



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 71/24

MAINTAINING THE SOLIDARITY OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

An Address by the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell
Sharp, to the North Atlantic Assembly,
Ottawa, September 27, 1971

To Mr. Speaker's warm words of welcome to you all I would like to add mine, both in my personal capacity and as representing the Government of Canada. This is the first time that the North Atlantic Assembly has met here; surely it will not be the last....

The North Atlantic alliance is based on a treaty between sovereign nations as represented by governments. With few exceptions, these are freely-elected governments, responsible to their citizens through powerful elected legislatures. These legislatures are at once an essential support to their governments and an essential check on the exercise of executive power. A treaty organization made up of freely-elected governments must be a voluntary association, held by shared beliefs and shared objectives.

Despite the exceptions, our alliance is a reflection of the people's will expressed in the ballot box. It is this foundation that explains why our countries have banded together for their common defence and it is this foundation which provides the sustaining force that has kept the alliance strong and closely knit for a quarter of a century.

It is governments that have the power to take decisions on NATO issues. Speaking for the Canadian Government, I can say that in the exercise of the decision-making power we recognize the vital importance of the role of individual Members of Parliament and the Legislature itself. Members of Parliament can affect and have affected decisions on foreign policy by their votes on the Government's actions. They are in close contact with people in all walks of life across the country and keep the Government aware of and in touch with changing public views and attitudes. They are extending their knowledge and interest in foreign affairs and their views are increasingly well-informed. In Canada, for example, our Senate and Commons Committees on External Affairs and Defence have developed a considerable degree of expertise and are playing a useful role in the development of policy.

The North Atlantic Assembly enables parliamentarians to involve themselves in foreign affairs and expand their knowledge by discussing the vital issues of the day with their counterparts from other NATO countries. As the representative of a Government committed to the principles and policies of the Atlantic alliance, I hope that the exchange of views which takes place here will confirm the solidarity of the alliance - not for solidarity's sake alone, but as a result of analytical examination of why NATO exists and what we collectively and individually derive from it. While an open examination runs the risk of disenchantment, it is my view that a searching look at fundamentals can only benefit the alliance. Self-delusion and a stand-pat attitude based on a superficial appreciation of reality will only lead to the alliance's demise.

The alliance will remain strong as long as it enjoys wide public support in all its member nations. Parliamentarians have an essential role to play in explaining alliance actions and policies to the people so that their support can be based on a proper understanding of what the alliance is about. In the end, public support depends on public acceptance of the alliance as a body to which their country should belong. This acceptance is threatened when member governments fail to live up to certain minimum standards in the conduct of their affairs, whether this be by abrogation of the democratic process, by adherence to a colonialist policy or otherwise. Full acceptance of the alliance can also be threatened if it appears to others that a member nation is taking unilateral action in its own interest at their expense.

At the NATO meeting last December, I expressed Canada's growing concern about the dangers of a trade confrontation between Europe and America, and the harm this would do to the solidarity of our alliance, apart from its effect on Canada.

In the event these were prophetic words: such a confrontation is no longer just a possibility; unfortunately it is a fact. And all of us who are concerned about the future of the North Atlantic alliance should be doing all in our power to ensure that the problems arising out of the balance-of-payments deficit of the United States are handled in such a way as to promote, not impede, co-operation between the member countries.

I appreciate that, as Secretary Connally has indicated, the United States measures are intended to provide a deliberate shakeup, so as to create an atmosphere in which some of the deep-seated problems in the monetary and trading systems can be solved by the world community working in concert. But the United States measures will be effective for this purpose only if our sense of mutual confidence is preserved. I regret to have to add that the result so far has been to disturb rather than to preserve that sense of mutual confidence.

I do not intend, this morning, to deal with the military aspect of the alliance. It is not my area of responsibility, nor do I think that there are any general comments I could make that would be particularly useful at this time. I should, however, like to draw to your attention the White Paper on Defence issued by the Canadian Government last month under the authority of my colleague the Honourable Donald S. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence.

The Paper reaffirmed that Canada would not only continue to contribute to alliance security in the North American and North Atlantic regions but would also continue to station significant forces in Europe as part of the NATO integrated force structure.

The Paper goes on to say:

"The decision reflected the Government's judgment that Canadian security continues to be linked to Western Europe and that Europe is still probably the most sensitive point in the East-West balance of power. It is the area from which any conflict, however limited, might most readily escalate into all-out nuclear war engulfing Canadian territory."

NATO is the most important forum in which North Atlantic countries can work toward the reduction of East-West tension. The alliance has become increasingly effective as a forum for consultations on defence and arms-control questions and many other political issues. One of the most compelling reasons for Canada to remain a member of NATO is the important political role that the alliance is playing - and that we can play as a member - in reducing and removing the underlying causes of potential conflict by negotiation, reconciliation and settlement. We continue to attach great significance to this aspect of the alliance's activities.

It is the Canadian view - shared by other members of the alliance - that we should carefully and prudently take advantage of changes in the East bloc and a greater receptiveness on the part of Eastern European countries to try to deal with them on a business-like basis. We have already gone a considerable distance in this policy, for example, through the visit of our Prime Minister to the Soviet Union in May of this year. We are now preparing for the return visit of Mr. Kosygin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, next month. We have no illusions about the difficulties in resolving major differences in these contacts, but there are benefits to be reaped, not only by the NATO country concerned but also by the alliance as a whole. The sum of all the bilateral contacts can have an important impact on the development of *détente*.

Mutual balanced force reductions is a long-standing NATO objective in the struggle to reduce tensions in Europe and one to which Canada attaches great importance. Reductions of the forces confronting each other could provide continuing security for both sides - and I emphasize "both sides" - while lowering defence costs. The Brezhnev speeches of March and May this year may signal a breakthrough. Certainly the indications that the Soviet Union is serious about force reductions negotiations must be followed up. Canada supports NATO efforts to prove Soviet intentions bilaterally. We also think that a representative of the alliance could supplement bilateral contacts by discussing with the Soviet Union and others the possibilities of moving to negotiations as soon as possible, on the basis of agreed principles. We were gratified that NATO ministers, at their meeting in June, endorsed the explorer idea and that this and other ideas will be examined at the high-level meeting in Brussels next week. The MBFR issue is very complex, involving as it does the forces of many countries in several parts of central Europe,

but the rewards would be commensurate with the effort required to reach agreement. It goes without saying that Canada is no more prepared than any of its allies to concede tangible security for unsubstantial promises. Yet we are encouraging our NATO colleagues to move forward on this issue, taking advantage of real opportunities in the search for a mutually acceptable agreement.

Canada was not a party to the four-power talks on Berlin but we participated actively in the alliance consultations that have accompanied them. We welcome the agreement on the first stage which emerged after months of hard bargaining. It is our hope that the second stage of the negotiations - between the appropriate German authorities - will be completed soon. Until then, Canada, in concert with its allies, does not think that the time has come to shift from bilateral to multilateral discussions on the possibility of a conference on European security. We are not dragging our feet by insisting on a satisfactory conclusion to the Berlin talks as a prerequisite for a security conference; we are simply recognizing that failure to achieve East-West agreement on Berlin would indicate that the climate was not ripe for the resolution of wider European problems. Once a Berlin agreement has been achieved, however, we see considerable value to be derived from a conference on European security, provided such a meeting was properly prepared and had good prospects of success. Any conference of this kind should involve not only all the members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact but interested neutral countries in Europe. While awaiting a Berlin agreement, the alliance must pursue its studies of the procedural and substantive problems of a conference against the day when a conference is a reality....

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