The Belief Systems of Critics: General Patterns between 1963 and 1989

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CHAPTER FOUR

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General Patterns between 1963 and 1989

Some decision-makers opposed to Canada’s Alliance commitments were united by similar underlying beliefs and assumptions. This chapter identifies elements of a belief system shared by many of these individuals, referred to here as “ Critics.”

SUBSTANTIVE BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF CRITICS

Critics feared entrapment

In contrast to defenders, Critics were deeply concerned about the possibility of entrapment. They were suspicious about the likelihood and possible consequences of the allies drawing Canada into an armed confrontation and had doubts about NATO undertakings, particularly American strategic objectives.

Fears of entrapment were expressed in different circumstances and with varying degrees of intensity. Some Critics feared that Canada was in danger of once again becoming entangled in European affairs. According to Eric Kierans, a member of the Cabinet Committee on External Policy and Defence in 1969, “people like [my] Mother had left Europe to get away from it and not bring it with her.” It was Kierans’ opinion that: “Cabinet Ministers should not be so acutely conscious of our allies’ pleas as to the desperate need for Canada’s continued military contribution abroad ... In the context of European problems it [is] important that the Soviet empire be put on notice that any of its adventures in Western Europe would be contained and met with resistance but European countries should look after that basic problem at this point in time and we should be devoting our resources to other priorities.” Other decision-makers suspected that Canada was so entangled in NATO that the Alliance, not the Canadian
government, dictated Canada's foreign and defence policies. Shortly after assuming power in 1968, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau assessed the situation in the following terms: "And I am afraid, in the situation which we had reached, NATO had in reality determined all of our defence policy. We had no defence policy, so to speak, except that of NATO. And our defence policy had determined all of our foreign policy. And we had no foreign policy of any importance except that which flowed from NATO. And this is a false perspective for any country."4

Critics also tended to suspect that the government was trapped into fulfilling military commitments to NATO that the other allies, not Canada, deemed necessary. Certain sectors within the government were criticized for shaping the armed forces not in view of "prior Canadian needs" but "for fear of the approbation of our allies."5 As was declared in one secret Cabinet meeting in March 1969, "External Affairs should not explain to Cabinet what the Dutch, Italians and Germans think our [NATO] policy should be. They should explain to other countries what our situation is and what our policies are."6

Aside from concerns about the extent of the Alliance's impact on Canadian defence policy, Critics also expressed doubts about NATO strategies and undertakings. A few senior advisers to Prime Minister Trudeau, including his foreign policy adviser Ivan Head, considered it irresponsible "for Canada to continue in NATO without attempting to make rational many of the inconsistencies in NATO policy which weaken the organization’s credibility." According to Head’s secret report for Cabinet, Canada should not continue to participate in NATO simply "because of the exhilaration of ‘consultation’ or the entreaties of the Europeans."7

Critics also worried that the United States might unwillingly draw Canada and the other allies into an armed conflict. As Lester Pearson wrote in a personal letter in 1961 (when he opposed acquiring nuclear weapons), there was a danger that the United States could entrap NATO in a global holocaust: "The Liberal party also believes that NATO should reduce its dependence on nuclear weapons in US hands which might only serve the purpose – in the absence of adequate conventional strength – of converting a limited military incursion into a global nuclear holocaust."8

As well, a number of decision-makers were alarmed by shifts in emphasis in American policy; they were leery, too, about the emotionalism, partisanship, and interservice rivalries that affected American defence policy-making. Once again, as Pearson’s comments indicate, certain American viewpoints left him discomforted and uneasy. As he told the Institute for Strategic Studies during an in camera lecture in 1965:
I was in Washington a few months ago. I spent an evening talking about a lot of things to some people who are pretty important in the present administration. I was surprised and somewhat disturbed to learn that there is a view in Washington that there is no use trying to do much about this, that it is inevitable, and that while we have to go through the motions and make all the usual declarations about the desirability of putting an end to nuclear weapons and especially to stop the proliferation of them, there is not only very little that we can do about it but, perhaps, in the long run it would not be a bad thing to have neighbours, who are on bad terms with each other having nuclear weapons as a deterrent on both sides to aggression ... Well, that may be, but I must say that I do not get very much comfort from a world organized on that basis.9

The idea that American defence policy-making was dominated by unsound military thinking or by excessive fear and antipathy was often posited. During the 1980s, Prime Minister Trudeau expressed concern about the influence of President Reagan's views on American defence policy-making. During a private meeting with West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Trudeau expressed the opinion that Reagan held unrealistic views about the possibility of bringing the USSR to its knees and withering away the Soviet empire. According to Trudeau, President Reagan and his Californian advisers were "the problem" while US Secretary of State George Shultz "might be more open to flexibility."10 Similarly, a close adviser to Trudeau, MP Paul McRae, wrote Trudeau that Reagan was dangerously aggressive, and that members of the American military were intent on inciting war.11 Whereas some Critics apparently feared that individual Americans, such as the president, posed a problem, others believed that the United States' superpower status ensured expansionist policies; they warned that segments of American opinion were dangerously aggressive, and that important members of the élite and the American military were bent on inciting war. For many, the chance that the Alliance leader might drag Canada into an armed confrontation not of its own choosing was in itself a salient threat.

If there was an underlying theme to these diverse comments and concerns, it was that involvement in the Alliance brought with it dangers of entrapment. Indeed, the imperative became that Canada should avoid, or avert, any action that might risk the country becoming embroiled in a deadly superpower conflict.

Critics believed Canada's established military ties to the allies should be restructured and de-emphasized

Critics sought to de-emphasize, if not restructure, Canada's traditional military ties to the allies. In general, these decision-makers
opposed maintaining or increasing the number of Canadian Forces personnel earmarked for NATO, including the number of Canadians deployed in Europe. They were generally critical of the government’s promises to modernize and commit more weapons systems and equipment to NATO, and they were generally intent on decreasing the percentage of the federal defence budget and the GNP directed toward Alliance purposes.

Several Critics thought the government should sever its military ties to the Alliance in order to encourage other countries within NATO and the Warsaw Pact to de-escalate. Some recommended Canada withdraw entirely from military alliances such as NATO and NORAD in order to hasten the process of disarmament on both sides. As Eric Kierans argued in an important speech in January 1969, “Canada’s withdrawal from its military commitments would hasten this day of reckoning – the realization by people on both sides of the Berlin wall that these billions are being spent each year, not as a deterrent against the other side but to impose order on themselves.”

While some sought to sever Canada’s traditional ties to NATO, others recognized that, even if Canada withdrew from the Alliance, its territory would remain a target in a nuclear war. They nevertheless pressed the government to begin symbolically disentangling itself from NATO as an example for other nations. As James Richardson, minister without portfolio, told his Cabinet colleagues in 1969, by reducing its military power in NATO, Canada could set an example for the Warsaw Pact and other non-aligned nations to follow. In Richardson’s view, a symbolic reduction of Canada’s military commitments would challenge the other side to de-escalate as well as foster a climate of international understanding.13 Prime Minister Trudeau argued similarly in 1968, saying that by restructuring, if not withdrawing, its military commitments from Europe, Canada could set a precedent and thus contribute to world peace. As the newly elected prime minister, he pressed Ottawa bureaucrats, “When are we going to start trying to de-escalate? When are we going to arrive at a plan to achieve peace by not getting stronger militarily?”14 In Trudeau’s view, the government could promote world peace by reducing its traditional military commitments to NATO and rechanneling resources into other avenues. Prime minister Trudeau commented to the British prime minister at a closed meeting in 1969:

The question which the Canadian government was asking itself was whether Canada could do something else which might be more effective in promoting the common objectives of the West. The escalation of military power between the USA and the Soviet Union was reaching frightening proportions. How much further could it go without by its very weight destroying our system of
values? Could we not do something to augment the chances in favour of peace rather than the chances against war? ... For example, the provision of aid on a more massive scale, the construction of more “exemplary societies” in the West, the development of the standards of social justice ... Was it not possible that if NATO were not so strong militarily, the Soviet Union might not be so afraid of liberalizing tendencies in Eastern Europe? The Canadian government was asking itself whether the time had not come to de-escalate NATO, whether guidelines could not be developed for negotiations with the Soviet Union to that end, whether the Soviet Union might not be prepared in particular for a quid pro quo for a Canadian military withdrawal from NATO.15

Whereas Trudeau initially assumed that reducing the number of Canada’s overseas stationed forces would de-escalate the arms race and promote world peace, other high-level Critics thought that reducing Canada’s military ties to Western Europe might contribute to détente and peaceful co-operation with the Soviet Union. Donald Macdonald argued in 1969 that Canada now had a “particularly unique opportunity” to promote détente with Eastern Europe. As president of the Privy Council, he told the Cabinet that, by withdrawing from Europe, “Canada would be in a far better position to play a more active diplomatic role and exercise all of the options on détente with Eastern Europe.” Moreover, withdrawal of Canadian Forces from Europe “could contribute to a lifting of the military siege against the Soviet Union ... influence the siege mentality of the Soviet Union’s leaders ... penetrate the Warsaw bloc countries to encourage liberalism and western contracts ... [and accentuate] internal problems within the Soviet empire to force a more rapid accommodation ...”16 Clearly, Critics at times assumed that by withdrawing or de-emphasizing Canada’s traditional military commitments to NATO, the country could help foster world peace, détente, or disarmament.

While many Critics believed the government should sever or reduce its established ties to the Alliance, some argued that Canada could divert its resources into less traditional commitments. Instead of withdrawal, they suggested a restructuring.17 A few months after assuming power, Pierre Trudeau, Ivan Head, and others pressed for and obtained a reordering of Canadian defence priorities. The protection of Canadian sovereignty was now in first place, while the fulfillment of NATO commitments was in third place, after “the defence of North America in cooperation with US forces.”18 Trudeau characterized these efforts to increase defence and surveillance over Canadian territory as another way of contributing to NATO’s overall security.19 In fact, he personally wrote NATO’s secretary-general in 1969, saying, “It is my view that Canada’s forces deployed in North
America and the adjacent oceans for the protection of the United States deterrent contribute to the security of the European members of NATO just as the defensive efforts of NATO members in Europe contribute to the security of Canada."20 Trudeau also made it clear to Cabinet, however, that "in the allocation of resources to the defence of North America, when the choice was between the first and second priority, the Canadian government would spend money on the first priority and only spend money on the second priority, primarily, if it assisted the first and, secondly, if it was necessary for political reasons."21 Fulfilling Canada’s NATO commitments was now the government’s third-ranking priority.

Some Critics proposed that, as an alternative to established military ties, Canada should attempt to foster greater economic interdependence among the allies. This was one of the major themes explored by Lester Pearson as part of his work on NATO’s "Committee of Three."22 While NATO’s role in fostering economic interdependence was never very important to the other allies, John Holmes wrote later that “Pearson and [Escott] Reid and company did not simply want to pretend that NATO was more than a military alliance in order to fool the public. They really believed it, they really wanted it to be something more.”23

Critics also argued that Canada might contribute in a different way to Alliance solidarity by helping open up channels of communication among the allies, pressing for increased allied consultation, and seeking to give the smaller allies greater influence over Alliance decision-making. Pearson believed that NATO could be strengthened, for instance, by according greater power and influence to “the European side of the coalition,” although “nobody did anything about it.”24 Later in his tenure, Trudeau also pressed for a more open exchange of views and what he called a “deepening of consensus” among the allies. As he told reporters in 1971, during his first trip to meet with Soviet leaders:

Canada is a great friend and neighbour of the USA and its ally in NORAD. But it is important for Canada to diversify its channels of communication because of the overwhelming proximity of the USA. Economically, culturally and even militarily it threatens our national identity. We are good allies but we need to diversify our communications with all the significant powers of the world. Hence we remained in NATO. This is even more true with the USSR – another superpower. If they can take time to discuss with us we are glad to do so.25

In keeping with his emphasis on opening channels of communication “with all the significant powers of the world in NATO,” Prime Minister
Trudeau also criticized the practice of inviting heads of state to NATO meetings in order to “rubber-stamp” documents which were already, in his words, “cooked” and “pre-cooked.” As Trudeau remarked to the press at the NATO Summit meeting in 1982, it was a pity that allied representatives could not communicate with one another more openly:

People come in with a speech which has been drafted by their officials in Brussels who have been working for years together, and then they each make speeches which are nothing more than paraphrases of the Communiqué which has been drafted in Brussels by people who have been working for years together. And so we all make speeches repeating what we are all saying in the Communiqué, and nobody has a chance to say: “Well, why did you say that? And where did you get this idea? And what makes you think that? The people across the river here have not got another point of view.” So that is a bit of a pity.26

Some influential decision-makers proposed that Canada contribute to international peace and security by diverting more resources to other multilateral organizations such as the United Nations. For example, devoting more human and diplomatic resources to the role of “helpful fixer” at the UN was proposed as an alternative, less costly way in which Canada could promote international – and thereby the Alliance’s – security. Thus, according to one drafter of the Department of External Affairs’ 1980 foreign policy review:

The main argument for Canadian membership in NATO and NORAD and the expenditure by Canada of about four billion dollars a year on defence is that Canada is contributing to a deterrent which makes it less likely that the Soviet Union will follow policies involving serious risks of precipitating a world war. There are other and less expensive ways by which Canada can promote its security. Lester Pearson by his activities during the Suez crisis in 1956 substantially reduced the chances that the crisis might lead to a world war. He did the same by his contribution to the achievement of an armistice in Korea in 1953. It is impossible to put a price tag on this. One could hazard the guess that the value of Pearson’s contributions to Canadian security by helping to prevent a world war arising out of Korea in 1953 or the Suez in 1956 was greater than all the Canadian defence expenditures since the second world war. Helpful fixing costs the Canadian taxpayer almost nothing.27

Other Critics suggested that, as an alternative contribution to the Alliance, Canada should promote multilateral arms control and disarmament discussions. According to an important speech by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1969, “it so happened that NATO after 20 years in
our opinion had developed too much into a military alliance and not enough into a political alliance, not enough into an alliance which is interested not only in keeping the balance of deterrence of tactical power in Europe but into an alliance which is interested in arms control and de-escalation.”28

Despite these suggestions about how Canada’s established military ties to the Alliance might be de-emphasized or restructured, Critics usually did not see themselves as deliberately trying to undermine the Alliance. Most simply saw NATO from a different perspective, viewing it as an institution based on irrelevant and outmoded patterns of military thought and interaction. Lester Pearson admitted in his autobiography that, “by 1956, in fact, I was losing hope that NATO would evolve beyond an alliance for defence; and even there I was beginning to have doubts about its future.”29 During his first couple of years in office, Pierre Trudeau also believed that the Alliance had lost its relevance and it was time to consider other ways to reorient Canadian defence and foreign policy. He explained to reporters in 1969: “That is why we have embarked on a defence and foreign policy review, to say that NATO is good, it has played a role, but perhaps there is something else. Perhaps there are other ways to forward the cause of peace and, perhaps other ways of influencing the strategic decisions.”30 In a fashion typical of Critics, Trudeau did not deliberately seek to undermine NATO. During the defence and foreign policy review period between 1968 and 1971, Trudeau shifted from favouring the withdrawal of Canadian Forces from Europe to being critical of NATO. He began to support continued Canadian membership as long as the government first pursued defence alternatives of a higher priority (i.e., sovereignty, North American defence). It may have been, as Admiral Robert Falls, former Chief of the Defence Staff suggested, that Trudeau felt “there were certain things he could do politically and certain things he couldn’t, both domestically and internationally.”31 Once Trudeau and his colleagues agreed in 1969 to reject the option of non-alignment and remain in NATO, Trudeau adhered to what he referred to as the Canadian public’s position.32

Over the years, however, Trudeau continued to criticize NATO decision-making processes, to question the extent of Canada’s different commitments, and to express dissatisfaction with select NATO commitments and strategic initiatives.33 He saw fit in 1969, for example, to express his scepticism to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Defence Secretary Robert McNamara about the value of a small Canadian mechanized unit in the West German plains. Rather than agreeing to maintain or increase the size of the Canadian brigade,
Trudeau inquired whether it would not be more appropriate for Canada to be assigned the job of watching Soviet nuclear submarines in Hudson Bay. He asked if a case should not be made for a substantial maritime role in the Atlantic for Canada, and he pointed out that Canada's military presence in Europe was intended not so much to scare "our potential enemies" as "to impress our friends." While this line of questioning reflected Trudeau's scepticism about maintaining Canadian land forces in Western Europe and an ASW role in the Atlantic, others saw it as an indication of the prime minister's fundamental opposition to NATO. Probably the most concise synopsis of Trudeau's viewpoint as it evolved between 1968 and 1979 is found in a transcript of a 1974 press conference. In reply to questions about NATO, Trudeau commented:

It's not that we want to become good members of NATO, I think we are good members of NATO ... we are part of the Alliance, we want to remain part of the Alliance. We are not pacifists, though we are pacific. We believe that in our position neutralism is not the best solution, that being members of these two alliances — NATO and NORAD — is Canadian policy. We have discussed it publicly in Parliament and with the Canadian public and it was and remains our position ... In other words, don't be afraid as some of them appear to be that Canada is dissatisfied with the idea or the reality of the Alliance, but do realize that criticism within Canada is not on the existence of it but on certain insufficiencies or incapacities that it has demonstrated ...

Trudeau felt, then, that it was appropriate to criticize "certain insufficiencies or incapacities" of NATO, but did not see himself as deliberately trying to undermine the Alliance. It merely seemed that, from his perspective, NATO was an irrelevant and outmoded institution. It was not until 1991, when he was out of office, that Trudeau told Chief of the Defence Staff John de Chastelain that he could not understand why it had taken Canada so long — twenty more years — to get out of NATO.

Generally speaking, three streams of thought developed among Critics with respect to the consequences and implications of restructuring and de-emphasizing Canada's established military commitments to NATO. The first stream assumed that reducing or withdrawing Canada's contribution of forces, equipment, and money from Western Europe would be of little importance to the continuing function of the Alliance or to Canada's influence on the allies. As some Cabinet Ministers pointed out in 1969, "In pure numerical terms there was minimal military significance to our contribution [and] the Canadian contribution added little to the overall balance of
conventional forces in the Warsaw and NATO Pact countries.”38 According to Critics such as Donald Macdonald, Ivan Head, and Eric Kierans, Canada’s contribution to European security could be withdrawn because past experience showed it was neither needed nor appreciated by the other allies; moreover, it certainly played no role in influencing Canada’s other ties with Europe, such as trade. As Macdonald told the Cabinet in 1969:

Western Europeans are now mature enough to defend themselves without the intervention of Canadian support. Additionally, there is no evidence that Canadian presence or absence will be a major determinant in the United States’ decision to continue to play the great power role in Europe. The Europeans will continue to defend themselves because it is in their interest to do so and the United States will continue to participate in European defence as long as it considers it to be in its interest to do so. A negative decision by Canada will not affect those choices ... in purely military terms, there cannot surely be any serious claim that we have very great influence ... that we have a diplomatic position which we exercise out of all proportion to our military addition ... I would regard the argument as basically not proven...39

In his report to Cabinet, Ivan Head echoed Macdonald’s concerns: “It must be remembered that the European members of NATO have a combined population of 300 millions and a combined GNP of U.S. $500 billion. Measured in these terms, any possible Canadian contribution of military forces would be of marginal military influence.”40

Similarly, the first stream of thought among Critics believed that Canada’s contributions to Europe’s defence made no difference to the way in which the allies treated Canada in other issue areas. According to notes taken during one Cabinet meeting of a debate between Kierans and Mitchell Sharp, Kierans argued:

The fact that we had been in Europe in two world wars and were a member of NATO did not influence in the slightest the position of European negotiators in the trade area. France was now telling us that if we spent $20 million on the European Launcher Development Organization that they would finally be convinced of our interest in Europe. Next year we would be asked to demonstrate our interest in Europe in some other way. Mr. Sharp had not proved ... that a single economic decision was favourably influenced by our NATO membership.41

In reply to the argument that Canada would encounter a hostile reaction from its allies if the government was to sever or de-emphasize its established military ties, Critics often asserted that cutting
Canada’s traditional military contributions would likely have little impact. As Donald Macdonald argued, “I do not believe that we would be subject to increasing hostility in GATT, in the OECD, or in functional multilateral dealings with European countries merely because we were not participating in the security arrangements.”

Whereas this first stream assumed that Canada’s nuclear and conventional commitments to Western Europe were of little significance, the second stream believed that the acquisition of nuclear or conventional weapons could increase the likelihood of war either by accident or miscalculation; and reducing Canada’s NATO commitments might therefore decrease levels of international tension. Prime Minister Trudeau was himself initially inclined to cut back, perhaps withdraw, Canadian Forces from Europe, because he thought their withdrawal might contribute to a lessening of tensions and a reduction of the possibility of unintentional conventional war. As he explained to the minister of National Defence and the minister of External Affairs, “If NATO should engage in a conventional war with the Warsaw Pact, NATO would eventually lose because of the Warsaw Pact’s superior conventional forces. If NATO resorted to nuclear weapons everything would be lost. In these circumstances, what is the point of NATO maintaining substantial military forces?”

The third stream of thought did not presume that Canada’s commitments to NATO made a large difference in military terms, nor were these commitments important as evidence of Alliance resolve and solidarity, given the overall balance of strategic nuclear forces. As Gordon Robertson, clerk of the PCO and secretary to Cabinet, wrote the Prime Minister in 1969, owing to the bilateral nuclear balance of terror, Canada’s conventional commitments to Europe were no longer meaningful. Similarly, Ivan Head counselled that Canada’s traditional commitment to defend Western Europe and North America was relatively inconsequential in military terms as well as in terms of signalling Canada’s resolve to retaliate against the Soviet Union; rather, he argued, what was important was whether Canada’s military forces impressed “our friends.” Head’s top secret report for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in 1969 asked: “What size, and directed to what ends, should be our military force in order to ensure the continued goodwill and co-operation of our United States neighbour and, to a much lesser extent, our other friends and allies? (Briefly, the role of the Canadian Armed Forces is not, initially, to impress our enemies, but rather our friends. This is a political, not a military, role.)” For those in this third stream of thought, contributing to the balance of strategic, tactical, and conventional forces was no longer a critical pursuit. In the nuclear age, whatever the balance
of both sides’ forces prior to an armed conflict, the final outcome would be equally and totally devastating.

The first stream, then, assumed Canada’s military contribution to the Alliance was relatively insignificant and might therefore be reduced. The second stream was primarily concerned that strengthening Canada’s military commitments would exacerbate a dangerous situation and increase the likelihood of escalation. The third stream presumed that, because of the nuclear balance, Canada’s contribution of conventional forces to NATO was largely unnecessary. In addition to these three streams of thinking, Critics sometimes recommended that Canada de-emphasize or sever particular military commitments to the Alliance without assessing their strategic rationale and implications. It was sometimes recommended, too, that certain weapons systems be cancelled, reduced, or not acquired because Critics wanted, above all, to depart from a prescribed course of action or policy direction. Cabinet ministers Donald Macdonald and Eric Kierans, for example, recommended cutting back the number of CF-104 aircraft Canada deployed in Europe from 108 to 88. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, “other delegations at Brussels made clear their concern about Canadian plans to reduce the number of aircraft in its air division in Europe ....” During the subsequent Cabinet debate, Macdonald, Kierans, and to a lesser extent Trudeau, dwelled on the continued importance of signalling Canada’s intention to promote general de-escalation by reducing the number of aircraft, rather than on the strategic purpose for deploying these aircraft and their military implications.46 Although such recommendations were sometimes attributed to naivété about strategic matters, they indicated that Critics at times sought, above all, to depart from a previous policy direction.

Critics believed the external threat to the Alliance was exaggerated and misunderstood

Whereas Defenders portrayed the external threat to the Alliance as aggressive and opportunistic, their counterparts tended to argue that the nature of the communist threat was exaggerated, that the malign intentions of the Soviet Union had been misinterpreted, or that the Russians could be trusted. Trudeau’s frustration with the orthodox opinions advanced in the Stafeur report prompted him to secretly appoint Ivan Head as coordinator of a study of Canadian defence policy, which was unexpectedly presented to Cabinet in March 1969. Head was unconvinced that there existed “a probable, direct and credible threat to Canadian territorial integrity”: “This leaves the
Canadian government, unlike the governments of its NATO allies, free to make the major decisions concerning Canadian defence policy solely upon political considerations – what size, and directed to what ends, should be our military force in order to accord with the very real desire of a large element of the Canadian public that we maintain some form of armed forces …”47 As one who worked in a different milieu in the PCO and with Treasury Board, Head seemed relatively uninhibited about rethinking the nature of the threat and Canada’s options in that regard. Another mandarin from the PCO, Gordon Robertson, viewed the threat with less attention to the military’s established perspective and more attention to “political” considerations. He argued in 1969:

Once it is clearly recognized that broad political considerations are more important than military factors in determining Canadian defence policy, the next step is obvious. It is simply to shape defence policy to accord primarily with the most important political factors involved. This guideline suggests that the size, roles and structure of our forces should be developed in the future primarily as a function of our relations with the United States and Canadian internal security … [a military presence in Europe] may represent to a significant extent a by-product of our relations with the United States.48

While some Critics assumed the external threat to the Alliance was exaggerated, others noted that this threat was misunderstood. As Paul McRae wrote the prime minister, his impression of the Soviet Union was “of a nation very insecure, internally and externally, and with a government that is extremely conservative, and with a neurotic passion for secrecy … The internal problems … would seem to me to make any idea of invading the NATO powers rather ridiculous. Their inability to manage their satellites, the failure in Afghanistan, and the string of failures in other parts of the world, would lead me to believe that the shrill statements of Mr. Reagan, and his associates appear much overdone.”49

Many Critics assumed, too, that NATO’s chief adversary was motivated by many of the same concerns. “Is the Soviet Union not as afraid of us as we are of it?” Trudeau asked Ottawa bureaucrats in 1968.50 Similarly, James Richardson told the Cabinet Committee on External Policy and Defence in 1969 that the Soviet government faced “the same type of domestic demands and difficulties” as Canada. In Richardson’s view, “an alternative should be sought whereby Canada could signal to members of the Soviet empire that we realized and understood that their basic concerns were similar to ours.”51
As a consequence of their refusal to accept conventional threat assessments, Critics were often labelled as "naive," "simplistic idealists," or "doves." Their beliefs about the measure of the threat to the Alliance were usually based, however, on plausible evidence and logical reasoning. For instance, whereas some argued that the Pentagon and the CIA were exaggerating both Warsaw Pact military spending and the Soviet lead in arms technology and weaponry, others contended that the Russians had established an Eastern European buffer-zone and were acting aggressively in client states such as Czechoslovakia or Afghanistan because of insecurity, not malign motives fuelled by expansionist tendencies. Others maintained that self-interest, the threat of nuclear destruction, or modern verification techniques now ensured that the Soviet leadership could be trusted to disarm; a few, however, argued that the prevailing view of the threat was based not so much on historical fact as on American ideological conviction or the attendant demands of American domestic politics.

Owing in part to their conviction that the threat to NATO from the Soviet Union was exaggerated, Critics were often concerned about the spiraling arms race and the increased likelihood of accidental or miscalculated nuclear war. It was frequently argued that adversaries could justify arms buildups and bellicose defence postures based solely upon each other's threatening demeanour. As Eric Kierans explained in 1969: "NATO may or may not have been the appropriate answer to a particular threat in 1948. As a continuing institution, it is something else again. Instead of a genuine deterrent against a genuine threat, it has become a self-justifying deterrent against a non-existent military threat. NATO's existence guarantees that of the Warsaw Pact, each needs the existence of the other to justify its own existence. Two military bureaucracies leaping upon each other for reassurance." In a similar fashion, Prime Minister Trudeau emphasized that the real problem now was how to halt the spiral. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in 1982, Trudeau said: "We arm out of fear for our security and we will disarm only if we are convinced that the threat to our security has abated ... Security, unfortunately, is an elusive concept. It is not only a matter of weaponry. It is also a matter of perception. When each side acts in ways which the other perceives to be threatening, the gulf of suspicion widens between East and West."

For many Critics, the main threat to Canada's security was no longer the Soviet Union but the threat of nuclear war arising out of both sides' surfeit of weapons. The greatest threat to Canada was not
an armed attack, but the danger of a miscalculated or accidental conflict escalating uncontrollably to full-scale nuclear warfare. As Cabinet Minister Walter Gordon wrote to Prime Minister Pearson in 1964: "In the opinion of many people, including myself, the prospect of all-out war with the Soviet Union was less than it had been some years before. If there should be a war it would almost certainly be a thermonuclear war in which Canada’s contribution would be insignificant ... I, for one, have thought for some time that the Europeans should assume a greater responsibility for the defence of Western Europe and that Canada’s commitments there should be very substantially reduced." 58 According to a draft statement issued by Trudeau in 1969, "to say that there is no present threat to Canada’s territorial integrity is not to say that there is no present threat from without to Canada’s physical security. Should a major world conflict break out, it will not involve territorial aggrandizement at Canada’s expense, but it could easily involve mass destruction within Canada." 59 Writing twenty years later, Paul McRae also referred to the danger of accidental war escalating to thermonuclear war: "There is no doubt that the Pershing II missile, the Stealth Cruise, a host of anti-satellite and satellite weaponry, all escalate the danger of an accidental war and lessen the chances of meaningful survival." 60 For many Critics, the threat of nuclear war was much more dangerous and salient than any threat from the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact. As Trudeau remarked in 1983: "Today we have long since lost the ability to comprehend the force of a nuclear blast in terms of any comparison with traditional explosives ... The choice we face is clear and present. We can without effort abandon our fate to the mindless drift toward nuclear war. Or we can gather our strength, working in good company to turn aside the forces bearing down on us, on our children, on this Earth." 61

Some Critics viewed the Soviet threat in the context of a structural problem arising out of the competition between two heavily armed superpowers. Fearing that Canada was in danger of being entrapped, and subjected to great power ambitions, conflicting ideologies, and ominous military capabilities, they saw the Soviet menace as part of a larger threat system dominated by opposing military alliances and an ongoing arms race. As a result, Critics were sometimes not averse to suggesting that the United States was also provocative and dangerous. For some, the prospect of America undertaking independent military initiatives was fearsome, along with the prospect of the Soviet threat being manipulated to justify such initiatives. These worries were often exacerbated by American behaviour in a variety of domestic, continental, and international incidents, from McCarthyism to North
American defence policy to Cuba. The demonstrated penchant of Americans to indulge in sabre-rattling, their willingness to resort to aggressive military tactics, their propensity to escalate the arms race without sufficient allied consultation – a number of Critics focused on these concerns in their dealings with Canada’s closest neighbour.⁶²

Critics believed both sides’ weapons were unnecessarily threatening

While Defenders focused on the adversary’s intentions and capabilities, Critics tended to portray both sides’ weapons systems and strategies as unnecessarily offensive. They feared that both opposing blocs would perceive each other’s military equipment and forces as overly threatening, leading, in turn, to a spiraling arms race and the dangers of unintentional escalation. Many Critics pointed out, therefore, that Canada’s own weapons and strategies were not necessarily required, and might, indeed, be perceived by the enemy as dangerously offensive.

In his top-secret 1969 study, Ivan Head pointed out that Canada’s capabilities in anti-submarine warfare “broke the rules” that ensured the stability of the deterrent system precisely because they were intended to undermine the Soviet Union’s second-strike capability. As he warned the prime minister and Cabinet, “The purpose of our ASW program is to harass and destroy the Soviet missile-carrying submarine which is designed to perform a second-strike role.” Head went on to criticize the government’s commitment to supply nuclear-tipped CF-104 aircraft to Europe for their first-strike capability: “Our air division in Europe is based a few minutes flying time from East Germany, is a soft target, and is armed with air to surface nuclear weapons ... In the eyes of the Soviets it is credible only as a first-strike system.”⁶³

Another highly influential policy-maker under Trudeau, Gordon Robertson, warned that Canadian weapons systems might be perceived by the Soviet Union as designed for attack. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Robertson explained: “The Canadian nuclear strike aircraft are almost certainly already targeted by the other side. The logical deduction is either that these aircraft might never get off the ground if shooting started or, as viewed from the east, that they are deployed for a surprise attack, i.e. for aggression not defence. The heavy mechanized brigade is not designed to contain local conflicts which may erupt somewhere along the boundaries which now divide the opposing blocs in Europe.”⁶⁴

As well, several Critics felt compelled to point out to the other NATO allies, behind closed doors, that their weapons systems and
strategies might be interpreted by the enemy as overly threatening. In 1969, Trudeau voiced his own doubts to Henry Kissinger about American intentions to defend the United States’ second-strike capability (in the form of Intercontinental ballistic missiles [ICBMs], bombers, and submarines). According to the secret report of Trudeau and Kissinger’s discussion:

The Prime Minister voiced his reservations about the United States’ determination to take additional measures to protect not only Minutemen sites but also SAC bases and Polaris-carrying submarines. I saw Kissinger and Reston raise eyebrows and exchange surprised glances as if they had been warned that the Prime Minister might hold such views ... My impression is that ... the [US] authorities had not been prepared to believe that our Prime Minister would question in such a basic and thorough fashion present defence policies.  

The idea that allied weapons were overtly threatening led some Critics to warn, too, that, by storing or testing US nuclear weapons in Canada, the country would contribute to international tensions, new combat capabilities, and possibly provoke a Soviet first-strike or an accidental nuclear war. If the Canadian government agreed to test the air-launched cruise missile for the United States, Paul McRae warned the prime minister, Canada would possibly contribute to the development of an American first-strike capability. If Canada consented to deploy Pershing and cruise missiles, there was a danger that the Soviet Union would not back down but continue to deploy weapons to more troublesome areas: “Thus the deployment of the Pershing II missile with a 6 to 8 minute run from Europe to a Soviet silo, evoking a launch-on-warning situation, could result in the deployment of a [Soviet] missile off the U.S. shore, with a comparable flight period. A computer error, due to the short time for verification left under such a situation, would, or could, bring about World War III ...”

Sometimes the belief that both sides’ weapons were unnecessarily offensive produced arguments that were new and disturbing to others. Mitchell Sharp, Leo Cadieux, and Paul Hellyer, for example, were perturbed by the strange new hypotheses the prime minister suggested should undergird future Canadian defence policy. In a secret memorandum to Cabinet ministers in 1969, Trudeau proposed that the government establish a new defence policy which would exclude first-strike capabilities, confine nuclear weapons to a second-strike or defensive posture, and permit Canadian territory to be used for only solely defensive purposes. As Trudeau explained, “It would be of great assistance to make public that it was Canadian foreign policy that our military arrangements were purely defensive in character, that Canadian territory was to be used for defensive purposes.”
prime minister hoped his proposals would receive Cabinet's concurrence and "be the hypotheses upon which military planners could develop practical policies." Sharp, Cadieux, and Hellyer initially rejected them on the grounds that it would be too conceptually difficult to categorize weapons as "offensive" or "defensive," although the changes were finally mentioned in the 1971 Defence White Paper. It may have been Trudeau's emphasis on psychological factors - the need to empathize with the adversary's perceptions - that disturbed his Cabinet colleagues. Evidently, Trudeau believed that the "preservation of peace" rested principally on psychological variables. As he explained in his proposal: "It can, of course, correctly be pointed out that the enforcement of the proposal could not prevent the initiation of a nuclear exchange from the array of weapons systems which are completely outside Canadian jurisdiction. While this is so, it is also true that preservation of peace, and progress towards arms control depend above all on psychological factors."

In addition to the disturbing idea that elements of both sides' weapons systems were unnecessarily threatening, some Critics pointed out that certain Canadian commitments seemed unnecessary. During one Cabinet briefing, Trudeau rejected the Canadian military's reasons for contributing to NATO's submarine surveillance program. Instead, he asked a series of logical questions undermining the military's traditional assumptions for supporting Canada's role in NATO's anti-submarine warfare strategy. The prime minister's reasoning is reflected in the Cabinet Conclusions:

If it were assumed that Canadian destroyers could closely identify and track Soviet submarines and if it were assumed that no offensive action would be taken by those Canadian destroyers, then what value would there be in acquiring knowledge of the submarine's location and what comfort could there be in knowing that you tracked successfully, if the submarine attacked ... Destroyers only become totally effective if they can strike and destroy. If Canadian destroyers attacked in the first instance without warning then the allies would have instigated a nuclear attack. That possibility must be ruled out. If destroyers were attacking submarines, then it must be assumed that a nuclear exchange through ICBMs or bombers had already taken place. At that point it would be difficult to maintain that there was any deterrent value in the destroyer program ... In other words, are destroyers really needed for this type of activity and in particular, is there a need for 24 destroyers as shown in the model for forces 1972/73.

Admiral Robert Falls, former Chief of the Defence Staff, remarked years later that, during his tenure, Trudeau had capably used "a kind of Jesuit logic" to try to destroy the military's traditional arguments
in favour of contributing to NATO’s ASW capability: "There was one time when he [Trudeau] talked of submarines to me, and that allowed me to believe that he knew a hell of a lot more about the ASW aspects of the Navy than I certainly expected him to, and that he differentiated very clearly between an attack submarine and a "boomer," an SSBN. He was in fact using this kind of Jesuit logic, I suppose, to try and destroy what he thought was my position ... He was very clear that, you know, it was destabilizing to be trying to develop an ASW capability against SSBNs." 72

Rather than directly attack or undermine the military’s grounds for different types of commitments, many Critics put forward original metaphors and new strategic rationales for opposing certain types of commitments. For instance, those Defenders who seemed preoccupied with counting and comparing nuclear stockpiles were labelled “nuclear accountants” or workers in the “spagetti factory.” 73 The enemy’s threatening posture, they argued, was no more than a “measured response” to NATO’s initial provocations. Moreover, the Soviet Union’s nuclear missiles could be justified as modernized versions of previously acceptable missile systems. 74 Indeed, before the UN General Assembly in 1978, Prime Minister Trudeau argued for a new “strategy of suffocation,” maintaining that continued flight-testing of new strategic delivery vehicles would justifiably force the Soviet Union to respond in kind, thus contributing to the dynamics of the arms race and to both sides’ arsenals of threatening weapons. 75

Critics believed deterrence doctrine was unsuitable and unreliable

Many Critics lacked faith in certain aspects of deterrence doctrine and disparaged its underlying assumptions. To rely on the Alliance’s nuclear and conventional forces to deter war, they argued, would exacerbate, not reduce, the chance of war. To believe, furthermore, that the Alliance could credibly defend itself with nuclear or conventional forces was, to their way of thinking, misguided. Instead of relying solely on deterrence, Critics drew attention to alternative scenarios and options.

In an analysis of “the present super-power deterrent system,” for example, Ivan Head concluded: “The balance is an unhealthy one, because of the danger of accident, because of the danger which would follow the entry of new participants, because of the danger it may not be maintained.” Although Head advised in 1969 that “the balance appears to be a necessary evil,” he recommended that Canada restructure its defence posture so as not to further undermine the security of both side’s second-strike capacity. He suggested
Canada restructure its defence structure in order to: "(a) do whatever it can to protect the United States second-strike capability; (b) avoid doing anything which would have the effect of intimidating the Soviet second-strike capability; [and] (c) avoid adopting any posture or role which is credible in the eyes of the Soviets only as a first-strike role." Nevertheless, as Head concluded in his secret document for Cabinet, "In our present defence role, we break all three of these rules ..." He considered it important that the basic assumptions underlying the Alliance’s doctrine of flexible response be challenged. As he warned the prime minister, "Any assumption that the use of ‘tactical’ nuclear weapons will not escalate immediately to a full intercontinental strategical nuclear weapon holocaust must be challenged because there is no provable criteria for its premise. With the continued existence of mankind at stake, some extraordinary degree of certainty should be required."

As well, other influential policy-makers criticized Canada’s reliance on deterrence doctrine to prevent escalation. Trudeau informed the Cabinet in 1969 that Canada’s contemplated contribution to NATO of CF-5 squadrons and its current contribution of 108 CF-104 aircraft to Europe (which, as had already been announced, would be reduced to eighty-eight aircraft) should be reassessed. “In the event of hostilities in Europe, the French would retaliate with an atomic bomb and it was illusory to think otherwise,” he stated. At the Second United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in 1982, Trudeau also criticized the counterintuitive logic of nuclear deterrence: “The nuclear debate is difficult and seems to pursue an inverse logic. It deals with power that, by common consent, is unusable. It argues for more nuclear weapons in order that, in the end, there may be fewer. It perceives the vulnerability of cities and of human beings as an element of stability in the nuclear balance. And worst of all, the debate goes on without much evidence of any light at the end of the tunnel.” Trudeau became increasingly concerned about the possibility that new intercontinental strategic weapons could be so mobile as to be virtually invisible. To his mind, this buttressed the stability of the doctrine of mutual assured nuclear deterrence, while calling into question the ability of both sides, or any international body, to verify arms control agreements:

You see the paradox. These questions are so intellectually difficult that, too often, the public and their leaders are tempted to leave these problems to experts, to nuclear accountants, to people who understand the technology, but do not consider the political dimension of the issue. If missiles stay in one place, the enemy knows where they are, and could destroy them by
launching a first strike, so that the side under attack could not respond with an attack of its own. One side would win the war simply by destroying the other’s nuclear missiles. That is why these weapons are destabilizing. You must use them or lose them. For that reason, making these missiles mobile also makes them more stabilizing weapons, in the sense that a first strike by the enemy would not destroy exactly where they are, and so he will not start a war, because the other side will still be able to send missiles back at him. That would assure the destruction of both sides, which is not in the interest of the side which might otherwise be tempted to launch a first strike. But there is a further paradox in the fact that, if these missiles are too mobile, you could not count them, even by using satellites. And if you cannot count them, neither side could verify that the other was respecting the treaties, such as SALT I, and other agreements that might be reached.80

For the prime minister, like other Critics, many aspects of nuclear deterrence were troubling, especially given the rapid development of new technologies.

Many Critics also believed that threatening to use nuclear or conventional weapons of mass destruction to prevent attack fundamentally undermined national and global security. Trudeau remarked in 1984:

The experts would have us believe that the issues of nuclear war have become too complex for all but themselves. We are asked to entrust our fate to a handful of high priests of nuclear strategy. And to the scientists who have taken us from atom bombs to thermonuclear warheads, from missiles with one warhead to missiles with ten or more, from weapons that deter to weapons that threaten the existence of us all. Canadians, and people everywhere, believe their security has been diminished, not enhanced, by a generation of work spent on perfecting the theories and instruments of human annihilation.81

Paul McRae concluded, similarly, that new developments in weapons technology had increased the likelihood of any conflict escalating into a major war. As he put it: “There is no doubt that the Pershing II missile, the Stealth Cruise, a host of anti-satellite and satellite weaponry, all escalate the danger of an accidental war and lessen the chances of meaningful survival. The fate of civilization is rapidly passing from the control of humans to control by a computer.”82 For Trudeau and McRae, like other Critics, deterrence imperilled rather than ensured Canadian security and the future of human civilization.

As a result of these sorts of concerns, some Critics were willing only to provide conditional support for deterrence. Several argued
that, in future, Canada should try to safeguard the Alliance’s second-strike capabilities, not help enhance an American first-strike capacity. Ivan Head wrestled with the problem of whether Canada should contribute to the doctrine of flexible response or the doctrine of preserving a balance of deterrents in the form of an assured second-strike capability (i.e., mutual assured destruction). He concluded that “the balance appears to be a necessary evil,” and that Canada should therefore concentrate its defence efforts on protecting the United States’ second-strike capability and, secondarily, assume a defence posture that related to NATO’s flexible response posture. Similarly, in 1969 Prime Minister Trudeau questioned whether Canada’s naval force should be prepared to destroy the Soviets’ second-strike capability. As Trudeau asked a group of Liberals in land-locked Alberta: “Our contribution in the naval area to our anti-submarine warfare – is this the right contribution? Should we be having the kind of naval force which is prepared to destroy the Soviet nuclear-armed submarines, which are a deterrent for them as the Polaris is a deterrent for the United States? … [Soviet] submarines are by nature, I suppose, in this capacity – they are second strike, they are deterrent. Is our policy right to be armed essentially against them?”

Some Critics were troubled, too, by the argument that nuclear deterrence was a successful strategy simply because there had been no war in Europe. Some maintained that, in the nuclear era, wars would be neither deterred nor conducted according to historical principles or precedents. As Paul McRae wrote Trudeau, “What I am surprised to find, and what worries me, are those who apply pre-World War I – and II – thinking, including the Munich syndrome, and who don’t seem to have any concept of what is in store for civilization if the two superpowers ever go beyond the brink.” Still others found it difficult to believe that a war in the European theatre would not immediately become a global conflict. The assumption that a nuclear exchange could be limited and tactical, or that there could be a winner in any nuclear war, was summarily rejected, meanwhile the old “win-lose” mentality was criticized as outdated, and the notion of a balance, superiority, or sufficiency of nuclear forces was seriously challenged.

A number of Critics also questioned the need to strengthen the Alliance’s conventional forces, fearing such a move would exacerbate, not reduce, tensions and the arms race. Essentially, they assumed that “the moment one side was unsuccessful in matching the conventional forces of the other in a military confrontation then there would be reliance upon nuclear weapons.” Critics often questioned the point of maintaining substantial conventional forces, given
that it would be difficult for both sides to refrain from escalating any conflict to all-out nuclear war. As Trudeau’s adviser in the Privy Council Office, Gordon Robertson, wrote, it was difficult to justify the presence of Canadian Forces in Europe:

First, if the European members of the Alliance are not capable of containing a local conflict in Europe, then it is neither reasonable nor credible to expect Canadian troops to perform this function ... Second, the presence of Canadian troops in Europe, unlike U.S. forces, does not directly guarantee the credibility of the nuclear deterrent ... it is very doubtful whether NATO has the capacity to effectively carry out a strategy of flexible conventional response in the first place ... the Canadian contribution [i.e. of conventional forces to Europe] is not sufficient to make the doctrine of flexible response workable; nor, if it were workable, would the absence of the Canadian contribution make it unworkable.90

Like Head and Robertson, many Critics considered it unnecessary to commit additional conventional forces and military equipment to NATO in order to signal the Alliance’s resolve to retaliate against limited aggression. Their preferred solution was to raise the nuclear threshold, establish a lower balance of conventional forces, and promote nuclear disarmament and arms control, including mutual and balanced conventional force reductions. As Trudeau reasoned in 1983, the “sensible approach” would be for both sides to reduce their conventional forces to mutually agreed levels:

As long as this imbalance of conventional forces persists, so does the risk that nuclear weapons would be brought into action at an early stage of any conflict. That is why we say that the nuclear threshold in Europe is too low. And of course we can never be certain that the use of nuclear weapons in the European theatre would not escalate rapidly to ever more massive nuclear retaliation on an international scale. The conclusion we draw is that the best way to raise the nuclear threshold is to establish a more reasonable balance of the conventional forces on each side. How then do we achieve this balance? ... The simple, though expensive answer is for the West to increase its conventional forces until they match those of the Warsaw Pact. I see this as a last resort. The far more sensible approach would be for both sides to reduce their conventional forces to mutually agreed levels, a task to which we have devoted the past ten years at the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks in Vienna.91

Finally, Critics drew attention to alternative scenarios that could not be resolved or averted by issuing a traditional deterrent threat.
Such scenarios included nuclear arms races in the Third World,\textsuperscript{92} armed revolution and insurrection in trouble spots outside Europe,\textsuperscript{93} as well as civil uprisings, famine, and poverty in the Third World.\textsuperscript{94} For Critics, these threats to international peace and security could not be offset by a doctrine they deemed both unsuitable and unreliable in the nuclear era.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Some Canadian decision-makers harboured fears about entrapment and doubts about NATO initiatives. Their worries about being trapped in an American-led incursion were voiced more fervently than were their fears about the possible threat from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, in many situations, when issues of maintaining, de-emphasizing, or strengthening Canada's NATO commitments arose, these influential decision-makers tended to dwell on the probable reaction of the NATO allies rather than on the Soviet Union.

Critics believed the dangers of entrapment could best be averted by restructuring and de-emphasizing Canada's traditional contributions of forces, equipment, and money to NATO. They worried that these commitments otherwise increased tensions and the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust. They were united by a concern that Canadians avoid entrapment in potentially provocative and expensive NATO undertakings. Critics also viewed both blocs' weapons as posing unacceptable risks. Many aspects of both sides' weapons and strategies, being unnecessarily offensive, could, they felt, contribute to dangerous arms races and escalating tensions. Yet another essential element in their belief system was the conviction that the external threat to the Alliance was often exaggerated and misunderstood. Rather than rely solely on deterrence as a strategy for war prevention, Critics tended to challenge conventional thinking and draw attention to alternative courses of action.

A number of examples in this chapter were attributed to confidential sources. Yet it is possible to affirm that, at different times between 1963 and 1987, Walter Gordon, Lester Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, Ivan Head, Gordon Robertson, Donald Macdonald, James Richardson, Gerard Pelletier, Eric Kierans, and Paul McRae held beliefs typical of Critics. As the minister of Finance under Lester Pearson between 1963 and 1965, Walter Gordon questioned many aspects of government policy. That the Soviet threat might be exaggerated, that overseas forces might not be necessary, and that the government needed to re-examine the extent and measure of its NATO commitments – these were all issues that Gordon personally raised with the prime minister.
in 1964, before his resignation after the general election of 1965. Under Pearson's tenure, however, the control over foreign and defence policy-making exerted by himself, External Affairs Minister Paul Martin, and Defence Minister Paul Hellyer resulted in few Cabinet debates and little questioning of Canada's NATO commitments between 1963 and 1967. Indeed, the Cabinet quickly agreed on 9 May 1963 to fulfill Canada's nuclear commitments. And Pearson, Martin, and Hellyer steered Cabinet policy toward consistent support of Canada's other Alliance commitments. Thus between 1963 and 1967, the government's NATO policy did not undergo any important shifts in emphasis and commitment.

In fact, it was not until 1967-68 that Lester Pearson began to question the need for Canada's deployment of a large contingent of Forces in Europe. Indeed, by the late 1960s, Pearson was beginning to espouse beliefs more typical of Critics than Defenders. Although Pearson was a defender of Canada's membership in NATO for most of his life, questions about the extent and measure of those commitments began to vex him in the late 1960s. Whereas Pearson had helped found the Alliance in 1949, he gradually became disappointed with its military character and the nonemphasis on Article II of the Treaty, which had called for greater economic, social, and cultural ties within the Atlantic Community. That Pearson cannot be unequivocally categorized as either a Defender or a Critic seems evident by his differing attitudes toward the issue of acquiring nuclear weapons for the Canadian Forces. In the months prior to the 1963 election, for instance, there was some confusion about the implications of the Liberal party's non-nuclear stance and Pearson was on record as being opposed to the weapons systems. Owing in part to Paul Hellyer's advice, though, Pearson changed his mind and promised that, if elected, he would renegotiate these agreements. Once elected, he proceeded to replace the sand ballast in all the weapons with nuclear warheads. It seems that, in his later years, Pearson walked a fine line between the notes of Defender and Critic; if he had doubts or criticisms, they were expressed in the form of "quiet diplomacy." Although his doubts about whether Canada should retain a 10,000-strong military force surfaced more openly in 1967, it was not until he stepped down from office that he publicly criticized the practice of stationing Canadian Forces in Europe.95

Pierre Trudeau assumed power in 1968 on a platform that was openly critical of NATO and the extent to which membership in the Alliance dominated Canadian foreign and defence policy. By 1971, he seemed convinced that, while Canada should remain a member of NATO, the kinds of commitments the country made to defend NATO's
territory should be North American-based. His initial inclination to withdraw Canadian Forces from Europe was tempered by the process of Cabinet debate and extra-Parliamentary discussion, such that he and Ivan Head eventually settled for a two-thirds reduction in the number of overseas forces. When this reduction was heavily criticized by the NATO allies and Cabinet ministers alike, and was also attacked in Parliament, the prime minister compromised again, settling for a fifty-percent cut. Thus, although Trudeau espoused many of the beliefs typical of Critics between 1968 and 1971, as prime minister he was obliged to make compromises. In the mid-1970s, his approach became more publicly supportive, and less openly critical, of NATO. Like Pearson before him, Trudeau’s views defy easy categorization. He was at once a supporter of Canada’s continued membership and involvement in NATO and a critic of select NATO initiatives and directions. By the time he undertook his peace initiative in 1983–84, however, many of his statements and off-the-cuff remarks reflected the reasoning frequently espoused by Critics.

Other influential decision-makers between 1968 and 1971 – Ivan Head and Gordon Robertson, for example – are more easily classifiable as Critics. As Trudeau’s chief adviser on foreign policy, Head wrote, at Trudeau’s request, a brief for Cabinet that outlined many of the reasons for reducing the number of overseas stationed forces, de-emphasizing Canada’s NATO commitments, and restructuring the shape of the Canadian Forces based in Canada. This brief was itself based on a detailed memorandum written by Gordon Robertson.

Within the Cabinet itself, President of the Privy Council Donald Macdonald, backed by Minister-without-Portfolio James Richardson and, to a lesser extent, Secretary of State for External Affairs Gerard Pelletier, often put forward arguments and reasoning typical of Critics. As we have seen, Donald Macdonald was a well-informed, outspoken Critic who took a keen interest in these issues, even preparing his own detailed briefs for discussion in Cabinet. Although he supported some form of co-operative arrangement with the United States for the defence of North America, he questioned Canadian military contributions to NATO. Richardson focused more on the implications for world peace if Canada was to withdraw, or at least weaken, its military commitments to NATO. Among other considerations, Richardson believed Canada would have a unique opportunity to contribute to a lessening of East-West tensions. Pelletier also favoured non-military approaches to the lessening of world tensions, and quietly sided with Macdonald – and presumably, Trudeau.96

Postmaster-General Eric Kierans was another vigorous NATO Critic. He frequently argued against Canada’s continued membership
in NATO, and was one of the few high-level decision-makers who recommended that Canada withdraw entirely from the Alliance. (Trudeau encouraged him to make this argument so as to incite a national debate.) In fact, nearly all Canadian decision-makers believed that Canada should remain a NATO member – the recurring debate centred on what should be the measure and extent of Canada’s military and non-military NATO commitments. In the end, Kierans’s influence over the long term was marginal, as he resigned in April 1971 in opposition to the general direction being taken by the Trudeau government. As one who was seen to “meddle too much” in departmental matters that were not his affair, Kierans had less apparent influence on defence policy than other Cabinet ministers such as Mitchell Sharp, Leo Cadieux, and Donald Macdonald.

Although Pierre Trudeau, Ivan Head, Donald Macdonald, Gordon Robertson, James Richardson, Gerrard Pelletier, and Eric Kierans were vigorously opposed by Defenders such as Mitchell Sharp, Leo Cadieux, Marcel Cadieux, and Ross Campbell, they were able, particularly between 1968 and 1971, to moderately reshape Canada’s NATO commitments in a direction consonant with their underlying beliefs and assumptions. Nuclear weapons were phased out, Canadian Forces in Europe were at least symbolically cut back, and the emphasis of the 1971 Defence White Paper was on defensive forces based in Canada as a contribution primarily to sovereignty and North American defence.

Access restrictions limit the extent to which one can draw a similar profile of decision-makers in the period between 1978 and 1989. Confidential briefing notes written by MP Paul McRae for Prime Minister Trudeau indicate that McRae’s viewpoint was largely shared by the prime minister. But in the late 1970s and 1980s, it is difficult to determine whether beliefs typical of Critics had a significant impact on defence decision-making. Many of Trudeau’s public comments during the peace initiative indicate that the prime minister held the beliefs of Critics to be self-evident. Yet his convictions are not in themselves a sufficient explanation for the shifts in Canada’s approach toward NATO between 1978 and 1989. Many other factors – such as the United States’ request that Canada test the cruise missile, the tone of President Reagan’s anti-Soviet remarks, and the emergence of a vociferous peace movement in Canada – could have contributed to this prime minister’s shift in approach toward Canada’s NATO commitments. Until the relevant Cabinet documents are released (1998–2009), researchers will be unable to discern whether beliefs typical of Defenders or Critics had a critical effect on defence decision-making in the last decade of the Cold War.
Belief Systems of Critics

We can conclude, however, that between 1968 and 1978 the presence of several Critics in the inner circles of decision-making had a significant impact on the Trudeau government's lack of support for some NATO initiatives. This is not to say that it was solely the presence of Trudeau, Head, Robertson, Macdonald, Richardson, Pelletier, and Kierans that accounted for the government's intention to disarm the nuclear weapons and reduce or withdraw Canadian Forces from Europe. Naturally, other systemic- and domestic-level factors contributed to these shifts in policy as well. There seems no doubt, though, that many of the substantive beliefs of Critics significantly affected the high-level debate regarding Canada's NATO commitments between 1968 and 1978. Despite DND's established policy in favour of nuclear weapons for the Canadian Forces, despite the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and contrary to the recommendations and reprimandings of other allies, the convictions of a few politicians brought about significant changes in the government's defence policy.