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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Statement in the House of
Commons by the Secretary of
State for External Affairs, the
Right Honourable Joe Clark, on
USA-Soviet arms control talks

Canada

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Over our Thanksgiving weekend, the eyes of the world were focused on Reykjavik. There, the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union met to reinvigorate the summit process begun last year in Geneva and to narrow some of the many differences which divide them. Their goal was to give the process impetus, and they succeeded.

Arms control and security are the central international issues of our time and the manner of their resolution will shape the global outlook for decades to come.

It is still too early to provide a final assessment of this latest meeting. The task now in Washington and in Moscow is to ensure that the progress which appears to have been made is not wasted. All governments share in this responsibility and we in Canada must do our part.

Today, as a contribution to our own discussion and debate within this House, and in the country at large, I would like to make some brief observations about the nature of the Reykjavik meeting in the broad context of East-West relations.

First, it would be well to remember that Reykjavik was but one staging point in the difficult and unending process of managing the relations between East and West. During the meeting, both sides moved more than anyone had thought possible. Immediately after the meeting, both sides reflected their disappointment that the breakthrough that was so close did not occur. Now reflecting on that progress, both sides agree that the proposals made in Iceland are still on the table and in negotiation.

This process of building East-West relations has been proceeding with renewed intensity since January 1985. Reykjavik was designed not to conclude new agreements but to lay the ground for them. Whether history will judge it a success depends entirely on the use that is made of the progress in Iceland.

The most notable aspect of the Reykjavik meeting is the extent to which the sides were able to reach understandings on the whole range of nuclear weapons and testing. They agreed provisionally to reduce by 50% within five years the main components of their strategic nuclear arsenals - land-based missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic bombers. At one point in their discussion, they also agreed to eliminate ballistic missiles completely in 10 years.

On intermediate-range nuclear weapons, there was similar provisional agreement on their complete elimination from Europe within 5 years, with the USSR and USA each retaining only 100 warheads in Soviet Asia and the continental USA respectively. The USA and Soviet Union also agreed on the need to negotiate reductions in short-range nuclear arsenals.

There was mutual acceptance of a step-by-step process for reducing nuclear tests, leading eventually to a complete cessation of tests once nuclear weapons had been abolished. There was a broad convergence of view on the verification procedures to be applied to the various measures.

The fact that such detailed discussions occurred and resulted in such wide-ranging tentative agreement attests to the seriousness and dedication with which the two sides have been approaching their task. The main significance lies in the demonstration that major, negotiated reductions in nuclear arsenals need not be an impossible dream.

At Reykjavik three lessons were reinforced. The first two are: both sides are serious; and arms control is possible. But the third lesson is that arms control will not come easily. It is a deliberate and difficult process.

The more sobering element of reality as it has emerged from Reykjavik lies in the fact that the two sides remain far apart in their views on the future role of strategic defences. This is not a question of saying yes or no to SDI but of finding a way of managing the research on defensive weapons in which both sides are engaged.

A key issue between the two governments is whether research is limited to the laboratory under the existing ABM treaty. That is a treaty with two signing parties - the United States and the Soviet Union. Its text does not refer directly to research, although the private negotiating record of either side may mention research. The agreement on what precisely is intended in that treaty is for these two governments who are the parties to the agreement to work out.

It is important to note that this is a different issue from the debate we have seen in recent months over what is allowed by agreed statement "D" of the ABM treaty referring to ABM systems based on other physical principles. Our interest is to ensure strict adherence to that treaty, and continued respect by both sides for the integrity of this fundamental arms control agreement.

The situation today in no way represents a step backward from the situation as it existed prior to the Reykjavik meeting. Technological, political and legal uncertainties and disagreements have always characterized the debate on strategic defence. Even in this area, however, there has in our judgement been some movement toward better mutual understanding, in that the legitimacy of research related to strategic defence is now accepted by both sides. In a treaty that refers explicitly only to "development, testing and deployment", the issue has become, in effect, what are the limits on permissible research.

Mr. Speaker, we ought not to allow ourselves to focus exclusively on nuclear and strategic arms questions as if they constituted the totality of East-West relations. True, these issues have inescapably become the central element of this relationship, but they should not be seen in isolation from the broader context. There are other areas of arms control, most notably in relation to chemical weapons, where there is ground for cautious optimism. Further, we understand that on human rights questions and on a range of bilateral matters, progress continues to be made. Mr. Speaker, I should add that I was encouraged by my own talks on Human Rights with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, when he visited Ottawa. Our discussion was frank and more open than I believe has been the case before. Canada believes Progress here and on regional issues is essential to enable us to establish trust in each others intentions. This process of building trust is far from finished.

Peace and security require patience and persistence. Emotional swings between exaggerated expectations and gloomy foreboding do not facilitate the necessarily careful and painstaking way in which difficult policy choices must be tackled.

As both the Prime Minister and I have made clear, the USA and USSR have made remarkable progress on the central arms control and disarmament issues over the past months. They are still seriously engaged in the task of seeking compromise on remaining areas of disagreement.

We are encouraged by the public undertakings of both the President and the General Secretary to build on the progress which was achieved at Reykjavik. The resumption last Wednesday in Geneva of the Nuclear and Space Negotiations can only be regarded as more good news.

The superpowers have succeeded in bringing a major arms control agreement tantalizingly close.

We can't stop here. We must move ahead. Arms control is a fragile process. Its environment must be protected. It is therefore doubly important that all actions be resisted which might be seen as weakening or unravelling the existing international framework on which East-West relations and arms control are built.

Much attention has been focused on SDI and the ABM treaty. The Geneva negotiations will need to resolve the differences that continue to exist here. Progress in other areas should not be held hostage to the resolution of these difficulties. Our European allies are especially concerned with Intermediate Nuclear Forces. Canada would like to see an agreement in this area as well as in the area of strategic weapons, which threaten us directly.

Canada believes firmly in the value of the confidential negotiating forum. It is, in the end, irreplaceable. But it can be aided through techniques such as special envoys and, as we have just seen, by Summits. We would urge both superpowers to continue to use all these techniques, and not rely on negotiating in public.

If a Summit in Washington this fall is now unlikely, setting a date for early next year could help maintain the impetus of the process.

Canada is involved in East-West relations as a member of the NATO Alliance. That Alliance is the foundation of our security. What happens at the negotiating table between the USSR and the USA has a direct bearing on our own security. We are at the same time a nation dedicated to peace. Canadians have always worked for peace and international understanding. We have not, and will not hesitate to make our views known: publicly when that is appropriate, privately on a permanent basis.

But Canada's role is not simply to give advice. Many of the persisting obstacles to negotiating progress arise directly from a lack of trust. The priority attention Canada has given to verification issues in particular attacks this question directly. Arms Control agreements alone do not produce security; confidence in compliance produces security. Verification justifies that confidence. Such an approach enhances the credibility of our counsel.

Canada's participation as a Western country in the process of building East-West relations will continue. The visit to Canada in the last month of Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and the Czechoslovak Prime Minister were part of this process. And early next month I will travel to Vienna for the opening of the CSCE Follow-Up meeting which deals with East-West relations from the human rights, security, economic and human contact dimensions. It provides us with another opportunity to move the process ahead in an integrated comprehensive manner.

Our hopes for real progress in East-West relations were strengthened by the developments at Reykjavik. Canada has been in touch with both sides, before and since the meeting in Iceland. We will continue to use all our resources to help the United States and the Soviet Union build on what they began.