

On January 8, following two days of meetings in Geneva, the United States Secretary of State, Mr. George Shultz, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Andrei Gromyko, agreed to undertake a new set of bilateral negotiations on nuclear arms and space weapons. That agreement represents an important step forward in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and in the prospect of reducing the danger of nuclear conflict. The negotiating process which it initiates can have far-reaching and positive implications for East-West relations, and also for negotiations in multilateral arms control fora in which Canada is a direct participant. I take this first occasion, in this session of Parliament, to congratulate both the United States and the Soviet Union for resuming negotiations.

We are particularly encouraged by the objectives agreed on by the two sides for their negotiations: the prevention of an arms race in space and its termination on earth; the limitation and reduction of nuclear arms; and the strengthening of strategic stability, leading ultimately to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Those themes have long been central elements of Canadian foreign policy.

As the joint statement following the Shultz/Gromyko meetings indicated, the negotiations will address "a complex of questions concerning space and nuclear arms - both strategic and intermediate range - with all these questions considered and resolved in their inter-relationship". It is understood that a principal theme of the discussions will be the relationship between offensive and defensive systems. Included in the latter will be the USA Strategic Defense Initiative and Soviet defensive systems. It is altogether appropriate that the defensive systems of each side, both actual and potential, figure in these negotiations.

The United States President, Mr. Reagan, has stated that the Strategic Defense Initiative is a research programme designed to examine the feasibility of strengthening strategic stability and reducing reliance on nuclear weapons through greater attention to non-nuclear defensive measures. To date, the full extent of the programme has not been explored and it would therefore be premature to draw definitive conclusions about it. Given the extraordinarily complex technical questions which SDI raises, questions which even an intensive research programme is unlikely to resolve for many years - if ever - it is obvious that it is a highly hypothetical concept.