

NATO Report

east-west relations generally, but on the importance we attach to the early initiation of talks between the United States and the Soviet Union on the limitation of offensive and defensive strategic nuclear weapons. The Secretary of State for External Affairs also expressed our hope that, once begun, these talks would be pursued, despite any temporary setbacks on other fronts. He joined other spokesmen in welcoming the United States government's willingness to enter into bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union on a number of world problems, including the limitation of nuclear arms, and the United States pledge to consult its partners as these negotiations progress.

[*Translation*]

The Secretary of State for External Affairs underlined the importance which Canada attaches to including China in any attempts to settle major world problems. He informed the meeting of the steps taken thus far toward establishing diplomatic relations with the Peking government and that we have now had a response from the Chinese, indicating their willingness to enter into substantive discussions. These will be taking place in Stockholm through the two embassies with our embassy reinforced as necessary by sending officials from Ottawa. The expectation is that these discussions will get underway in about a month's time. There is no indication of how long this will take. We are anxious for them to succeed, but they will be essentially confidential and are not likely to be helped if carried out under the glare of constant publicity.

[*English*]

The Secretary of State for External Affairs and I used the occasion of the meeting to explain to our allies the outcome of our defence policy review as it will affect our approach to NATO in the future. We confirmed Canada's intention to remain in the alliance and informed the members of the decision to embark on a planned and phased reduction of the size of the Canadian forces now stationed in Europe. We explained that in carrying out this decision, the government intended to consult closely with Canada's allies. The purpose of consultation would be to enable us to take account of the views of our allies as plans are made regarding the nature and the timing of the reduction of our forces in Europe and the extent and location of Canada's continuing military contribution to NATO. The Secretary of State for External

[Mr. Cadieux (Labelle).]

Affairs stated that account would also be taken of any international developments which might have a bearing on the balance of security in Europe and elsewhere.

A number of the ministers referred specifically to Canada's recent decision. While they welcomed our intention to remain in the alliance, they expressed the hope that the decision to reduce our forces in Europe would not be carried out in such a way as to jeopardize the security of the alliance or the prospects for east-west negotiations. With these considerations in mind, they welcomed our undertaking to consult them on our plans.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I think it is rather a pity that this is the first opportunity we have had in parliament to discuss this new policy of the government—whatever it may be—which was announced the day after the house recessed. Quite apart from any personal opinion I might hold in this regard, I think it would be rather difficult for the government to persuade the people of this country that the step taken, as announced on the day after the house recessed, did not demonstrate considerable contempt for this ancient institution.

I really feel for the minister who has just spoken because it must have been rather difficult for him to carry this message to Washington and to attempt to explain to our NATO allies the Prime Minister's policy in respect of defence—whatever that policy might be. We cannot help but feel this way on the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of NATO, a time that reminds us of the part Canada played in the establishment, the foundation and the development of this alliance.

I agree of course that the immediate issue was to decide how to get on with the resolution of east-west problems. I agree with that wholeheartedly. I agree of course that the ministers were wise to explore to the full the possibility of the countries of the east being serious with regard to the détente. The fact that this should be the theme of this meeting of NATO ministers emphasizes to all of us how inappropriate was the decision of the government of Canada to announce on the eve of that meeting its decision to reduce its support of the NATO alliance, and thereby to that extent—which is to a considerable extent—reduce and weaken the position from which the NATO countries would be conducting any such negotiation with the countries of the east.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.