

An idea for Canada

the attempt made by former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau to work out his peace plan showed, such initiatives are doomed to failure without full superpower support. The Trudeau peace plan was a remarkable academic exercise, but brought little political change. The world did not and does not require more information about the nuclear threat; we already have enough information and education on the potential catastrophe of a thermonuclear war. What we need at this point is definite superpower commitment to resolve the nuclear weapons dilemma. For example, scientists know today a great deal more about the phenomenon called "nuclear winter," whereby it does not matter which side strikes first in a nuclear war, because the whole planet is likely to experience the ravaging ecological after-effects of a nuclear exchange as soon as the explosions reach an approximate level of 5,000 megatons. Does this new knowledge change the nuclear war-planning of either superpower? Not at all. The truth is that more than ever the nuclear doctrine and capabilities of both the United States and the Soviet Union are being refined to accommodate military strategies for fighting and winning a nuclear war.

My essential point is this: there is definite wishful thinking in believing that Canada can alone, or with the help of other middle powers, change the essential conditions of the strategic world. The sad reality of international relations is that world politics are still characterized by the struggle of political entities for power, prestige and wealth in a condition of global anarchy, and that a world community of common values has yet to displace international conflict. However, a lack of fundamental leverage by middle powers does not mean that we should underestimate the possibility we have of helping the superpowers gradually to come to terms with their problems.

A possible Canadian contribution

In contrast to a grandiose and idealistic scheme such as the late Trudeau peace plan was, the government of Canada might consider smaller *ad hoc* goals in order to assist the United States and the Soviet Union in their search for cooperation. As a practical step that the Conservative government could initiate for the purpose of lessening the threat of nuclear war, Canada might concentrate its efforts on implementing confidence-building measures between the two superpowers. These measures are intended to prevent a process of escalation by which some military action or signal might lead to a nuclear conflict. For instance, in time of deep crisis or conventional conflict involving directly or indirectly Washington and Moscow, a number of events taking place or messages transmitted could be misinterpreted and as a result increase the risk of nuclear war (such as an unusually large Soviet fleet of *Typhoons* patrolling our Arctic waters at a time when both superpowers were at odds over the settlement of a regional crisis).

Thus it would be in the interests of Canada to encourage and press the United States and the Soviet Union to give serious thought to establishing in Ottawa a Nuclear Crisis Control Center, located geographically as well as

symbolically in the country that sits exactly between the thermonuclear arsenals. The idea of a Nuclear Crisis Control Center was first suggested in November 1983 by the working group on nuclear risk reduction of US Senators Sam Nunn and John Warner. This Center could perform several functions. First, senior US and Soviet military and civilian officials would work side-by-side to help defuse incidents which could lead to the use of nuclear weapons. This means that the Center would be staffed around-the-clock by military specialists and would have high speed communications links to the White House, the Kremlin and military headquarters on both sides. Second, those officials would work together to assist Washington and Moscow in maintaining close contact during a crisis precipitated, for example, by third-parties or nuclear terrorists. Third, they would exchange information concerning events that might lead to nuclear proliferation or the acquisition of nuclear weapons by subnational groups. Fourth, they would exchange information about military activities of one country which could be misunderstood by the other country during periods of tension (such as the example of the *Typhoon* above). Finally, they would establish a dialogue about nuclear doctrines, forces and activities that might help superpowers understand better their respective nuclear strategies. They could also use this forum to maintain an agreed data base on the nuclear capabilities of the two sides, information which is necessary for strategic arms control negotiations.

Not much, but ours

Admittedly, the setting up of a superpower Nuclear Crisis Control Center in Ottawa would not go far towards solving the strategic problem, which is the Soviet-US rivalry itself. But nevertheless, through the creation of the Centre Canada might contribute greatly to a fruitful, permanent and non-politicized dialogue between high officials from Moscow and Washington. It is precisely because of the importance that these communications be as excellent as possible that Ottawa should offer its full support for a Center, which, by its very existence and with a little organizational momentum, might engage the United States and the Soviet Union in a process of cooperation leading to further confidence-building measures. While it is beyond Canada's ability to get the superpowers to settle the substantive aspects of their nuclear disagreements, it is not beyond Canada's skills to use its diplomatic assets (such as our current excellent relationship with the Americans) to create some opportunities and incentives for a gradual *rapprochement* between the nuclear giants. If the conditions of international security improved, it is likely that the growing threat posed by Soviet submarines and US strategic defences to our territorial defence and sovereignty, would be alleviated to an extent which would allow Canada to stay out of the arms race. By the same token, the proposal of the Nuclear Crisis Control Center might turn out to be a successful and realistic way in which Canadian diplomacy could fulfill its traditional role of middlepower mediator in the world. □