

CANADIAN

FOREIGN POLICY

SERIES

89/2



External Affairs Affaires extérieures
Canada Canada

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

East-West Relations: the Way Ahead

Speech by
the Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at the University of Calgary

Canada

Calgary, Alberta

January 13, 1989

Sometimes we use a phrase so often that it loses its sharp particular meaning. For example, what does it mean to have a closed society? What is a free society? Those are not abstract questions. They lie at the root of what distinguishes today's Western democracies from traditional Soviet society. They are at the heart of the curiosity and excitement about changes occurring in the Soviet Union, and the ripple of those changes around the world.

This week's news out of Moscow was about a conflict at a party meeting called to nominate a candidate. Disputes like this are commonplace in Canada but extraordinary and rare in the Soviet Union. Just as it was extraordinary and rare for the Soviet people to witness a no-holds-barred debate on every aspect of Soviet social, political and economic life at last spring's Party Conference. And even more extraordinary has been the unflinching determination with which Mr. Gorbachev and his colleagues have exposed one Stalinist atrocity after another to the glare of history.

Only five years ago, the détente of the 1970s was everywhere in ruins. Soviet troops were in Afghanistan. The Polish government, in order to avoid Soviet invasion, was repressing its own citizens. Soviet SS-20 missiles were being deployed against targets in Western Europe and Asia.

Today, the skies are a lot clearer. The Soviets are leaving Afghanistan, they are destroying their SS-20 missiles and last weekend in Paris they announced their decision to destroy chemical weapon stockpiles. Some of the worst excesses of Stalinist dictatorship are in retreat. As well the Soviets are taking a more constructive role in dampening regional tensions in some quarters.

Those are more than a change in policy. They seem to reflect a deep change in the attitude of a regime towards its people, and certainly they have set loose expectations and practices that would be very difficult to stop or reverse. Whatever the motive, or the momentum, the Soviet Union has moved from the worst features of a closed society in the direction of a more free and open system. Those are developments which Canada should welcome and encourage. But if "perestroika" is the refrain of today's Soviet Union, it is not the whole score.

I was especially struck by a recent comment made by Alexander Yakovlev, one of the senior Politburo members. Yakovlev, a close confidant and supporter of Gorbachev, is one of the intellectual forces behind the current reform programme in the USSR. He was for ten years Soviet Ambassador to Canada. He said that his observations of Canadian political and parliamentary life had convinced him that multiparty democracy and pluralism were not the sort of evolution he would ever want to see in his own country.

We must conclude from this that Soviet values and political culture will not converge with western values in the foreseeable future. While they talk of democracy and pluralism they also believe in a one-party state. While they seek to be more responsive to the will of the people, they do not intend to turn the reins of power over to them. And in any event, there is no warrant in Russian history, either before the Revolution or since, for the view that the Soviet Union will eventually evolve into a free society as we understand the term.

At the same time that we commend and encourage Mr. Gorbachev's reforms, we must remember the nature and the history of the Soviet system. Is it acceptable that while some religious groups enjoy greater freedom, others such as Ukrainian Catholics do not? Is not the freedom to worship an indivisible one? Would the practice of internal exile to a closed city be acceptable to any western democracy? Andrey Sakharov's exile to Gorky, with all its sad history of harassment by the KGB, remains very real for some Soviets. Can we forget the unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Afghanistan and the savage war which followed?

Nor should we forget that several European states which were Western historically and culturally for centuries are now under the control of regimes imposed and sustained by Soviet armies. Canadians know this full well. Many of our citizens can testify through bitter personal and family experience that the imposition of communist rule in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the German Democratic Republic effectively suppressed traditional political, social and cultural values in these nations. And while some of these governments have introduced positive reforms, others seem impervious to glasnost and the winds of change.

In military terms, despite Mr. Gorbachev's very welcome initiatives to reduce the huge Soviet military machine, the West still must face formidable and ever-improving Soviet forces. Each year, the USSR spends somewhere between 15 and 20% of its GDP on defence.

So, as Canadians assess our own policy, as we pursue Canada's interests, including our desire for peace and our belief in freedom, we have to look at all the faces of the Soviet Union. Moreover - we have to remember our own geography and history. We are right next door to both the Superpowers, in the direct and inescapable path of any serious conflict. We are a symbol and defender of free societies, to the point that in this century, over 100,000 Canadians paid with their lives to oppose totalitarian ambitions in Europe. This latter point is one we must never forget. In Paris last Sunday, I began my speech to the Conference on Chemical Weapons with a reminder that Canadians were tragically among the first to suffer the painful illness and death caused by mustard gas attacks in the First World War.

One avenue which has been especially valuable for Canada in its pursuit of better East/West relations on a broad front is the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), whose basic document is the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Over the years we have been active in all aspects of the CSCE process -- promoting military security; economic cooperation; human rights -- because we believe that these are interrelated in promoting East/West security and stability.

Canada played a leading role in the Vienna Follow-Up meeting of the CSCE, in progress since November, 1986 and now approaching its conclusion. We have done our part to promote substantial improvements by some countries in their record of compliance to the Helsinki Declaration. We have worked patiently and persistently with the 34 other CSCE participating governments to secure a range of new commitments which will make the Vienna Concluding Document a milestone in East/West relations.

The Conference is in its final stages -- indeed, its conclusion could be days or hours away, although there are still a few problems being worked out. Without going into greater detail, I expect that the Vienna Concluding Document will record major progress in all areas covered by the CSCE process.

It can constitute a solid foundation for further progress in the search for human rights, stability and security in Europe.

Especially welcome will be two new negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe, and a separate ongoing conference - on the human dimension - to deal with human rights and related issues. The Concluding Document will contain substantial new commitments in human rights, including religious freedoms, freedom of movement, the right to promote and protect human rights, and the rights of minorities. As well it will bring a range of measures to reduce bureaucratic obstacles to emigration and travel, and freer information flows including telephone and postal communications.

On human rights, the progress made by the USSR has been impressive during the two years since the Vienna Meeting began. In 1986 Canada had 42 outstanding family reunification cases with the Soviet Union. By the end of 1988 these were reduced to 11, of which 7 are being settled. We are assured by the USSR that efforts are being made to resolve the remaining cases as quickly as possible. Emigration figures have increased dramatically: some 3,500 Jewish emigrants in December alone, most of them to Israel. In recent months many long-term refuseniks have been given exit permission. Hundreds of political prisoners have been released, including all the original Helsinki monitors, and there have been no new arrests or incarcerations under the explicitly religious and political articles of the criminal code. Jamming of Western radio by East European countries has ceased. There has been greater freedom of speech, minorities have been given greater scope for self-expression, and religious groups enjoy greater tolerance.

We are also encouraged by Mr. Gorbachev's pledge before the United Nations that this progress would continue, that reforms would be permanently reflected in legislation and practice, and that in coming years the Soviet Union would evolve into a society increasingly governed by the rule of law and respectful of the rights of all its citizens.

Overall, these developments have convinced us that the Moscow Meeting could contribute positively to further progress in human rights in the USSR and eastern Europe. If negotiations now underway with the Soviets are resolved, as we expect they would be, Canada would attend this meeting.

As in the past, the consultations we've had with a wide range of Canadian groups will be essential to the success of the Moscow, Paris and Copenhagen meetings of the Conference on the Human Dimension. Our delegation in Vienna was one of the strongest and this reflects, in no small part, the thoughtful and informative contributions we've received from across Canada. When the Vienna meeting is over, we'll have opportunities for assessing our progress and charting our course. The same public interest expressed through the widest possible consultations will help us make the most of these three meetings on the Human Dimension. We are determined that the Soviet Union meet the same standards of openness regarding the rights of the Canadian media and interest groups as has prevailed at the Vienna Meeting.

Negotiation - and we've done a lot of it in the last decade - has always been one side of the two-track strategy which has guided the policies of the Western alliance. The second part has been - and remains - a militarily credible deterrence against aggression and intimidation. One lesson which history has taught us on numerous occasions is that negotiation based on mutual respect for each other's strength often succeeds. Negotiation from weakness cannot.

Western solidarity has therefore both military and political elements. We must be prudent but imaginative. To that end we maintain a highly professional and active Embassy in Moscow; we are constantly assessing our relations with the Soviet Union to determine how our relations can best be expanded and enriched. But prudence suggests that we avoid euphoria regarding Soviet intentions and measure accomplishments not statements. Prudence demands that we examine each new Soviet proposal with a careful eye to see how it affects our own vital interests. Prudence requires that we in the West remain clear-headed about what our most cherished ideals of peace, political freedom and respect for human rights really mean. Prudence demands that we maintain a credible military and political defence of these values.

Canada, as an ally, must continue to honour its obligation to make a contribution to the defence of the West. This will require active participation in NATO forces. It will require that we support the viability of the American strategic deterrent which underpins NATO's security. For example, we cannot shirk our responsibility to permit the continued testing of air launched cruise missiles over Canada. These constitute an important part of that strategic deterrent, the part which assures that no attack could go unpunished.

Credible deterrence must go hand in hand with imagination at the negotiating table.

But there is no doubt that, in the last two years, the focus has turned to negotiation. That has already produced a treaty eliminating an entire category of nuclear weapons. The conference in Paris this week made progress towards an end to chemical weapons. There is a chance to move forward on human rights.

We may indeed be entering a new and more fluid era, where East/West differences are much less sharply etched. That would bring its own challenges, but would hold special opportunities for Canada, as a member of the Security Council, a strong and modern economy, and the immediate neighbour of both superpowers.

Thank you.