

Confidence-building measures needed

West now ready to think and act seriously upon non-nuclear alternatives and, one would presume, to try to sell the idea to the Soviet Union?

It is not at all clear, furthermore, that conventional weapons could be treated as an alternative to modernized theatre nuclear forces. Even if the alliance, like Dickens's Barkis, were willing, there is little likelihood that the Soviet Union would respond in kind, especially in view of the British and French nuclear force modernization programs. In short, there is now little chance of turning back the theatre nuclear force structure clock.

Canadian quandary

There are two enduring realities of Canada's NATO relationship which will factor into any consideration that we might give to the alliance's current thinking about conventional rearmament. The first is that for sound economic, military and social reasons Canada remains committed to the security of Western Europe. In fact, although not on paper, the NATO relationship is our first defence priority. The second reality is that we have not in peacetime seen fit to commit ourselves as fully as we might have to European security. Because of the diverse roles assigned to Canada's armed forces, our distaste for most things military, and our penchant for approaching most aspects of Canadian defence policy from a cost-benefit standpoint, our force structure commitment to NATO Europe has by any yardstick of military professionalism left something to be desired.

Yet there may well be, if only for reason of national pride, a significant degree of sympathy in Canada for the professional plight of the Canadian Armed Forces in Europe; given our traditional distaste for nuclear weapons and our basic distrust of both nuclear war-fighting and nuclear war-winning scenarios, there may well also be a significant degree of sympathy among Canadians for the idea of alliance conventional rearmament. But whether these sentiments are likely in the foreseeable future to be translated into a tangible strengthening of Canada's conventional force commitment to NATO Europe is certainly moot.

As has happened in the past Canadians may find themselves attracted to a conventional arms control regime for Europe, partly in the hope of getting themselves off the hardware hook. This rather narrow view of self-interest, coupled with a long-standing belief that there is something to be said for mutual arms reductions by the two heavily armed camps in central Europe, helped to explain Canada's early and strong interest in the Vienna mutual and balanced force reduction (MBFR) negotiations. Yet if Ottawa's worries about the implications for Canada and for

European stability of the existence of these camps have been heightened of late, it should not look to the MBFR negotiations for salvation.

This set of negotiations has undoubtedly had value as an on-going forum for East-West dialogues over the inherent dangers in the confrontation in Europe; and given the current state of disrepair in East-West détente, the very existence of an inter-alliance forum such as MBFR continues to have an important symbolic meaning. Yet the Vienna negotiations have been stalemated since the mid-1970s over "data discrepancies" in the reported number of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe, and there is no early resolution of this stalemate in sight. East-West differences over this issue probably only underscore the reality that militarily-significant force reductions in central Europe are not at present amenable to a negotiated settlement, and this may well be the most important lesson for arms control which the MBFR discussions have to offer. This reality should delimit Canadian expectations about a conventional arms control regime in Europe.

Optimally, Canada might aim for some sort of understanding between East and West about the inherent dangers of an in-depth expansion and modernization of conventional capabilities in Europe, some sense of which will be inconsistent with stable mutual deterrence. We might also promulgate, in appropriate fora, the idea that mutual deterrence could not be strengthened by an East-West accord on the no-first-use of armed force in Europe to be clearly distinguished from a potentially destabilizing no-first-use of nuclear weapons pledge. Yet the most that can probably be hoped for at present will be a modest but meaningful strengthening of the dialogues between NATO and the Warsaw Pact with respect to their military establishments: communications about capabilities and intentions, data exchanges and the like — the stuff and substance of confidence-building measures (CBMs).

If obligatory, and given agreement on adequate verification measures, these might well obviate the perceived need for extensive conventional force modernization programs. Canada has an expertise in both verification and confidence-building measures, garnered through its preparations for the MBFR, CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and other arms control exercises of the past decade; and, as in past arms control negotiations, this expertise would be crucial to the salience of the Canadian voice in any discussions about a CBM-based conventional arms control regime in Europe. The time may well be ripe for such a regime, given East-West interest in the newly-established Stockholm conference on disarmament in Europe. The first phase of its discussions will focus on CBMs, and the Canadian voice should be heard.