

Statement

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STATEMENT

BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE OCCASION OF NATO'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

OTTAWA

April 4, 1989.

Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to pay tribute to the fortieth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has been a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy for successive Canadian governments. What we celebrate is not only forty years of uninterrupted peace in Europe but the values which brought us together then and which still unite us today.

When he signed the Treaty on behalf of Canada, the Right Honourable Lester Pearson stated:

"This treaty, though born out of fear and frustration, must, however, lead to positive social, economic and political achievements which will extend beyond the time of emergency which gave it birth, or the geographic area which it now includes."

We should remember the situation at that time: the Soviet Army, still at wartime strength, remained in Europe; West Berlin was blockaded; nascent democracy in Czechoslovakia had just been crushed in a communist coup; and the still-devastated Western European nations were being overtly threatened with the same fate. That is in stark contrast to the opportunities and prosperity that exist today and NATO has been, and is, an essential instrument in that progress.

The unity and determination of the Alliance has often been tested - by periodic turmoil in Eastern Europe, the Hungarian uprising, the Suez Crisis, the crushing of the Prague Spring, détente in the seventies, Afghanistan and the two-track decision. In each instance, NATO has emerged stronger and more relevant.

Today NATO provides for the common security of over 600 million people in 16 nations on both sides of the Atlantic. The modern era is marked by conflict, yet Europe, the region with the highest concentration of sophisticated weaponry in the world, is enjoying the longest sustained period of peace and stability since the height of the Holy Roman Empire. That peace was made possible through NATO's persistent commitment to pursue complementary goals: first to maintain adequate defences to deter aggression; second to control and limit armaments through carefully negotiated and verifiable agreements; and third to constantly promote dialogue with the countries of Eastern Europe.

Has the Alliance met the test that Lester Pearson set for it 40 years ago? Has it led to positive social, economic and political achievements? Is it more than just a military alliance? Clearly the answer is YES to all three questions.

It was through NATO in 1972 that we and our Allies set down our objectives for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Through that process, we have secured from the Soviet Union and its East European Allies real commitments in human rights, economic cooperation and military security. Today, in the East, there is greater respect for the rights of individuals, greater freedom to travel to visit friends or relatives, and greater freedom to worship. That progress would not have been made without the tenacity with which the Allies pressed the East to extend to their publics the privileges and rights we take for granted.

We are at an historic juncture now. The two superpowers have agreed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. Significant progress has been made on a treaty to reduce by approximately 50 per cent the size of their strategic nuclear arsenals. A new sense of purpose has been injected into efforts to control and ultimately ban chemical weapons. And perhaps most important of all, new negotiations to reduce conventional forces in Europe are underway in Vienna. With imagination and goodwill on both sides we have every reason for optimism.

President Gorbachev is claiming credit for much of this success and certainly he deserves a good deal of credit. After all, he is redefining the Soviet Union. But it is important to remember that President Gorbachev has been responding to ideas and proposals originally made by the West. He has been responding to the unity and fidelity to western values, which are at the heart of the success of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Every Canadian of goodwill celebrates the changes that are appearing in the Soviet Union and in parts of Eastern Europe. They represent the kind of genuine progress toward the social, economic and political achievement Mr. Pearson described. The challenge for NATO is to continue to bring down the tensions between East and West and continue to build up confidence and co-operation. That will require the same unity and determination which have allowed the NATO Alliance to contribute so strongly to the progress so far.

Some have suggested that Canada should step aside from the responsibilities of membership in this Western Alliance. Had we stepped aside before, NATO would not have been able to contribute as constructively to the progress the world sees now. Canada has many means to influence peace in the world. One of those, which has worked for forty years, and is essential to continued progress in East-West relations, is the NATO Alliance whose anniversary we mark today.

NATO has been good for Europe, good for North America and good for Canada. This government is committed to ensuring Canada continues to play a full and leading role in NATO, in helping to shape a new era in East-West relations.