

# Canada's international security policy

by L.A. Delvoie

**T**he most fundamental duty of any Canadian government, as of any national government, is to ensure the physical security of its citizens. Domestically, the government fulfills this responsibility through the promulgation of laws, the establishment of courts, and the maintenance of police forces and correctional institutions. Externally, it does so first and foremost by maintaining armed forces charged with assuring the defence of its citizens, of its national territory and of the nation's basic interests. More broadly, however, the national government must have a security policy; it must marshal all of the political, diplomatic and military resources at its disposal, not only to be in a position to defend the nation and its citizens, but also to prevent or forestall armed threats to their welfare, from whatever quarter.

In the last forty years, Canada's security policy has been characterized by essentially four complementary and mutually reinforcing elements: (1) collective defence and deterrence; (2) international peacekeeping; (3) arms control and disarmament; and (4) conflict resolution. The genesis and rationale of each of these elements will be examined in turn.

## Collective defence and deterrence

Canada's approach to national defence has traditionally been governed by two basic determinants, geography and demography. On the one hand, Canada faces on three oceans and has a land border with only one other nation. This geographic reality, bolstered as necessary by the existence or presence of the British Royal Navy, was the principal guardian of Canada's security throughout much of its early history as colony and nation. Canada has had the good fortune to be one of the few nations on earth to have been spared invasion for a period of 170 years.

On the other hand, a combination of Canada's geography and demography makes it a highly vulnerable country. It is the second largest nation on earth, but is extremely sparsely populated. Its population is inadequate in size and resources to provide for its own defence over such a large land mass. This reality, combined in the mid-twentieth century with the development of the long-range bomber and the intercontinental ballistic missile, has left Canada with little or no choice but to look to others for assistance or cooperation in ensuring its security.

In other words, the Canadian government, in seeking to fulfill its responsibilities to the nation and its citizens,

had before it one of two choices: to become a client state or protégé of some great power, or to become a proponent of and participant in some system of collective defence. The Canadian government chose the latter course.

There arose, of course, the question as to where Canada should look for partners in collective defence. Here again, some of Canada's basic determinants inevitably came into play in identifying the elements of mutual interest which must underlie any such enterprise: geography, language, common political institutions and values, as well as the socio-economic realities of North America. These elements pointed in the first instance to the United States. History, language and culture pointed to Britain and France. A shared Western civilization, as well as patterns of twentieth century immigration to Canada, pointed to countries such as Belgium, Holland, Portugal, Italy and Germany. But as the experience of history in the twentieth century, and in particular the history of the periods leading up to two world wars made clear, the existence of a community of interests was insufficient in itself to prompt the creation of a collective defence system. What was also required was an external stimulus, a shared perception of a threat and a shared will to defend against that threat.

## Birth of NATO

That external stimulus was provided in the late 1940s by the actions, policies, pronouncements and military capabilities of the Soviet Union, in which Canada and a number of other Western countries saw a direct threat to their interests and to their security. Canada thus joined with these countries in creating a standing politico-military alliance whose vocation was the collective defence of its member states. This was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which was created in 1949 and which marked its thirty-fifth anniversary in 1984.

NATO as a defensive alliance rests on two basic pillars. On the one hand, it maintains a military capacity to defend its members in the event of attack. On the other hand, it maintains a politico-military system capable of

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