



Canada and NATO

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Canada was one of the prominent members of a small group of States that forged the Alliance together. After the Communist formed the government in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Canada along with the United Kingdom redoubled their efforts with the United States to build a multilateral, collective defence scheme intended to enhance Western security and promote Western values. Canada wanted a collective defence that would be achieved through political and economic resources apart from military means.¹ Due to its traditional linkages with Europe, especially France and the United Kingdom, Canada has a European heritage and political and economic alignments. Nonetheless, geographically located in North America it has close ties with its neighbour to the south and this emphasises its North American identity. Canada's foreign policy was developed balancing these two relations. Canada's commitment to the Alliance was the first time that the country was committing itself to a military Alliance during peacetime, by placing its troops to provide international security without the fear of domestic or international discord.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a military Alliance set up in 1949 to serve three purposes: to deter (erstwhile) Soviet expansionism, forbid the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and encouraging European political integration.² To achieve these goals several Western European nations along with the United States and Canada came together to build a military cooperation and collective defence union. Accordingly, after much discussion and debate the North Atlantic Treaty³ was signed on 04 April, 1949 which set up the NATO.

As signatories to the Treaty the Parties stated that they will continue to strengthen the United Nations “... and (to) refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”⁴ Article 5 of the Treaty, perhaps the foundation of the Alliance, stated that the Allies agree “in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all” and that following such an attack, each Ally would take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force” in response⁵. Significantly, Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty also have an important purpose. Article 2 seeks to eliminate international conflict in international economic policies and Article 3 states, the members will cooperate with each other through mutual aid and assistance to build capacity to resist armed attacks. These articles were included at the behest of Canada.

Canada in NATO

As one of the few countries to have emerged out of the Second World War with a strengthened economy and as one of the world’s ranking military powers, Canada was an important contributor to the NATO. By 1953, Canada was allocating more than eight percent of its GDP to defence spending, this was considerably more than the 1.4 percent it was spending in 1947. During the Korean War, Canada’s defence to GDP ratio was the fourth largest within the Alliance (today it is one of the Alliance’s lowest). It has also been remarked that during the war in Korea, the Canadian Air Force flew jets far advanced than what the US Air Force had over the European theatre to protect its European allies.⁶

Over the years of the Cold War, Canada’s contribution eased and in the latter years it would be cited more for its limited contributions rather than for its active engagement in the formative years of the Alliance. The change occurred as a result of four broad reasons:

- ❖ Canada envisaged an Alliance that would provide military security with equal weight on economic and political cooperation. However, it found that the emphasis on the military aspect far outstripped the other two stated goals.
- ❖ It was becoming expensive for Canada to try to maintain a robust military presence in Western Europe, keeping in view the fact that any attack by the Soviet Union in North America would have to be stopped by Canada. It needed to build an air defence mechanism for the whole of North America. This was not possible to develop if it had to continue its contribution to the European air defence.

- ❖ Another reason for Canada's lessening support to the NATO was the belief within Canada that, as the Western European nations recovered from the war; they would slowly take over the responsibility of their own defence.
- ❖ Lastly, it was felt that by continuing to provide support and attention to the 'needs' of Western Europe, which was recovering well, the limited resources available to Canada could not be provide to those parts of the world where the assistance was much more needed.⁷

Despite these differences Canada has reaffirmed its membership to the Alliance during and beyond the ending of the Cold War. It contributed to the Alliance as per its obligation but it maintained the view that the NATO was not synonymous to the defence of Western Europe and that the Alliance was for the broader cooperation between the member States, not be limited to military aspects only.

Canada and NATO in the 21st Century

In its Lisbon Summit, NATO adopted its 2010 Strategic Concept. The development of a strategic concept was an opportunity for the Alliance to analyse the current and future security environments and their implications for NATO allies, to reflect on the strategic and operational lessons it has learned, and to set out its political and military objectives for the future. According to General Stéphane Abrial, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation, the time was right for a new strategic concept since the previous one was from 1999, when the Alliance had nineteen members as opposed to the current twenty eight members, and before the tragic events of 9/11. Canada played a role in the development of the Strategic Concept as was noted by the Standing Committee on National Defence of the House of Commons, Parliament of Canada, in its report on '*NATO's Strategic Concept and Canada's Role in International Cooperation (2013)*'. It stated that, "The Committee heard that Canada played an integral role in the development of the 2010 Strategic Concept by providing a member to the group of 11 experts which created the framework and worked on the initial draft of the document. We were told that the NATO Secretary General made a deliberate choice in asking Canada to contribute to the team, noting that in addition to representation by the Americans and some Europeans, the Canadian voice was an important one to be heard."⁸

Nonetheless, it became clear that Canada continues to hold the belief that Europe is now capable of defending itself. The decision to withdraw from the NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) program seems to go against the spirit of Smart Defence, Paul Chapin, Vice-President of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, argued that European allies, notwithstanding their current economic problems, are rich enough to “look after themselves and their security.” In providing *evidence* before the Standing Committee on National Defence of the House of Commons, Parliament of Canada he stated that, “In the 60-odd years of NATO, I think the sum total of NATO common funded investment in Canada is a navy pier at Halifax, and only once have NATO assets made it over to North America: post-9/11 when the AWACS were brought over, and a very minor contribution after Hurricane Katrina. So there is a sense that we're not necessarily getting the return on investment, and part of that is driven by the fact that, yes, we do have needs like other Alliance members and we should be beneficiaries of some of those programs that we fund on our own shores. We just don't see that occurring.”⁹ This was further bolstered by Colonel George Petrolekas, a member of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, who in his *evidence* stated, “NATO's boundaries end at the western shores of Canada and the United States. You never see any discussion about the Pacific dimension of NATO. It always seems to end on the western shores of France..... That's one of the things we need to raise. What we would like, first of all, is for NATO to more seriously address the role it has to play in places like Africa and Asia....”¹⁰ It is from these continents that more migrants are coming to Canada and much of the nation's non-US trade comes from and goes to Asia, a portion that is certain to increase substantially.

It is this focus on how NATO is serving the interest of Canada which was perhaps the reason for Canada's delayed response to the commitment to take charge of one, of the four newly established, NATO Response Force (NRF), part of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) to be stationed in the Baltic. Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its military actions in Ukraine have led transatlantic policy-makers to reassess collective defence arrangements across what is frequently referred to as NATO's “eastern flank”. At the NATO's Wales Summit in 2014, the Alliance agreed to form the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). A core feature of the RAP is the 5000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) created within the NRF.¹¹

NATO Defence Ministers announced in June 2016 in Brussels, their final agreement to deploy a 4000 strong force to the Baltic States to counter Russian aggression. The forces are to be

stationed in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The United States, Germany, and Great Britain publicly committed to each leading a battalion much before Canada, which is to lead the fourth battalion. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the announcement during the Warsaw Summit 2016. This would be Canada's largest sustained military presence in Europe in more than a decade. He announced that, Canada will lead a robust multinational NATO battlegroup in Latvia, becoming one of four Framework Nations, as part of the Alliance's enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe. (However, for the moment it will deploy four hundred and fifty soldiers as opposed to the one thousand that the United States would be deploying in Poland by 2017.) Additionally, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) will deploy a frigate that will undertake operational tasks with NATO's maritime forces in the region. Canada will also deploy an Air Task Force, which will include up to six CF-18 fighter aircraft, to conduct periodic surveillance and air policing activities in Europe. The land, maritime and air initiatives announced form Canada's renewed mandate under Operation REASSURANCE and demonstrate Canada's unwavering commitment to NATO, to the protection of Alliance territories, and to the ultimate goal of protecting the safety and security of our citizens.¹² Reports suggest that the decision to deploy was taken after intelligence reports provided details of Russia's efforts to retool its military for a fight with NATO forces and warned that it was mobilising for war.

For Canada, relations with Russia are important not just because it is a neighbour across the Arctic but also because as the Arctic ice begins to melt, it will not only become a new and shorter polar route of commerce between Europe and Asia, but there will be a scramble to stake claim on its rich natural resources. It assumed that all nations that have claims to the Arctic will follow the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to regulate, and control sovereignty claims and development in the Arctic, as well as commercial routes. However, the UNCLOS has not been ratified by all and the overall weakness of the UN in dealing with powerful nations is well known. In such a situation if Canada is to become directly involved in a conflict, the question that arises then, is will it be able to count on the Alliance to come to its assistance, if military assistance should ever become necessary against a newly aggressive Russia. President Putin's has already stated that Russia has interests in the north and will seek to control resources there. It is assumed that China will do the same, perhaps even more aggressively, as it seeks to secure raw materials. What further complicates the situation for Canada is the additional claim on the resources of the Arctic by allies such as the United States. National interests are always

more important than friendships, after all, and some very powerful nations have their eyes on the Arctic's resources.¹³

Canada, NATO and the 'First Use' Policy

Canada (along with Germany and the Netherland) has been urging NATO to review its 'first use' policy with regards to use of nuclear weapons in conflict. This issue was first raised during the months leading to the Washington Summit in the backdrop of the revision of the Strategic Concept (1999). Canada put forth the view that the rationale for a first use policy no longer existed before the Alliance. The Canadian Parliament's Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and International Trade released a report, titled *Canada and the Nuclear Challenge: Reducing the Political Value of Nuclear Weapons for the Twenty-First Century*¹⁴, in which the Committee recommended "that the Government of Canada argue forcefully within NATO that the present re-examination and update as necessary of the Alliance Strategic Concept should include its nuclear component."¹⁵ The report stated, "NATO could, ... preserve its policy of deterrence yet support the need for progressively limiting reliance on nuclear weapons by declaring that it would not use these weapons to respond to a conventional attack, a highly implausible scenario in any case."¹⁶ While the recommendation of 'No First Use' policy was not accepted, the Strategic Concept (1999) did consider Canada's recommendations to state, "The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war.... The Allies ... consider that, with the radical changes in the security situation, ... NATO's ability to defuse a crisis through diplomatic and other means or, should it be necessary, to mount a successful conventional defence has significantly improved. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated by them are therefore extremely remote.... NATO's nuclear forces no longer target any country."¹⁷ Similar views are expressed in the 2010 Strategic Concept as well which stated that, "...The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote."¹⁸ Nonetheless, it was made clear that as "...nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance."¹⁹

Acknowledging both, that NATO will remain a nuclear alliance and Canada's "...allies (within the Alliance) may look at collective defence through different lenses, (a) principle ... still very much the bedrock of the Alliance....", Canada, along with other members have, "... noted that coming to the defence of an ally does not necessarily or automatically imply military action as is

often perceived. ... Invoking Article 5 remains a political decision that requires consensus among NATO member states. That is to say, allies would need to agree that an attack has occurred, they then would need to agree that collective action is warranted, and finally, they would need to agree on what collective action they would take, which could include the use of force.”²⁰ This would ensure that the decision to use nuclear force would be taken in consultation with the North Atlantic Council²¹.

Conclusion

The NATO was at an important aspect of Canada’s foreign and defence policy during the Cold War years, despite the gradual withdrawal from military contribution to the Alliance. It continues to be an important aspect of Canada’s international policy and Canada continues to work to expand the scope of the Alliance to focus more on economic and political cooperation. Nonetheless, two views, perhaps, endure to be part of Canada’s NATO policy. The first is Canada’s belief that European nations are capable and ready to handle the defence of their territory. This view does not negate the fact that Canada would provide assistance, nor would it withdraw from its commitments as an Alliance member. Nonetheless, Canada has continued to raise questions such as, if persistent military presence in Europe is still the best method to protect peace and democratic values. It continues to stress on the need to build relations with nations of Africa and Asia. Canada works closely with its network of diplomatic missions across the region in countries such as Egypt, South Africa Kenya etc in Africa and India, South Korea, Japan etc in Asia to strengthen development and trade cooperation with a range of government, private sector and civil society partners, as well as regional organizations. Canada is also supporting international diplomatic efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism, encourage peaceful conflict resolution and prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.²²

The other issue that Canada faces is the question will NATO’s meet the political and military needs of Canada, if the need so arises in the future. Canada had committed itself to defending its overseas partners, and has stationed troops, aircraft, and deployed most of its navy to do so. Europe's reciprocal commitment to defend North America, especially Canada is next to non-existent. The then Soviet threat and the present Russian threat are directed at Europe. To protect North America, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), a United States and Canada bi-national organization, is charged with the missions of aerospace warning

and aerospace control for North America thereby mitigating the need for NATO defence to some extent.

Despite these questions, Canada continues to be a member of the NATO because the Alliance provides it with additional resources to counter possible threats. “As the global approach to recognizing potential threats such as cyber-security, disruption of energy supplies, nuclear proliferation, ...” hybrid warfare, terrorism etc and the need to confront these threats as far away from national boundaries increases it would require a collective approach to international security. Given that Canada also needs to balance international activities with its own domestic defence and security requirements, in a world of finite resources, NATO continues to offer Canada flexibility in how it chooses to contribute to international peace and security.²³ The Alliance also provides Canada with an additional platform to develop security relations through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe. Partners from around the globe have participated in operations alongside NATO allies in Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere.

To conclude, while questions will continue to be raised about the relevance of NATO and whether or not Canada still benefits from the Alliance, it is for the moment true that NATO is clearly important to Canada’s security interests today and that it remains in Canada’s national interest to be an active member of the Alliance.²⁴

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Disclaimer: Views expressed are of authors and do not reflect the views of the Council.*

Endnotes:

¹ David G. Haglund, “Canada and the Atlantic Alliance: An Introduction and Overview”, in David G. Haglund (edited) *What NATO for Canada* (Centre for International Relations, Queen’s University, Kingston, 2000), pp. 03-04, <http://www.queensu.ca/cidp/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.cidpwww/files/files/publications/Martellos/Martello23.pdf>, Accessed on 19 July 2016.

² North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “A Short History of NATO”, <http://www.nato.int/history/nato-history.html>, Accessed on 18 July 2016.

³ The text of the Treaty is available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, “North Atlantic Treaty”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm, Accessed on 18 July, 2016.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Op. Cit 01, David G. Haglund, pp.05.

⁷ Ibid, pp.05-07.

⁸ Standing Committee on National Defence, House of Commons, 41st Parliament, Second Session, December 2013, Parliament of Canada, “NATO’s Strategic Concept and Canada’s Role in International Cooperation (2013)”, pp. 02, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/committee/412/nddn/reports/rp6313596/nddnrp01/nddnrp01-e.pdf>, Accessed on 20 July 2016.

⁹ Standing Committee on National Defence (Number 040), House of Commons, 41st Parliament, First Session, May 2012, Parliament of Canada, Evidence by Paul Chapin, who is the vice-president of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, and Colonel George Petrolekas, a member of the board of directors. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5587774&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=1>, Accessed on 20 July 2016.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ NATO Review Magazine “Securing the Nordic-Baltic Region,” <http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2016/Also-in-2016/security-baltic-defense-nato/EN/index.htm>, Accessed on 20 July 2016.

¹² Prime Minister of Canada, “Prime Minister Attends NATO Summit In Warsaw”, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/07/09/prime-minister-attends-nato-summit-warsaw> and Prime Minister of Canada, “Canada Makes Commitment To NATO Defence And Deterrence Measures”, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/07/08/canada-makes-commitment-nato-defence-and-deterrence-measures>, Accessed on 20 July 2016.

¹³ J.L. Granatstein, “Is NATO Still Necessary for Canada?”, http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/7804~v~Is_NATO_Still_Necessary_for_Canada_.pdf, Accessed on 18 July 2016.

¹⁴ Report is available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=1031537&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=36&Ses=1>, Accessed on 26 July 2016.

¹⁵ Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Parliament of Canada, “Canada and the Nuclear Challenge: Reducing the Political Value of Nuclear Weapons for the Twenty-First Century”, December 1998, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=1031537&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=36&Ses=1&File=213#premier>, Accessed on 26 July 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid. Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Parliament of Canada, “Canada and the Nuclear Challenge: Reducing the Political Value of Nuclear Weapons for the Twenty-First Century”, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=1031537&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=36&Ses=1&File=213#premier>, Accessed on 26 July 2016.

¹⁷ NATO, “The Alliance’s Strategic Concept”, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm, Accessed on 26 July 2016.

¹⁸ NATO, “Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” pp 14, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf, Accessed on 26 July 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Op. Cit 08, Standing Committee on National Defence, House of Commons, 41st Parliament, Second Session, December 2013, Parliament of Canada, pp.19-20.

²¹ The North Atlantic Council (NAC) is the principal political decision-making body within NATO. It brings together high-level representatives of each member country to discuss policy or operational questions requiring collective decisions. The Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) has comparable authority to the NAC for matters within its specific area of competence, i.e., nuclear policies, planning and consultation procedures. However, in practice, the NAC convenes far more frequently than the NPG and covers a broader scope of themes, as broad as the member countries decide it should be. Consequently, it is commonly referred to as NATO’s principal decision-making body.

²² Global Affairs Canada, Government of Canada, “Canada and the Middle East & North Africa”, <http://www.international.gc.ca/name-anmo/index.aspx?lang=eng>, Global Affairs Canada, Government of Canada, “Canada and Asia-Pacific”, http://www.international.gc.ca/asia_pacific-asie_pacifique/index.aspx?lang=eng, Accessed on 27 July 2016.

²³ Op. Cit 08, Standing Committee on National Defence, House of Commons, 41st Parliament, Second Session, December 2013, Parliament of Canada, pp. 20.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 21.