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LEAVING ITS ALLIANCES IS NO CHOICE FOR CANADA

WEAKENED NATO, NORAD MIGHT TEMPT KREMLIN LEADERS

By JOE CLARK, Special to *The Gazette*, April 3, 1986.*

OTTAWA — Gwynne Dyer (March 15) argues Canada should leave the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the North American Aerospace Defence Command to make "nuclear war . . . less likely to happen." He believes we could become a Canadian Finland.

Both his assumptions are wrong.

Leaving the Western alliance would make nuclear war more likely. The Soviets might be emboldened by a break in the West. NATO would feel weakened, and some of its members might be driven to hawkish demonstrations of strength.

Road closed again

The atmosphere that led to the Reagan-Gorbachev summit could be shattered, and the road closed again to negotiated arms control.

Second, Canada could never be Finland. The Finns are an estimable people, shaped by their own nature and history. But their nature and history are different from ours.

We are proud of our role as an international peacekeeper, a moderate and reasonable country. But moderation is a means, not an end. Our purpose is to enlarge freedom. We prefer to do that by advocating peaceful settlement of disputes, by fighting poverty and famine, and by promoting respect for human rights.

But we have also always been prepared to defend our values, by force of arms if necessary. The determination and gallantry of Canadians in two world wars and in Korea are as much a part of our history as diplomacy and development. There is nothing neutral in Canada's nature or tradition.

Geography is not the paramount reason we belong in NATO or NORAD. Freedom is. Those alliances, with all their imperfections, defend a system of free societies and — by maintaining strength in the face of Soviet strength — help keep the peace.

It demeans Canadians, and misreads our history, to suggest that we stay in NATO because leaving it would displease the United States. We are in NATO because we belong there, just as we belong in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, and in the fields of Asia and Africa teaching agricultural reform.

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Indeed, Canada played a key role in the invention of NATO, which both asserts our commitment to freedom and provides the means for ensuring a collective Western approach to fulfilling that commitment. Through NATO, we and others can — and do — influence American policy.

Parenthetically, commentators who regard NATO as a Canadian burden rather than a Canadian invention nurture the notion that Canada is a country without identity or accomplishment.

There is no doubt that an uncontrolled arms race would threaten humanity. All countries have an obligation to reduce that risk, and a country such as Canada can have more influence than many others. We can best exercise that influence by being true to ourselves.

Part of our strength is our reputation for working consistently and constructively where we have expertise or standing — on verification, banning chemical weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, and other issues. Part of our credibility is that we do not pretend to be neutral. Part of our authority is that we do not grandstand.

When events move slowly, and fear and frustration increase, the temptation grows to make dramatic gestures. Regularly, as foreign minister, I am invited to embrace some dramatic extreme in Canada's name, so "our voice will be heard."

International events rarely respond to "voices." Change is almost always undramatic, a product of steadiness, not surprise.

Indeed, dramatic departures are often counterproductive. Dyer suggests that Canada's quitting NATO would inspire Poland to leave the Warsaw Pact. Almost certainly, the opposite would happen. The disarray we would cause in NATO would undoubtedly inspire the Soviet Union to insist on even greater solidarity within the Warsaw Pact.

What is more curious about Dyer's proposal is its timing.

Two years ago the world was worried by both an increase in arms and a decrease in contacts. Now, at least there is contact, between Soviet and American leaders, negotiators and populations.

The movement has been substantial on both sides. There is the real possibility of progress in reducing overall numbers of arms. The two leaders have agreed to meet regularly, and are appearing on one another's televisions. While progress will, inevitably, be slow, there is more hope now than for several years.

Failed to divide

These negotiations are happening, in part, because the Soviet Union was left with no doubt about Western solidarity. Attempts failed to divide NATO over Afghanistan, over missile deployment in Europe, or over the U.S. strategic defence initiative (SDI, or Star Wars). Jeopardizing the unit that led to Geneva could jeopardize Geneva itself.

Indeed, the resumption of negotiations between the superpowers makes NATO and NORAD even more important. While only two countries are at the table, all the world's people are affected by the results.

NATO provides Canada, and other allies, with direct access to the details of the negotiations, and influence on the negotiations. In the past we have proposed specific initiatives the Americans could consider raising at the table and have seen our proposals accepted. Surely we would wish to be able to do so again.

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