

The ministers agreed that, while the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia did not constitute a direct threat to NATO, the uncertainties regarding future Soviet intentions could not be ignored. The communiqué therefore reaffirmed the determination of their governments to defend members of the alliance against any armed attack, in accordance with the North Atlantic Treaty. It also observed that any Soviet intervention directly or indirectly affecting the situation in Europe or in the Mediterranean would create an international crisis with grave consequences.

It was considered that, in view of the new situation created in Eastern Europe, certain improvements in the military forces available to NATO would be desirable. The nature and extent of these improvements were discussed in the Defence Planning Committee, and the Minister of National Defence will be describing that discussion to you in more detail.

I should like to emphasize, however, that the limited improvements envisaged for NATO's forces could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered provocative or an escalation of the arms race. Their immediate military purpose was to improve the ability of the alliance to cope with the uncertainties of the period ahead resulting from recent Soviet action. Behind this, they served the larger political purpose of demonstrating to Soviet leaders that recourse to force in solving European problems was unproductive; that the reaction which it would inevitably generate could only serve to complicate rather than ease the solution of present or future problems.

Having accepted the requirement to maintain appropriate defences, the ministers underlined with equal emphasis their unanimous view that détente remained as the long-term goal of the alliance. It was agreed that the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia had seriously set back hopes of settling the outstanding problems which divided Europe, but it was acknowledged that solutions for these problems, together with progress in arms-control and disarmament, were essential elements in establishing a situation of lasting peace. In my own statement to the Council, I expressed the importance which Canada attached to continuing progress in the field of arms-control and disarmament. I expressed the hope that the Non-Proliferation Treaty would not become a casualty of the events in Czechoslovakia and urged that early action be taken by all concerned to bring the Treaty into force as soon as possible. I also indicated our desire to see the important discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union on the limitation and reduction of offensive and defensive strategic arms begin as soon as possible.

The ministers agreed that continuing attention should be devoted by the alliance to arms-control and disarmament so that progress could be resumed as soon as circumstances permitted. The communiqué specifically noted that, while recent Soviet actions seem to rule out any movement for the time being on the question of mutual force reductions, NATO should pursue its study of the issues involved so that it will be in a position to move ahead when more favourable circumstances prevail. Canada attaches particular importance to this element of the discussion in Brussels.

In conclusion, the ministers agreed that the North Atlantic alliance would continue to stand as the guarantor of security and the essential foundation of European reconciliation. Recent events had further demonstrated that its continued existence was more than ever necessary.