

The Vienna talks on force reductions in Central Europe are in their ninth year but have so far not attracted much media attention in Canada. While some progress has been made in these negotiations, in which Canada is a direct participant, the principal stumbling block has been the failure to reach agreement in factual terms on the present strength of Warsaw Pact forces. The Soviet Union insists that the total number of WPO forces in the area is almost 150,000 less than the number which has been confirmed by the best allied intelligence available. Continuing efforts have been made by the Western negotiators to persuade the Eastern members to provide a detailed breakdown of their figures to support their calculations or to cooperate in clarifying the differences between Western and Eastern figures. Unless both sides can agree on the numerical base from which reductions must be made, clearly it is virtually impossible to verify what is left after reductions even if such reductions can be monitored. Moreover, the Eastern side has proved to be very reluctant to accept what NATO would regard as adequate verification measures.

New life is being injected into these negotiations through a draft treaty tabled by the West last week in Vienna which makes substantial concessions to the Eastern side. The West now proposes that the countries concerned should undertake a binding obligation in one agreement (instead of two sequential agreements as proposed previously) to reduce to a common collective ceiling on each side of approximately 700,000 ground force manpower and 900,000 ground and air force personnel combined. These reductions would be in four stages over a period of seven years, with the United States and the Soviet Union withdrawing 13,000 and 30,000 troops respectively in the first year after conclusion of the agreement. Other direct participants including Canada would join in the reduction process in the three final stages. Agreement on manpower data would remain a pre-condition. If the Warsaw Pact countries are prepared to cooperate, particularly on the question of the actual present strength of their forces in the area and on verification, it should now be possible to progress more rapidly toward an agreement.

I am certain you would agree that a reduction and balancing of the existing levels of troops of the two Alliances confronting each other in Central Europe would serve to reduce tensions and improve the climate of East-West relations. Such an agreement would also maintain and even enhance the security of the two sides.