

STATEMENT DISCOURS

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EXTÉRIEURES.



85/03

STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT
HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON USA-SOVIET ARMS
CONTROL TALKS

OTTAWA

JANUARY 21, 1985

On January 8, following two days of meetings in Geneva, the United States Secretary of State, Mr. George Shultz, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Andrei Gromyko, agreed to undertake a new set of bilateral negotiations on nuclear arms and space weapons. That agreement represents an important step forward in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and in the prospect of reducing the danger of nuclear conflict. The negotiating process which it initiates can have far-reaching and positive implications for East-West relations, and also for negotiations in multilateral arms control fora in which Canada is a direct participant. I take this first occasion, in this session of Parliament, to congratulate both the United States and the Soviet Union for resuming negotiations.

We are particularly encouraged by the objectives agreed on by the two sides for their negotiations: the prevention of an arms race in space and its termination on earth; the limitation and reduction of nuclear arms; and the strengthening of strategic stability, leading ultimately to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Those themes have long been central elements of Canadian foreign policy.

As the joint statement following the Shultz/Gromyko meetings indicated, the negotiations will address "a complex of questions concerning space and nuclear arms - both strategic and intermediate range - with all these questions considered and resolved in their inter-relationship". It is understood that a principal theme of the discussions will be the relationship between offensive and defensive systems. Included in the latter will be the USA Strategic Defense Initiative and Soviet defensive systems. It is altogether appropriate that the defensive systems of each side, both actual and potential, figure in these negotiations.

The United States President, Mr. Reagan, has stated that the Strategic Defense Initiative is a research programme designed to examine the feasibility of strengthening strategic stability and reducing reliance on nuclear weapons through greater attention to non-nuclear defensive measures. To date, the full extent of the programme has not been explored and it would therefore be premature to draw definitive conclusions about it. Given the extraordinarily complex technical questions which SDI raises, questions which even an intensive research programme is unlikely to resolve for many years - if ever - it is obvious that it is a highly hypothetical concept.

As the programme is presently understood, research on SDI does not in and of itself contravene the provisions either of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty or of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, both of which Canada strongly supports. In light of significant Soviet advances in ballistic missile defence research in recent years, and deployment of an actual ballistic missile defence system, it is only prudent that the West keep abreast of the feasibility of such projects.

However, actual development and deployment of space based ballistic missile defence systems by either side would transgress the limits of the ABM Treaty as currently constituted. That could have serious implications for arms control and would therefore warrant close and careful attention by all concerned. We welcome in this regard President Reagan's affirmation that the USA would not proceed beyond research without discussion and negotiation.

We should be under no illusion that the course charted at Geneva will be an easy one. It won't be. What we are witnessing now is the beginning of a long and sensitive process. The conduct of Canada should be calculated to encourage the success of that process. Nothing is more important than that the two nuclear superpowers agree on means to end the arms race.

For our part, Canada will continue to work actively -- in the United Nations, in NATO, and elsewhere -- to make practical progress on arms control, and to improve understanding between East and West. The agreement at Geneva, after a long and dangerous stalemate, offers a new chance, and the world cannot waste that opportunity.