

Since 1977, NATO members have been deeply concerned about the Soviet Union's deployment of a powerful intermediate-range missile with triple warheads - the SS-20, which poses a very serious threat to many of the European member states. In 1979, a special meeting of NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers took what is known as the "two-track decision" to counter this Soviet threat: 1) to deploy 108 Pershing II launchers and 464 Ground Launched Cruise Missiles to replace shorter-range missiles, and 2) to propose negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States to limit land-based intermediate-range missile systems on both sides.

Since 1979, the Soviet Union has continued to expand its force of SS-20s, which now numbers 333 missiles with 999 warheads. In addition, it continues to deploy some 250 intermediate-range SS-4 and SS-5 missiles which threaten European centres.

In November 1981, however, the Soviet Union and the United States opened formal negotiations in Geneva to limit Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF). The outcome of these Geneva talks on intermediate-range missiles will have very important implications for the security of all NATO countries, but particularly of our allies in Europe. The talks are also a crucial step in the broader context of arms control and disarmament negotiations aimed at the prevention of nuclear war.

Canada shares the deep NATO interest in successful INF negotiations. The Government is following the talks closely and intends to continue consulting actively with the United States in the development of the Western negotiating position. We are willing to give full consideration to any serious Soviet proposals that would enhance the chances for effective and verifiable agreements. At the same time it is the Government's deeply held conviction that real progress can only be made on the basis of the principle of mutual security.

Canada and its allies would prefer not to deploy new missiles. They are convinced, however, that the INF negotiations will not succeed if the Western Alliance shows signs of weakness. They cannot accept a result which would require NATO to abandon the modernization of its forces in Europe while the Soviet Union maintains its missiles. The conclusion of the present agreement is fully consistent with and is a manifestation of Canada's support for the NATO two-track decision.