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# New Ways of Thinking about Nuclear Weapons and Canada's Defense Policy

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## NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CANADA'S DEFENCE POLICY

Erika Simpson *Diefenbaker's  
Legacy 1998*

Canada is unique in that it has both the technological capability and the resources to develop its own nuclear weapons, or to acquire them from the United States, but has chosen not to. This paper analyzes the legacy of John Diefenbaker's government with regard to this aspect of Canadian defence policy, and the onset during the Diefenbaker years of new thinking about nuclear weapons. It explores how Diefenbaker and other key decision makers came to question whether Canada should assume a nuclear role; it examines their beliefs about nuclear weapons and the nature of the nuclear threat, and their assumptions about deterrence and about the nature of Canada's allied military commitment and involvement.

Between 1957 and 1960, the Diefenbaker government undertook to acquire five different nuclear weapons systems: Bomarc missiles; CF-101B Voodoo air defence interceptors, to be deployed in Canada; CF-104 Starfighters, to be deployed in Europe as part of NATO's strike force; Lacrosse atomic missiles (which were eventually replaced by Honest John missiles), also to be deployed in Europe; and the rarely mentioned nuclear depth charges and torpedoes for Canada's maritime forces in the North Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> For a number of different reasons, the government had decided to commit itself to purchasing nuclear weaponry.<sup>2</sup> By 1961, however, the government

1 For an in-depth discussion of the nature and timing of these commitments, see Erika Simpson, "Canada's Contrasting NATO Commitments and the Underlying Beliefs and Assumptions of Defenders and Critics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1995), 247-66.

2 The major factors that seem to have impelled the government to embrace nuclear weapons include new technological developments such as the development of the Russian Sputnik in 1957 and the successful testing of the Bomarc B in 1959. Bilateral pressures, including the Congressional debate in the United States against acquiring a full complement of Bomarcs and the American transfer to Canada of the Voodoos, incited military advisers such as General Charles Foulkes, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to favour acquiring these nuclear-capable weapons systems. NATO directives, including MC 14/2 and MC/48/2 recommending defence preparations premised on using nuclear weapons from the outset, appeared to sway Diefenbaker and his first Defence Minister, George Pearkes. Financial imperatives such as the cancellation of the Avro Arrow, and its substitution with the relatively inexpensive Bomarc missile, also seemed to affect Diefenbaker's attitude. In fact,



Diefenbaker receiving poppy from Douglas Harkness, 1 November 1957 (Art Smith, MP, stands at left) (courtesy the Diefenbaker Centre, MG01/PHAL.003).

began to change its mind on the nuclear acquisition issue, and by the end of the following year high-level decision makers, including the Prime Minister himself, finally expressed outright opposition to fulfilling Canada's nuclear commitments. This paper attempts to explain this change in government policy and outlook, not so much by exploring the international and domestic factors that prompted it,<sup>3</sup> but rather by analyzing the beliefs and assumptions of the senior decision makers which lay behind it. The paper argues that the underlying attitudes and beliefs of key policy makers were an important influence on Canadian defence policy making during the Diefenbaker years.

The policy makers involved fall into two groups, who are identified here as Defenders (pro-nuclear) and Critics (anti-nuclear). In the first group were Diefenbaker's first Minister of National Defence, George Pearkes; Pearkes's successor,

military recommendations such as General Lauris Norstad's briefing to Cabinet seemed to have a considerable influence on members of Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. For further discussion of the impact and timing of these different factors, see Simpson, "Canada's Contrasting NATO Commitments," 246-98.

3 International crises such as the Cuban Missile Crisis led some decision makers such as Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green to question the necessity of acquiring nuclear weapons more forcefully. Canada's high-profile position in the UN's eighteen-nation Disarmament Committee influenced the Cabinet's debate. Cabinet was also influenced by: President John Kennedy's failure to consult during the Cuban Missile Crisis; the publication of the US State Department's press release criticizing Canada's nuclear policy; increasingly divided public opinion in Canada; Opposition Leader Lester Pearson's unexpected volte-face regarding the nuclear issue; as well as domestic criticism in the form of an outpouring of letters and complaints from groups like the Voice of Women. For further discussion of the impact and timing of these different factors, see *ibid.*

Douglas Harkness; the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Foulkes; the Canadian Ambassador to the United States, Arnold Heene; and other high-level military officials, such as the Chief of the Air Staff Hugh Campbell and Air Chief Marshal Frank Miller. Cabinet Ministers George Hees and Pierre Sevigny and Secretary to the Cabinet Robert Bryce may also be included in the group. The views espoused by this group were predominant in the Canadian government through the latter part of the 1950s, and represented traditional assumptions about nuclear weapons and Canada's responsibilities and involvement in nuclear deterrence. The group was instrumental in convincing Diefenbaker early in his prime ministerial leadership that Canada should acquire nuclear weapons. However, Diefenbaker became less certain about the nuclear option after he appointed his good friend and nuclear opponent Howard Green as Secretary of State for External Affairs in 1959.

Green, Undersecretary of State for External Affairs Norman Robertson, who also strongly opposed the acquisition of nuclear weapons, and George Ignatieff, who was appointed special adviser to Diefenbaker on nuclear issues in January 1961, indeed played a key role in eventually getting Diefenbaker and his government to rethink the nuclear acquisition issue. This group, and Critics more generally, articulated new ways of thinking within the government about the nuclear threat and the suitability of a nuclear deterrence strategy. There was an outlook that would be influenced by the Canadian public's increasing anti-Americanism and a growing Canadian peace movement, and which years later would reach full expression in the policies of the government of Pierre Trudeau.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is framed as an analysis of the beliefs and assumptions of these two main groups, first the Defenders and then the Critics, and it describes the legacy that was left by the triumph of the latter, and particularly John Diefenbaker, over the former.

## BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF DEFENDERS

The main elements of the classical (i.e., Defenders') thinking about nuclear weapons and Canada's nuclear commitments, which prevailed strongly in the Canadian government through most of the 1950s, were as follows.

### *Defenders feared abandonment*

Defenders feared that, if Canada weakened or reneged on its military commitments, the nation would be in danger of deserting its closest allies and finding itself abandoned and isolated. George Pearkes, Douglas Harkness, and other defence officials such as Charles Foulkes and Frank Miller argued that if the government failed to acquire nuclear systems, the country would be neglecting its allies and perhaps even running the risk of American retaliation.

### *Defenders believed Canada should pursue closer ties to the allies through established military commitments*

Canadian decision makers had done a variety of things to signal Canada's close military ties to Europe and the United States, but the tendency among Defenders was to advocate traditional and established means of fostering such ties. In the early 1960s,

4 For an in-depth analysis of Trudeau's views on, and the attitude of some of his advisers toward, nuclear weapons, see *ibid.*, chs. 3-4, 107-237.

these involved: commitments to maintain or increase the number of Canadian military forces personnel earmarked for NATO, particularly those deployed in Europe; promises to modernize or earmark more weapons systems and equipment for NATO, again particularly in Europe; and commitments to maintain or increase the percentage of the federal government's defence budget and the percentage of Gross National Product directed toward supporting the alliance.

*Defenders believed the external threat to the allies was self-evident and imminent*

Another core belief of Defenders related to their perceptions of the threat to the allies. Their discussions of the nature of the threat in fact were infrequent because the threat was accepted without critical reflection. For example, rather than consider whether the Communist world was monolithic or divided, Defenders focussed their intellectual energy on analysing the other allies' — particularly the Americans' — reactions to and positions toward the Communists.

*Defenders assumed Canada's and the allies' weapons were defensive and non-threatening*

Defenders tended to downplay Canada's capabilities, characterizing its weapons systems and intentions as defensive, not offensive. Although some commentators criticized select NATO weapons for being potentially first-strike systems, Defenders portrayed Canada's and the allies' weapons systems as part of a second-strike deterrent; the CF-104s in Europe, for example, were considered defensive until Trudeau began questioning this basic assumption in 1969. Whereas Defenders such as Harkness referred to Canada's Bomarc and CF-101s as defensive, they avoided discussing the potentially offensive role of Canadian weapons systems such as the CF-104s. Indeed, the records of Cabinet meetings and high-level debates show that most Canadian leaders assumed that Canada's weapons systems were defensive, and did not consider whether the Soviet Union might perceive those systems as somehow provocative.

*Defenders believed in the deterrence doctrine*

Defenders premised their support for maintaining, if not strengthening, Canada's nuclear commitments on the doctrine of deterrence. Most expressed considerable faith in deterrence, a faith they retained as nuclear strategy evolved from "massive retaliation" in the 1950s to "flexible response" in the 1960s. Before 1957, for example, most Defenders believed deterrence was provided by the American monopoly on ballistic nuclear missiles.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1950s, the deterrence doctrine was, for them, based on the idea of massive retaliation.<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s, they believed that a credible deterrent was necessary so as to ensure a "flexible" response.<sup>7</sup> Despite the continuing

5 Until 1949, only the United States had developed thermonuclear weapons. The first Soviet explosion of an atomic device in 1949 was followed four years later by the development of a hydrogen bomb. But it was not until 1957, with the launch of Sputnik, that military strategists in the United States and Canada generally recognized that there now existed a "balance of terror" between the United States and the USSR. This balance had attendant implications for deterrence strategy — implications that came to be appreciated around 1959-60.

6 US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles first promulgated the doctrine of massive retaliation in 1954. It suggested that the United States would defend its interests in the world with considerable force, possibly including nuclear weapons.

7 The strategy of "flexible response" was officially adopted by NATO in 1967; however, it had been

changes in strategy, Defenders continued to accept that Canada had to fulfil its nuclear commitments or run the risk of undermining deterrence.

It is clear that, in the 1957-60 period, most Cabinet ministers and senior advisers were Defenders who recommended modernizing Canada's weapons systems with nuclear weapons because of their beliefs about the dangers of abandonment, the nature of the threat, the utility of nuclear weapons, and the reliability of deterrence. Foremost among these advisors were Defence Minister George Pearkes and his senior military adviser Charles Foulkes. The Prime Minister initially relied a great deal on their assessments. Whereas Diefenbaker seemed unsure of himself at the 1957 NATO Council meeting, and perhaps confused about the nature of the military commitments he was undertaking, there can be no doubt that between 1957 and 1960 he favoured acquiring nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, behind the scenes and in private conversations, Ambassador Arnold Heene, Air Chief Marshal Frank Miller, Chief of the Air Staff Hugh Campbell, Associate Defence Minister Pierre Seigny, senior Cabinet minister George Hees, and Secretary to the Cabinet Robert Bryce were also vigorous advocates of fulfilling Canada's nuclear commitments.

In fact, within the inner circle of senior decision makers at this time, there was no one who was clearly opposed to, or even critical of, Canada acquiring nuclear weapons. The views of Diefenbaker's first Secretary of State for External Affairs, Sidney Smith, had not yet crystallized, and, until Green replaced Smith, Undersecretary Norman Robertson would feel uncomfortable about articulating his growing concerns about nuclear weapons.<sup>8</sup> As for the Prime Minister, he did not encourage debate and discussion of defence issues among his senior advisers; indeed, in defence matters he initially relied solely on his own opinions and the advice of Pearkes<sup>9</sup> and Foulkes. He had no interest in discussing these issues with External Affairs or having them debated in Parliament. Thus, defence decision making was dominated during these early years by Defenders. That it might not be necessary to acquire nuclear warheads in order to demonstrate Canada's continued commitment to NATO and NORAD was an idea yet to be countenanced.

But as Canada moved into the 1960s, the Prime Minister and the nuclear

unofficial doctrine since the early 1960s. According to Canada's Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy in 1963, "Flexible response is in a sense a generalization of the concept of a limited war. It is based on the proposition that the Western Alliance as a whole and the United States in particular should not be placed in a position of excessive reliance on nuclear weapons or, more generally, of requiring to employ force in a manner incompatible with Western aims and objectives. The principle of flexible response places increased emphasis on the provision of conventional forces. It involves reduced dependence on strategic and tactical nuclear weapons although it does not reduce the requirement for these capabilities." See DND, Directorate of History (DHist), R.J. Sutherland (Chairman), et al., "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy," p. 14 [SECRET CANADIAN EYES ONLY].

8 Interview with Basil Robinson, 14 September 1992. See also Basil Robinson, *Diefenbaker's World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 108; Knowlton Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 84; and J.L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence: Norman Robertson and Canadian Statecraft, 1929-1968* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1981), 336-63.

9 Pearkes was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia in 1960 and Douglas Harkness became the new Minister of National Defence. Whereas Diefenbaker had accorded Pearkes much authority and influence, Harkness was not as close to the Prime Minister nor as highly esteemed. Although he proved to be a vigorous Defender who argued in favour of acquiring nuclear weapons with conviction and energy, Harkness was not able to convince the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of his views.

proponents within the government began to face a challenge to their policies and positions. The challenge came from the Critics, both senior government officials and other elements of society who had different attitudes toward and beliefs about nuclear weapons.

## BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF CRITICS

### *Critics feared entrapment*

In contrast to the Defenders, the Critics were preoccupied with the dangers of entrapment rather than abandonment. They tended to be suspicious of the likelihood and possible consequences of the allies drawing Canada into an armed confrontation. They worried about NATO undertakings, particularly American military objectives.

From the time Howard Green was appointed External Affairs Minister in June 1959, Prime Minister Diefenbaker became increasingly suspicious of the United States and fearful that the alliance leader would draw Canada unwillingly into a dangerous international confrontation. His suspicions reached a climax during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Cabinet debated whether or not to alert the Canadian military forces. In the emergency Cabinet meetings during the crisis, Diefenbaker and Green voiced their fears that the country was in danger of becoming entangled in American domestic affairs. Green argued that "there were great dangers in rushing in at this time." Furthermore, Canada should not be "stampeded" by Washington.<sup>10</sup> In particular, Diefenbaker's and Green's fears about entrapment led them to recommend that the Canadian government try to behave normally and deliberately, that the troop rotation to Europe be deferred, and that the government delay its decision to alert the Canadian military forces.<sup>11</sup>

Underlying their arguments was the assumption that alerting the military forces would only increase the likelihood of war. In one emergency Cabinet meeting, Diefenbaker's concerns about war impelled him to caution his colleagues that "Canadian mothers did not want their sons to be killed in any foreign war," and "the Cuba business was no affair of Canada's."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, his fear that the United States would drag Canada unwillingly into an armed confrontation, possibly a nuclear war, was such that when British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan sent an urgent message to Diefenbaker, the Canadian Prime Minister reported that Macmillan thought that the Soviet Union was "balanced on the knife's edge of indecision" and "any hostile

10 Privy Council Office (PCO), Cabinet Conclusions, 23 October 1962, pp. 4-5; 25 October, p. 16 [SECRET]. The Cabinet Conclusions were obtained under the Access to Information Act from the PCO, but are now also on deposit at the National Archives of Canada (NA). The records of Cabinet meetings, usually written by Robert Bryce, often attribute points made by Ministers not to specific individuals but to "some Ministers" or to "the Cabinet." However, comments made by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and the Minister of National Defence were usually specifically attributed. Further evidence that it was Diefenbaker and Green who made these arguments in Cabinet is confirmed by other accounts of Cabinet meetings. See NA, Douglas Harkness Papers, MG 32, B19, vol. 57, "Unnumbered series on 'The Nuclear Arms Crisis'"; Patrick Nicholson, *Vision and Indecision* (Don Mills, ON: Longmans Canada, 1968), 158-59; Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 199; and Pierre Sevigny, *This Game of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 256.

11 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 23 October 1962, pp. 4-5; 24 October 1962, p. 5 [SECRET]; and NA, Douglas Harkness Papers, MG 32, B19, vol. 57, "Unnumbered series on 'The Nuclear Arms Crisis'."

12 See Patrick Nicholson, *Vision and Indecision*, 159.

act might precipitate a Russian attack." Diefenbaker took Macmillan's message to mean that alerting Canada's defence might be just enough to precipitate the outbreak of war.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, it was not Diefenbaker's fears about Khrushchev's intentions that provoked the Prime Minister to oppose alerting the armed forces, but rather his beliefs about the escalatory tendencies of American military leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately following the Cuban Missile Crisis, Diefenbaker ordered Harkness and Green to conduct secret negotiations with the United States to acquire nuclear warheads based on either the "joint control" or "missing parts" concepts.<sup>15</sup> He seemed to accept the necessity of accepting nuclear warheads but only so long as the United States consented to his concept of "joint control." As early as 1961, Diefenbaker had been saying that Canada preferred joint control of Canada's nuclear weapons systems, and this would require that President Kennedy use his executive powers to reinterpret the existing US law in such a way as to permit the "necessary agreement" of Canada.<sup>16</sup> Even during his first meeting with Kennedy, before their relationship became embittered, Diefenbaker referred to the imperative of obtaining joint control and joint custody over the nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup>

In later years, Diefenbaker's close aide, Basil Robinson, explained that the Prime Minister's reason for seeking joint control seemed to be "to satisfy himself" that nuclear weapons located in Canada would not be used, except with the agreement of the Canadian government. According to Robinson, Diefenbaker was motivated not simply by "crass politics," but rather believed it was his "political responsibility"<sup>18</sup> to acquire and maintain joint control. Indeed, the Prime Minister was afraid of being accused of not having ensured Canada an equal say in the decision to use nuclear weapons.<sup>19</sup> Diefenbaker's memoirs also seem to confirm this assessment: "It was essential that the Canadian government be in as strong a position as possible to bring its influence to bear on any decision to use nuclear weapons, and perhaps to deter the United States from any possible ill-considered decisions in this respect."<sup>20</sup>

Diefenbaker's own belief that Canada was in danger of entrapment stemmed from his experiences in dealing with the Americans since coming to office, and his growing anti-Americanism. Privately, Diefenbaker referred to "the avalanche of anti-Americanism" in Canada, which stemmed from the widespread impression that the

13 Ibid., 165; Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 199.

14 PCO Cabinet Conclusions, 24 October 1962, p. 7, [SECRET].

15 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 30 October 1962, p. 10, [TOP SECRET].

16 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 21 February 1961, p. 1, [SECRET].

17 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 25 August 1961, p. 6, item k), [SECRET]. Diefenbaker also told the Cabinet after this meeting with Kennedy in 1961: "The President had said he would go as far as possible to meet the Canadian position in the matter, and there had been reliable reports in the last few days that members of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee would agree to joint control with Canada over nuclear weapons stockpiled in this country for Canadian use. It would not have been possible two years ago to obtain US agreement to this principle. A change in US law might not be required to give effect to an agreement to share with Canada joint control over nuclear weapons stockpiled in Canada." These comments do seem to indicate that some measure of Canadian joint control, as Diefenbaker conceived it, was being seriously discussed in the United States in 1961.

18 Diefenbaker told Cabinet in 1961 that not to obtain joint control "would be an abandonment of responsibility on the part of Canada." PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 25 August 1961, p. 4, [SECRET].

19 Basil Robinson interview, 14 September 1992.

20 John Diefenbaker, *One Canada 1962-1967*, vol. 3 (Scarborough, ON: Macmillan-NAI Publishing, 1977), 92.

United States was pushing other people around, from distrust of the American military, from the aggressiveness of American economic interests — and, he added almost as an afterthought, from the adverse Canada-US trading relationship.<sup>21</sup>

The Prime Minister's suspicions about US leaders began to affect his decision making in 1960, well before Kennedy became President. His growing impression was that the Americans were overly aggressive and that US military leaders were untrustworthy. For example, he came to regard the NORAD agreement of 1957 as having been presented to him under false pretences.<sup>22</sup> He was also frustrated about his unsuccessful effort to sell the Avro CF-105 Arrow to the United States, doubly so because he later had to acquire American-made interceptors.<sup>23</sup> He was also embarrassed to have been obliged to intervene personally to secure the Bomarc program.<sup>24</sup> With the inauguration in 1961 of a new, young, and seemingly impetuous President, Diefenbaker's suspicions of the Americans grew. They were reinforced by the Bay of Pigs incident in April 1961 and came to preoccupy him once he found the infamous "sofa memo": "What We Want from Ottawa Trip."<sup>25</sup> By 1963, according to George Ignatieff, the Prime Minister's distrust of the United States had grown to the point that he truly believed he had been tricked into accepting a defence policy which was subordinated to a certain type of weapons program and to the interest of a foreign government.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, it is notable that Diefenbaker — for example, during the Berlin crisis in September 1961 — harboured no suspicions whatever that the other NATO allies might seek to draw Canada unwillingly into an armed confrontation.

*Critics believed Canada's established military ties to the allies should be restructured and de-emphasized*

Critics sought to alter Canada's military support for the allies. In particular, they opposed increasing the number of Canadian military forces for NATO purposes. They were critical of the government's promises to modernize and deploy more

21 NA, Arnold Heeney Papers, MG 30, E 144, vol. 2, file "Memoir, 1960, Chapter 15, diary, #2," 30 August 1960 entry; see also Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 58.

22 Interview with George Ignatieff by Roger Hill, Senior Research Fellow, Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, "Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security Transcripts" (CIIPS Transcripts), unpublished transcripts (Ottawa, 1987), 104. These are verbatim transcripts of interviews conducted by Roger Hill, David Cox, Nancy Gordon, et al. Excerpts are cited with the permission of Roger Hill.

23 According to Ignatieff, "he [Diefenbaker] was told by National Defence after he had signed NORAD, there was no need for such an aircraft, because the United States would take care of all that and they would not buy the Arrow in any shape or form; they had all kinds of aircraft and missiles and we were going into the missile age anyway. And in his fury, I think, Diefenbaker not only made the decision to scrap the Arrow, but he said that every Arrow plane, even the few models that had been made, had to be destroyed." CIIPS Transcripts, p. 118.

24 John Diefenbaker, *One Canada: The Years of Achievement 1956-1962*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), 51-52, 60.

25 For a detailed account of Diefenbaker's growing suspicions once Kennedy came into power, see Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*. Nash argues that Diefenbaker's perception of the United States shifted because he strongly disliked Kennedy. In fact, Diefenbaker's "anti-American" impulses began to affect his decision making in 1960, well before Kennedy became President.

26 As Ignatieff recalled, "It affected his whole attitude in relation to the United States. I mean a lot has been said about his personal antipathy to a young President such as Kennedy. But it had this background in the defence issues, where he felt he had been cornered into a subordinate position and contrary to all his convictions." CIIPS transcripts, p. 118.

weapons systems and equipment to NATO, and they were generally intent on limiting the percentage of both the federal government's defence budget and the nation's GNP directed toward the Western alliance.

Between 1957 and 1963, most high-level decision makers, including Diefenbaker and Green, steadfastly rejected the concept of a complete severing of Canada's association with NATO — what they called "neutralism." In fact, Diefenbaker claimed that he could not abide neutralists, and heaped scorn on James Minifie, "the reigning advocate of neutralism," a "Washington-based journalist and expatriate for whom Canada wasn't good enough."<sup>27</sup> But Green, Robertson, and Ignatieff all believed the government should restructure its nuclear commitments to NATO. It was this small group that, at the beginning of 1960, played a central role in changing Diefenbaker's mind on the nuclear question. It was just after Ignatieff became a special advisor to Diefenbaker on nuclear issues that the Prime Minister began to embrace new ideas such as "joint control" and "missing parts" — propositions which seemed designed to delay decision making.<sup>28</sup> High-level military advisers, such as Foulkes, argued that negotiations with the United States to acquire nuclear weapons would need to be based on the principle that the warheads for the Canadian military forces in Europe, and the interceptors in Canada, would be supplied by the United States and remain American property. They also maintained that nuclear weapons stockpiled in Europe would be guarded by NATO soldiers, and custody and maintenance would remain with the United States.<sup>29</sup> But Diefenbaker now espoused "joint control." He explained: "We have made it equally clear that we shall not in any event consider nuclear weapons until, as a sovereign nation, we have equality of control — a joint control."<sup>30</sup>

Green, Robertson, and Ignatieff were the formulators of the joint control approach. Ignatieff later explained:

We came up with our own formula for defusing the government's nuclear dilemma.... To the beleaguered Prime Minister, this compromise solution was a welcome peg on which to hang his own indecision, and he clung to it even after it became obvious that it wasn't strong enough to save his government.<sup>31</sup>

The missing parts approach also grew out of the trio's conversations.<sup>32</sup> Their suggestion that nuclear warheads be stored on American territory and delivered quickly in the event of emergency seemed designed to bridge gaps among opposing viewpoints

27 NA, Arnold Heeney Papers, MG 30, E 144, vol. 2, file "Memoir, 1960, Chapter 15, diary, A#2," 31 August 1960 entry. James Minifie was the author of a book which argued for Canadian neutrality, *Peacemaker or Powdermonkey: Canada's Role in a Revolutionary World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960).

28 For instance, the missing parts idea was based on the condition that the United States would consent to store the nuclear warheads, or parts of the warheads, on American soil and, in the event that Canada authorized their deployment during an emergency, the United States would undertake to transport the parts to Canada and install them in the Bomarc missiles and Voodoo interceptors.

29 For example, see General C. Foulkes on CBC TV, "Citizen's Forum," 6 November 1960, transcribed in *News and Views* 92, no. 22 (November 1960): 11.

30 For Diefenbaker's own reference list of his statements referring to joint control, see Diefenbaker Canada Centre (DCC), Prime Minister's Office, vol. 74, file 10385, "Public Statements by Members of the Government Regarding the Acquisition and Storage of Nuclear Weapons," 24 November 1960.

31 George Ignatieff, *The Making of a Peacemaker* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1985), 189.

32 According to Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 152.

in Cabinet. It sought to satisfy Diefenbaker's desire for joint control while moderating US escalatory tendencies; and it endeavoured to satisfy Green, who was fervently opposed to having nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Ignatieff later admitted: "We knew all along that the [joint control] proposal was no more than a holding action, that the Americans would never accept joint control with regard to the use of nuclear weapons. But in the meantime it did enable Howard Green to wage a number of successful campaigns on behalf of the one cause, which, in his mind, overshadowed all others in importance, namely arms control."<sup>33</sup> The missing parts approach also sought to mollify Defence Minister Douglas Harkness, who worried about Canada's defence of the deterrent.

*Critics believed the external threat was exaggerated and misunderstood*

While Defenders believed the Soviet threat was self-evident and imminent, Critics tended to believe that the threat was exaggerated and the intentions of the Soviet Union were being misinterpreted. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Diefenbaker took the position that the Americans were exaggerating and misinterpreting the threat by Khrushchev. In fact, he had taken a similar view of the Soviet threat back in 1961 when, during the Berlin crisis, he had observed that it should not be overlooked that the Soviet Union had fears, too. Although Soviet policies sometimes defied reason, it was important to understand their interests, objectives, and concerns.<sup>34</sup> A few months later, Diefenbaker referred to Khrushchev as a "realist" who supported "a course of peace — a course of realism — a course in keeping with the choice of the Canadian people."<sup>35</sup> By October 1962, Diefenbaker was so preoccupied with the motives of Kennedy and other American military leaders that he barely bothered during Cabinet meetings to assess Khrushchev's intentions, and when he did so, he took a relatively benign view of Soviet motives. Indeed, many years later, Diefenbaker still argued that Khrushchev's approach during the crisis was cautious and moderate. As he wrote: "Khrushchev went out of his way to cultivate a moderate and reasonable image."<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Diefenbaker perceived the Soviet threat to be overstated, his impression of the United States as a threat to international peace and security intensified. Instead of criticizing Khrushchev for secretly deploying missiles to Cuba, he lambasted American officials for first telling him that the substance of their photographic evidence was secret, and then shortly afterward revealing it to the press.<sup>37</sup> Although the depth of Diefenbaker's suspicions was quickly evident to Kennedy owing to the Prime Minister's impromptu proposal for an on-site inspection team, Diefenbaker openly revealed his distrust of American intentions when he told reporters during the crisis that, if his on-site inspection proposal was implemented, "the truth will be revealed."<sup>38</sup>

Diefenbaker was concerned that certain American leaders were bent on inciting war. His Cabinet had come to the conclusion that there were "domestic political

33 Ignatieff, *The Making of a Peacemaker*, 189.

34 DCC, Speech Series Collection, vol. 65, file 996, "Partial Notes for an address to the Canadian Bar Association," Winnipeg, 1 September 1961, p. 22.

35 DCC, Speech Series Collection, vol. 87, file 1122, 28 May 1962, p. 2.

36 John Diefenbaker, *One Canada 1962-1967*, 71.

37 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 24 October 1962, p. 2, [SECRET].

38 Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 189.

overtones in the US decision" to confront the Soviet Union over Cuba. Instead focussing on Khrushchev's provocative intentions, the Cabinet concluded that United States could be responsible for provoking war by imposing a selective blockade on Cuba.<sup>39</sup> As the Prime Minister explained to Cabinet, certain military lead in the United States appeared determined to fight the USSR — indeed, three years before, some of them had told him that the United States could defeat the Russians any time before the autumn of 1962, but that the outlook thereafter was less certain.

Diefenbaker's gradual change of heart regarding the Soviets, which seemed occur in 1961, stemmed in part from his belief that, as a matter of survival, it is essential for freedom-loving nations to seek, through the processes of diplomacy build on the hope of international peace. He came to the view that, although Soviet foreign policy would not be transformed, it was possible "to identify and to welcome certain modifications in the Soviet approach to international problems." For example, he emphasized that the Soviet Union's participation in the UN's Special Disarmament Committee should not be disregarded.<sup>41</sup>

The Prime Minister's altered perception of the Soviets also stimulated change in the way he processed information about Soviet actions. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, he suggested to his colleagues that Khrushchev's attempt to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba was understandable given the Americans' previous deployment of nuclear missiles in Turkey, within striking distance of the Soviet Union. Whereas in 1958 Diefenbaker likely would have condemned Khrushchev in 1962 he was trying to see the situation from the adversary's viewpoint.

For Diefenbaker and other Critics, the main threat to Canada's security came not the Soviet bloc but the threat of nuclear war arising out of both sides' stockpiles of nuclear weapons. In their view, the greatest threat to Canadians was not the danger of armed attack, but the possibility of miscalculated or accidental war escalation uncontrollably. The threat of nuclear war was much more dangerous and salient than the threat from Russian missiles in Cuba.

*Critics believed both sides' weapons were unnecessarily threatening*

Critics viewed the weapons and weapons structures of both the allies and the Soviet bloc as problematic. Many of NATO's weapons systems, they pointed out, were unnecessary, and potentially threatening. Critics worried in particular that both sides would regard the other's forces and doctrine as provocative, prompting a spiral of arms race and uncontrollable escalation.

As more information circulated in the late 1950s about the dangers of nuclear war, some key policy makers in Ottawa, including Howard Green and Norman Robertson, became increasingly vocal on the matter of Canada's nuclear acquisition policy. Arnold Heeney wrote in his diary: "My judgement is that this instinctive repulsion for nuclear involvement of any kind is at the base of Mr. G's [Green's] negative attitude over all defence matters, espec. [especially] where the United States, the great nuclear power is involved."<sup>42</sup> Like his minister, Norman Robertson was "absolutely horrified that mankind would seriously contemplate using the nu-

39 PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 23 October 1962, p. 4, [SECRET].

40 Ibid., 24 October 1962, p. 7, [SECRET].

41 For early evidence of his changing perceptions, see DCC, Diefenbaker Speech Series Collection, vol. 30, file 779, speech to Michigan University, Lansing, USA, 7 June 1959, pp. 6, 18, 20.

42 NA, Arnold Heeney Papers, MG 30, E 144, vol. 2, file "Memoir, 1960, Chapter 15, diary # 15, September 1960 entry

weapon."<sup>43</sup> As Basil Robinson explains, both Green and Robertson were affected by the anti-nuclear arguments propounded in the mid-1950s by the peace movement, first in the United Kingdom and later in Canada. Robertson, particularly, took the anti-nuclear viewpoint to heart, believing that once one understood the effect of a nuclear explosion, one's only course could be to oppose nuclear weapons and contribute to efforts to put them outside humankind's experience.<sup>44</sup>

There is no doubt that the peace movement beginning in Britain in the 1950s and spreading throughout Western Europe and North America in the 1960s caused many Canadians to think about the dangers of nuclear war and to question the assumptions undergirding the policy of deterrence. Letters, marches, and appeals drawing attention to the dangers of nuclear war had an overwhelming impact on some leaders. For some, the dismantling and destruction of nuclear, conventional, biological, and chemical weapons became the only option.

Diefenbaker's own beliefs were profoundly influenced by impressions he received in the early 1960s as more people began to discuss the dangers of nuclear war.<sup>45</sup> His assertions in January 1963 that "nuclear war is indivisible" and "nuclear weapons as a universal deterrent are a dangerous solution" were purportedly based on his reading of the Nassau Communiqué and ideas expressed by George W. Ball, the US Under-Secretary of State.<sup>46</sup> But the Prime Minister was also influenced by the personal mail he received from anti-nuclear groups such as the Voice of Women.<sup>47</sup> Although very much swayed by Green,<sup>48</sup> Diefenbaker claimed to be considerably affected by the thousands of letters he received from ordinary Canadians which reflected changes in the general climate of opinion.<sup>49</sup> Even though he reasoned that people rarely wrote letters except to express their opposition to something, he regarded his letters to be a most useful cross section of the public's understanding — or even sometimes misunderstanding — of the goals the government had set for itself.<sup>50</sup>

An examination of his personal jottings reveals that, by 1961, Diefenbaker believed that he himself would somehow be responsible if nuclear weapons were used

43 Interview of Basil Robinson, 14 September 1992.

44 Ibid. Robinson also speculates that Robertson's comparatively early exposure to the peace movement stemmed from his strong interest and close reading of developments in British politics. See also Gamatstein, *A Man of Influence*, 338-39.

45 Nicholson, *Vision and Indecision*, 159; Sevigny, *This Game of Politics*, 259.

46 *Hansard*, 25 January 1963, 3128.

47 See Nicholson, *Vision and Indecision*, 159; Sevigny, *This Game of Politics*, 259.

48 By 1962, Diefenbaker referred to Green as "one of the greatest leaders in the field of disarmament and world peace" and someone who had achieved for Canada "an undisputed place in the field of international affairs and the pursuit of peace for all mankind." DCC, Prime Minister's Papers, vol. 87, file 1122, "International Affairs-Defence Policy," 28 May 1962, p. 3.

49 Generally speaking, Diefenbaker relied on letters but not on public opinion polls to detect shifts in public opinion. This is confirmed by Pierre Sevigny's remarks in Peyton Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs: 1961-1963* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 71, and Harkness's comments in Peter Stursberg, *Leadership Last 1962-1967*, 25.

50 DCC, Diefenbaker Speech Series Collection, vol. 59, file 967, "Notes for an Address on 'The Nation's Business,'" 21 June 1961, p. 1. According to Arnold Heeney's diary, Diefenbaker was powerfully affected by the shift toward anti-Americanism which he detected in his letters beginning in 1959. See NA, Arnold D.P. Heeney Papers, MG 30, E 144, vol. 2, file "Memoir 1959, Chapter 15, diary #1," 29 March 1959 entry.

in a third world war. As he scrawled on his notes for a radio speech: "the thought of a third world war, especially one in which nuclear weapons would be used, is a constant companion of one who has the responsibility and trust which rests on me."<sup>51</sup> It may have been this sense of responsibility and trust which prompted him to begin cautioning that many of NATO's weapons were unnecessary and might be perceived as provocative, thus posing a threat to all. Certainly by 1963 he felt compelled to explain to the House of Commons that acquiring more nuclear weapons was a mistake and would add nothing materially to Canadian defences. He indeed argued that there should be no further development of nuclear power anywhere in the world, and that having nuclear weapons as a universal deterrent would be a dangerous situation.<sup>52</sup>

Diefenbaker's view that the stockpiling of nuclear weapons by both sides was unnecessarily threatening seems to have been prompted partly by his personal sense of responsibility for the survival of millions of Canadians. But it probably also grew out of his regular weekend conversations with Green, who believed fervently that nuclear weapons were threatening and dangerous. Indeed, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Canada might lead, Diefenbaker thought, to a spiralling arms proliferation in other regions of the world, including the Middle East, and to heightened dangers of unintentional escalation.<sup>53</sup>

The belief that nuclear weapons were dangerously offensive sometimes prompted new lines of reasoning. In Diefenbaker's case, he no longer refrained from referring to the possibility of nuclear war, but began to put forward vivid and grisly references to its consequences. Due in part to his rhetorical skills, Diefenbaker excelled at using vivid metaphors — the Pentagon intended to make Canada a "burnt sacrifice"; the Liberal party wanted to make Canada a "nuclear dump."<sup>54</sup> With great effect, the Prime Minister calculated the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons. "The present day bomb, with the dimension of 100 million tons of TNT," he announced, "would equal the explosive content of 10 million aircraft in the last war. That is why those of us who have the responsibility of leadership — this responsibility that remains with us day and night — carry this fear that through error or mistake we bring about a war that will destroy all mankind."<sup>55</sup>

#### *Critics believed the deterrence doctrine was misleading*

Critics generally believed that relying on NATO's nuclear forces would increase, not reduce, the likelihood of war, and they drew attention to threatening scenarios which they feared could not be averted by deterrence. As early as 1961, an unidentified

51 DCC, Diefenbaker Speech Series Collection, vol. 56, file 950, "Speech on CBC Radio International," 5 May 1961, p. 2.

52 *Hansard*, 25 January 1963, 3129-3130.

53 For example, see PCO, Cabinet Conclusions, 23 August 1961, p. 6, item c), [SECRET]. The Cabinet Conclusions did not directly attribute this argument to Howard Green but to "some" Cabinet ministers. It is highly probable that it was Green, however, as it is accompanied by other arguments typical of his reasoning (e.g., "It would be a tragic policy for Canada to stockpile nuclear weapons at this time . . . the Canadian example might result in a dozen or more powers, some of them, like the United Arab Republic, in tense and dangerous parts of the world, following the example . . .").

54 Peter C. Newman, *Renegade in Power* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), 388, 392.

55 DCC, Diefenbaker Speech Series Collection, vol. 87, file 1122, "International Affairs - Defence Policy," 28 May 1962, p. 2.



minister argued during a Cabinet meeting that it would be misleading to give Canadians the impression that Bomarc missiles and Voodoos could actually defend them against nuclear weapons.<sup>56</sup> While Diefenbaker initially subscribed to the view that making preparations for civil defence against nuclear attack was necessary, by 1960 he stated there would almost surely be "total destruction" and "a shattered world" if nations drifted into nuclear war. One year later he considered there could be "no margin for doubt about the devastation which could be wreaked on mankind either by intent or by miscalculation," and by 1963 he made even stronger references to nuclear war, stating: "The day the strike takes place, eighteen million people in North America will die in the first two hours, four million of them in Canada."<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the Diefenbaker years, high-level decision makers such as George Pearkes, Charles Foulkes, Douglas Harkness, Arnold Heeney, Hugh Campbell, Frank Miller, and George Hees held beliefs which led them to advocate Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons. Initially the Prime Minister was also convinced that Canada should acquire these weapons systems, but he eventually changed his mind and came to oppose their acquisition. Part of the explanation for Diefenbaker's changed position and outlook lies in the emergence early in the 1960s, at the centre of decision making in Ottawa, of people like Howard Green, Norman Robertson, and George Ignatieff who strongly opposed Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons. These individuals, along with the peace movement and the growth of anti-American sentiment in Canadian society, clearly influenced the Prime Minister to rethink the nuclear issue.

Advocating nuclear weapons until late in 1960, Diefenbaker then began to harbour doubts about Canada's nuclear commitment, which he finally rejected in December 1962. Although he wanted Canada to remain a member of NATO, he eventually questioned the necessity of acquiring nuclear weapons as part of Canada's allied commitment. Despite pressure from US leaders, the Canadian media, and Canadian military officials, Diefenbaker became more inclined to take the view that Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons would in fact contribute to international tensions and increase, not decrease, the likelihood of a global holocaust. His attitudes toward President Kennedy, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy's "sofa memo," and the US State Department's press release criticizing Canada's nuclear policy, all contributed to his growing fear of entrapment in the destabilizing and potentially destructive foreign ventures of the United States. Although Diefenbaker's changing convictions were not the only factor impelling his government to oppose nuclear weapons, they were of great importance.

It is interesting to consider that Canada was the only country during the early 1960s that rejected acquiring nuclear systems while it had the opportunity to possess them.<sup>58</sup> But this stance was short-lived, and Diefenbaker's successor as Prime Minister,

Lester Pearson, acted quickly to embrace nuclear weapons. Yet, a few years later, Pearson would be succeeded as Prime Minister by Pierre Trudeau, who would in fact hold many of the same underlying beliefs and convictions as Green, Robertson, and Ignatieff.<sup>59</sup> Whereas the latter three were among the first influential Canadian policy makers to criticize and oppose nuclear weapons, John Diefenbaker's legacy with respect to Canadian defence policy was that he eventually allowed this questioning and criticism to take place, and became the first Prime Minister to countenance Canada taking an anti-nuclear stand.

## Note

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56 PGO, Cabinet Conclusions, 23 August 1961, p. 8, [SECRET].

57 DCC, Speech Series Collection, vol. 65, file 996, "Partial notes for an address at the Canadian Bar Association Dinner," Winnipeg, 1 September 1961, p. 11; Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*, 228.

58 At that time, three NATO nations (the United States, Britain and France) possessed their own nuclear weapons. Five other NATO countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece and Turkey) entered into bilateral agreements with the United States under which they would acquire nuclear weapons systems. As a 1968 DND study for the Special Task Force on Europe added, these warheads were to be retained under American custody until their release was authorized by "joint decision."

DND, DHist, DND for STAFFEUR, "Canadian Military Interest in Europe," V 2390-1 (STAFFEUR), 1 November 1968, p. 26, [SECRET].

59 See Simpson, "Canada's Contrasting NATO Commitments," ch. 4, 184-245.