

# Canada's role in the post-summit world

OTTAWA — A change of thinking, almost as important as the will to scrap nuclear missiles, is quietly taking root in western defence councils.

Knowledgeable analysts — some in very high places — are beginning to doubt the wisdom of matching the Warsaw Pact man-for-man and tank-for-tank in Europe.

This re-assessment of the conventional military balance could be instrumental in determining the next step in the disarmament process launched by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Washington this week. And it could help define Canada's role in the post-summit world.

With both superpowers now formally committed to eliminating all of their intermediate-range nuclear missiles, the focus will quickly shift to other types of weapons. Since conventional arms account for 80 per cent of the world's military spending, they will occupy a pivotal place in the unfolding agenda.

"It's terribly important that the momentum be maintained," said Canada's Disarmament Ambassador Doug Roche in a recent interview. "And it will be difficult to make further advances before there is discernible progress on the question of conventional forces."

There has always been a good deal of skepticism about military bean-counting among peace



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activists and academics. But now, for the first time, it is beginning to show up in defence circles.

The breakthrough came last summer when U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (the heads of the army, navy, air force and marine corps) advised the Reagan Administration, in a classified military document, that NATO has sufficient conventional strength in Europe to deter a Soviet attack. Their assessment was leaked to the press in Washington last week.

It was the first clear public signal that, even within the military establishment, informed commentators are questioning the long-held tenet that the western alliance would be overwhelmed by the vastly superior East Bloc forces in a surprise attack.

"All of a sudden, the cries of gloom and doom that we'd been hearing for years didn't seem so credible any more," said John Barrett, deputy director of Ottawa's Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament.

Although it is difficult for a layman to penetrate the conflicting claims emanating from Moscow

and Washington, there are two generally acknowledged facts about global military strength:

The first is that the Warsaw Pact has a considerable numerical advantage over NATO in manpower and conventional weapons. The International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, one of the most credible research agencies in the field, estimates in its latest study that the Warsaw Pact has a 200,000-man advantage in ground forces and 5,300 more battle tanks than NATO.

The second is that NATO's troops are, for the most part, more professional, more flexible and better equipped than those of the East Bloc.

Until this fall, it was an article of faith among NATO members that the West had to beef up its conventional forces in Europe, particularly if the superpowers decided to reduce their nuclear arsenals.

Officially, this is still the line being taken by most western governments. U.S. Defence Secretary Frank Carlucci told reporters at last week's NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels that the alliance remains as determined as ever to upgrade and modernize its conventional forces in Europe. And Canada's Defence Minister Perrin Beatty affirmed that