

Prime Minister Chrétien

Jean Chrétien talks to **Canada World View**

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NATO celebrates its 50th anniversary at a time when its original purpose — protecting its members against an overwhelming military threat from the east bloc — no longer exists. Is NATO still relevant?

Prime Minister Chrétien

In my view, the Alliance is more relevant than ever. As you know, the end of the Cold War did not give rise to a period of international peace and stability, as many expected. Instead, an era of instability and unprecedented change marked by vicious ethnic conflicts and a host of new security anxieties ensued. Far from becoming irrelevant, NATO remains the key to providing stability to the Euro-Atlantic area. A case in point is the fact that NATO intervention became the key to the Dayton peace accords and to stopping the war in Bosnia. Furthermore, there are all kinds of new threats that can be addressed and contained only by a strong institution such as the Atlantic Alliance.

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Can you expand on these threats? Are you referring to non-military threats?

Prime Minister Chrétien

Well, I'm referring to threats such as ethnic and religious intolerance, terrorism, nuclear weapons, biological weapons, possible threats to our information infrastructure and others. Threats that are not always the fact of states but of groups or individuals. To deal effectively with these threats, you need a strong military and political institution, one that has credibility and moral authority. And NATO has all that. Its integrated command structure, standardized operating procedures and standing forces help support preventive diplomacy, crisis management and peacekeeping.

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Last fall, many observers said that NATO is currently going through a mid-life crisis, that it has to redefine its role, even to question its very existence. Others say that while NATO still has a purpose, it has to carefully examine its *raison d'être* if it is to justify its existence in the absence of a serious military threat to its members. What are your views on this and how will Canada contribute to NATO's renewal?

Prime Minister Chrétien

Well, it's obvious that the world has changed and that an institution like NATO must adapt to new circumstances. Like our partners, we recognize that collective defence is no longer the most urgent task of the Alliance. And that is why it now has a more flexible military structure and a new Strategic Concept built around rapid reaction capability. We strongly support NATO's new roles and the Alliance's new partnership with the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. I believe that NATO can play a pivotal role in ensuring stability and renewed prosperity in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the danger of nuclear weapons has re-emerged — in particular, with last summer's testing by India and Pakistan. I think NATO has a role to play in promoting nuclear non-proliferation.

Finally, the Alliance has entered into successful partnerships with Russia, Ukraine and countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as with the Organization for Security and

Co-operation in Europe. It also has a good relationship with the United Nations. These partnerships contribute greatly to our global security. They must continue.

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You mentioned, and we will conclude on this, the threats posed by nuclear arms. There was much debate in the fall about Canada's position with regard to proposals that NATO renounce the right to first use of nuclear weapons. Can you clarify Canada's position on this issue?

Prime Minister Chrétien

As we approach a NATO summit — which marks the organization's 50th anniversary and takes us into a new century — I think that a review of the Alliance's Strategic Concept is a timely undertaking.

To be worthwhile, this review should be comprehensive. That is to say, the revised Concept should address all aspects of NATO, including nuclear weapons.

As I just said, NATO must be part of the solution to the problem of proliferation. And so the Alliance will require new initiatives, new approaches and new thinking to respond to the new dynamics of a changed world. ●

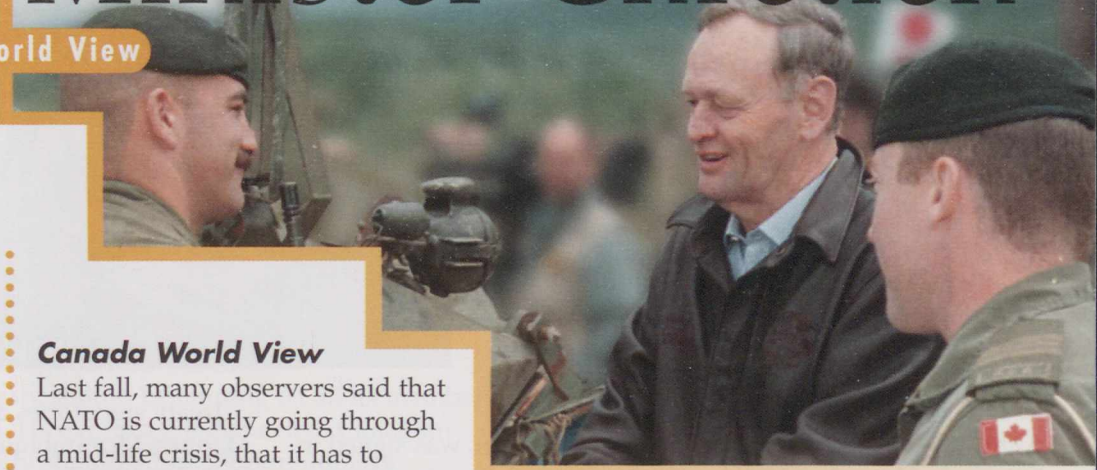


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