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NATO AND WESTERN UNITY

Text of an address by Mr. L. B. Pearson,
Secretary of State for External Affairs of
Canada, to the American Council on NATO,
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1957.

Lately the world's attention has been centred upon the United Nations, and in this past week or so I personally have been much more involved in United Nations affairs than I have in those of NATO. This, of course, is because we have been trying, through the United Nations, to ease the critical situation in the Middle East. That is an area that may not technically be within the NATO Treaty limits, but what happens there is certainly of vital concern to NATO.

The United Nations is important; very important. I don't think we could do without it. But as long as it remains an imperfect instrument for peace - especially as long as there is a "double standard" in its membership with respect to compliance with its resolutions - NATO is essential as a deterrent and a shield against aggression. I am very glad, therefore, to have this opportunity to meet and talk with a group concerned with the Atlantic Alliance, which remains the effective basis of our policy of collective security, and will remain so until the United Nations can discharge that responsibility on a wider basis.

I'm sure it would be profitable neither to you nor to me, or to enlightenment on the subject, if I were to try to talk about NATO from the military point of view. There is some one here much better qualified than I to do that - in fact, the one person most qualified to do so. So I will confine myself to the non-military aspect of the Alliance, which, if not so immediately important, is basic to the success of NATO.

As a son of the parsonage, I find the tradition of speaking to a text a useful one, and the text I should like to offer tonight is from the Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Co-operation in NATO, which was published last December. The passage appears in the introductory section of the Report, and reads as follows:

"The fundamental historical fact ... is that the nation state, by itself and relying exclusively on national policy and national power, is inadequate for progress or even for survival in the nuclear age. As the founders of the North Atlantic Treaty foresaw, the growing interdependence of states, politically and economically as well as militarily, calls for an ever-increasing measure of international cohesion and co-operation. Some states may be able to enjoy a degree of political and economic independence when things are going well. No state, however powerful, can guarantee its security and its welfare by national action alone".

NATO's First Task

If I may be pardoned a certain pride of co-authorship, I believe that passage expresses pretty clearly the basis of NATO and the principles upon which it must live and grow. It leads inevitably to the conclusion that the first task of NATO is to look to its internal strength - military and diplomatic - and to its unity. I would like to go on from there to some more particular thoughts, particularly about unity, without which our strength will not be sufficient. That unity, moreover, must be based on something deeper than defence co-operation alone if it is to survive. As we wrote in our report, "there cannot be unity in defence and disunity in foreign policy". That seems to me to be obvious, but some years of participation in international affairs have led me to the somewhat cynical conclusion that the obvious is often more difficult to implement than the obscure.

Triangular Relationship

The unity of NATO, its cohesion and strength, depend primarily upon the closest possible co-operation between the United States, the United Kingdom and France. They are the heart and soul - and much of the muscle - of the Atlantic Community and it ought to be the task of all of us to work for the maintenance and strengthening of the good relationship between them. There is nothing that I know of in contemporary international affairs which is more important.

The efforts which we continue to make - and rightly - to settle problems in the United Nations are no substitute for, though I hope they will always be complementary to, this other and closer co-operation.

Perhaps a Canadian may be pardoned for showing a special interest in this triangular relationship, for we are, in a sense, a part of every side of the triangle.

The United States shares with us the North American Continent. We are linked with her by ties of friendship and neighbourliness, of geography and trade and self-interest.

We could not break these links even if we desired, and we would be very foolish if we tried.

Our ties with Great Britain and France have a very special character, evolving from history and tradition and race. We have with them a family relationship of a kind which is easy to feel but hard to describe. It has been driven deep into our national consciousness, into our peoples' feelings. We Canadians have stood side by side with the people of our two mother countries in dark and dangerous days, in 1914 and 1915; in 1939 and 1940; days when, if they had failed or faltered, freedom throughout the world would have fallen.

We may differ with them - as we have recently in the Suez crisis - not on principles and objectives, but on their methods in trying to solve a particular problem of foreign policy. But our distress when we feel we must so differ makes us all the more conscious of the necessity of keeping those differences to the irreducible minimum.

Canadians feel almost the same distress when there are difficulties and divisions between London and Paris, on the one hand, and Washington, on the other; the more so because we know that this kind of difference can have far-reaching consequences from which only the enemies of peace can benefit.

You will realize, then, how strongly we in Canada feel about co-operation between the three great Western powers, in and out of NATO.

Fortunately, such a structure of co-operation does not have to be built from bare ground. There are strong ties between these three countries that existed long before NATO - ties of culture, of blood, and of partnership in war - which we must work hard to strengthen.

This work of building Atlantic unity, however, is not for Governments alone, but for every citizen of all the Atlantic nations. It lays a duty on each of us to try out best to understand the national attitudes, the national problems, and even the national prejudices of our NATO partners; and to keep constantly in mind the over-riding compelling need for working together.

We have had recently in the Middle East an unhappy, indeed an alarming demonstration of what may occur when co-operation breaks down among the three major members of the Atlantic alliance. I have no intention of going into the record of the divergence of policy that occurred there, but it would be pointless, even harmful, to pretend that it did not happen. We have to face the fact that despite all hopeful progress toward closer unity in recent years, NATO was badly shaken by an important disagreement among certain of its members on the best way of dealing with a critical situation. It is,

however, a mistake to brood over the past. It is better to draw the necessary conclusion from this experience so that it will not recur.

Effective Consultation Needed

An obvious lesson is that there needs to be much more effective consultation in NATO on foreign policies in advance of national decisions regarding those policies. I am not suggesting that more effective consultation of this kind will rule out all possibility of divergent policies, any more than it rules out the necessity of a government acting on its own quickly and effectively in a genuine emergency. There will always be some difference of national approach to particular problems in a democratic coalition such as ours, and there will always be domestic considerations impinging on the requirements for consultation with allies. But if we are to preserve NATO, we cannot afford to let such differences of approach or our pre-occupations with domestic considerations lead to deep division of policy on important matters.

North Atlantic consultation and co-operation, however, leading to the maximum unity of policy - if I may venture to quote again from the Report of the Committee of Three "will not be brought about in a day or by a declaration, but by creating over the years and through a whole series of national acts and policies, the habits and traditions and precedents for such co-operation and unity. The process will be a slow and gradual one at best; slower than we might wish. We can be satisfied if it is steady and sure. This will not be the case, however, unless the member governments - especially the more powerful ones - are willing to work, to a much greater extent than hitherto, with and through NATO for more than purposes of collective military defence".

It is easy, of course, to profess devotion to the principle of political consultation in NATO. It is difficult, almost impossible, if the necessary conviction is lacking, to convert the profession into practice. Consultation within an alliance means more than exchange of information, though that is necessary. It means more than letting the NATO Council know about national decisions that have already been taken; or trying to enlist support for those decisions. It means the discussion of problems collectively, in the early stages of policy formation, and before national positions become fixed. At best, this will result in collective decisions on matters of common interest affecting the Alliance. At the least, and this minimum is essential if a coalition is to be maintained, it will ensure that no action is taken by one member without a knowledge of the views of the others. We must keep pressing for the maximum, but I confess there have been occasions recently when I would have been glad to settle for the minimum!

Another lesson we might profitably draw from the Middle East crisis is that events outside the strict geographical area of the North Atlantic Treaty can be of very vital

concern to the members of NATO and ought, therefore, to be discussed in a NATO context. Geographical limits cannot be placed upon the process of consultation on national policies. We certainly have had cause to learn this recently if we never knew it before; just as we also know that the NATO circle of consultation and co-operation will not be large enough for many of these questions, and that our NATO circle can never be exclusive.

I have said earlier that the cohesion and strength of NATO depend primarily upon the closest possible co-operation between the United States, the United Kingdom and France, and in what I have just said about consultation, I have been thinking particularly of consultation among these three. They are the members of NATO with the most to contribute to the Atlantic Community, in both a material and political sense. They carry the heaviest responsibilities and upon them mainly rests the obligation to work together. This is particularly true of the United States because it is the strongest member of the Alliance. In fact, it has been said recently that the United States is the only member that has any substantial freedom to choose its course of action for itself. I think I understand what the author of that remark meant, but I am inclined to doubt if even the United States has very much freedom to choose its own course of action in this narrowing world and in the face of apparently limitless Soviet ambitions. I am fully aware, however, of the crushing weight of responsibility carried by the United States and the other major members of NATO, and I realize how easy it is for those who do not have such great responsibilities to preach about consultation. Let me, however, add just one further point. While the bigger members of NATO may have far more to contribute, militarily and otherwise, than the smaller ones, there is no member we could easily do without. We need them all and we want them all, freely and enthusiastically doing their part to build up Atlantic unity. It is very important, therefore, that the smaller members of NATO have a sense of full participation in the councils of the Alliance and that they are taken into the confidence of the other members to the greatest possible extent. The result, I am sure, will be better than that suggested by a Princeton Professor in the Times this morning when he wrote:

"Do not coalitions of this sort (asked the professor) always end by the weaker members of the group trying to cash in on their nuisance value at the expense of the stronger and richer members?"

We have good machinery in the NATO Council for this close consultation. We have, I think, made recommendations in our Committee Report by which this machinery can be improved. NATO has an efficient and devoted Secretariat, at the head of which is a man, Lord Ismay, who has provided unselfish, experienced and international leadership of a very exceptional kind which has left us all greatly in his debt. As he leaves NATO, we are indeed fortunate in securing as his successor a dynamic

and brilliant statesman, that great European and believer, as well, in Atlantic unity, Paul Henri Spaak.

It is not, however, the machinery which matters so much. It is the will of governments to use that machinery to bring about close co-operation and harmony in the formulation and execution of policy.

If we do not display that will, with something of the determination and desire - and even passion - that we show in national affairs, then NATO will weaken and eventually die for it will be solely a military alliance held together only by a common fear and disappearing when that fear disappears or, perhaps, seems to disappear.

A Supreme Test

The Atlantic nations are now facing a supreme test of their capacity to unite. If they fail in this, they may find it difficult to prosper and even survive as free nations. This test is the inescapable result of the tragic experiences of the recent past. Success in meeting it is made the more essential by the awful necessities of a thermo-nuclear future. Can we combine our national strengths, merge our national policies, and modify our national prides and prejudices to meet this test; or will we relax into that anarchical and jealous independence which seems unfortunately to have been the characteristic and dominating feature of sovereign states in modern times, except when they are confronted with great and pressing peril.

Mutual understanding is, I believe, the quality that will help us most in finding the right answer through the greater strength and unity of NATO members - understanding, patience and tolerance, as we try to meet collectively a destiny which in any case will be collective.

This essential understanding between us is hindered by any things; including the differences within the NATO states of power and historical development and tradition. May I mention one way in which these differences reflect themselves and create misunderstanding. Our own two countries, the United States and Canada, have emerged although by different roads, from colonial status; yours by the one which led to battle, ours by the one which led to conference. As two states, covering a great continent, we have no need for living and working space for our people outside our boundaries; therefore, no temptation to absorb other areas for their riches or resources, of which we have an abundance at home. Both historical and practical considerations, therefore, enable us to indulge to the utmost our North American desire for moral satisfaction by sympathizing with and supporting peoples who have just won or are seeking to win national independence from other powers. This is a worthy instinct and one for which we have no reason to apologize. But we should not let it obscure the truth that whatever the defects of colonial policies and practices over the last two centuries may have been

(and these defects have undoubtedly existed and sowed the seeds of bitter feelings), the principal powers in Western Europe, "colonial" because of pressures and circumstances that we have not experienced, have contributed very largely to the fact that so large a part of the world has today either attained sovereign power or is about to attain it. Independence movements, whether in Africa or in Asia, have all received much from those European sources of personal and national freedom. We are perhaps too much inclined to associate the word "colonialism" with "exploitation", and too little to recognize the treasures of law and government, of administrative knowledge and of technical skill, which flowed from the Western European powers to their colonial possessions and which provided the essential foundation and indeed the framework upon which the edifice of sovereign independence could be erected. It may be true that "good government is no substitute for self-government"; but it is equally true that only good government can make self-government tolerable, except on the basis of despotism, which does not become freedom merely because the word "national" comes before it.

In regard to this and many other problems arising out of the differing circumstances of the NATO partners, we should show that understanding which is as important, if not more important, in strengthening our coalition than developing techniques of co-operation, certainly than writing reports or making speeches about such co-operation.

The need, then, for NATO, in the military and non-military aspects of co-operation, is as great as ever. Our determination to satisfy that need by our national policies and attitudes should be as great as ever. The difficulties ahead are great. Our resolve to overcome them must be greater.

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