear guarantee applies to no other ally with the same degree of absolute certainty as it does to Canada and, contrary to general allied experience, has been enhanced by the increasing vulnerability of the United States.

Those basic considerations which induced Canada to play an active part in the founding of the Alliance are still valid to-day. Canada's role stemmed from the realization that her interdependence with Europe was so complete that where she had been engaged in two wars in that theatre she could not, under increased factors of interdependence, hope to escape a similar involvement in future. Secondly, it was understood that under the demands of modern warfare a posture of deterrence (in the classical form) and the infrastructure for a meaningful defence in Europe would have to be constructed in peace-time and that for this purpose the peace-time engagement of the United States was indispensable. The Alliance was thus designed to serve as an instrument for crystallizing the latter's involvement in Europe as it existed then as the result of American occupation duties and to prevent a relapse into isolation. Finally underlying the concepts of interdependence and alliance co-operation was the Canadian predilection for a multilateral approach. The latter was partly derived from our natural penchant for compromise and co-operation, as drawn from our national experience, and partly rooted in the instinctive preference for collective rather than bilateral association with our powerful American neighbour.

The military side of Canada's basic contribution to NATO has undergone relatively few changes over the past decade; the latter, however, may be said to have changed in meaning as the result of altered strategic and international political conditions. The assignment of one army brigade and one air division to the NATO "shield" forces in the central sector in Europe has remained unaltered, with the exception of the additional earmarking of one battalion for AMF flank duties. While the presence of Canadian forces in Europe can no longer be said to exercise its original effect in an emergency situation that determined their initial assignment, the presence of these elite forces in a state of immediate combat-readiness, comparable only to that of the U.S. forces in Germany, has appreciably assisted SACEUR, against certain European reluctance, in laying the foundation for a modern conventional defence posture as part of NATO's strategy of flexible response. In his attempt to