

Nevertheless, the initial Western proposal at the MBFR talks in Vienna included the withdrawal of a Soviet tank army, and thus a reduction of one of the main instruments of surprise attack. Moreover, equal ceilings on manpower would, the West assumed, mean a reduced possibility of surprise attack. Also, the negotiation of associated measures was, in the Western view, a way to overcome Soviet secrecy and thereby further reduce the risks.

Canada referred to the subject at the outset of the CSCE process in 1973. With reference to the preparation of proposals for confidence-building measures (in which the Canadian delegation was to play a key role) the Secretary of State for External Affairs said: "The least the world can expect of us is that, in our search for greater security, we define measures to enhance confidence and to lessen the risk of military surprise..."²⁸

By the late 1970s, NATO was faced with a "new short-warning attack threat". Dramatic increases in and modernization of Soviet conventional armaments, especially those useful for surprise attack, were combined with new developments in Soviet military doctrine. "The growing emphasis of Soviet force structure and doctrine on conventional operations using highly ready, forward-deployed shock forces, designed to strike before NATO defences are in place, presents a different military problem to that perceived by the West when the Vienna talks got under way."²⁹ In his Alastair Buchan memorial lecture in 1977, Helmut Schmidt listed as one of seven objectives of MBFR the elimination of the threat of a surprise attack.³⁰ The following year it was suggested that neither side be allowed to maintain or develop the ability to launch a surprise attack. Under such an agreement, both sides would depend more on reinforcements. In addition, the mobility of frontline forces would be reduced. Each side would accept aerial and other types of reconnaissance within a defined zone.³¹

²⁸ Statement to the CSCE, Helsinki, 4 July 1973.

²⁹ Richard Burt, "Implications for Arms Control," in New Conventional Weapons and East-West Security Part II, Adelphi Papers 145, IISS, London, p. 24.

³⁰ Reproduced in Survival, January/February 1978, p. 5.

³¹ Christoph Bertram, The Future of Arms Control: Part II, Adelphi Papers 146, IISS, London, 1978, p. 20.