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Address by the  
Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for  
External Affairs, at the  
Opening of the Ministerial  
Meeting of the North Atlantic  
Council

HALIFAX

May 29, 1986.

Mr. Secretary General,  
Mr. Chairman,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Canadian people and the Canadian Government, I extend to you all a warm welcome to Canada and to Halifax.

It is a great honour for Canada to host the Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Council. This Organization means much to Canadians. We were present at the creation, indeed played no small part in its genesis. And we have been with NATO at every step along the way.

During the long years of its existence, the Atlantic Alliance has known great moments, made historic decisions, weathered stormy periods, and resolved difficult crises. Today, the Alliance finds itself on the threshold of what could be a new era in East-West relations.

The disappointments of détente are behind us, the tensions of the first years of this decade have eased, and there is hope for a better tomorrow. But it is hope tinged with scepticism and tempered by experience.

As we embark on our deliberations, let it be clear that the Alliance has gathered to give hope a firmer foundation, to disprove the sceptics, and to pursue the noble cause of reconciliation between East and West without neglecting the firmness that prudence demands.

When Allies meet, it is customary to celebrate the role the Alliance has played in preserving the peace in Europe and North America. This is not an empty boast. Would that the rest of the world could say as much.

Let us never tire of declaring that our freedom, our rights, our system of social justice, our economic development, our democratic way of life, represent the product of our common values. And that we owe their preservation to the Atlantic Alliance.

NATO is not only a defensive alliance, of course. It is the primordial instrument of Western political consultation, more so today even than at the time of the Ottawa Declaration that NATO issued 12 years ago.

In this respect, let us pay tribute to the accomplishments of the Secretary-General. Thanks to his tireless efforts to encourage frank and effective consultations among allies, and to the sensitivity and wisdom he has shown in chairing alliance discussions, NATO's recent record on consultations has been enviable.

We will be meeting today and tomorrow in a less formal way that reflects the Secretary-General's considerable efforts to improve the quality of political discussions among Foreign Ministers. Our agenda will permit more time than ever before for those issues, current and prospective, that concern Allies the most.

Of all the issues before us, the most important is the effective management of the West's relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The most urgent issue is that of arms control and disarmament. International terrorism and conflict in the Third World should also command some attention.

There exists today a renewed desire for cooperation between East and West that cannot fail to promote peace, if properly cultivated. But the peace that we have enjoyed for nearly forty years continues to depend on our having a sizeable deterrent force in being.

It is a paradox we have had to deal with ever since the Alliance was formed: Only by maintaining forces sufficient to counter those of our adversaries have we been able to ensure our defence.

But the most important phase of our work lies ahead of us: ensuring our security at a reduced level of armaments.

In the realm of arms control and disarmament, we are in a period that is both uncertain and expectant.

No one is pleased with the current military situation. Weapons continue to accumulate. They are more and more sophisticated. And the stakes are so high, and the negotiations so complex that progress must inevitably be very slow.

When we add to this Mr. Gorbachev's repeated indulgence in what I will charitably call Soviet "kite flying", you will agree that the way ahead is anything but clear.

But public opinion expects early results, and it is imperative that we try to meet those expectations. We need to get the message across that the Geneva negotiations are vital to international security, and that we have gone into them determined to see them through to a successful conclusion.

In this connection, I should like to thank the United States publicly for the quality of the information it has supplied to Allies on the Geneva negotiations. To those professional critics who are quick to condemn what they see as a lack of consultation within the Alliance, let me say that at no time has the United States failed to keep its Allies posted on the course of the negotiations.

We are convinced there is common ground between East and West. And the West's proposals have been designed to identify that common ground with increasing precision.

We invite the countries of the Soviet bloc to examine our proposals carefully. We are aware of the Soviet proposals, but we are firmly convinced that the USSR can do better and offer more.

It is of fundamental importance that parties to arms control agreements comply fully with the terms of those agreements. Regretably, the Soviet record of compliance has raised so many questions that the United States itself now no longer feels compelled to abide by the SALT II agreement. That is a profoundly disturbing development, and one we hoped could have been avoided. Let us hope the Soviet record improves and that President Reagan's May 27 announcement is not the final word on the issue.

All of us, East and West alike, bear a responsibility for the welfare of our planet. The Chernobyl accident afforded ample proof of how ecological disaster can transcend international boundaries.

Our sympathies go out to the people affected by this catastrophe. I trust the Soviet Union will accept our invitation to work more closely with the rest of the world in making nuclear power safer.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not say a few words about international terrorism.

In the late 1970s, there were some 500 terrorist incidents a year; by 1985, the figure had risen to over 800. The great majority were cases involving members of the Alliance; a good number were directed against the Alliance itself.

As we remember and regret those instances in our own countries when the bomb has replaced the ballot, we must also recognize the international dimension of terrorism.

Our own responses to terrorism, and the way these responses affect relationships within the Alliance, are as important as terrorism itself. The last thing we want is to see international terrorism succeed, where the Soviet Union has failed, in dividing us.

Let us therefore build upon the foundation of cooperation already laid, both within the Alliance and in other forums, to combat terrorism effectively.

Between East and West, much still needs to be accomplished. But a significant first major step has been taken on the road to reconciliation. We very much look forward to the next meeting between Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev.

There are enough areas in which East and West are talking for substantial progress to be made, if the political will exists.

And most of all if we remain united and determined. Here in Halifax, let us reaffirm our solidarity, and work together to ensure every new idea and proposal for international peace and security is accorded a full, sympathetic and urgent hearing.

When we chose Halifax to host the meeting of the Atlantic Council, the charm of the city and of this part of the country were certainly not the least of our reasons.

But we wished also to signify how deeply rooted in Europe Canadians remain, and how great an affinity we continue to feel for the Atlantic Community.

This Atlantic port, closer to the shores of Europe than to our own West Coast, symbolizes the enduring link between the Old World and the New. Since the days of Leif Eriksen, John Cabot and Jacques Cartier, Europeans have come to these shores, and to this harbour, in search of safe haven and fortune.

And more recently, Halifax anchored the lifeline which sustained allied forces in Europe in two world wars. From this point, too, Canadians sailed to Murmansk, or died en route, maintaining the "northern connection" with the Soviet Union.

In brief, when we welcome you in Halifax, we are asserting the community of interest we share with you; we also hope to remind you of the important contribution made to the Alliance by Canada.

Our military presence in Europe, and the commitment we have made to the reinforcement of Europe in time of crisis, are unique not only as geographically remote from Europe, who also have security interests in the North and in Asia.

But a long time ago, Canadians judged that our common civilization made the security of Europe indistinguishable from that of North America. And ever since, Canadian defence policy has had two priorities - holding the line in Europe, and defending the North American continent.

We all have a duty to fulfill, each in our own way. We all place a high premium on peace. We must all do our part to see it is maintained.