

Supply

expressed an interest in the subject of the proposed flight testing of unarmed Cruise missiles in Canada. Hon. members opposite also received a copy of this letter and by now have had an opportunity to weigh its contents. Regardless of one's political or philosophical underpinnings, I can assure everyone that the facts presented therein are not in dispute. Defence is not a matter for philosophers; defence questions are questions of stark reality and, therefore, I think that it will benefit this debate if parts of this letter are read into the record.

[Translation]

I must clarify certain other points concerning the present state of the negotiations with a view to signing an agreement with the United States on tests of weapon systems in Canada. In addition to unarmed Cruise missiles, the United States might want to test other systems, such as helicopters, surveillance and identification systems and aircraft navigation systems. Canada would have full and continuous control over all testing, which would be subject to the environmental and security requirements of our country. The Cruise missile would not be more dangerous than a small plane because there would be no impact and the use of a parachute would make the missile recoverable. Each test proposed by the United States would first have to be authorized by Canada and could even be forbidden later on. Biological and chemical nuclear testing would not be authorized. Finally, the negotiation of such an agreement with the United States could prove a strong incentive for the two superpowers to conduct fruitful negotiations with a view to concluding a monitoring agreement on weapons control and a balanced and mutual disarmament. The government will proceed normally with the negotiation of the master agreement. It is not expected that any agreement on Cruise missile testing will come about before the end of the year, and certainly not before the United Nations Second Special Session on Disarmament. Of course, any agreement on arms testing in existence or being negotiated would be subject to the provisions of any new agreement made during UNSSOD II. However, in the meantime, Canada will continue to ensure the strength and efficiency of the Alliance.

[English]

Clearly, the Canadian government, and myself as Minister of National Defence, would dearly love to halt the production and testing of any weapons system, and to live in a world that is free of aggression and free of any threat to peace. Sadly, today's international scene does not present us with such a picture. Unfortunately, history, as I said at the beginning of my speech, provides us with overwhelming evidence that such a naive approach to the world is both irresponsible and dangerous. Certainly, the history of the Soviet Union's expansionism since World War II and of their blatant disregard for basic human rights—even as we speak, in Poland and Afghanistan—is evidence enough of the danger inherent in such an approach. Intentions are all very well but clearly one's actions and the actual facts of history will demonstrate one's sincerity. The U.S.S.R. has clearly demonstrated its sincerity in this regard.

It is all very well for the members of the NDP to travel across this land, preaching an end to war and peace for the world. Mr. Speaker, we as a government simply cannot take that chance. We are positively bound to protect our people's right to peace and freedom by something more substantial than the pursuit of an ideal and a "pie in the sky" approach to matters of such importance.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lamontagne: As I have stated, Mr. Speaker, the security of the western alliance is based on the concept of credible deterrence. This motion proposes a worldwide nuclear freeze, a freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. Put quite simply, a freeze at this time is unacceptable because it would freeze an unstable and unequal military balance, thus entrapping the West in a position of dangerous inferiority.

We must remember that a global freeze would apply not only to strategic nuclear weapons, where a rough parity might exist between the Soviet Union and the United States, but also to intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe, where the balance has been seriously upset by the Soviet deployment since 1976 of 300 SS-20s. It is unfortunate that this clear imbalance in favour of the Soviet Union, which has brought about NATO's modernization program, is not recognized by members opposite.

Mr. Ogle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would the hon. member accept a question?

Mr. Lamontagne: I will finish what I have to say and if there is time then, I will be ready to answer the question.

Clearly, Canada does not favour proposals for a U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. nuclear weapons freeze at existing levels. Rather, we hold the view that the two major nuclear powers should first negotiate substantial and verifiable reductions, both quantitative and qualitative, in their nuclear arsenals.

We believe that the U.S.A. is committed to arms control and to the achievement of equitable and verifiable agreements aimed at substantial reductions in nuclear forces. While freeze proposals reflect the desire of people everywhere to reduce the threat of nuclear war, proposals in themselves do not promote reductions, equality or verifiability. Rather, it will result in a locking-in of existing inequalities, while making further progress difficult, if not impossible. For these reasons, the goal in arms control must continue to be the negotiation of substantial reductions in the nuclear arsenals of both sides. So you see, Mr. Speaker, that we can do better than a freeze, and we want to do more than a freeze.

It is for similar reasons that I cannot support the final proposal presented in this motion, that calls for a worldwide pledge against first use of nuclear weapons. There is considerable confusion in the public debate about the terms "first use" and "first strike". It may be helpful to members and to our discussion if I attempt to define the terms.

A first strike, often qualified by the adjectives "preemptive" or "disarming" is generally taken to mean a major premeditated attempt by one side to destroy the offensive nuclear systems of the other effectively, to the point that the country concerned could not effectively respond. It is, of course, a principal reason why both the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union have seen fit to maintain what is described as a triad of strategic forces—land-based, sea-based in submarines and heavy bombers. This is in order that their eggs are not all at one time in the same basket. It is our judgment that neither side has the capacity to