



National Defence and Arms Control: Canadian Priorities that Share a Common Logic and a Similar Purpose

On October 2, the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Perrin Beatty, addressed the Consultative Group on Disarmament and Arms Control Affairs on the theme of "The Interrelationship between Arms Control and Disarmament and Defence." Following is the text of his address.

"I have been Minister of National Defence for only three months. In that time, I have been very much aware of the task ahead as I prepare to put before Cabinet guideposts for the direction which Canadian defence policy should take in the years ahead.

Your group provides an important forum and I am happy to have this opportunity to outline my thinking on the relationship between arms control and defence. I regret that my schedule will not permit me to stay with you for the remainder of the afternoon but Bob Fowler and his team will stay and I will look forward to hearing your views from him. I am committed to consulting widely before introducing a White Paper and my office will be seeking further opportunities for us to exchange views on major defence and security policy issues.

The report of the Special Joint Committee last June recommended that the Government should engage the public in a continuing dialogue on security policy, beginning by making public its own views and the arguments behind them. I wholeheartedly agree and can think of no more important body with which to take up that dialogue than the Consultative Group.

For many Canadians, the fading memories of global conflict instill a sense that great wars are the stuff of history, of ancestral achievement and sacrifice. We learn to approach war as we would other subjects in a curriculum, and the study of conflict assumes its place on our library shelves, and in our minds, beside chemistry, English literature and engineering.

Our movie screens reflect a different approach. War becomes a subject of celluloid fantasy, taking place in exotic places, conducted by men and women of uncommon courage and beauty. With a few honourable exceptions, the causes of conflict are left unclear, and the effects on individuals and societies drift into the background, too complex, too disturbing, too bothersome to weigh on the minds of the moviemaker or moviegoer.

Perhaps all this is inevitable, a by-product of our 'long nuclear peace,' as *The Economist* magazine recently labelled the post-war period. It is not surprising that, for most Canadians, war is a subject of study or fantasy, since for most it is not within our experience.

But there is, possibly, an additional aspect to this phenomenon. Perhaps our minds have become numbed by the repeated cataloguing of the instruments of war which modern man has invented with such ingenuity.

We have become reluctant voyeurs, fixated by the endless march of technology, and the engineered elegance of ever more discriminating means of destruction.

Yet this is a fascination tinged with dread. For, while conflict is a distant memory for most Canadians, we know that history provides us with few examples of perpetual peace. And we also know that the gleaming weapons which are testimony to the technological genius of man may also be the instruments of his destruction.

Thus, it is not just a lack of familiarity which influences our approach to these questions. It is also fear, not simply of the unknown, but also of the unprecedented. I do not need to tell this group that never before in the history of man has the risk been so great that world conflict could be final and nearly instantaneous in its consequences. This potential for finality leads some to approach the question of security with a clinical —



The Honourable Perrin Beatty, Minister of National Defence.

even cynical — detachment inappropriate to the issues at hand. And it is a very different reaction which leads others to treat the same questions with an emotionalism bereft of logic, to cry in the darkness that reality must change simply because they wish it were different.

But reality does not provide solace to either the logician or the romantic. Nuclear weapons can never be disinvented. There is, however, legitimate concern that current international structures may not be able to prevent their use. Our talent for invention may not be matched by our capacity for control.

We live in a paradox. The very characteristics of nuclear weapons, which have undeniably helped to preserve our long post-war peace, compel us to search for additional mechanisms of control, of confidence-building and cooperation.

Perhaps it is the novelty of this condition and our growing estrangement from the past which causes old lessons to be discarded and new untested insights to occupy their place.