

PIERRE TRUDEAU'S LAST HURRAH

In a new book on the impact of the Trudeau years on Canadian foreign policy, two historians take a harsh view of the 1983 "peace initiative."

BY J.L. GRANATSTEIN AND ROBERT BOTHWELL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND ADMINISTRATION WERE IN A PARTICULARLY jingoistic mood in late 1983. The Grenada invasion, botched though it was in its military implementation, had been trumpeted as a sign of a new resurgence of pride in the military, patriotism, and the old American virtues. The propaganda tomtoms were beating furiously to hail the virtues of the Strategic Defense Initiative (popularly known as "Star Wars"), announced by President Reagan (without consultation with his allies or even with the State Department) in a TV address in March 1983, as a way to protect America completely from nuclear attack. While few took SDI seriously in the West, the Soviets had been greatly alarmed. In Washington, the president continued to ride high in the opinion polls, many of his advisers remained true believers in the necessity to grapple with the communists, and Trudeau, a proponent of Canadian equidistance, inevitably was seen as suspiciously soft on the Soviets.

A Pentagon official recalled that when he heard of the initiative, his response was, "Oh God, Trudeau's at it again." But why worry, he added, if Trudeau had no influence on other people? An officer of the National Security Council noted that "there was no predilection here to alter [Trudeau's] lack of influence." And Lawrence Eagleburger, the third-ranking official of the Department of State, told a private dinner party a week before Trudeau arrived in Washington that the Canadian's peace efforts resembled nothing so much as those of a leftist high on pot. Eagleburger was thought to be one of the more "pro-Canadian" officials in the State Department, which made that slap all the more stinging – and outrageous.

IN THESE UNPROFITIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, HOW TRUDEAU PRESENTED HIS case to Reagan was obviously critical. Some of his advisers insisted that the prime minister say precisely the same things he had said to other leaders. But the ambassador to Washington, Allan Gotlieb, urged Trudeau to appeal directly and personally to Reagan on the high ground. The prime minister agreed and handled himself well. Realizing that he was approaching from the margin, he took the softest of soft lines. As the Gwyns [Richard and Sandra, writing in *Saturday Night*, May 1984] reconstructed it, Trudeau had said: "Mr. President, your intentions are good and I agree with them wholly. You are a man of peace. You want peace through strength. Because of your policies, the U.S. has regained its strength and self-confidence. But, Mr. President, your message is not getting through. The people think you want strength for its own sake, and that you are ready to accept the risks of war. That must change, Mr. President. You must communicate what you truly believe in." At least one American present felt offended by this approach, even if Reagan was not. Trudeau, he remembered, "took a condescending view of the President as a simpleton in international affairs." Instead, "that hour was a tutorial for Trudeau on superpower politics. We never heard much more about the initiative."

Reagan emerged from the White House after the meeting to wish Trudeau "Godspeed," a phrase that struck many Canadians as dismissive and patronizing and as an indication of Canada's – and Trudeau's –

influence. The Canadian was important enough to be treated politely, but his message was not. Still, for whatever reason, the president's militant rhetoric toned down slightly in the weeks that followed, and Trudeau and other Canadians clung to that as a positive result of the prime minister's visit. Even some Canadian officials in Washington who thought the initiative nothing other than "a form of local madness to which Canadians are prone" believed that Trudeau had cooled the president's perfervid expressions of anti-communism. To no one's surprise, however, very few American officials appeared to agree.

THE TRUDEAU INITIATIVE PAUSED FOR A MONTH OVER THE CHRISTMAS holiday and into the new year. In the middle of January, the prime minister met UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuellar to urge him to convene a meeting of the five nuclear powers, a request that met no action. Later in the month, with Andropov still ill and unable to receive visitors, Trudeau took his show on the road once more, this time to Eastern Europe. Perhaps the satellites, known to be troubled by Soviet missile deployment on their territory and by the slow pace of negotiation between Moscow and Washington, might have more freedom to act if the Soviet leadership was incapacitated, or so Trudeau was said to feel. As one official working on the initiative put it, "If there was no one home in the USSR, then you went to the satellites." That at least was the motivation behind the visits to Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania, the first two of which were sites for Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range missiles. The Czechs called the initiative "useful and correct," but denounced the Americans for deploying cruise missiles in Europe. The East Germans, pleased that Trudeau was the first NATO leader to visit East Berlin, pledged their support. President Ceausescu of Romania, the most independent-minded of satellite leaders, hailed Trudeau's efforts for peace, even though the prime minister generally hewed close to the NATO line in his seven hours of conversations with the Bucharest leader. *

After his return to Ottawa, Trudeau wrapped up the peace initiative – and declared victory – in a speech in the House on 9 February. In this speech, the prime minister suggested "ten principles of a common bond between East and West," a new decalogue that had been put together by Ivan Head, then the president of the International Development Research Centre.

The prime minister reiterated that his goal had remained the one he had announced in October at Guelph: to change the trend line of crisis. There had been, he believed, some small successes in Reagan's cooled rhetoric, in the Soviet return to the MBFR talks, in the meeting between Shultz and Gromyko at Stockholm. In any case, Trudeau concluded on the highest note possible by saying that "Canada and Canadians ... saw the crisis; that we did act; that we took risks; that we were loyal to our friends and open with our adversaries; that we lived up to our ideals;

**Romania was in economic crisis with food and electricity shortages in 1984 (and after) and a leadership that heaped praise on itself. The current joke in Bucharest asked why Romanians were like penguins. The answer: because they live in the cold, eat no meat and clap all the time.*