



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA'S POSITION ON TESTING CRUISE MISSILES AND ON DISARMAMENT

An Open Letter to all Canadians by the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau,
Prime Minister, Ottawa, May 9, 1983

In recent months I have received a great number of letters and petitions protesting against the possible testing of cruise missiles in Canadian territory. Because it was physically impossible to send a personal reply to all those who had expressed their concerns to me, I gave a public response when I spoke last month at a dinner in honour of Vice-President George Bush.

Because this whole question continues to weigh heavily upon the consciences of those in government and the general public, I have now decided to address myself directly to Canadians through this open letter. My purpose is to explain the position of the Government of Canada on the testing of the cruise missile, and on the broader issue of disarmament.

By way of a preamble, let me point out that our freedom to discuss and argue issues is what gives our democracy its greatness and its strength; but that same freedom can also make us appear vulnerable in the face of Soviet totalitarianism.

In recent years, the Soviet Union has deployed hundreds of new *SS-20* missiles, each equipped with three nuclear warheads, capable of reaching all the great cities of western Europe. However, there has not been any significant outburst of public opposition, either inside or outside the USSR.

That the Soviet people have not protested against this action of their leaders surprises no one. What is surprising, however, is that those in the West who are opposed to new nuclear weapons have remained relatively silent about the installation of the *SS-20s*. In contrast, they are now taking to the streets to oppose the possible deployment of American *Pershing II* and cruise missiles to protect Europe against the Soviet nuclear threat.

What is particularly surprising in Canada is to see protesters opposing the possible testing of cruise missiles in Canadian territory, but not opposing the fact that similar missiles are already being tested in the Soviet Union, as was confirmed in December by General-Secretary Andropov.

Because people in the free world feel powerless to influence the leaders of the USSR, there is a great temptation to direct the whole force of their anguish and their protests against the only decision-makers who are sensitive to public opinion, namely

the leaders of the democratic countries. Having convinced themselves that it is useless to denounce the SS-20s, people find it easier, I suppose, to forget about them. The strange result of this forgetfulness is that it somehow becomes possible to portray the Soviet Union not as the aggressor, but as the innocent target. This represents a curious amnesia and reversal of roles, which the Soviet leaders are quick to exploit for their own purposes.

They hope, obviously, that one-sided information, and one-sided protests, will lead to the unilateral disarmament of the West. Indeed, there is a segment of public opinion in western Europe which has already adopted that policy.

During the first special session on disarmament at the United Nations, I proposed, in the name of Canada, a strategy of suffocation. It was designed to smother, even in the laboratory, the development of any new nuclear weapons systems. Obviously, my proposal had to apply to both sides or to neither. There certainly was no suggestion in that proposal that the West should disarm unilaterally.

Because our strategy of suffocation was rejected by the Soviet Union, as evidenced by the continued deployment of the SS-20s, a weapon much superior to the SS-4 and 5, there was no question of urging its acceptance by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries alone. That is why we allied ourselves with the "two-track" strategy of our NATO partners. Those two tracks are to seek to negotiate the removal of the Soviet SS-20s and, at the same time, to prepare for the deployment of new American missiles in Europe so as to pressure the Soviet Union toward serious negotiations, and so as not to leave our European allies in a vulnerable position, if the negotiations on intermediate range nuclear forces ended in failure.

Having declared our support for the two-track strategy, Canada should bear its fair share of the burden which that policy imposes upon the NATO alliance.

It is hardly fair to rely on the Americans to protect the West, but to refuse to lend them a hand when the going gets rough. In that sense, the anti-Americanism of some Canadians verges on hypocrisy. They're eager to take refuge under the American umbrella, but don't want to help hold it.

When we seek to apply moral principles to this issue, it's easy to become trapped in positions which are either too complex or too simple. The former can paralyze us. The latter can deceive us.

Into the trap of over-complication fall those who insist that no moral position is valid which does not take into account every possible future breakthrough in nuclear weapons technology, every possible future difficulty in detecting the actions of the other side. Into the trap of over-simplification fall those who are content to talk about

how many bowls of rice could be purchased for the price of a missile, or who condemn governments for spending anything at all on defence.

I do not deny that there is an element of truth and validity in an unconditionally pacifist position. I simply say that it is simplistic to ignore the real, complex and often immoral world to which our moral choices must apply. The Pope himself recognized this fact in a message he sent last June to the second United Nations special session on disarmament. "In current conditions," he wrote, "deterrence based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself, but as a step toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable."

I believe that the Soviet peoples desire peace just as much as the peoples of the free world. But I also know that the Soviets are very heavily armed. In these circumstances, it would be almost suicidal for the West to adopt a policy of unilateral disarmament, or a policy of suffocating the development of new means of defending ourselves against the Soviet SS-20s. That is the kind of heroic moral choice which an individual could make in his personal life, but does anyone have the right to impose that choice upon a whole nation, or upon the community of free countries?

When the choice is between steadfastness or weakness in the face of totalitarianism, history should have taught us that to refuse to risk one's life in defence of liberty is to risk losing liberty, without any guarantee of saving one's life.

That is why the Government of Canada has chosen, not without anguish or full awareness of the risk, to join our NATO partners in adopting a policy of strength in reaction to the Soviet Union.

In supporting the two-track strategy of the Atlantic alliance, however, we shall insist that progress be made simultaneously on both tracks. This combination of steadfastness of purpose and willingness to negotiate seems to be bearing fruit, as witness the latest offer of General-Secretary Andropov to take into account the numbers of warheads as well as missiles.

Indeed, are we to think that this new-found flexibility of Mr. Andropov is a straightforward show of goodwill? Are we to believe seriously that, on two occasions since last December, the Soviets would have contemplated publicly a reduction of their nuclear forces if we had weakened in our resolve?

To me, the answer is clear. And it is absolutely essential that the United States continue its efforts to negotiate the removal of the SS-20s in exchange for the non-deployment of new American missiles in Europe, or at least to negotiate smaller numbers of missiles on each side.

I hope that my explanation of our policy will have established that, were we to agree

to collaborate in testing the guidance system of the cruise missile, it would be because of our solidarity with the other Western democracies, in a world which has turned a deaf ear to our suggested strategy of suffocation.

That being said, however, I would add that we should not abandon hope for the ending of the nuclear arms race.

All the people of the world, whether they be friends or enemies, value their own lives, and the lives of those they love. If the discovery of the terrible secrets of the atom gives us the power to destroy the whole planet, there is a still more powerful force which can save it — our love for our children, and our love of life.

Therefore, I shall continue to believe that our strategy of suffocation is the best strategy.

The great powers of the world refuse to accept it now. But that will not stop us from repeating our proposal at every opportunity, until the recognition of its truth frees us all from moral anguish and from fear.

S/C