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NATO IN CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs Conference, Calgary, March 1, 1969.

Two Canadian Prime Ministers, Mr. St. Laurent and Mr. Pearson, were among the founders and chief architects of NATO. Twenty years later, under a new Prime Minister, Canada is reviewing its foreign and defence policies, and one of the key questions is whether or not Canada should stay in NATO. Within the last few weeks, the British Prime Minister and the German Chancellor, meeting in Bonn, have re-affirmed their full support of the alliance, and the President of the United States, at NATO headquarters in Brussels and in other European capitals, has renewed his country's pledge to stay in Europe and to stay in NATO. General de Gaulle, with all his distrust of what he likes to call "the American hegemony", has kept France in the alliance, maintains two divisions in Germany and, although he has withdrawn his forces from the unified NATO command, fosters the closest liaison between the French and NATO headquarters.

Why, then, is Canada, an outward-looking, internationally-minded country, closely tied by history, geography and national interest to the United States and Western Europe, the one country currently conducting a fundamental review of its role in the NATO alliance? First let me make clear that the review has not been undertaken for reasons of narrow domestic self-interest. Canada is very far from being a self-contained economy, our standard of living and our very ability to survive depend on a world-wide pattern of foreign trade. No nation in this position can turn inward upon itself and ignore its international responsibilities. To live and to grow, Canada needs a stable and prosperous world.

Regardless of any review, the whole thrust of Canada's foreign policy is directed toward the twin objectives of world order and world prosperity. This means that, for its own self-interest and its own self-respect, Canada must make its proper contribution to the maintenance of world peace and the raising of the world standard of living. These are political objectives and are pursued in the United Nations and NATO, by means of other groupings such as the Commonwealth and the newly-founded Francophonia, and bilaterally with the nations of the world.

The pursuit of these political objectives involves military activity, which for Canada is not and cannot be a matter of national ambition but, rather, a contribution to keeping world peace, and foreign aid as a contribution to raising the standard of living in less-developed countries.

The purpose of the current review of foreign and defence policy is not to question whether Canada should be engaged in political activity, keeping the peace and foreign aid. And it is not to question the value of NATO as such, for NATO is going to continue for some time to come with the support of its European members and the United States, no matter what we do.

The review of our foreign and defence policies is designed to find out it we are serving our own interests best and making our most effective contribution to world order and world prosperity under our present arrangements. If not, these arrangements will be changed. Coming to NATO, the questions the review asks are the same: is membership in NATO in Canada's national interest? does membership in NATO represent an effective Canadian contribution to the maintenance of world peace?

I can't answer these questions for you today, since the Government has not yet arrived at any conclusion. I can, however, discuss with you the background against which the decision will be made and some of the considerations that will bear upon it.

The late forties was a critical period for the Western world. Wartime co-operation between the Western allies and the Soviet Union had disappeared. In three years, the U.S.S.R. had established political domination over five Eastern European countries and part of Germany, together making up a population of about 100 million. The final takeover of Czechoslovakia also saw growing Soviet pressure on such countries as Finland, Turkey and Iran, and the blockade of Berlin. Canada, having seen two world wars explode out of European quarrels, saw yet another explosive situation developing.

Western Europe, weakened by war, feared both aggression from the powerful military forces maintained by the Soviet Union and Moscow-directed internal Communist subversion.

The democracies of Western Europe had to find a way to protect themselves and the way of life they represented. Hopes that the United Nations might be able to provide such protection through universal collective security had soon been dispelled - in part by the indiscriminate Soviet use of the veto. This was the background against which NATO came into being, a pooling of resources by like-minded nations to protect a common way of life.

While the immediate threat which led to the establishment of NATO was to the Western European democracies, it was seen in Canada and the United States as directly affecting North American security. The lesson of two world wars had been learned, and we accepted that we could hardly remain uninvolved if a third such war should break out. At the same time, however, Canada shared the general feeling that it is possible to benefit by past mistakes; that, by taking the right action at the right time, it should be possible to prevent a war rather than have to fight it. Gradually, it came to be accepted that the effective action which was required could only be

achieved on a collective basis. Mr. St. Laurent was the first Western statesman to express this conclusion, when he said on July 11, 1948: "We believe that it must be made clear to the rulers of the totalitarian Communist states that, if they attempt by direct or indirect aggression to extend their police states beyond their present bounds by subduing any more free nations, they will not succeed unless they can overcome us all."

All this was 20 years ago, and perhaps the most telling answer to the question of whether NATO has been worthwhile is to be found in the simple fact that since its establishment no further European countries have fallen under Soviet domination - either through direct military intervention or by subversion. The nations of Western Europe have grown and prospered. In a period marked by violence and conflict in other parts of the world, Europe has enjoyed a unique degree of stability. NATO's success is often taken for granted these days, but this fact should not be allowed to detract from its achievements. Paradoxically, it is the fact of NATO's success that permits the luxury of questioning the need for it. I am often asked how one can be sure that the 20 years of peace Europe has enjoyed are due to the existence of NATO. I suppose in the end there is no substantive proof, but I can tell you this. The question is one which is easily asked in Calgary, 6,000 miles from the Iron Curtain. But it is a question that simply is not asked by those who live their daily lives in the shadow of massive Soviet forces.

NATO is unique in the sense that it is the only example of a formal alliance that operates effectively in peace-time. Fifteen countries, despite their inevitable conflicts in national interest, have been able to continue to co-operate for two decades. This is a major accomplishment, and something to celebrate. It also bears on the contention that the members of NATO have not, in fact, faced a real threat from the Soviet Union - that the danger they see is imaginary. If 15 independent states have been prepared to make the effort required to maintain an effective alliance arrangement for 20 years, there must be a commonly perceived danger to which they consider a collective response the best answer. The danger is quite clear. The Soviet Union continues to increase and streamline its enormous military potential; its intentions remain uncertain; and there are unsolved problems in Europe which could ignite a nuclear war because they involve the vital interests of the super-powers. Canada cannot remain indifferent to this danger.

To deal with this situation, NATO had developed features which distinguish it from old-time alliances and make it a uniquely modern instrument of collective security:

> First, it provides effective defence on a relatively economical basis. By a pooling of resources under a unified command rather than reliance on individual effort, the members of the alliance help to ensure that in times of crisis or actual conflict there will be a quick and effective response. In an age of split-second timing and enormously complex and expensive weapons systems, the security which NATO provides to its members could not be attained in any other way.
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> Secondly, NATO is the instrument whereby the protection afforded by the United States nuclear deterrent is extended to Europe. By co-operating with the United States in continental defence, Canada contributes to the overall deterrent strength of the alliance.

Thirdly, because the member countries can depend on United States nuclear protection, they do not have to produce or acquire independent control of nuclear weapons. By helping to limit the spread of these weapons, NATO contributes to the idea of "non-proliferation" and at the same time, within the alliance, helps to reduce the possibility of nuclear war occurring by accident or miscalculation.

Fourthly, NATO enables West Germany to make an effective contribution to the defence of the West. Germany has the largest single military establishment in Western Europe, but all of its forces are integrated into NATO and responsible to NATO commanders. Germany has no general staff of its own and no forces available to German commanders outside NATO. Because of the nuclear protection which Germany receives through the alliance, it has been prepared formally to renounce the right to manufacture nuclear weapons on its own territory. This was done in 1954 when Germany entered NATO.

Finally, one of the most important characteristics of the NATO system is its provision of machinery for continuing consultation on military and political issues. This arrangement gives smaller members of the alliance like Canada a chance to participate in the making of policy on a wide range of major issues of concern to us that we would not have in any other circumstances. But is this participation effective? It is often assumed that, when lesser powers sit down with a super-power, all they can do is listen and agree. There are two super-powers in the world today, and they are very different. The U.S.S.R. operates in secrecy and by stealth, without much, if any, regard for the wishes and views of its allies. The United States, on the other hand, is an open society with a government that must win elections to achieve and maintain power. While it may be in a position to dominate the alliance, by its own choice it proceeds by consent and is susceptible to many-faceted influences from within and without its borders.

While NATO brings important advantages to its members, the alliance approach also involves both military and political obligations. On the military side, in addition to the guarantee of mutual assistance under the Treaty, there is an implicit understanding that each member will make an appropriate contribution to the overall military resources of the alliance. In the political sphere, just as there is an opportunity to advance ideas and influence the actions of others in the alliance, so there is a requirement to take views and interests of others into account. NATO operates by consensus and there is an expectation that, except in special circumstances, agreement will be reached.

One of the criticisms sometimes directed against NATO is that, besides placing these constraints on the freedom of action of individual members, it is a conservative bureaucracy, tending to perpetuate itself and unable to adjust effectively to changing circumstances.

In an organization made up of 15 governments, there can at times be some difficulty and delay in co-ordinating views. At the same time, to the

extent that there is a braking influence, it can have a positive value in restraining a member country from taking precipitate action which could have an adverse effect on the alliance as a whole. When one is dealing with issues of war and peace (and particularly nuclear war), this could be vital. Secondly, while progress toward political solutions may appear slow when approached on a collective basis, otherwise there might well be no progress at all.

NATO, like any large and complex organization, has its imperfections. For each member the question is simple - do the advantages of belonging to NATO outweigh the disadvantages? Unlike the members of the Warsaw Pact, the members of NATO are free to withdraw if they should wish, but the fact that after 20 years none of them has so far chosen to do so suggests clearly where the balance of advantage or disadvantage lies.

Looking at NATO in today's world, we must ask ourselves: What is its role in the immediate future and where does Canada fit in?

It seems to me that a durable solution to the problems which continue to plague Europe and threaten world peace must contain two elements: a lasting settlement, on a generally acceptable basis, of the political issues of Central Europe, including the division of Germany; and the creation of some type of European security arrangement which would adequately meet the needs of all the countries concerned, both East and West.

The issues involved are complex and this goal will not be achieved quickly or easily. If any progress is to be made, there must be some mechanism to keep the peace and at the same time contribute to the creation of a climate in which movement toward a durable solution is possible. Does NATO satisfy these dual requirements?

NATO's main emphasis in the early years was on providing a defensive shield against possible Soviet aggression in Western Europe. This continues to be a fundamental purpose of the alliance, but the emphasis is shifting as Europe's political and military circumstances change. The alliance is now devoting its energies and attention to the twin objectives of deterrence, which is the prevention of war, and of détente, which is concerned with improving relations between the Eastern and Western nations.

The objective of deterrence is to prevent war. To do this, the Alliance must try to maintain a situation in which Soviet military adventure is obviously unrewarding and the likelihood of war breaking out in Europe is minimized. At the same time, if a conflict should occur, NATO must have the ability to respond effectively and prevent escalation to all-out nuclear war.

To achieve these objectives, NATO has developed the capacity for "flexible response". This requires NATO to have available enough military forces, both conventional and nuclear, to convince the Soviet Union that any type of armed attack on its part would be unprofitable. Above all, the strategy of flexible response attempts to avoid a situation in which NATO would be faced with the stark choice of yielding to a conventional attack or resorting to nuclear war. It is also designed to contain an incident started by accident or miscalculation long enough to make a political solution possible without resort to tactical or strategic nuclear weapons. In such a situation, days or even hours could be crucial. This is why NATO is correctly described as a peacekeeping force.

Détente calls for continuing attempts by members of the alliance - both individually and collectively - to improve relations with the states of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union. Obviously, this policy depends on some reciprocation from the other side. The aim is to reduce tensions and replace them with an atmosphere of confidence and stability. In such an environment, it is hoped that both sides would be able to develop and respond to initiatives designed to produce durable solutions that would make the existence of armed blocs unnecessary. In this sense, NATO's avowed objective is to create circumstances in which the alliance would become redundant.

The pursuit of détente will be a slow process, probably bedevilled by setbacks such as that which occurred in Czechoslovakia last year. Its success will be the sum total of the various individual and collective activities of the members of the alliance. Much of the progress will necessarily have to be made through bilateral relations between individual NATO members and members of the Warsaw Pact. In this process NATO has an important function to perform in providing the machinery for co-ordinating the activities of its members. What one does could have important implications for the others, and close consultation is therefore essential. There is also scope for collective initiatives and the alliance is already at work in this area. A specific example of such a collective initiative now being examined in NATO is the proposal for balanced force reductions. This calls for negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, designed to achieve agreement on the progressive lowering of military forces on both sides. The relative balance of military strength in Europe, which now permits a reasonable degree of stability, would be maintained at progressively lower levels. Early last summer, NATO proposed to the Warsaw Pact that discussions on this idea be initiated and, although the events in Czechoslovakia intervened, the matter has not been dropped.

Whatever Canada may decide, the alliance will continue to be the mechanism through which peace in Europe is maintained and decisions are taken on the issues affecting the evolution of East-West relations and the solution of European political problems. We must decide if these matters are of real concern to us and, if so, whether we have a better chance of influencing them in a favourable direction through continued membership in the alliance or by withdrawing.

I appreciate that there are differing points of view as to the importance of developments in Europe for Canada and our ability to influence them. Because of this, I think the open debate we are having is highly desirable. For my part, I cannot escape the conclusion that what happens in Europe matters very much to Canada. Our interests there cover many areas - history, culture, trade and finance, to mention only a few. Perhaps the most fundamental of all, however, relates to the fact that it is in Europe that the vital interests of the super-powers are in starkest confrontation, so that there is the greatest chance of a conflict escalating into a nuclear war. Because of Canada's geographic position between the two super-powers, this war would be fought out above our very heads. This is why Canada has a direct, selfish interest in the prevention of war.

I am not suggesting here that we ignore our interests in other parts of the world, but simply that, in terms of priority, Europe and developments there must continue to have a major claim on our energy and attention for some time to come.

Last summer's events in Czechoslovakia illustrated dramatically the determination of the Soviet Union to maintain its grip on Eastern Europe. It is difficult to accept, however, that the urge for greater freedom and a better way of life now manifesting itself on the other side of the Iron Curtain can be indefinitely suppressed, even through the brutal use of force. With all the uncertainties inherent in this situation, the period ahead seems to call for a combination of vigilance and perception. Vigilance is needed to cope with the consequences for the West of further difficulties such as Czechoslovakia; perception, to discern opportunities that the inevitable process of change in Eastern Europe might provide to make progress on Europe's political problems.

Will Canadian interests in the future best be served through continued Canadian membership in NATO? One of the major concerns in our review of defence policy and related foreign policy considerations has been to establish whether there are, in fact, any better alternatives to NATO for Canada. We are examining this problem ourselves, we are seeking the views of other informed observers and taking account of the opinions we have received from the public at large. At the same time, a Parliamentary committee is conducting its own review of many of the issues.

If we should decide that it is in our interest to remain in NATO, it will be necessary to take account of the responsibilities as well as the benefits that go with such a policy. I mention this because there have been suggestions recently that, by withdrawing from the alliance or maintaining only nominal membership, Canada could have most of the benefits the system provides without paying for them. I doubt that this approach would appeal to many Canadians or that the benefits would in fact flow so readily. This is not to say that a decision to stay in NATO would mean that we stay for another 20 years, or that our military contribution will remain the same.

Governments are often accused of losing touch with the wishes and aspirations of the people, and the Government of Canada has heard such accusations often enough. But there is one issue on which the Government and the people of Canada stand four-square together - the paramount determination to do our part to prevent war. If Canada decides to stay in NATO, it will be because we are convinced that in NATO we can effectively help to prevent war. If some other course is taken, it will be because we think such a course will better enable us to help to prevent war. No other consideration, however seductive it may appear, will be permitted to deflect Canada from its supreme objective, the prevention of war.

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