



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA AND NATO

An Address by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, to the Twenty-fifth Session of the North Atlantic Assembly, Ottawa, October 26, 1979

I would like to thank you...for this opportunity to speak about the importance my Government attaches to the North Atlantic Alliance. This twenty-fifth annual session of the North Atlantic Assembly is the first occasion for me to outline to you, the elected representatives of NATO countries, my Government's views on the Alliance as it enters its fourth decade.

But first of all, I should like to extend a warm welcome to Ottawa to my parliamentary colleagues attending this meeting. My Government is intent on increasing the participation of parliamentary groups and others in the study of general policies, including defence policy. Consequently, a group such as this, which shares the same objective in all member countries of the Alliance, is even more welcome in our capital.

For 30 years now, the Alliance has been of great service to its members when peace was at stake. No one can say with certainty what would have happened in the absence of a collective defence structure such as NATO. Nonetheless, I am convinced, as most Canadians are, I am sure, that Western European stability and security and, consequently, Canadian security owe much to the existence of NATO. Since its inception, the Alliance has been based on the principle of association between European member nations, the United States and Canada, as well as on the indivisibility of defence of its two continental sectors. Basically then, NATO plays an essential role in Canada's security.

Canada is not on the sidelines in the conflict of values and goals between the nations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. As I have publicly declared before, there is no question about our full commitment to the Alliance.

On this positive note, let me take this opportunity of confirming that my government has every expectation of achieving a 3 per cent real growth in defence expenditure in the coming financial year. Under the difficult economic conditions facing Canada and other member nations, I think this serves to demonstrate both the priority we place on making our own forces more effective and the importance we give to our role in the Alliance.

As most of you will know, we are embarked on major — and too-long delayed — re-equipment programs involving a new tank, a new maritime patrol aircraft, a new fighter aircraft and a new frigate program. These will involve a major expenditure of funds.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe that it is easy to place too great an emphasis on how much is spent on defence and too little on how well it is used. As a new government, we are reviewing our foreign and defence policies to ensure they are attuned to the world of the 1980s. In particular, we shall pay attention to the effectiveness of our defence spending. I think it is appropriate to mention our concern over the escalation of financial contributions to NATO. No one can fault the logic of sharing costs for NATO infrastructure. No one can dispute the desirability of certain common funded programs; but we expect the same efficiency in the management of things we do collectively as we demand in our own management of national defence programs.

It is against this background of ensuring we get good value for our defence dollar that we are committed to re-equipping our own forces and increasing their effectiveness in the North American and European sectors of the Alliance. To produce this increased effectiveness, we shall continue to commit our best efforts to meet the goal of an annual 3 per cent real growth in defence expenditures during the five-year period ending in 1984. Clearly what we actually achieve – and what we aim to achieve after that period – will depend on international developments, national circumstances and the results of our examination of defence policy and its effectiveness both at home and abroad.

A few minutes ago I spoke of the two sectors of the Alliance, namely, the European and the North American. I chose to express it that way to underline the fact that Canada is also part of the protected sector of NATO. This fact sometimes seems to be forgotten in Europe. Furthermore, our defence efforts in North America contribute to the security of the United States strategic deterrent force which gives its support to the Alliance, and reinforce, as does our participation in NATO's traditional land, sea and air forces, the Alliance's global deterrent capability.

We do not say that by reason of our contribution to the defence of North America we should reduce our contribution to European defence. On the contrary, as I have already stated, it is our intention to reinforce our contribution by means of our re-equipment programs. We do, however, want our allies in Europe to be fully aware of the twofold contribution that we make.

For Canadians, NATO has always been much more than a purely military alliance. It is for us the principal forum for consultation among the NATO partners on a wide range of political questions, particularly in East-West relations. This dialogue on broad political and strategic issues serves a country like Canada particularly well, and we must constantly strive to develop and extend the habit of consultation among NATO nations.

The process of political consultation in NATO has, from time to time, I think you will agree, left something to be desired. This not surprising, for that process has to contend with the strains of seeking consensus among a group of nations characterized by vast differences in size, population, wealth and military resources.

Even so, these imperfections must be seen against the impressive degree of

consultation and co-operation that has been achieved. For Canada, the NATO Council and the bodies reporting to it constitute an important piece of consultative machinery. Without it, the task of advancing Canadian viewpoints on specific issues would be difficult. What has been accomplished in shaping common policies among a group of sovereign governments is an additional but fundamental reason why our interest in NATO countries remains a powerful one.

At the current time, the most important topics of consultation include the pursuit of meaningful *détente*, the identification of confidence-building measures, as well as efficient and well-controlled arms limitation in the East and West. For many years now, the member countries of NATO have been holding intensive consultations to formulate the Organization's position on mutual and balanced force reductions. Close consultation will also be necessary if progress is to be achieved at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to be held in Madrid. Furthermore, consultations on the vital questions of the modernization of nuclear forces in Europe and control of arms, including tactical nuclear weapons, being held in the third round of talks on strategic arms limitation, are progressing rapidly.

Canada's hope, of course, is that SALT II will enter into force soon. In my letters to President Carter and President Brezhnev last June, I made clear that Canada fully supported this agreement as a valuable contribution to stability in strategic weapons. A third round of SALT can provide an opportunity not only to seek more substantial reductions in intercontinental systems but also to deal, for the first time, with the longer-range nuclear forces in the European theatre. To this end, the Alliance must encourage the Soviet Union to negotiate seriously.

All NATO members are carefully examining President Brezhnev's recent speech in East Berlin. His declared willingness to reduce Soviet conventional forces in East Germany and to pursue negotiations on confidence-building measures is to be welcomed and, indeed, applauded — as must any initiative that offers the prospect of relaxing tensions. It is in this context that President Brezhnev's proposals on theatre nuclear weapons require analysis and clarification. They appear to allow Soviet modernization while denying it to NATO forces.

Canada is not, of course, a nuclear-weapon power in its own right. But Canadian security is dependent on an Alliance that relies on a defence and deterrent strategy that combines intercontinental and theatre nuclear forces with conventional forces. Our Alliance will face crucial tests — this year and throughout its fourth decade — as it strives to meet the need for the right mixture of both nuclear and conventional force modernization on the one hand and the pursuit of agreements on balanced and effective measures of restraint on the other. If we are sufficiently skilful and careful, we should be able to enhance the credibility of our conventional and nuclear deterrent and increase the stability of our relations with the Warsaw Pact countries. In so doing we will help to ensure the success of our Alliance in deterring war and in assuring a climate of peace less open to constant challenge....