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The Traditional Beliefs and Assumptions of Defenders, 1957-1963

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In 1957, the Diefenbaker government made firm commitments to acquire five different nuclear weapons systems. Between 1960 and 1961, however, the government wavered on these decisions. And by 1962, high-level decision-makers, including the prime minister, were expressing outright opposition to them. As we have seen, between 1957 and 1960 many different factors seemed to impel the prime minister and his Cabinet, as well as senior military and civilian advisers toward acquiring nuclear systems as part of Canada’s NATO commitment. Technological developments such as the development of the Russian Sputnik in 1957 and the successful testing of the Bomarc B in 1959 initially prompted Diefenbaker to support the Bomarc acquisition. At the same time, bilateral pressures spurred military advisers such as General Pearkes and Foulkes to favour acquiring these nuclear-capable weapons systems. NATO directives – including MC 14/2 and MC/48/2, premised on using nuclear weapons from the outset – appeared to sway Diefenbaker and his Defence minister. Financial imperatives, such as the cancellation of the Avro Arrow and its substitution with the relatively inexpensive Bomarc missile, affected Diefenbaker’s attitude as well. Military recommendations, such as General Norstad’s briefing to Cabinet and SHAPE’s recommendations, exerted considerable influence, too, on members of Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. Influential defence policy-makers had to consider all these international and domestic variables when deciding to acquire nuclear weapons systems.

Between 1961 and 1963, it was apparent that other systemic- and state-level factors were interacting to dissuade Canadian leaders from fulfilling their commitments. Momentous international events such as the Cuban missile crisis and the subsequent easing of tensions led decision-makers such as Green to question the necessity of acquiring
nuclear weapons at all. UN recommendations pertaining to the Irish resolution, for instance, or to Canada’s high-profile position in the UN’s Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee also influenced the Cabinet’s debate. American behaviour (Kennedy’s failure to consult during the Cuban missile crisis and the publication of the US State Department’s press release), electoral considerations (the influence of increasingly divided public opinion and Pearson’s unexpected volte-face regarding the nuclear issue), as well as domestic criticism (e.g., the outpouring of letters and complaints from groups such as the Voice of Women) — all contributed in some measure to different decision-makers’ lack of support for nuclear weapons.

Yet neither international pressures nor domestic concerns provide sufficient explanation for the changes in Canadian defence policy. One key reason for the government’s waffling support appears to have been rooted in individual attitudes: the fact that some decision-makers in the inner circle of decision-making favoured, and others opposed, fulfilling Canada’s nuclear commitments. In other words, one unexplored explanation for the government’s fluid attitude regarding nuclear weapons might be the significant influence of individual policy-makers’ underlying beliefs on defence policy-making.

This chapter examines whether beliefs typical of Defenders affected high-level decision-making between 1957 and 1963. Although no one decision-maker is singled out as the archetypal exemplar of a Defender, the evidence shows that many important decision-makers held belief systems typical of Defenders. These beliefs, in turn, skewed defence decision-making toward acquiring nuclear weapons as part of Canada’s NATO commitment.

SUBSTANTIVE BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF DEFENDERS

Defenders feared abandonment

Minister of National Defence Douglas Harkness was profoundly influenced by fears of abandonment. Harkness feared that the government could, in the near future, “disassociate” from NATO if “pacifists” and “neutralists” overtook governmental decision-making processes. He claimed that he himself had “squarely faced the fact” that “we lie between the world’s two greatest protagonists, and if war comes, we will be in the middle of it whether we are neutralists, isolationists or active supporters of the West; and whether we are unarmed or are armed with conventional or nuclear weapons.” Accordingly, he was frustrated that “neutralists,” like “ostriches with
their heads in the sand," wanted to disassociate Canada from its allies.¹ As he told a closed audience of supporters from the Royal Canadian Military Institute, "These people, by some weird intellectual gymnastics, come to the conclusion that if we disassociate ourselves from our allies no one will drop any bombs on us."²

Throughout his tenure as Defence minister (1961–1963), Harkness worried that Canada's "full partnership" in the Alliance would be jeopardized. He feared the allies would be frustrated with Canada because of the government's delays in fulfilling its nuclear commitments, and he worried about the implications of Howard Green's disarmament stand at the United Nations. His fears prompted him to write his Cabinet colleagues: "On the one hand there is our national desire to pursue disarmament unfettered by the commitments we have made to NATO ... On the other hand, this places in doubt our position as a full partner in NATO which provides the collective defence alliance vital to our national security in the absence of effective disarmament." Instead of following Green's course of "unilateral disarmament," Harkness proposed that Canada pursue a "collective approach" to disarmament and defence: "Canada should press within NATO for a more vigorous collective approach to disarmament in order to avoid the erosion of the strength of the alliance by unilateral national disarmament activities ... Effective disarmament negotiations should be conducted from a position of strength ... [and] in the absence of substantive progress in the field of disarmament, Canada should pursue collective defence through NATO."³ Harkness's blanket assertions that Canada's pursuit of "unilateral disarmament" would erode the Alliance's strength and that all disarmament negotiations should be conducted from a position of superiority were based on two assumptions. First, Harkness assumed that not acquiring nuclear weapons and advocating disarmament at the UN meant that Canada would be responsible for initiating a process of disarmament that would undermine and threaten the Alliance. Second, he believed that disarmament negotiations were unlikely to succeed, but should nonetheless be conducted from a "position of strength." He assumed that disarmament negotiations would have a better prospect of succeeding if Canada contributed in some measure to the Alliance's nuclear superiority.⁴

As we have seen in chapter 3, decision-makers' fears of abandonment were frequently expressed via dire predictions and negative expectations about what could happen if Canada's allied ties to Europe or the United States were weakened. Harkness, for example, focused almost entirely on the grave consequences for Canada's heretofore smooth working relationship with the United States. He
privately warned the prime minister about the dangerous consequences if the government decided not to acquire the nuclear-capable F-104 interceptors from the United States: “I should think there would be some danger that the Americans would want to have a complete revision of the norad arrangement set up, with quite unforeseeable implications for us.” Harkness also considered warning Green that, “if we should now limit the armament of these aircraft to the non-nuclear weapons, the result would be a significant reduction in norad’s defence capability – a result patently distasteful to the United States.”

In keeping with this tendency to invoke the fear of American retaliation, Harkness warned, too, about the implications of Green’s disarmament stance at the United Nations. In a confidential letter, he advised the prime minister not to encourage Green’s support of the “neutral” resolution at the UN, calling for the suspension of nuclear tests, because of possible adverse American reaction. It was not in Canada’s interests, he said, to “place pressure upon the Americans to accept an agreement which would be contrary to the essential requirements of American security and therefore of Canadian security.” Moreover, it would also be inadvisable “to place a major strain upon Canada’s diplomatic credit in Washington by voting in favour of a moratorium on testing.”

Compared to Harkness’s almost constant preoccupation with the consequences of Canada abandoning its allies, the prime minister expressed relatively little concern about the possibility. Diefenbaker assumed that if “the aggressor” attacked any of the allies, there would be no alternative but for Canada to go to war. As he wrote, “These are the very facts of survival that face us as a nation ... [and] the facts on which our defence policy decisions have to be made.” It also appears that Diefenbaker held strong convictions about the imperatives of Alliance solidarity; in the margins of one speech, he saw fit to scrawl: “The imperative need of Western Solidarity transcends all other conditions.” And in a draft of another speech, he inserted: “The alliance between Britain, the United States and Canada and the other Nations of NATO in an unbreakable chain of responsible co-operation is a major element for the survival of the free world.”

During the 1961 Berlin crisis, the prime minister rejected any notion that Canada not support its allies. Although he admitted that some of those who had served and sacrificed in two world wars against Germany might understandably possess an ambivalent attitude toward Berliners, Diefenbaker believed that Western eviction from Berlin would have repercussions throughout Germany and Europe. Canada could not abandon this Western European outpost because
of what it represented, he argued; to retreat now "would mean that the pledged word of the West would be called in question everywhere in the world with consequences impossible to calculate for the future of freedom."11

During the first few years of his tenure, Diefenbaker was relatively unconcerned that Canada's close relations with the Alliance leader were possibly threatened or dissipating. He acknowledged that there were "difficulties" for Canada arising from the fact that the United States had worldwide commitments and responsibilities, many of which were not shared by Canada. Nevertheless, he showed no hesitation in welcoming American leadership of the free world "so long as the American leaders did not take Canadian support for granted."12 He liked to point out that the close relationship between Canada and the United States was geographically, socially, and ideologically natural, since it was based on a common heritage and a common aspiration. In reply to questions about stronger military ties with the United States, he asserted that "cooperative arrangements which are designed to ensure survival in the military sense" were acceptable, so long as Canada's national, political, and economic identity was not jeopardized.13 In fact, Diefenbaker confided to the British prime minister in 1960 that although Canada's close relationship with the United States was sometimes interpreted as subservient, he felt the United States had done nothing that could be interpreted as "condescension" or "putting Canada in a subservient position."14

As prime minister, Diefenbaker initially believed there was no possibility that his government could desert the allies. Nor did he fear that the allies might disassociate from Canada. Like other Defenders, however, he expressed some concern about the effects of "neutralism" and "pacifism" on Canada's "responsibilities under NATO." And in 1959 he acknowledged that "neutralist sympathies" were beginning to surface in "certain quarters." Nevertheless, he was determined to make clear to the public that there was no neutrality in Canada's thinking or conduct, and no weakening of support for NATO:

What is our position in Canada? Some seem to have the view that we could be neutral in any war that may take place, neutral in the event that the United States was involved – or Britain, or France, or West Germany. There is no neutrality of that kind today. Our responsibilities under NATO, under the agreement entered into with the full cognizance and support of all Members of Parliament will not allow any choice to be made in the future. There can be no academic debates in Parliament or of Parliament on the question of whether or not we are automatically at war in the event that any of the nations in NATO are at war.15
Between 1957 and 1960, Diefenbaker assumed that allied relations were strong and only to a limited extent threatened by neutralists. A few other high-ranking decision-makers, however, including Harkness and Ambassador to Washington Arnold Heeney, worried a great deal about the negative message they thought the government was sending the allies by not forthrightly fulfilling its nuclear commitments. Heeney, in particular, feared that the “attitudes and prejudices” of Minister of External Affairs Howard Green and his under-secretary of state Norman Robertson threatened Canada’s defence relationship with the United States. As Heeney confided to his diary in 1962, he was concerned that Green’s attitudes and prejudices combined with Robertson’s “cosmic anxieties” were producing “a negative force of great importance.”

Underlying Heeney’s apprehension about the effect Green and Robertson were having on Canada’s defence relations was the ambassador’s long-held conviction that the Canadian-American alliance was “our most precious international asset.” As he confided to the prime minister in August 1960, the specter of the United States sliding into “isolationism” partly because of Canada’s stand on defence, was a “nightmare”: [I said] my nightmare was that the us would revert to an isolationist policy under the buffetings and criticisms of her allies & what Americans regarded as the lack of support which other nations were displaying. Here Canadian attitudes were of importance because of our traditional friendship ... It would be tragic if this came about as a result of the disintegration of the alliance and doubly so if we – who not long ago had despaired of the us accepting international responsibilities – had any part in bringing about such a development.

A close reading of the primary documents – drafts of speeches, personal letters, transcripts of commentary and interviews, diaries, and personal accounts – reveals that Douglas Harkness and Arnold Heeney were consistently susceptible to fears of abandonment. Diefenbaker was less fearful in this regard. George Pearkes and Charles Foulkes also feared abandonment, and their decision to refer to NORDAD as a NATO Command may have been based, in part, on the fear that Canada would otherwise be left to fend for itself with its neighbour to the south. At the time of writing, however, supporting evidence from the Public Archives of Canada remains inaccessible. There is no evidence that other high-level decision-makers, whether within the centre, inner, or outer core of decision-making – people such as Sidney Smith, Howard Green, or Norman
Robertson – believed the allies were in danger of abandoning Canada, or vice-versa.

Defenders believed Canada should pursue closer ties to the allies through established kinds of military commitments

Although Canadian decision-makers had suggested a variety of ways to pursue closer ties to the Alliance, the marked tendency among Defenders was to consider only established methods of fostering such ties, including commitments to maintain or increase the number of Canadian Forces earmarked for NATO purposes, particularly the number of military personnel deployed overseas in Europe. Promises to modernize or deploy more weapons systems and equipment to NATO were also typical ways of conveying support. Similarly, it was taken for granted that commitments to maintain or increase the percentage of the government’s defence budget and the GNP directed toward NATO defence purposes would be highly valued.

This case study focuses on Canada’s decision to modernize and deploy nuclear weapons systems. To some extent, because the Canadian government had not yet shouldered them, the commitments of the Diefenbaker government undertaken between 1957 and 1961 were non-traditional and unestablished. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the NATO Council and NATO’s Military Committee, the Alliance’s reliance on atomic and thermonuclear weapons had been recommended five years earlier, in 1952. In fact, the introduction of nuclear weapons for NATO’s Forces in Europe was first recognized at NATO’s Council meeting in Lisbon in February 1952. It was not until 1957, however, that SACEUR began to recommend, in SHAPE’s official planning guidance, that Canada acquire and deploy weapons systems defined as having nuclear weapon delivery capability. Thus, NATO’s decision to make defence preparations, on the assumption that nuclear weapons would be used from the outset, had already been established between 1952 and 1954. At least five years would intervene, however, before the Canadian government had to decide if Canada would follow orthodox practice in this regard.

To some extent, those who assumed Canada should contribute to NATO in such a traditional manner tended to adopt standard procedures. Diefenbaker and Pearkes refrained from querying the proposal to stockpile nuclear weapons in Europe at the first meeting of the NATO Heads of Government. According to Basil Robinson, Diefenbaker’s aide, this was because it was their first visit to “the NATO club,” a club which Diefenbaker “had joined but never visited and whose rules and procedures he would encounter for the first time.”
Neither Diefenbaker nor the Defence minister took a major part in the 1957 discussions. Although a note of uncertainty could be detected regarding the nuclear issue, little was said.\textsuperscript{20} The Canadian’s tendency to accept established ways of thinking are further evidenced by these decision-makers’ ready acquiescence to General Norstad’s request that Canada provide a nuclear strike-reconnaissance role for the Canadian Air Division in Europe. By the time Cabinet was forced to make a decision about replacing the unworkable Lacrosse system, the Defence minister’s explanation that the Honest John missile “was already in service with, or about to be introduced by” other NATO forces, indicated that this was almost standard procedure. The Cabinet agreed without debate to the Defence minister’s recommendation that Canada acquire the Honest John system.\textsuperscript{21} The records of Cabinet discussions from 1957–60 indicate that the Cabinet did not conduct a comprehensive examination of all options to determine which would be most suitable. Rather, ministers agreed to whatever military commitment General George Pearkes, visiting SACEUR General Norstad, or the chairmen of the Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Campbell and Frank Miller, recommended.\textsuperscript{22} In many instances, then, the tendency to follow orthodox procedure influenced the decision-making skills of high-level defence policy-makers.

Although decision-makers had a tendency to follow standard practice, many at the centre and inner core were truly convinced that Canada should pursue closer ties to the allies by acquiring nuclear weapons. Among the influential decision-makers in this case study, it was Minister of National Defence General George Pearkes; his successor Douglas Harkness; Chairmen of the Canadian Chiefs of Staff General Charles Foulkes, Hugh Campbell, and Frank Miller; as well as Prime Minister John Diefenbaker (until 1961) who firmly believed that Canada should foster closer allied ties by fulfilling its nuclear commitments. When Harkness wanted to make clear in speeches or letters that Canada was committed to strengthening NATO, he highlighted his determination to “proceed with the steps necessary” to strengthen the brigade group in Europe by “modernizing” its weapons; he also emphasized his intention to acquire Bomarc and Honest John missiles as well as CF-101 and CF-104 nuclear-armed aircraft.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, General Pearkes often expressed confidence in the government’s willingness to arm Canadian troops with nuclear weapons as “efficiently” and “effectively” as the troops with which they were co-operating.\textsuperscript{24} As well, General Foulkes assumed that the government was clearly obligated to acquire nuclear weapons. As he explained in a 1969 television interview:
I think in this problem of what nuclear weapons Canada should acquire we should clearly understand what weapons are necessary. Now the government has agreed to the Canadian Forces in Europe, in the North Atlantic and in Canada undertaking certain tasks. Some of these tasks indicate the necessity of nuclear weapons. And I would just point out what these tasks are; what the weapons are; how we expect to get them; and how they will be stored and how they will be controlled, and then we can look at the problem of whether we should acquire them or not when we know what we are after. Now for the brigade in Europe each brigade has a front-line task. It requires heavy support and for that heavy support, the government is planning to supply the Honest John rocket. Now the Honest John rocket requires a nuclear warhead. The Air Division you will recall had eight squadrons of F-86 day fighters. Now the day fighter is out of the picture and General Norstad has recommended to the government that we should replace them by a strike-reconnaissance – reconnaissance strike aircraft – and the Government decided to go into production of the F-104.25

Between 1957 and 1961, Prime Minister Diefenbaker assumed as well that Canada could signal its ties to the Alliance in a traditional fashion. At the 1957 NATO ministerial meeting, Diefenbaker endorsed the concept of acquiring nuclear weapons, reasoning that such a decision "follows logically from the decision taken in 1954 to organize our forces in Europe on the understanding that they would be able to use such weapons to repel attacks." Until at least 1961, the prime minister also tended to assume that the decisions to "re-equip" the brigade and the air division in Europe, and to acquire Bomarc and Voodooos, were the most important symbols of his government’s determination to strengthen NATO. Thus, within the inner circle of defence decision-making, all four – Harkness, Pearkes, Foulkes, and Diefenbaker (until 1961) – were convinced that Canada should modernize its weapons systems and equipment, particularly its forces in Europe, by acquiring nuclear weapons systems and equipment.26

Compared to Harkness, Foulkes, and Pearkes, however, the prime minister tended between 1957 and 1963 to place a greater emphasis on Canada’s contribution of conventional forces to Europe. He saw this commitment as another symbol of Canada’s allegiance to the allies. By 1959, Canada’s overseas deployment of conventional forces in Europe was such an established commitment that most high-level decision-makers simply overlooked it. In drafts of speeches and notations he wrote to himself, however, Diefenbaker frequently equated the strengthening of Canada’s conventional forces in Europe with the signalling of close Alliance ties.27
These decision-makers based their convictions about the imperative of re-equipping the Canadian Forces overseas and in Canada on typical "first-stream" and "second-stream" assumptions. For example, Harkness, in arguing that Canada's contributions of nuclear-tipped Bomars and interceptors were important to the Alliance, made a first-stream assumption that these commitments were key to the continuing function of the Alliance:

Over the years Canada has made her contribution to the overall deterrent forces of the West. In comparison to some of our allies, particularly the United States, that contribution may be small, but it does have some significance taken in conjunction with the forces contributed by other member nations of NATO. On this continent, just as we rely on the retaliatory forces maintained by the United States to discourage an attack, so too does the United States rely on Canada to provide defensive forces to ensure the effectiveness of their part of the deterrent.

Diefenbaker, on the other hand, tended to make second-stream assumptions, in that he usually assumed the overall balance of conventional forces in Europe would either prevent war or affect the outcome of war. Rather than emphasize Canada's key role in protecting the US nuclear deterrent, Diefenbaker drew attention to Canada's contribution to the balance of conventional forces in Europe. The prime minister's constant emphasis on Canada's conventional contribution to Europe, culminating in his much-criticized "Nassau speech" in January 1963, was based on a second-stream assumption: in case of war, the prior balance of conventional forces in Europe would heavily determine the outcome. Finally, in terms of third-stream assumptions, none of these decision-makers assumed that Canada's military commitments to NATO made little strategic difference, being important only insofar as they signalled a unified resolve and Alliance solidarity.

As we have seen in chapter 3, Defenders sometimes promoted military commitments that strengthened Alliance ties without assessing their strategic rationale or implications. For example, some espoused different weapons systems as an appropriate commitment to NATO, without appreciating their purported military purpose. In 1957, Diefenbaker committed the government to abide by NATO documents MC 14/2 and MC 48/2 because he seemed to want to belong to "the NATO club." He neither appreciated nor fully understood the implications of these documents for re-equipping the Canadian Forces. Then, in 1959, he announced that the government would acquire Bomarc missiles to replace the Canadian-made Avro Arrow;
however, he did not acknowledge or examine the Bomarc’s strategic rationale. The Chiefs of Staff tried to advise him against simultaneously announcing the Arrow cancellation and the Bomarc acquisition, saying that Bomarcs were intended to complement, not replace, interceptors. Nevertheless, the prime minister, without military advice, wrote his speech announcing the new commitment.\(^{30}\)

In another episode illustrating his tendency until 1961 to promote agreed-upon commitments that apparently strengthened Alliance ties, Diefenbaker consented to acquire the F-101 interceptor without fully exploring its nuclear capability. Although he had cancelled production of the Arrow interceptor in 1959, the Department of National Defence later advised him that they needed an air interceptor. Diefenbaker, however, emphatically drew a large question mark on the department’s paper arguing for the F-101 Voodoos to meet the bomber threat and achieve “adequate deterrence.” He was clearly perplexed by the sentence arguing that CINCNORAD had a stated requirement for a “supersonic” interceptor in the North American air defence system “for as far in the future as it is was possible to see.”\(^{31}\) Whether he was confused because he had recently cancelled production of the Arrow interceptor or because he doubted the military’s recommendation is difficult to judge. Certainly, he knew there would be “criticism that we cancelled a Canadian program, thereby throwing people out of employment, and are now accepting American planes to do the job that the Canadian planes would have done.”\(^{32}\) Yet Diefenbaker did agree to acquire the Voodoos from the United States. It was only later, when the Defence department advised him that the Voodoos needed arming with MB11 nuclear missiles, that he began to direct a behind-the-scenes effort to acquire conventional warheads. The entire episode illustrated Diefenbaker’s initial tendency to agree to commitments that augured well for Canada’s defence relationship with the United States, without fully appreciating their strategic rationale or implications.

Although their occasional inconsistencies can be attributed to ignorance or disingenuousness, some Defenders’ beliefs about the need to strengthen Alliance ties were so thoroughly entrenched that a coherent, strategic rationale to support a NATO commitment was not always necessary. For example, whether Diefenbaker was uninformed about strategic rationales or politically astute and deliberately ambiguous is still very much debated.\(^{33}\) It is well known that the prime minister was disinclined to seek advice from advisers in Defence or External Affairs, and that he rarely called together the Cabinet Defence Committee while he was prime minister. As well, he was renowned for leaving RCAF presentations before decisions were
taken and never seemed to want to take the time to debate defence-related issues. Moreover, for at least his first eighteen months in office, Diefenbaker did not trust External’s “Personailities,” especially “the intellectual” Norman Robertson. It took “a lot of hard work” before Diefenbaker could appreciate that he was no longer leader of the Opposition and might now consult more comfortably with External Affairs. Indeed, until Green came to power and allied himself with Robertson, the prime minister relied almost entirely on his own beliefs and assumptions to guide him, although, to a lesser degree, he did listen to the advice of General Pearkes and General Foulkes. Until 1961, then, he often neither required a strategic rationale nor wanted information about possible defence implications before deciding in favour of another new Alliance commitment.

Defenders rarely put forward unconventional proposals about how Canada might pursue closer ties to its allies. The tendency was to reaffirm conventional wisdom and maintain the status quo. Harkness, for one, focused almost entirely on established methods of fostering closer ties, particularly on acquiring nuclear warheads. However, Diefenbaker and a few other influential decision-makers occasionally did put forward less traditional ideas. The prime minister first referred to NORAD as a multilateral NATO Command at the 1957 NATO ministerial meeting. This was initially interpreted as a diversionary tactic, to deflect criticisms by Pearson and others that the government was moving too closely toward defence integration with the United States. However, Diefenbaker, Pearkes, and Foulkes continued to make this argument at secret NATO Council meetings, in speeches, and in private correspondence. They believed Canada’s new commitment to NORAD could entail another military command for NATO. Even though a flurry of memoranda from Jules Leger in External Affairs warned that NORAD could not be a NATO command—American reluctance to establish a multinational command in North America and the implications for American disclosure policy would not allow it—these three decision-makers continued to portray NORAD as part of the established military framework of NATO. At NATO Ministerial meetings, General Pearkes saw fit to remind other defence ministers: “To increase the effectiveness of the air defence of this continent, we have within the last year set up the joint air defence command known as NORAD. As the Prime Minister said in Paris, and as he reiterated in the House, we consider this to be an integral part of the NATO military structure.”

The belief that NORAD should be viewed as a NATO command seems to have been based on a first-stream assumption—namely, that the Canadian air-defence system was of primary importance in
defending the entire Alliance. The Sputnik launch in 1957 heralded the development of Russian ICBMS, against which American and Canadian interceptors and missiles were powerless. Nevertheless, Diefenbaker, Foulkes, and Pearkes continued to assume Canada’s air-defence system was essential to defending the US deterrent, and that the front line of battle would be on Canadian territory. As the prime minister noted in a 1959 television address, technological revolutions beginning with the Sputnik launch and the development of the long-range ballistic missile meant that “Canadians as a whole realize that, for the first time in history, this country will be one of the first to be attacked if war begins.” 40 In fact, well before his government deployed nuclear-armed interceptors and Bomars, Diefenbaker assumed, in typical first-stream fashion, that Canada’s contribution of conventional air interceptors to the balance of conventionally equipped forces substantially helped defend the Alliance. As he confidently told an American audience in 1959, “The United States of America cannot defend itself with full effectiveness without Canadian cooperation and without defence facilities on Canadian territory.” 41

Besides suggesting that NORAD become a NATO command, Diefenbaker, Smith, and Smith’s successor Green sometimes made unconventional suggestions about fostering economic and political interdependence among the allies and opening up consultation channels as a way of strengthening the Alliance. During his short time in office, Smith often spoke about it not being enough to trust “military instruments of policy alone.” He underlined the importance of NATO members “developing their political, economic and social partnership.” He mentioned pursuing closer ties to the allies through “non-military fields” (although Smith admitted it was “too early a stage” in the development of these non-military forms of co-operation to be more specific). 42

The prime minister was a much more vigorous advocate of opening up consultation channels than most. 43 While Pearkes, Foulkes, Campbell, and Harkness focused exclusively on strengthening Canada’s military commitments to the Alliance, Diefenbaker believed the first requirement for the Western nations was to strive for “Western unity,” to “remain true to each other,” and to work toward “perfect understanding.” 44 Indeed, the problem of how to foster non-military ties with NATO so preoccupied Diefenbaker that he sometimes scribbled questions in the margins of speeches asking himself how he proposed to make NATO more than a military alliance. In one speech, his own answer was that Canadians could contribute to the Alliance’s strength by obtaining more extensive knowledge of NATO’s organization and by participating in NATO’s consultative assembly of
parliamentarians. The prime minister’s most unconventional suggestion, however, was his notion of “full and fair consultation.” From 1957 to 1963, the prime minister repeatedly suggested to the allies, especially the United States, that they consult on all decisions that could affect one another. In his opinion, the “Basic NATO Principle” was increased consultation, and he did not hesitate to remind Americans of this obligation: “It needs constantly to be recalled that NATO is an alliance of sovereign states each bearing its own responsibility for the safeguarding of peace, each with its survival at stake. A special obligation falls on the larger, more powerful members to make a reality of consultation, and to reconcile the responsibilities of leadership with those of true partnership.”

Yet Diefenbaker – and to a lesser extent Pearkes, Smith, and Green – may have emphasized consultation not because they wanted to consult with the allies but because they wanted to be consulted on issues of importance. The emphasis Diefenbaker and Pearkes placed on their “distinctly beneficial” consultations with General Norstad, and Diefenbaker’s wounded reaction in October 1962 to Kennedy’s nationwide television address airing barely two hours after he himself was consulted, seem to indicate that they believed the allies should consult with Canada more extensively and more often on issues of great moment. Whereas Pearkes, Foulkes, Harkness, and initially Diefenbaker believed that Canada should modernize its forces with nuclear weapons, they also assumed that the United States and the other allies should consult with Canada if and when the use of these weapons was contemplated.

Defenders believed the external threat to the Alliance was opportunistic and aggressive

Between 1949 and 1959, Defenders tended to perceive the external threat to the Alliance as monolithic and inexorably bent on NATO’s destruction. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of a monolithic threat assumed a mythic stature which some Defenders realized was not necessarily based on reality, but which, nevertheless, remained potent. Although this threat appeared in various guises over the years, its chief manifestation was as an aggressive challenge to the Alliance from an adversary inexorably bent on expansion.

The first point to be made about the imagery of high-level Canadian decision-makers between 1957 and 1963 is that although their assumptions about the threat were seldom articulated, they nonetheless seemed to provide the context for decision-making. Among themselves, though, decision-makers rarely discussed the enemy’s
underlying motives or intentions and seldom concretely referred to their conception of the nature of the menace. Thus, when the prime minister spoke of the threat to the Alliance, he referred interchangeably to “Mr. Khrushchev,” “the USSR” or “the Kremlin.” Harkness, too, rarely referred in concrete terms to the threat, although when he did so he focused on the “expansionist” imperatives of the “Soviet Union” or the “Soviet Bloc.” For Sidney Smith, though, the Soviet Union’s “military machine” was the problem, while General Foulkes and General Pearkes saw little need to refer concretely to the threat from the Soviet Union, as it was omnipresent.50

From 1954 through 1961–62, Diefenbaker’s imagery hardly changed at all. In 1954 he stated that “the responsibility for a continuation of the Cold War rests on the USSR.”51 In 1959, when the Soviet attitude seemed to give way to a measure of moderation and understanding, he continued to suggest that “nothing justifies the conclusion that any of the basic Soviet positions have been abandoned or modified.”52 During the Berlin Crisis, Diefenbaker was certain that “the Kremlin” created crises wherever and whenever it suited its purposes.53 For Diefenbaker, the threat was inexorably resolved on destroying peace and creating crises.54 Indeed, if Diefenbaker analysed the reasons for changes in Soviet policy, his musings often seemed to be the product of pure conjecture. As he told the Canadian Bar Association in a lengthy exposition on the nature of the Soviet threat:

One could speculate indefinitely on Soviet motives for desiring a relaxation of tension. It seems clear that one of Mr. Khrushchev’s main concerns is to modernize Soviet society and to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people. To this end he no doubt requires the assurance of a long period of peace, with some relief from the burden of armaments production and with time to broaden and consolidate the Soviet economy ... The fresh look which Mr. Khrushchev has given to Soviet foreign policy ... arises primarily from a deep-seated Soviet fear of nuclear war and its consequences. It might be influenced by possible Soviet concern about the long-range implications of the policies of Communist China. It accords better with the image of benevolence and reasonableness which the Soviet Union hopes to project in the under-developed world. Of more direct concern to Canada, a Soviet policy of conciliation offers a better prospect of driving wedges into the ranks of his diplomatic adversaries, of creating slits [sic] among members of NATO.55

By 1961, Diefenbaker had recognized that the threat was no longer monolithic (e.g., he spoke of Soviet concern over China) and, by 1961–62, he had developed a more nuanced view of the USSR. Nevertheless,
he continued to believe that an aggressive and opportunistic adversary threatened the Alliance.

Other high-level decision-makers were more reticent about naming the true nature of the threat. Evidence documenting Peake’s and Foulkes’s beliefs about “the threat” is, in fact, difficult to find. However, Ignatieff, years later, said, “Foulkes was in on the Pentagon view, that the enemy was the Soviet Union, that they were a direct threat to North America, and that for purposes of defending North America there could be no separation of authority or sovereignty.” Basil Robinson also suggests that Peake was “in the Harkness/Foulkes school of thought,” although it was widely understood at the time that “the military” presented its viewpoint to Peake and he accepted it unequivocally.

As Defence minister, Harkness emphasized that “overriding all other considerations is the open threat of the Soviet Union to eventually achieve world domination.” Harkness believed the Soviets were implementing their threat of world domination on all fronts – ideological, military, economic, and political – and gave little thought to the underlying tenets of Soviet military or communist doctrine. In a classified speech delivered in 1961, he stated his conviction that, once the Soviet Union’s reliance on force and the threat of force was realized, the true intentions of the Soviet bloc would be clear to everyone:

The present world situation is typified by a speech by Mr. Khrushchev published in Moscow exactly one month ago today. In that speech he spoke of peaceful co-existence but he also referred to the fact that the communists govern a vast area of the world and that they in turn will rule the whole globe. He termed this victory inevitable by the laws of historical development. While we can perhaps vary in our interpretation of such statements, there is no doubt that force, and the threat of force, unfortunately continue to be a declared factor of Soviet bloc policy.

Peake, Foulkes, Harkness, and Diefenbaker may have projected harsh images of the external threat to the Alliance but their imagery was not much different from that of many other Conservative members of Parliament, military representatives, and Canadian citizens. It was fairly typical in the late 1950s to make categorical assertions, such as one member’s comment to the prime minister that “the head of the Soviet Government can be compared with the typical schoolyard bully who understands only one language, calculated in terms of military strength.” It is important to appreciate the lengths to which these decision-makers would go in order to preserve their underlying beliefs about the nature of the threat.
In Harkness’s case, as well as Diefenbaker’s until 1961, any evidence demonstrating the threat as other than aggressive and opportunistic was generally ignored, overlooked, or rejected. Examples abound of this tendency to overlook or deny evidence that undermined these men’s core beliefs about the external threat to the Alliance. In 1958, for instance, Diefenbaker disregarded Khrushchev’s purported grounds for unilaterally suspending the Soviet nuclear-testing program. Instead, he attacked him in a personal letter for a decision that he saw not as “the product of negotiation and agreement among nations” but as one which “could be reversed overnight and without consultation by your Government.” Diefenbaker also denied any notion that Khrushchev’s visit to the United States in 1959 heralded a basic change in Soviet policy. In his view, neither this visit nor any other gestures of accommodation warranted a change of attitude toward the Soviet Union:

On the Soviet side, threats, abuse and suspicion appear to have given way to an attitude of greater moderation and understanding. Many different interpretations have been placed on the new Soviet approach. There are those who see it as reliable evidence of a genuine determination on the part of the Soviet Union to negotiate settlements of outstanding differences. There are others who cannot bring themselves to believe [that] Mr. Khrushchov’s [sic] words of moderation are anything but a deceitful cloak for continued Soviet pursuance of aggressive aims ... Nothing which emerged from Mr. Khrushchov’s [sic] visit to the United States and nothing he has said publicly since that time justifies the conclusion that any of the basic Soviet positions have been abandoned or modified. The Soviet hold on Eastern Europe has not been relaxed. The German problem is as intractable as ever. There are no signs of falling-off in Soviet defence preparations. There is still much room for skepticism as to the real substance of Soviet disarmament proposals. We should not leap to the conclusion that the differences we have lived with for more than a decade are on the point of being swept away, or that trouble may not arise again in areas which are at present in a state of quiet.

Initially, Diefenbaker explained the unexpected – the defused Berlin situation, the Soviet Union’s disarmament proposals at the UN – as “certain modifications” in the Soviet approach but not a “basic change.” As the prime minister wrote in a speech he himself drafted in 1959, “Past experience with the Soviet Union will warn us that we should not assume uncritically that ... [there is] a change of heart among Soviet leaders.” Indeed, Diefenbaker’s reluctance to accept that there could be any kind of basic change in the Soviet Union continued until 1961–62.
Harkness also ignored any evidence that undermined his convictions. As he saw it, the situation of peaceful co-existence was simply a front. Mr. Khrushchev, he said, had an underlying plan. Even now he was developing “peace fronts throughout the world, including pacifists of all political beliefs.”64 Even after the Cuban missile crisis ended and Khrushchev retreated in the face of Kennedy’s threat and a naval blockade, Harkness saw fit to warn Diefenbaker, “Recent events in Cuba have, of course, provided further evidence of what a Soviet promise is worth.”65

Notably, between 1957 and 1961, few leaders viewed the United States or the other NATO allies as a threat. Diefenbaker often referred to the allies as a “grand alliance” or the “Anglo-Canadian-American Community.” The members of the “NATO family,” he said, pose no threat to Canada or to each other, given their “unswerving dedication to freedom.”66 For General Pearkes and General Foulkes, who helped establish NORAD, the United States could not conceivably pose a threat and, comparatively speaking, the intentions of the other allies were of little significance. Indeed, for Pearkes, the Alliance leader was “the principal arsenal and bastion of the free world.”67 Certainly, from 1957 to 1961–62, few if any of these decision-makers were disconcerted about the capacity or propensity of the United States to use its own growing stockpile of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons.

If they perceived an internal threat to the Alliance at all, it emanated from the neutralists and pacifists within the general populace. Harkness utterly rejected “the pacifist position advocated by those who say there is no possible defence at the present time [and] we should throw up our hands in utter bewilderment and disband all our military forces.”68 On March 1962 he wrote to a Mrs. Worrall about the Voice of Women. He was afraid, he wrote, that this group had “attracted to itself, a large number of pacifists, neutralists, and left-wingers, and that these people are making every effort to undermine public feeling as far as maintaining strong defences is concerned. They are, however a group which it is politically unwise to attack, I believe, as they play on the sympathy of individuals and gain the active support of a considerable number of well-meaning women who may not be too well informed as to the actualities of the world situation.”69 For Harkness, Pearkes, Foulkes, and Diefenbaker (until 1961), the external threat to Canada and NATO was single-mindedly aggressive and inexorably bent on expansion.

Defenders assumed both Canada’s and the Alliance’s weapons were necessary and non-threatening

Defenders were inclined to downplay the capabilities of Canada’s weapons systems and view the Alliance’s as non-threatening. Many
Defenders entirely overlooked Canada's conventionally equipped forces overseas, and it was left to aides such as Jules Leger and John Holmes to tally the real measure of Canada's conventional commitments to NATO. The brigade group and the air division in Europe, along with the ocean escorts, were assumed to be so obviously necessary that they were almost entirely ignored. Thus, between 1957 and 1963, little, if any, debate occurred about whether to increase, withdraw, or reduce the number of Canadian Forces deployed overseas. Even after the Berlin crisis in September 1961, Diefenbaker decided, without discussion or fanfare, to nearly double the brigade group from 5,500 to 10,000 soldiers.

As well, many Defenders downplayed the capabilities of the nuclear weapons systems Canada intended to acquire. As Douglas Harkness was careful to explain to the House of Commons, "[The] three weapons systems ... being obtained need a nuclear capability, but I should like to make it clear that their military role can in no way be compared to such strategic nuclear weapons as are maintained by the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union. Defensive weapons with a nuclear capability may be required to maintain the credibility of the deterrent and in the event that the worst happened, would be required to provide an effective defence against Soviet aggression." Similarly, General Pearkes explained to Cabinet in 1958 that the "central question of policy was whether Canadian forces should be as well equipped as US forces alongside them." He emphasized that the Canadian Forces should be equipped with "the best weapons available," and that "to refuse or to neglect to have these available when required would place an intolerable handicap on our defences." According to Diefenbaker in 1959, the negotiations connected with the acquisition of nuclear warheads were motivated by "our intention to provide Canadian forces with modern and efficient weapons." However, as minister of National Defence, Harkness was most firmly convinced that Canada's nuclear weapons were necessary. Indeed, in his view a world without nuclear weapons could increase the possibility of war: "I dare say that all of us wish that the atomic bomb had never been discovered. Yet its absence would not reduce the possibility of war. It might even heighten it. Man can destroy himself without the aid of nuclear weapons." The Defence minister's conviction that Canadian nuclear weapons were necessary and defensive also prompted him to write what might be called "rationalizations" rather than "strategic justifications." He reasoned, for example, that Canada's deployment of nuclear-tipped missiles in Europe would be a measured response to the enemy's initially threatening provocation: "[The Honest John] would be used against concentrations of enemy
forces in the battle area and it should be remembered that the Soviet field forces are also furnished with similar weapons. I do not think our troops should be required to face a potential enemy with inferior weapons and it is for this reason that our Army has been supplied with the Honest John. Several other armies of NATO members also have this weapon.”

The tendency to assume the Alliance’s own weapons were largely benign is illustrated, too, by these decision-makers’ approach to the issue of fallout from nuclear explosions over Canada. In 1961 the Cabinet received “the best information available” so it might consider what was called the “dead man fuse” question. The decision-makers were told that the Bomarc missiles could destroy the enemy’s aircraft without causing the nuclear weapons they carried to explode, even if the warheads had been activated beforehand. As for the resulting fallout from the Bomarc missiles exploding on impact with the enemy’s aircraft, they were told that these small nuclear explosions would not cause a great deal of fallout because of their explosion high in the air. However, it was added, there was a “strong probability” that the use of conventional warheads would result in the explosion of activated nuclear weapons carried by enemy aircraft. Later, Harkness assured Green in a personal letter that the Bomarc missiles would destroy Soviet bombers and the bombs they were carrying with only a “minor” release of radioactive fallout. Although Cabinet ministers seemed reassured by phrases such as “would not cause great fallout” and “strong probability,” many Canadians were not as confident. The minister of National Defence continued to receive well-reasoned letters from citizens, asking, for example:

Although the atomic blast from our missile may not trigger the enemies’ H-bomb, what about the blast of the atomic bomb in our Bomarc? No matter how small it is, it will liberate deadly radiation; if it is anywhere near a town or city, it could partially or completely destroy it and its inhabitants; and the flash could blind people for miles around ... It would seem to me, in this age of advanced technology, that it would be quite easy for an enemy, once he knows that his plane or missile is about to be destroyed, to set off his bomb before he is hit, thus still causing undue damage through blast, heat, and radiation.

Harkness, in his personally written draft of a “standard reply,” vigorously maintained that such concerns were unwarranted and “completely incorrect”:

The Bomarc equipped with a nuclear warhead on contact with an aircraft or even exploded in close proximity to that aircraft would in all probability not
only destroy the aircraft but also neutralize or “cook” the bomb thus preventing it being triggered. The size of the nuclear warhead designed for the Bomarc is relatively small as compared to the bomb or bombs carried in the aircraft and this, coupled with the fact that the explosion would occur several thousands of feet in the air, would have little affect [sic] at ground level.\(^8\)

Moreover, Harkness’s conviction that the explosions from the Bomarc missiles would not threaten Canadian lives was sufficiently firm that he expressed no concerns to the prime minister about possibly moving the line of defence northward. As he wrote in secret correspondence, the only foreseeable problem with moving the likely area of air battle was the possibility of negative newspaper articles written by so-called defence “experts”: “From a Canadian point of view, I believe we would be at a disadvantage, although military opinion does not accept this, in moving the likely area of air battle from roughly along the 49th parallel to roughly a line through Calgary, Saskatoon and 100 miles north of Winnipeg. I would think it almost inevitable that some of the newspaper defence experts would finally get on to this idea and you are well aware of what the effect on people in Western Canada would be of articles along this line.”\(^8\) Rather than acknowledging the concerns about the dangerous effects of nuclear fallout from Soviet bombers and Bomars alike, Harkness worried about the predictably negative reactions of newspapers and Western Canadians.

Harkness insisted that Canadian nuclear weapons would be defensive and tactical, not offensive or strategic. As he wrote to his nephew, “In any discussion with regard to the acquisition of nuclear weapons, I think you must make a distinction between the strategic nuclear bombs or retaliatory forces, to which I have already referred, and the tactical and defensive nuclear weapons necessary for the ground forces in Europe and for the air defences here at home.”\(^8\) Once his colleagues in Cabinet and Canadians in general became agitated about whether to fulfill Canada’s nuclear commitments, Harkness drew an even sharper distinction between the “offensive” nuclear weapons possessed by the United States and Britain, and soon to be possessed by France, and the “defensive” nuclear weapons sought by Canada. As he wrote to a constituent shortly after the Cuban missile crisis, Canada had no intention of either acquiring or manufacturing offensive nuclear weapons: “Although Britain has offensive nuclear weapons and France is in the process of developing them, we have no intention of either acquiring or manufacturing such weapons in Canada. As a partner in NATO, we rely on the strategic nuclear forces of the United States and there is no requirement for us to obtain an offensive nuclear arsenal similar to that possessed by members of the so-called ‘nuclear club.’”\(^8\) The Defence minister
buttressed his claim with the argument that Canada’s possession of nuclear weapons would be “entirely different from a military and moral standpoint, the fundamental difference being the fact that it was not physically possible to use these weapons unless an enemy had on his own initiative made their use imperative to the survival of a defender.”

Harkness also asserted that the Bomarc and Voodoo systems deployed in Canada could only be used in a defensive mode (i.e., they could not reach Russian or Eastern European territory). But he completely avoided the question of whether, as part of NATO’s “forward strategy” in Western Europe, Canada’s CF-104S, Lacrosse, and Honest John systems were defensive or offensive. The CF-104S, in fact, were meant to strike as far forward as possible, and the Lacrosse and Honest John atomic weapons were intended to be used from the outset in forward areas. Nevertheless, Harkness consistently avoided any discussion of whether these systems were therefore offensive, like the Bomarc and the CF-101S.

Unlike military experts such as Pearkes, Foulkes, and Harkness, Prime Minister Diefenbaker initially drew few distinctions among nuclear weapons. Judging from the lack of evidence indicating his views, the prime minister did not address these questions until 1961–62. As Basil Robinson explains, it may have been that, on assuming power, Diefenbaker never had to consider contrary arguments; only later, when the public, media, and Green began putting forward opposing ideas, was Diefenbaker forced to review any ideas and arguments contrary to the prevailing “pro-nuclear” view. By 1961, however, the prime minister was suggesting that Canada would abide by the principle of “not spreading nuclear weapons” because all its nuclear weapons would be “defensive,” and the warheads would be “neither manufactured nor tested in Canada.”

As already mentioned, high-level decision-makers during this time period nearly always referred to the nuclear weapons Canada planned on acquiring as “Honest John,” “Little John,” or the “Lacrosse” systems, not as nuclear missiles. As well, they consistently referred to the nuclear-equipped interceptors and missiles as “Voodoo” and “Bomarc.” The Chief of the Defence Staff wrote of the need to acquire interceptors to complement the “family” of nuclear weapons. And Douglas Harkness likened the acquisition of nuclear weapons to buying a rifle: “The situation is much the same as a man living in a lonely cabin in the woods who fears that he may be attacked by a bear. He does not wait until the bear actually attacks him to buy a rifle, but secures it beforehand and has it ready in the event of need.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, many Defenders tended to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons with relative equanimity.
for example, assumed that those who advocated acquiring and using nuclear weapons were rational, while those who were opposed to nuclear arsenals or to contemplating their eventual use were irrational and emotional. The issue of whether or not to acquire nuclear weapons, he explained, "is a question which some people cannot face dispassionately. It gives rise to emotional disturbances which cloud the issue and preclude rational discussion." Similarly, General Pearkes assumed that it was all right for Canada to have nuclear weapons, since it would never use them unreasonably (although other countries might). His remarks in one Cabinet meeting are instructive. He said it would be necessary to undertake complex negotiations with the United States to equip Canadian Forces with "the most effective weapons." At the same time, he praised the United States for having refrained from conducting similar negotiations with other countries outside the Alliance. In his view, "the rigid U.S. attitude with respect to nuclear weapons was understandable when one thought of what some countries outside the 'Iron Curtain' might have done in the last few years if they had had such weapons available to them."

Such attitudes may have stemmed from a reluctance to accept disturbing new information about the dangers of nuclear weapons. For instance, Basil Robinson now believes that the true measure of the force of a hydrogen nuclear explosion had not yet been brought home to General Foulkes, Air Marshal Miller, or Douglas Harkness. In Harkness's case, his reluctance to accept "nuclear reality" may have impelled him to defend the utility of nuclear weapons. Rather than confront the apocalyptic nature of nuclear weapons, he claimed he had faced up to the "hard fact" that a nuclear war could come about:

I believe that the basic reason for so much questioning on defence matters is the underlying fear of the nuclear weapon. Unfortunately the hydrogen bomb is with us and we have to accept this as a reality ... I am inclined to believe that this fear of the present nuclear stalemate leads some people into a "head in the sand" attitude. By that I mean a refusal to face the fact that a nuclear war could conceivably come about. This in turn leads to an irritation on the part of those individuals because the government is planning defence measures to meet such an awful possibility, remote as it may seem.

The established point of view at the time was that it would be possible to survive a nuclear war. Although today the underground system designed in the 1950s to protect the prime minister and his aides—"the Diefenbunker"—has been converted into a museum, thirty years ago it symbolized the government's determination to protect Canada's leadership against nuclear attack. The view among
Defence policy-makers in the late 1950s was that the principal organs of government could survive a nuclear war relatively intact. Although comparatively little was known about the after-effects of nuclear warfare on people and the environment, the Department of National Defence engaged in intensive planning to put in place “survival operations” in the event of a nuclear attack. Preparations were also made for the “post-attack situation,” so as to ensure continuity of government, emergency communications, shelter, and the maintenance of law and order. When Harkness was minister of National Defence, he too spent considerable time improving the “national survival program” in case of nuclear war. He ordered civil defence preparations, including the stockpiling of stores and the provision of a nuclear detonation-and-fallout reporting system. He also arranged a large national survival exercise, and called for the training of up to 100,000 militia in special nuclear survival courses. He was provided with background information on the “Post-Attack Situation,” indicating that “it is reasonable to assume that if an approximate balance in nuclear strength is achieved between East and West, the side having made the most efficient preparations for survival will possess a marked advantage.”

Defence decision-makers received detailed estimates about the number of Canadians who would be killed in “a heavy attack.” The dead would number “many hundreds of thousands of people,” while some 1.2 million people in sixteen Canadian cities would need to be “rescued.” With few household shelters under construction, departmental estimates suggested that most Canadians could find some shelter from fallout in their basements. Arrangements to ensure some form of continuity of government at the federal and provincial levels were made as well. Taken together, all these estimates and contingency plans probably contributed to the widespread assumption that the Alliance’s weapons were necessary and that it would be possible to survive a nuclear war.

Defenders believed deterrence doctrine was suitable and reliable

Many Defenders expressed faith in deterrence, although the kinds of military commitments it required to be credible varied as technology and nuclear strategy evolved. In 1954, American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced what came to be called the doctrine of “massive retaliation.” It was based on the American government’s decision to depend on its capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and in places of its own choosing. The NATO Council, in turn, revised its military doctrine by declaring that the Alliance would resort to atomic
weapons whether the enemy did so or not. Despite the Soviet Union's development of the hydrogen bomb and the reality of mutual vulnerability, the main elements of deterrence, based on the strategy of massive retaliation, did not change. Indeed, the lesson learned by US strategists from the Korean War prevailed: that the allies should rely on nuclear weapons in preparation for future wars. As well, American interest in reducing the cost of armed personnel contributed to shifting the reliance from conventional to nuclear forces.

Although American doctrine changed little between 1954 and 1960, defence strategists were mindful of the essential ambiguity of the threat to resort to mutual destruction, and the implications of technological developments in the Soviet Union. The production of long-range Soviet bombers increased after 1955, and the Soviets began experimenting with medium-range ballistic missiles. The United States accordingly devoted more of its military expenditure than before to strengthening its Strategic Air Command (SAC) forces and developing nuclear missiles.

In 1957, owing to the Alliance's increasing reliance on nuclear systems to sustain the doctrine of deterrence, NATO military authorities decided to reduce the conventional forces in Europe – to the point they were deemed inadequate to sustain a massive attack in the frontal sector of Europe. The spread of tactical atomic weapons, which were developed before the Korean War but were unavailable in sufficient numbers until 1955, then became the starting point for various theories of limited war. American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and SACEUR General Lauris Norstad became the two principal architects of American policies on limited war. According to defence analyst Albert Legault, "Their statements ... were not marked by precision and clarity, and it is difficult to give an opinion on the exact substance of American thought during this period." In principle, however, the two Americans indicated that the use of atomic weapons in a limited conflict (possibly over Berlin in 1959) would be the prelude to full-scale thermonuclear warfare. For Dulles in particular, the prospect of a limited war, based on the danger of automatic escalation to full-scale nuclear warfare, was still a credible deterrent. The problem that became apparent to Norstad and others in the higher echelons, however, revolved around the double-edged sword of massive retaliation. Legault explains:

The policy of massive retaliation had the advantage of offering no alternative bargaining point. It was thus a double-edged weapon, for it created such a feeling of uncertainty in the mind of the enemy that he was compelled to think rationally about other means of procedure if he did not wish to
precipitate a crisis of which he would have been the first victim. On the other hand, the dubious effectiveness of the West’s conventional forces and the necessity of having recourse to atomic arms threatened to plunge the West into the very abyss it was trying to avoid.\textsuperscript{100}

In order to limit the problems associated with massive retaliation, Norstad conceived the idea of creating an advance line of conventional and tactical nuclear forces to form a shield within Europe (\textit{MC/70}). His ideas about stockpiling tactical atomic weapons and the forward deployment of conventional forces in Europe did not imply, however, that he was advocating a strategy of limited war in Europe for \textit{NATO}. Norstad was always careful to be seen as being supportive of Dulles’s principal doctrine of massive retaliation.

Between 1960 and 1964, the main tenets of deterrence altered. Immediately on Kennedy’s succession to power, the doctrine of “flexible response” or “controlled response” was officially endorsed. (Flexible response had been the unofficial doctrine of the \textit{USAF} and the Navy since 1958). Known also as the “McNamara doctrine,” after Defence Secretary Robert McNamara, deterrence was now based on the idea that, since nuclear parity was fully established, the United States could not reasonably resort to general nuclear warfare in order to defend limited goals. As Kennedy explained in 1961, “We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear action.”

The United States thus decided to strengthen its non-nuclear capability for limited war. The American administration reassured the allies, however, that this in no way weakened \textit{NATO}'s determination to resort to nuclear weapons in the event of a major aggression that could not be resisted by conventional weapons. The new concept was that, in the event that \textit{NATO} forces were about to be overwhelmed, the “shield” would force what Norstad called “a pause,” thereby emphasizing the costs and consequences of continued aggression.

Thus, in the period between 1954 and 1963, deterrence doctrine evolved. Dependence on all-out retaliation using nuclear weapons gradually gave way to reliance on different levels of response, ranging from limited conventional and nuclear war (the shield), to full-scale intercontinental nuclear warfare (the sword).\textsuperscript{101}

In the inner circle of defence decision-making in Canada, leaders seldom followed the various permutations of deterrence doctrine as it developed during these years. Most expressed faith in the credibility of massive retaliation and assumed that, to deter the threat, the allies simply had to ensure that the costs of attacking would be far greater than any conceivable benefits. Rarely, in fact, are more complicated concepts – the shield, the sword, and flexible response, or references
to the underlying contradictions and ambiguities of deterrence – found in the available classified, declassified, and unclassified documents.\textsuperscript{102}

Several of the decision-makers at the centre and core of policy-making – General Pearkes, General Foulkes, Douglas Harkness, Ambassador Arnold Heeney, and Prime Minister Diefenbaker – had a great deal of faith in the utility of nuclear weapons to deter war. As General Pearkes explained to Parliament in 1959, “The aim of the western alliance is, first of all, to deter the outbreak of war. Should this fail and an attack follow, we must be in a position to defend ourselves and to destroy the enemy’s ability to wage war.”\textsuperscript{103} Pearkes also proved to be relatively prescient in 1959 about the implications for deterrence of stockpiling nuclear weapons in Europe. As he told his fellow Defence ministers at NATO headquarters, the Alliance’s defence was based on “the concept of the deterrent.” Therefore, he believed “advances” in the future, such as placing “intermediate range missiles” in “certain European countries” and maintaining stockpiles of nuclear warheads for the defence of the whole NATO area would “provide us in due course with an increasingly flexible deterrent power.”\textsuperscript{104} At this same meeting, Pearkes told the other ministers that, “should the Russians ever think that they were in a position to make a full-scale onslaught, we will be ready to unleash the nuclear striking force which is that sword of which I have spoken.”\textsuperscript{105}

Harkness also had a great deal of faith in the utility of nuclear deterrence to prevent war. Indeed, his reliance on the doctrine was almost religious. This faith was reflected in his personally developed standard reply to those who wrote to him opposing nuclear weapons:

It should be pointed out that the purpose in maintaining our defence force is to prevent a war rather than to start one. This we do, along with the Allies, by creating a situation wherein any potential aggressor knows that if he attacks us he would be destroyed. The only two weapons systems being obtained for our forces in Canada which have a nuclear capability are the Bomarc surface-to-air missile and the F101B interceptor aircraft. Neither of these can be used until after hostile aircraft have been over Canadian territory many hundreds of miles. Thus, they are incapable of starting a war but do contribute to the deterrence of war.\textsuperscript{106}

By referring in his standard reply to the nuclear forces “in Canada” only, Harkness avoided dealing with the issue of whether the CF-104s and Honest John missiles in Europe buttressed or undermined the stability of nuclear deterrence.

Harkness was never reluctant to deal with the issue of whether, by acquiring nuclear weapons, Canada would deter or increase the risk
of war. As he argued in personal correspondence, “The possession of such weapons [e.g., nuclear weapons for air defence] cannot be regarded as increasing the risk of war. On the contrary, the risk of failure which they present to an aggressor can represent a definite contribution to the deterrence of aggression.”107 The presence of peace, he explained, was attributable only to the workings of deterrence: “There is no doubt in my mind that the nuclear retaliatory power of the West has been the key to peace in the past few years. Atomic energy can be a force for good – a force to help maintain peace through fear of its almost incomprehensible power.”108 Harkness interpreted even the most ambiguous evidence as confirmation of the validity of deterrence. “I do not think,” he said to students at the Royal Canadian Military Institute, “that there could be a single responsible student of defence in the Western world who would not admit that Soviet military aggression had been prevented in the past ten years by the nuclear deterrent in the hands of the United States and the United Kingdom.”109

In each decade, different military commitments were deemed necessary to help ensure a credible deterrence posture. In this time period, most military officials were neither confused nor uncertain about the imperative of fulfilling Canada’s nuclear commitments in order to render credible the Alliance’s system of nuclear deterrence. The imperative of acquiring nuclear warheads so as not to abandon the allies in the face of the Soviet threat gave rise to frequent outbursts of frustration directed against the prime minister and Howard Green.110 By 1962, many high-level officials shared Defence Minister Harkness’s concern about the “woeful” inadequacy of continental air defence owing to the deployment of warhead-less Bomars and CF-101 aircraft, and were in agreement that Canada had to acquire weapons “equal or superior to those in the hands of the enemy they would have to fight.”111 The Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly recommended in 1961 that the government fulfill its commitments in order to protect the American deterrent and provide twenty percent of NATO’s tactical nuclear strike force in Europe. As they saw it, acquiring nuclear weapons of a tactical nature and limited range would be neither provocative nor increase the risk of nuclear war.112

In contrast to such advisers, Prime Minister Diefenbaker experienced considerable unease about the issue of rendering Canada’s defences credible and either deterring a nuclear war or prevailing in it. On the question of what would happen if deterrence failed, he thought in 1959 that the Alliance should be able to defend itself with conventional weapons. He also believed that nuclear war would result in either “total destruction for all or, at best, a victory over a
shattered world." By September 1961, he was waffling in favour of acquiring nuclear weapons for Canadian Forces in Europe, but believed that what was at stake during the Berlin crisis could be “the survival of mankind.” It could be a question of “existence or non-existence,” he said; “head-on collision” would be insane and suicidal. By December 1962, Prime Minister Diefenbaker had utterly rejected the utility of nuclear weapons for deterring aggression or prevailing in the event of war.

Between 1954 and 1960, however, the prime minister had placed a great deal of faith in the basic principle of nuclear deterrence. Simply put, he recognized that “Canada, the United States, and the other nations of the free world must maintain sufficient military strength to deter an aggressor.” He also grasped the principle underlying Dulles’s doctrine of mutual destruction early on. Even in 1954, he was able to explain that peace was finally obtainable now that the USSR understood the deterrent power of the nuclear bomb. In Diefenbaker’s own words, with some assistance from Winston Churchill: “[T]he awful power of the H. bomb may mean man’s survival and mankind’s freedom from war. Mankind may be on the threshold of Peace because the USSR realizes what the free nations have contended since 1945, that war may spell the physical extinction of mankind. The prayer of Canadians and people everywhere is that the H. bomb, in the words of Churchill, may be the greatest deterrent to the outbreak of World War III and may well be the beginning of a new age of Peace.”

The prime minister also understood nuclear deterrence well enough to realize that a policy of “no-first use” might undermine the threat of mutual destruction. In August 1960, he warned the House of Commons: “To declare in advance that we would never use such weapons would weaken immeasurably their deterrent effect. Do not let us overlook the importance of the deterrent ... if we announce that we are not going to use them we would be decreasing our ability to prevent war, which is the main object of all our defence preparations.”

Yet it is notable that, compared to other close colleagues like Pearkes, Foulkes, Harkness, and Heeney, the prime minister was much more concerned that the threat of nuclear retaliation would not necessarily prevent all kinds of nuclear war. Indeed, the danger of nuclear war breaking out by accident or miscalculation was such that Diefenbaker addressed these concerns in a personal letter written to Khrushchev in 1958. This is not to say, however, that between 1957 and 1961 the prime minister paid a great deal of attention to alternative scenarios that could not be prevented by relying on deterrence doctrine. None of these decision-makers seemed to consider unconventional scenarios, though their American counterparts at the time
were seeking to control the flexible and decentralized procedure the president relied on for authorizing the use of nuclear weapons in the field. Indeed, there is no record of Canadian ministers considering the dangers of a front-line commander resorting, without permission, to short-range atomic weapons such as the Honest John without Presidential authority. In June 1962, the US Defence Department developed an electronic lock and key system for the remote control of tactical nuclear weapons from higher headquarters (now referred to as the Permissive Action Link, or PAL system). In contrast, high-level Canadian decision-makers did not discuss whether the president would exercise final authority or whether the flexible, decentralized procedure the president relied on was dangerous. According to Cabinet records, neither did they consider whether massive retaliation could cope with the problem of a minor conflict escalating to a nuclear war. As well, the issue of whether accidental nuclear war was likely or controllable was hardly considered, and any ideas or suggestions that the Alliance could muster against amorphous, diffuse perils, such as environmental threats, human rights violations, and nuclear proliferation were inconceivable. In emergency meetings during the Cuban missile crisis, in fact, Cabinet ministers avoided discussing what the post-attack situation might look like in the event of a deterrence failure. During the emergency meeting of 25 October 1962, they agreed only that draft emergency orders should be sent out to “a lot of other departments affected.” Rather than discuss how the general population might be affected in case of nuclear war, attention was focused on the shortcomings apparent in the “National Defence Warbook.” Instead of discussing in concrete terms the foreseeable effects of a nuclear war on the North American population, Cabinet ministers focused on “certain revisions” to the Warbook that now seemed necessary. With the exception of a few comments by Green about the dangers of nuclear proliferation, Cabinet ministers avoided considering threatening scenarios that could not be dealt with other than by relying on the workings of nuclear deterrence.

**CONCLUSION**

Many Cabinet documents, memoranda, personal letters, diaries, original drafts of speeches, and transcripts of interviews indicate that the core beliefs of Defenders greatly influenced decision-making regarding Canada’s nuclear commitments between 1957 and 1963. In particular, George Pearkes, Charles Foulkes, Douglas Harkness, Arnold Heeney, Frank Miller, and Hugh Campbell possessed belief systems typical of Defenders; moreover, until 1961–62, John Diefenbaker reflected many elements of this same belief system. Although these
men differed somewhat in terms of the intensity with which they held certain core beliefs, all of them espoused elements of the same system. In secret discussions, debates, and correspondence, they feared that Canada might neglect the allies, and that the allies might abandon Canada, unless Canada fulfilled its nuclear and conventional commitments. They assumed that the country should pursue closer ties to its NATO allies through established military commitments, particularly by upgrading its weapons systems to nuclear capability. They believed that the external threat to the Alliance from the Soviet bloc was opportunistic and aggressive. They regarded both Canada's and the Alliance's weapons as necessary and non-threatening. And their faith in deterrence as a suitable and reliable doctrine led them to recommend retaining, if not modernizing, Canada's nuclear and conventional commitments to the Alliance. It was this adherence to the main elements of a belief system typical of Defenders that prompted these decision-makers to advocate the acquisition of five different types of nuclear weapons systems for the Canadian Forces.

Many ministers and defence advisers recommended modernizing Canada's weapons systems with nuclear weapons because of their beliefs about the dangers of abandonment, the nature of the threat, the utility of nuclear weapons, and the reliability and suitability of deterrence. Beginning in 1957, Defence Minister General Pearkes, supported by his senior adviser General Foulkes, argued in favour of acquiring these weapons systems for the Canadian Forces. Initially, the prime minister relied a great deal on their assessments. Although Diefenbaker was unsure of himself at the 1957 NATO Council meeting, and perhaps confused about the nature of the commitments he was undertaking, between 1957 and 1961 he undoubtedly favoured acquiring these weapons. Behind the scenes and in private conversations, Ambassador Arnold Heeney, Frank Miller, Hugh Campbell, Pierre Sevigny, and George Hees were also vigorous advocates of the nation's nuclear commitments.

The presence of these influential Defenders in the inner circle of decision-making contributed greatly to the government's support for the acquisition of nuclear weapons. This is not to say, however, that it was solely Defenders who accounted for the government's pro-nuclear stand. Other factors – the climate of opinion among the NATO allies, technological developments, American pressure to acquire the CF-101s and Bomarc – contributed to the outcome as well. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the main elements of the belief system of Defenders played an important contributory role.

In other words, we cannot attribute Canada's decision to acquire nuclear weapons to international, technological, and strategic developments beyond the government's control. The underlying belief
systems of political leaders were important factors impelling the
government to favour the acquisition of nuclear weapons. In fact,
defence decision-making was affected by the 1957 NATO Council
directives, General Norstad’s briefing to Cabinet, Diefenbaker’s can-
cellation of the Avro Arrow, and the launch of the Sputnik. However,
key Canadian leaders supported the acquisition of nuclear weapons
for the Canadian Forces because of their beliefs about the dangers of
abandonment, the salience of the Soviet threat, the utility of nuclear
weapons, and the importance of buttressing deterrence.

Finally, it is important to note that, within the inner circle, no high-
level decision-makers initially opposed, or even criticized, Canada’s
nuclear commitments. The views of the first minister of External
Affairs, Sidney Smith, had not yet crystallized and, until Howard
Green assumed office, Deputy Minister Norman Robertson felt
uncomfortable about putting forward his own growing concerns. The
prime minister did not encourage debate and discussion among his
advisers; indeed, with reference to defence matters, he initially pre-
ferred to rely on his own opinions and the advice of Pearkes and
Foulkes rather than discuss the matter with External Affairs or
submit the question to parliamentary debate. During this period,
Howard Green was still a backbencher; he did not become minister
of External Affairs until June 1959. And George Ignatieff, another
potential critic of the government’s stance, did not return to Ottawa
from London, England, to act as Diefenbaker’s adviser on nuclear
issues until January 1961. The idea that it might be unnecessary to
acquire nuclear warheads in order to demonstrate Canada’s commit-
ment to NATO was therefore an idea not yet considered. Indeed, it
was not until Howard Green took office that the Prime Minister
began to vacillate about whether or not to fulfill these commitments.