

Focus: On Confidence-Building

Focus is our column for secondary school students.

Canada is about to play host to a major East-West gathering. The 16 states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which Canada is one, and the seven states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) will meet in Ottawa from February 12 to 28 to negotiate an Open Skies agreement. The agreement will allow individual states of each alliance to fly over individual states of the other alliance on short-notice, using unarmed surveillance planes. The notice will be long enough to make sure that air safety is not threatened but short enough to prevent the covering up of any major military activities.

The flight of a Soviet military plane over Canada would normally be considered a threat to Canadian security. Indeed, when military planes from one alliance occasionally stray into the airspace of the other alliance, it is usually viewed as a chance to test the



Swiss army vehicles on the move during recent military exercise. Being allowed to watch an exercise like this one gives countries confidence in the intentions of other countries.

reduce wrong impressions and suspicions about the possible use of military force. It thus improves relations between states and makes it much less likely that a war will start by mistake.

Say, for example, that Canada was suspicious about what was happening at a military base in Czechoslovakia. Under an Open Skies agreement, Canada would be able to fly over the base, see what was going on there and decide for itself — based on what it saw — whether its suspicions were justified. Without Open Skies, Canada would have to operate on the basis of suspicions alone.

Just as important as what Open Skies will do to clear up suspicions is what it will say about intentions. If a country were preparing for an attack it would not likely agree to Open Skies, because its preparations would be discovered. Movements and gatherings of troops and weapons can easily be seen from the air. So in signing an Open Skies

agreement, countries will be saying to one another: "Look, you can trust me. My intentions are peaceful and I want you to see this for yourself."

Open Skies will not be the only confidence-building agreement in existence. Last November two Canadians were invited to Switzerland to observe a military exercise there. Switzerland, like Canada, has signed what is known as the Stockholm Document (1986). Under this agreement, countries are required to invite observers from the other signatory countries to watch military exercises above a certain size. Again, this is a way of letting countries see for themselves that the military exercises are just that — exercises — and not preparations for an attack.

NATO and the WTO are in the process of negotiating an agreement on reducing their conventional (i.e., non-nuclear) armed forces in Europe. Canada hopes that agreement on Open Skies will speed this negotiation and others, leading to many arms control agreements throughout the 1990s.

Open Skies will be able to help in the verification of some of these future arms control agreements, that is, with seeing whether or not the other side is living up to its commitments. Right now the United States and the Soviet Union are the only countries in NATO and the WTO that have reconnaissance satellites capable of seeing detailed military activities. Their allies have to rely on them for this information. Under Open Skies, the allies without satellites will be able to see for themselves that arms control agreements are being lived up to and that their security is not being threatened. This should make them more willing to sign agreements.

Building confidence is an important step in the process of limiting arms and building security. An agreement on Open Skies will be such a step. ■

Why Open Skies will not be a threat

opponent's air defences, or to do some spying. In fact, when Open Skies was first proposed by the USA over thirty years ago, the Soviet Union rejected the idea as an espionage plot. What has changed? Why is Canada going to agree to let WTO countries fly over Canadian territory and take detailed photographs whenever they want to? (Remember that the planes will not be carrying weapons, so there will be no danger of Canadians being bombed or shot at.)

Open Skies is what is known as a confidence-building measure. The goal of a confidence-building measure is to