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EXTÉRIEURES.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
THE HONOURABLE MITCHELL SHARP,
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
JUNE 5, 1972

"NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING
BONN, MAY 30-31, 1972"

I have just returned from the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany -- situated at the crossroads of Europe. In terms of time, too, the Bonn meeting took place at a crossroads in the evolution of East-West relations.

The NATO meeting coincided with the completion of President Nixon's talks with Soviet leaders. Secretary of State Rogers reported to his colleagues in Bonn on this historic visit and in particular on the strategic arms limitation agreements. We all welcomed these agreements as an important turning point in efforts to curb the nuclear arms race and enhance international security through nuclear arms control. Along with other Ministers, I welcomed the commitment of the United States and the Soviet Union actively to continue negotiations on further limitations. I also expressed particular appreciation to the United States for having regularly consulted its allies in the North Atlantic Council throughout the negotiating process.

On June 3 shortly after the NATO meeting the Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers signed a final protocol bringing the Berlin Agreement into force. At the same time representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union and Poland exchanged instruments of ratification concluding their non-aggression treaties. The Canadian Government welcomes these agreements as major steps forward in relations between East and West. The Berlin Agreement hopefully marks the end of the recurring tension and instability in and around Berlin that have frequently envenomed East-West relations since the blockade in 1948. The non-aggression treaties should remove another source of tension, allowing the FRG to put its relations with Eastern Europe on a more normal basis.

Together these developments open the way for the Alliance to take part in multilateral preparatory talks on a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and for the two German states to begin negotiations on a modus vivendi. Such an accommodation is necessary for the success of the Berlin agreement and for the maintenance of stability in Central Europe. If the two German states can agree on a modus vivendi it will pave the way for their entry into the United Nations and a general recognition of the GDR.

When one looks back at the many years of stagnant East-West relations, the conclusion of the Berlin agreement and the non-aggression treaties represents remarkable progress. It vindicates the Alliance's policy of making a Berlin settlement the pre-condition for progress on preparation for a conference and demonstrates that the Alliance, through its solid support for Chancellor Brandt's "ostpolitik" is a positive instrument for détente.

NATO Ministers agreed in Bonn to accept the invitation of the Finnish Government to hold multilateral preparatory talks in Helsinki to prepare for a Conference on Security and Co-operation. The exact date on which the European countries, the United States and Canada will sit down to talk about a conference will have to be set by mutual agreement among the potential participants. With other NATO members Canada will now move to engage other interested countries in planning for this phase.

I should emphasize that a decision to convoke a formal conference has not yet been taken. That decision will depend on the outcome of the preparatory talks. The aim of NATO countries at these talks will be to ensure that our proposals are fully considered and to establish that enough common ground exists among participants to warrant reasonable expectations that a conference will produce satisfactory results.

For example, we want to see more normal contacts and exchanges between countries of different political and social systems in Europe. To achieve this end, the Conference should deal in a practical way with measures designed to contribute to the freer movement of people, information and ideas. I was not alone in underlining the importance of this consideration at our meeting last week.

On the military side NATO ministers were agreed that certain stabilization measures could usefully be discussed at a conference in order to create confidence on both sides.

In addition to a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, NATO Ministers devoted considerable attention to the question of mutual and balanced force reductions. Just as we have always considered that progress in East-West political détente must be measured in terms of practical results, especially on the Berlin problem, so we believe that any real improvement in security in Europe will remain illusory unless it is accompanied by some reduction in the concentration of military power in the area.

This is not to say that force reductions should be negotiated at a conference. It would be impossible in practical terms to carry out negotiations on such a complex matter among the 35 participants in a conference. Preparations for a conference and for MBFR negotiations should, however, proceed as far as possible in parallel. In order that force reductions complement the political achievements of a security conference, talks on the two subjects should be concurrent but separate.

Unfortunately the explorations on MBFR have not yet begun because of Soviet unwillingness to receive Manlio Brosio, former Secretary-General of NATO, as an explorer. More recently, however, the Soviet Union has expressed its willingness to explore procedures for negotiations on MBFR. At the Bonn meeting NATO ministers affirmed their support for multilateral explorations. The next step will be to find means of translating this idea into action. I suggested in Bonn that a group should be selected among NATO members to engage the Soviet Union and other interested countries in preliminary talks to seek sufficient agreement to bring about negotiations. Considerable interest was shown in the Canadian idea at the meeting and we hope Alliance members can reach accord on some form of group approach in the near future.

The atmosphere in Bonn was very much influenced by the promising progress recently made in the broad negotiating process by which we hope to resolve the underlying causes of tension, including the division of Germany. NATO countries responded by expressing their intention to pursue the opportunities for progress on both preparations for a conference and explorations for MBFR. We should have no illusions about the difficulties that lie ahead. In many ways the task which now faces us is the most difficult of all. We shall have to combine continued defence preparedness with pursuit of détente, Alliance solidarity with willingness to seek accommodation with the other side and firmness on basic principles with flexibility on means.

Canada has direct and identifiable interests in both security and co-operation in Europe. That is why we have supported Alliance policies in defence and détente in the past and why we intend to work with our NATO allies in the continued search for improved East-West relations through mutual balanced force reductions and a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

I should now like to table the communiqué issued after the meeting of the North Atlantic Alliance, and suggest, if the House agrees, that it be printed as an appendix to Hansard.