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Canada

Just over one month from now we will mark the first anniversary of a truly historic agreement. On December 6 of last year, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan signed the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Agreement. It was a landmark in modern times: for the first time ever it had been agreed that a whole class of nuclear weapons would be eliminated.

That was an achievement applauded by all Canadians. It demonstrated that East-West rivalry need not lead inexorably to catastrophe.

Next year we will commemorate another notable milestone: the 40th anniversary of the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I mention this because it has everything to do with last December's success in eliminating a class of nuclear weapons.

Last year's agreement did not simply materialize from thin air. It was not a unilateral gesture of good will by a new leadership in the Soviet Union, anxious to demonstrate its new persona to the West. In fact, the genesis of the agreement began in the late 1970's, with a decision by the Soviets that was neither benign nor welcome.

I ask you to remember those times. The Soviet Union had just increased instability in Europe by deciding to deploy their SS-20s -- a new generation of intermediate range missiles -- weapons for which there were then no Western counterparts in Europe. NATO tried to persuade the Soviets not to deploy. But words didn't work; the Soviet missiles went in. So Canadian and other NATO Ministers took what is known as the "two track" decision -- one track deploying Western weapons in Europe; the other track inviting Moscow to negotiate a limit to such weapons on both sides.

The Soviet response was to stonewall the negotiations, and to try to arouse public opinion in the free societies of the West against the NATO decision. Their tactic depended heavily on mobilizing the peace movement in Western Europe against the NATO deployment.

Some of you will remember the rallies and the marches, accompanied by consistent Soviet diplomatic attempts to break the resolve and the unity of the West.

The Soviet Union won an enormous propaganda windfall from those deployment debates -- even though, as the figures in the INF Agreement now show us, the Soviet Union deployed four times as many warheads in Europe as the United States did.

But despite the propaganda pressures, Western governments stood firm; Euromissiles were installed; and the Soviet Union, unable to break the unity of the West, agreed to follow the second track of the NATO decision; which led to talks; which led, in turn, to last year's historic agreement. Negotiation was not the Soviet's first option. Their first option was to try to divide NATO. When division failed, they negotiated.

Other factors were, of course, important -- including obviously, the new openness and flexibility that both Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Reagan now demonstrate. But had the "two track" decision failed, or had the peace movement prevailed, there would have been no compelling pressure on the Soviet Union to remove their own missiles.

Let me make a point that should be self-evident. Nuclear war would be terrible. Its prospect frightens children. It frightens adults. But one does not need nuclear weapons to wage terrible wars. Look at Iran-Iraq. Look at Cambodia. Look at the Crusades. The world can't wish away war. We can try to stop it when it occurs. We can send peacekeepers when there is a peace to keep. And we can work to prevent war - using tools that range from foreign aid to the threat of retaliation. In assessing the importance of NATO, it is worth noting Europe, which erupted into violence twice in the forty years before NATO was established, has known no war since that time. So the debate is not between war-mongers and peacekeepers. The debate is about the best way to keep peace and expand freedom.

History has taught us before that no one negotiates successfully from weakness. Certainly the Soviets understand strength. In the late 1970's, as Soviet missiles were deployed, the West learned that words alone don't work. Last year, Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Reagan showed us what happens when the West remains strong and united.

The lesson for us was clear -- that progress requires both the will to negotiate, and the strength to be taken seriously. At the core of that strength was NATO.

NATO is an organization born in dark days. It was created just four years after the termination of the most awful conflict ever known to mankind. A shattered Europe was groping towards recovery, economically, socially, politically and emotionally.

The times in Europe then were both bleak and ominous: Soviet-instigated civil war in Greece; the Berlin blockade; the steady disappearance of fledgling democracy in Eastern Europe. It was against that stark backdrop that Canada, the United States and our Western European allies joined together to form this mutual self-defence arrangement. One of its principal European proponents, incidentally, had been a Labour government in Great Britain. NATO was not an American initiative: rather, its inspiration was far more Anglo-Canadian, its intent to ensure that history would not repeat itself after this great war through another American retreat into isolation.

Why did we join? Why did we stay? Why are we still there?

The answer to each question is the same. We are in NATO because a strong North Atlantic alliance serves the best interests of Canada. Obviously, the world has changed enormously since that western alliance was first put in place. But many of the conditions which led to the creation of NATO are the same today as they were in 1949. Europe is still divided between societies that are free and societies that are not. Canada is still vitally interested in protecting freedom, and advancing it, in Europe. The alliance across the Atlantic is still a powerful instrument to resist American instincts to isolation, and to encourage American cooperation with other free nations. So does it encourage cooperation within Europe, and cooperation by Europe with North America.

One thing that has changed is that the direct threat to Canada is more terrible now, with strategic missiles. We are in the path between the superpowers. Changing our policy does not change our geography and, since we can't wish missiles away, we owe it to our own safety to maintain institutions which control them, or which bring their numbers down.

I ask you to consider Canada's interests.

No other Western nation shares our unique geographic circumstances: a country huge in land mass but sparsely populated; exposure to three of the world's great oceans, to the west, the east, and in our Arctic north; sandwiched directly between the two great nuclear superpowers. To defend and protect that territory, all by ourselves, would involve an immense financial cost. To decline to defend or protect it would be to invite other nations to steadily erode Canadian sovereignty. Those are realities for this country, whose land mass is the second largest in the world.

But geography is not the paramount consideration. Freedom is.

Canadians have long enjoyed the benefits of a free and democratic society and institutions. Our commitment to those values has been demonstrated time and again.

Next week we will bear witness to the thousands of Canadian citizens who died in battle defending those ideals -- twice in Europe in this century, and again, on the other side of the globe, in the Korean War.

Our freedom, our prosperity, our values are best nourished in direct relation to their strength in the rest of the world. When they are advanced in the world at large, they are made safer here at home; when they are imperilled abroad, they are jeopardized here.

That view has been at the heart of Canadian foreign policy since it began. Our policy is the opposite of isolation. We are one of the most effective and consistent internationalists in the world. It is particularly ironic to hear the argument that to withdraw from an alliance is an act of Canadian nationalism. Because isolation is an American disease, not Canadian. One of the differences between the two societies in North America is that Canadians have always worked to build international cooperation, and Americans have been inclined more often to go it alone.

That is why Canada seeks to strengthen international organizations like the United Nations, the Commonwealth, La Francophonie, and our defence alliances. That is why Canadians work in the deserts of Africa, in the villages of Asia, in the schools and hospitals of Latin America and the Caribbean. That is why we have been consistently at the forefront of the movement to liberalize and expand the international trade in goods and services.

NATO is a case in point. At its inception, NATO was seen as the most effective means to provide Canada, and our allies in the United States and Western Europe, with the security that is the most basic pre-condition to wealth and freedom. We also had a particular interest in promoting the recovery of Western Europe.

Modern day Western Europe, with a population well over 300 million, is now the world's wealthiest region. That did not happen by accident.

Central to its recovery from the devastation of the Second World War has been NATO. Europe has become strong because, for the last four decades, it has enjoyed peace and political stability - the longest uninterrupted peace Europe has enjoyed in the twentieth century. Secure and at peace, Western Europe has prospered and grown. That security was assured through the collective assertion of western will through NATO.

Like most other cooperative arrangements in life, the maintenance of unity and resolve in NATO has not been effortless or without strain. We have had to face constant challenges to its integrity from within and outside the alliance.

At times the American commitment to the alliance has been questioned, or was thought to be wavering. Fatigue with its international commitments, or frustration with having to pay a large share of the cost, have, on occasion, tempted some Americans to shrug off the burdens of collective defence, to go it alone, to look out only for number one. Europe worries periodically about the strength of the American commitment. Often there are tensions, which Canada is well placed to resolve.

Of course, I do not raise these questions today in a vacuum. We are in an election period, and the New Democratic Party is committed to the following policy resolution:

"Be it resolved that the New Democratic Party confirms its commitment to peace and disarmament by reaffirming its policy calling for Canadian withdrawal from NATO and other military alliances."

Their leader reiterated that commitment in the debate last week, but argues that withdrawal would not happen immediately. What would happen immediately, under the NDP proposal, is that Canada would begin to withdraw its troops from Europe, and would serve notice of an intention to "... withdraw, ... from NATO and other military alliances."

Either of those actions would send a dangerous message of disunity to our allies, and could encourage the Soviet Union to renew its attempts to divide the West, perhaps at cost to the arms negotiation process. Just as a solid Western alliance led to progress in arms negotiations, a divided Western alliance could remove the incentive to negotiate arms reductions.

Let there be no mistake. A signal that Canada intended to leave NATO would weaken the Western alliance. And the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Europe would revive the fear in Europe that she would be left alone, and could encourage isolationists in the United States to follow suit. Canada is an architect of this Alliance. If we begin to withdraw, the western alliance inevitably weakens.

But apart from the dangerous impact in NATO, that kind of withdrawal from obligations breaks the best Canadian tradition. It is an act of isolation -- an act against international cooperation. What would we leave next? The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, because we don't like its rulings? UNESCO because we don't like some of its programs? The Food and Agriculture Organization, because we didn't like an election result? In all of these organizations, Canadians have faced frustrations. There have been suggestions we should withdraw, or reduce our commitment, or exempt ourselves from the rules. But Canada's tradition is to stay active in international organizations, to make them stronger, more constructive. That tradition led us to create NATO, because it was needed. It should lead us now to strengthen NATO, because we need the balance and unity NATO brings.