

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY - I

Text of a statement delivered in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, on March 28, 1949.

Just four years ago today, Mr. Speaker, on March 28, 1945, this House adopted, on a division of 202 yeas against 5 nays, a resolution endorsing the acceptance by the government of Canada of the invitation of the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the republic of China, to send representatives to a conference of the United Nations to be held on April 25, 1945, at San Francisco, for the purpose of preparing a charter for a general organization for the maintenance of international peace and security. The terms of that resolution provided that this House endorse the acceptance by the government of Canada of the invitation to send representatives to the conference; that this House recognizes that the establishment of an effective international organization for the maintenance of international peace and security is of vital importance to Canada, and, indeed, to the future well-being of mankind, and that it is in the interests of Canada that Canada should become a member of such an organization.

This House then approved the purposes and principles set forth in the proposals of the four sponsoring governments, and declared that it considered those proposals a satisfactory general basis for discussion of the charter of the proposed international organization. The House agreed that the representatives of Canada should use their best endeavours to further the preparation of an acceptable charter for such an international organization for the maintenance of international peace and security, and that the charter establishing the international organization should, before ratification, be submitted to Parliament for approval.

The adoption of this resolution had been preceded by a lengthy debate which made it abundantly clear that although the people of Canada had -- in your generation, Mr. Speaker, and mine -- participated in two victorious wars, they realized at what terrible cost in human life, human suffering and anguish, to say nothing of the cost in material wealth, these victories had been and were being won, and that the establishment of an effective organization for the maintenance of international peace and security was of vital importance to Canada, and, indeed, to the future well-being of mankind.

The conference was held, and the representatives of more than fifty nations affirmed their determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, reaffirmed their faith in the dignity and the worth of the human person, and agreed to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours; to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and, moreover, to refrain in international relations from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.

This great charter was solemnly signed by the delegations of fifty nations, and each one took it back to his respective constitutional authorities for ratification. It was ratified by those fifty nations in the most solemn manner in which international obligations can be made binding. Actual hostilities having come to an end in the meantime, a new hope spread its lustrous radiance over most of the civilized world.

The charter was not, however, a perfect instrument, and some of us did have grounds for misgivings. I remember listening with mixed feelings to the closing address of Mr. Gromyko, in which he stated that the charter in itself could not be a guarantee that its provisions would be carried out and ensure the maintenance of peace, but that to achieve this important and noble task it would be necessary to have united and co-ordinated action by the most powerful military powers of the world. He went on to say that it would be necessary for all members to try to settle all disputes by peaceful means. These words had an ominous sound after we had listened earlier in the conference to the statements of Mr. Molotov about the great part -- and it was indeed a great part -- that the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics had taken in saving the civilization of Europe, and about the great strength of their armies and their intention to maintain them at great strength. Mr. Gromyko went on to say:

Under the charter, the members of the international organization obligate themselves to achieve peaceful settlements of the disputes. Let us hope that this aim will be fully realized.

We were not unmindful of the fact that each of the great powers had been given a right of veto on the operation of the principal organ of the international body, and it would seem that any one of them could prevent it from being effective unless, if it were so disposed, it were allowed to have its own way in every regard.

Unfortunately these misgivings were soon to be converted into positive anxieties. When the general assembly met for the first time in London in January of 1946 I remember whistling to keep up our courage and pointing out that these obligations had been undertaken in the most solemn way in which international obligations could be contracted, and saying:

It is true we have also agreed that, on most important matters, the decisions of the security council shall be made by an affirmative vote of seven members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members, and we have called that the "veto" right of the great powers, and there are many to whom it has given some concern. But is not the charter itself, its purposes and its principles, solemnly accepted and ratified by those great powers, a firm pledge on which each of us can implicitly rely that they will use their privileged position only as a sacred trust for the whole of mankind?

I think events have shown that it was rather a vain hope. Speaking for the Canadian delegation at the second part of that assembly in October, 1946, I felt constrained to point out that the security council had not proceeded to complete its organization, and I did so on behalf of the Canadian delegation in the following words:

Canada therefore urges that the security council and the military staff committee go ahead with all possible speed in the constructive work of negotiating the special agreements and of organizing the military and economic measures of enforcement. It appears to us that it would be in the interest of all members of the United Nations to see the security council equipped and ready in fact to enforce proper

decisions for the maintenance of world peace and also to see serious consideration given to the reduction of national armaments so that the productive capacity of the world thus conserved may be used for improving the living conditions of all peoples.

There was no very enthusiastic response to that suggestion from our friends of eastern Europe. A month later, speaking again for the delegation, I said:

The Canadian delegation feels that it would be premature to call in question in this first session of the general assembly the rule of unanimity set out in article 27. What we do call in question is the manner, or perhaps rather the number of cases and the kind of cases, in which that rule of unanimity has already been applied.

I went on to say:

The security council was given primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations. But the experience of the past nine months can scarcely be said to have demonstrated that the security council would be capable, under its present practices and procedures of taking prompt and effective action.

And further:

In the unsettled state of the world, which is the inevitable aftermath of the war, circumstances or disputes may be expected to arise where it would be important that the security council should be capable of taking prompt and effective action for the maintenance of peace and security. In such circumstances we would all like to feel that the council would be ready and able to take effective action promptly and not after a dispute or source of friction was fanned into a conflagration; that it would not wait until it is necessary to resort to force or until men, desperate from the frustration of waiting for a decision, might take whatever action they thought apt to serve their own interests.

That warning was applauded, but got very little beyond applause. The next year, when the succeeding meeting was held, speaking again for the Canadian delegation on September 18, 1947, I made, among other remarks, the following:

There is a growing feeling in my country, as in other countries, that the United Nations, because of the experience of the security council, is not showing itself equal to the discharge of its primary task of promoting international confidence and ensuring national security. The economic and social council is functioning fairly successfully. The specialist organizations are doing good work. But the security council, founded on what is called the unanimity of its permanent members, has done little to strengthen the hopes of those who saw in it the keystone of the structure of peace. It has done much to deepen the fears of those who felt that, with the veto, it could not operate effectively in an international atmosphere of fear and suspicion, where pride is often allowed to take precedence over peace, and power over reason.

I went on:

Nations, in their search for peace and co-operation, will not and cannot accept indefinitely an unaltered council which was set up to ensure their security, and which, so many feel, has become frozen in futility and divided by dissension. If forced, they may seek greater safety in an association of democratic and peace-loving states willing to accept more specific international obligations in return for a greater measure of national security. Such associations, it has already been pointed out, if consistent with the principles and purposes of the charter, can be formed within the United Nations. It is to be hoped that such a development will not be necessary. If it is unnecessary, it will be most undesirable. If, however, it is made necessary, it will have to take place.

Let us not forget that the provisions of the charter are a floor under, rather than a ceiling over, the responsibilities of member states. If some prefer to go even below that floor, others need not be prevented from moving upwards.

Two or more apartments in the structure of peace are undoubtedly less desirable than one family of nations dwelling together in amity, undivided by curtains, or even more substantial pieces of political furniture. They are however to be preferred to the alternative of wholly separate structures.

This, you may say, is defeatism of the worst kind. It is not. It is merely sober realism.

During the months which followed there had been disturbing developments in eastern Europe, and very disturbing developments in the security council. These had been and were continuing to be demonstrations of the fact that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and their satellites did not intend or expect the United Nations to perform any useful function, unless it were the function of enabling them to extend their influence and domination. Everything else was blocked by the veto. Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Roumania, Yugoslavia, and then Czechoslovakia and many others, had seen their free democratic institutions ruthlessly crushed out of existence. Methods which had succeeded in those countries were being resorted to in Greece, in Italy and in France; and the upholders of genuine democracy were seeing with alarm that chaos being fostered and extended in their countries as an organ to bring about the kind of constitutional changes of which we have seen so many terrible and consequential examples.

This fateful march of events had made it unmistakably clear that the soviet union was a threat to peace and security -- directly, or according to the size of its armed forces, and indirectly, by its support of communist parties in countries which had not yet been driven into the soviet orbit.

Its record of international co-operation for peace was a bleak one. Ever since the San Francisco conference the soviet union has insisted that all measures for assuring and enforcing peace should be agreed to in the first instance by the security council in which it has a veto. It has refused to participate in almost all the international organizations set up under the aegis of the United Nations. It has refused to join the food and agricultural organization, the international refugee organization, the international labour organization, UNESCO, the international monetary fund, the international civil aviation organization, and the proposed international trade organization. It had spurned almost all the organizations set up for international co-operation in which it could not use the veto.

Meanwhile it had given its own unique meaning to the concept of defence through the methods of indirect aggression; and one has only to look at what happened in Czechoslovakia to realize how effective those methods can be, even in a sincerely democratic country.

Well, the fear of subversive communism allied to soviet might is in fact the mainspring of the development leading up to this North Atlantic security pact. Hon. members know what those developments were. On January 22, 1948, Mr. Bevin declared that soviet hostility to the European recovery programme and soviet obstructionism over the German settlement had convinced the United Kingdom government that the time had come to go ahead with plans for closer political and economic unity of willing western European states. Hastened in their negotiations by the communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia in February and soviet pressure for a treaty with Finland, the United Kingdom, France and the Benelux countries signed the treaty of Brussels on March 17, 1948.

Under this treaty these signatory governments undertook that if any one of them should be the object of armed attack in Europe, the others would, in accordance with provisions in article 51 of the charter of the United Nations, afford the party so attacked all military and other aid and assistance in their power.

On the very day that this treaty was signed, hon. members will recall the impressive broadcast made by the President of the United States at noon, and will remember that the Prime Minister came into this house and declared, to the accompaniment of plaudits from all quarters in the house, that this treaty was a partial realization of the ideal of collective security by an arrangement under the charter of the United Nations, and in doing so he referred to a statement which the president had made just a couple of hours before.

The president, in reporting to congress on the critical nature of the situation in Europe, had given this treaty his full support, and indicated that he was confident that the United States would extend to the free nations the help which the situation required.

During the months which followed, members of the Canadian government, in a series of public statements, made clear their view of the gravity of the international situation. They also indicated the general line of the North Atlantic treaty which the government considered would meet the dangers confronting the still free countries of western Europe. On June 11, for example, I said:

The best guarantee of peace today is the creation and preservation by the nations of the free world, under the leadership of Great Britain, the United States and France, of an overwhelming preponderance of force over any adversary or possible combination of adversaries. This force must not be only military; it must be economic; it must be moral.

Meanwhile the senate of the United States had been considering a resolution introduced by Senator Vandenberg. This resolution was adopted by the senate of the United States on June 11 by a vote of sixty-four to four. It set forth six objectives of United States foreign policy. Three of these objectives were directly related to proposals for a North Atlantic security pact. May I just read them into the record? They are as follows:

1. Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defence in accordance with the purposes, principles and provisions of the charter.

2. Association of the United States by constitutional processes with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security.

3. Contributing to the maintenance of peace by making clear its determination to exercise the right of individual or collective self-defence under article 51 should any armed attack occur affecting its national security.

On July 6 the representatives of Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States met in Washington for the first phase of the series of noncommittal and exploratory talks on security problems of common interest in relation to the Vandenberg resolution.

These talks have now culminated in the draft text tabled in the house on March 18. The text has been prepared by the representatives of the countries which took part in the original discussions, and by the representative of Norway who joined in the deliberations on March 3. The treaty, if signed, will bring together in alliance against war the free nations of the North Atlantic community which share a common heritage, a common civilization, a common belief in the purposes and principles of the charter of the United Nations, and a common desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. Those are the nations which, when they put their signatures to an international document, intend that it shall be carried out.

This treaty is to be far more than an old-fashioned military alliance. It is based on the common belief of the north Atlantic nations in the values and virtues of our Christian civilization. It is based on our common determination to strengthen our free institutions and to promote conditions of stability and well-being. It is based on the belief that we have in our collective manpower, in our collective natural resources, in our collective industrial potential and industrial know-how, that which would make us a very formidable enemy for any possible aggressor to attack.

Of course it is not easy to venture forecasts, or to attempt to say what might have been in history; but one can wonder. The purpose of the treaty is to preserve the peace of the world by making it clear to any potential aggressor that, if he were so unwise as to embark on war he might very well finish up in the condition in which the kaiser found himself after the first great war. He might very well find himself in the position in which Hitler and Mussolini found themselves after the second terrible war. They were not told in advance what they would have to take on and overcome. I think it is fair, both to ourselves and to any possible aggressors, to tell them in advance that, if they attempt anything, they will have to overcome those who were great factors in preventing the realization of the hopes of the kaiser and of Hitler and Mussolini.

This is not a treaty to make war. It is intended by us, and intended by the others who participate in it, as the best possible insurance against war at the present time, in view of the inability of the United Nations to give us that insurance. I should like to put on the record a phrase or two of Secretary Acheson of the United States:

The paramount purposes of the pact are peace and security. If peace and security can be achieved in the North Atlantic area, we shall have gone a long way to assure peace and security in other areas as well.

I should like to refer also to the words of the foreign minister of Great Britain, Ernest Bevin:

I think I can say without exaggeration this is an historic occasion. It is certainly one of the greatest steps toward world peace and security that have been taken since the end of the first world war, and if we look at the history of relations between this European continent and the new world of the western hemisphere, I think we can say this agreement marks the opening of a new era of co-operation and understanding. This is the first time the United States of America have ever felt able to contemplate entering into commitments in peacetime for joint defence with Europe, and it is a most famous historical undertaking into which they are now entering in common with the rest of us. We shall with them, and the rest of those who join in this pact, make our due contribution in the firm belief that the step now being taken will bring peace and security for our common civilization for many generations to come.

Let me add one sentence from the speech of France's foreign minister, Mr. Robert Schuman:

Today we have obtained what we vainly hoped for between the two wars. The United States has recognized that there is neither peace nor security for America if Europe is in danger.

We in Canada also recognize that there is neither peace nor security for Canada if western Europe, quite as much as any part of this hemisphere, is in danger; but we feel that, by uniting our efforts, by making our peaceful intentions clear, by making our preparations serious, and by forcing the totalitarian rulers of the communist states to realize that we mean business, we are not contracting our strength but expanding it. We will create a situation which will enable us to speak in the only language they recognize, the only language they understand -- the language that speaks from strength.

This is, of course, a serious step for this young nation, but I think it is a step that will implement the desire of all the Canadian people that civilized Christian nations should at some time abandon trial by might for the rule of law. Although I invite all hon. members to consider the general tenor of the draft treaty, and to express their views by their votes or otherwise on this resolution only after having done so, I do insist that there be full opportunity before ratification of the treaty -- that is to say, before it becomes binding on Canada -- to consider it again in detail in this house, with the knowledge that the language being considered is the definite language that is there to stand.

(The last part of Mr. St. Laurent's speech was delivered in French and translated in Hansard as follows:)

Mr. Speaker, to all Canadians of my own race and creed, the bitterness with which the pact is being opposed by the few communists who unfortunately live in our midst, is sufficient proof that it is in the interests of true Canadians to approve the pact.

I would like to quote from one or two examples of the literature that is being distributed by those communists throughout the country. I was in Oshawa during the weekend. There, a meeting was being attended by several hundred persons. At the door of the hall, a young man handed out a circular entitled: "Don't Let Them Sign Your Death Sentence."

"Whether you are of military age or over, male or female, the signing of the North Atlantic pact concerns you directly. It might prove to be the signal for the U.S. Brass Hats to start dropping atom-bombs. Your personal survival -- the fate of your family and loved ones -- as well as our country's national existence -- is at stake."

"The fateful hand at Ottawa can be stopped from signing on the dotted line."

"Sign a peace pact, not a war pact!"

"A real peace pact can be achieved through the United Nations. War is not inevitable. Which path Canada takes, depends on you. Canada should speak up for peace and understanding between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The Soviet Union is engaged in long-term rebuilding of her war-ravaged land that is meaningless without peace."

"Only if we have forsaken peace and decided on the path of war, will we by-pass the United Nations and join a military alliance which gives real control of our future to Wall Street."

At a meeting held in Windsor, copies of the newspaper Canadian Tribune, issue of March 14, 1949, were distributed.

"Is peace treason? You have told the House of Commons that the Department of Justice is investigating the statements and policies of the Labor-Progressive Party".

"We Communists do not have to answer for our patriotism. We warned the world in the 30's of the consequences of appeasing Hitler. We were right then -- and we are right now when we warn Canadians that your government has sold out to the U.S. imperialists, that you have abandoned the Charter of the United Nations, that you are deliberately working up a war hysteria, etc."

"I reject the charge of 'treachery' to Canada... I say that Canadian foreign policy must be changed if our country is to be saved from disaster."

And in another column:

"We communists will in the future as in the past defend the highest interests of our country."

When we realize that, to them, "our country" means "their country behind the iron curtain", when we examine the stand which their leaders have taken in Italy and France, there cannot be any question in that regard.

They want Canada to keep quiet, to permit the expansion of that ideology of communist and atheistic terrorism. I know that in my province, among the people of my race and my religion, there is no wish that disasters such as those which have come to so many European countries should be repeated here, and that the situation which within former democratic countries of Europe has given rise to religious persecution which has shocked the whole civilized world should come to pass in Canada.

We want peace, but not the peace of persecution, the peace of atheism, the peace of concentration camps and the peace of imprisonment without trial.

Mr. Robert Schuman, speaking on behalf of the government of France said:

We are obtaining today what we vainly sought between the two wars: The United States, recognizing that there can be neither peace nor security for America if Europe is in danger, offer us both immediate aid in the organization of our military defence and a guarantee of assistance in case of war.

And he added:

Far from being inconsistent with the charter, the Atlantic pact is within the framework of the charter. It is the necessary complement of the charter, it serves the same cause, that of peace and security.

To all genuine Frenchmen, to those whose patriotism rises above all ideologies, he points out the following:

And is it not a well-known fact that the western allies, relying on the common victory and on a friendship born out of war, have demobilized their troops and reduced their armaments, while in Russia and the satellite countries not only has the war potential been maintained, but the troops on active service have been kept in uniform. That lack of balance between forces, which is not warranted by any exceptional circumstance, threatens security and causes anxiety. That is all the more true because these forces are shrouded in mystery and the Russians refuse to submit to any control whilst the western democracies hide neither their strength nor their armaments.

Finally, and above all, these forces are subordinated to an ideology which is avowedly bent on expansion and which has possessed since 1947, a powerful instrument, the cominform, a political manifestation of a military alliance.

We have the same mentality as our ancestors in the old country and we are aware, I feel, just as they are, of a situation which the press summarizes as follows. I now take the liberty of quoting Mr. Froissart in L'aurore France libre:

The pact promises nothing more than to allow us to live and die with our religious creed, under our laws, within a moral code which, at least, does not purport to make falsehood a patriotic duty, informing a family duty, and police terrorism a means of social emancipation.

Evidently, Mr. Speaker, we would consider it more satisfactory were it not necessary to sign alliances in order to ensure peace. However, we require a certain degree of security for ourselves, for our families and the families of our children. I feel we shall obtain this security only through an agreement for peace between those great nations who have the habit of respecting their undertakings and whose military and industrial strength is such that no aggressor will undertake lightly to overcome them.

The United Nations charter was enthusiastically accepted in this country. This pact devolves upon us certain moral obligations but the express obligations comprised by its terms are less formal than those in the United Nations charter.

Indeed, under the United Nations pact, we had undertaken, with the approval of this parliament and of the nation, to carry out the decisions of the Security Council, whenever a decision had been reached by the majority.

Under this pact, we undertake to consider any aggression against the territory of any signatory power as an aggression against ourselves, but we reserve the right to decide by ourselves, in this Canadian parliament, the form, the extent and the time of our participation in hostilities.

It is a pact of mutual security, but one which under no circumstances can serve as a pretext for offensive aggression. We are signing it as a defence pact against aggression and I am positive that no Canadian would have it serve as an instrument of offensive aggression against anyone. None of the member governments would want to use it as Communists claim we wish to use it, as a green light to shower atomic bombs upon them.

We want to avoid war. We want to resist any aggression; but if ever, which we do not recognize as a possibility, anyone sought to use it as authority to start an offensive war, we would be fully justified by the terms of the pact and absolutely bound by our responsibilities to our country and to our families, so say: "That is not what it was designed for. It must not operate that way."

If, however, an act of aggression is committed against any of us, it will constitute an aggression against all the nations that have signed the pact. Then each will be bound on its national honour, to take in accordance with its own constitutional practice, such measures as the nation itself, its parliament and its government, consider best calculated to fulfil the obligations it has assumed in order to repel that aggression and restore peace.

I suggest that all hon. members of this house carefully consider the pact, and I venture to hope that, after they have done so, they will come to the conclusion that it constitutes a firm assurance to themselves and to future generations, against the horrors of war.

S/C