Unhelpful Fixer? Canada, the Euromissile Crisis, and Pierre Trudeau’s Peace Initiative, 1983-84

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This article provides the most rigourous international history to date of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s 1983 peace initiative, one of Canada’s major foreign policy ventures of the Cold War. Drawing on newly declassified archival materials in Canada as well as interviews with Canadian officials, this article reveals that this initiative had a two-track strategy, aiming to mobilise Western European leaders to exert pressure on the Reagan Administration, on the one hand, while quietly urging European allies to call for a review of NATO strategy. Based on previously unavailable archival sources from seven different countries, this article also reveals how the Canadian initiative was received by the world leaders Trudeau sought to win over. It reassesses the Canadian initiative, revealing that it borrowed heavily from existing proposals from other countries, and that NATO leaders viewed the initiative as a mere electoral ploy to help Trudeau win re-election rather than a serious project to ease East-West tensions. This article concludes that with this initiative Canada was not in fact playing the role of a ‘helpful fixer’ in international affairs and that the initiative constituted part of a wider and understudied trend in government responses to the tensions of the ‘Second Cold War’.

In December 1979, NATO announced its dual-track decision in response to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles: arms control negotiations would be pursued to try to secure the removal of Soviet SS-20s; meanwhile, American Cruise and Pershing II missiles would be deployed in Western Europe in the autumn of 1983 to counter the Soviet weapons. As that date approached, East-West tensions worsened and public opposition in Western Europe and indeed in North America to the deployment of these ‘Euromissiles’ swelled. While the governments of NATO’s largest members insisted on the timely
The deployment of Euromissiles in the autumn of 1983 in the absence of a breakthrough in arms control talks, several NATO governments, notably those of Denmark and Greece, instead called for the autumn 1983 deadline be pushed back to leave more time for negotiations. The Canadian government took a unique approach, combining support for the scheduled deployment of the Euromissiles with a high-level ‘peace initiative’ launched by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that aimed to improve East-West relations and revive arms control negotiations.

This peace initiative, unveiled on 27 October 1983, stands out in the history of Canadian foreign policy for its sheer ambition; the leader of this typically low-profile middle power declared that he sought to usher in ‘a new climate of East-West confidence’. Yet this intervention remains absent from existing international histories of the Euromissile Crisis and the so-called ‘Second Cold War’ of the early 1980s, in which Canada tends to be overlooked. Existing studies of the peace initiative, meanwhile, have tended to approach it from the perspective of Canadian foreign policy and even more specifically of Trudeau’s personal trajectory, focusing on his motivations and the origins of the initiative. It has also been argued that the peace initiative marked a return to Canada’s international role as a ‘helpful fixer’ between the great powers, a role that Trudeau had vocally eschewed at the beginning of his premiership in 1968 but that he supposedly embraced with his 1983 initiative in a startling ‘pirouette’ of Canadian foreign policy. According to this interpretation, the peace initiative ‘embodied the helpful-fixer concept writ large’. The only study to date to use a more international approach is Susan Colbourn’s recent article, which convincingly outlines the importance of NATO’s dual-track decision in the development of the initiative and places Trudeau’s policies within the context of the Euromissile Crisis.

Debates surrounding the initiative have centred on how successfully it helped reduce tensions between the superpowers. In his memoirs, Trudeau claims that ‘very soon after my mission the Cold War rhetoric of… President Reagan… became much more conciliatory’, suggesting that it was Trudeau who had brought about the so-called ‘Reagan reversal’ from a hawkish to a softer stance towards the Soviet Union. More recent studies
of American foreign policy under Reagan have revealed that this shift in fact started before Trudeau launched his initiative, definitively ruling out the suggestion that Trudeau’s peace mission was the catalyst. Nevertheless, most studies of the Canadian initiative have tended to focus narrowly on what influence Trudeau had over the Reagan Administration and its relations with Moscow. This concentration on the United States has obscured an indispensable dimension of the initiative, namely Trudeau’s strategy of winning over European NATO allies. From the very beginning, ‘the point of departure of the […] initiative [was] in NATO’, and it was understood that any success of the initiative would depend on support from Western European leaders in the first instance. Trudeau accordingly started his peace mission by meeting with six NATO leaders in Europe, before meeting with dozens of other world leaders from the Western bloc, Communist states, and the Non-Aligned Movement, bringing the initiative to a close in February 1984.

Drawing on recently declassified Canadian documents, as well as personal interviews with Canadian officials, this article sets out the strategy behind the peace initiative, restoring the centrality of NATO to the development and execution of the Canadian project and the hitherto overlooked influence of other NATO leaders on Trudeau’s proposals. Furthermore, drawing on newly available archival sources from seven countries, this article provides the most thorough assessment to date of how Canada’s allies responded to Trudeau’s overtures, before considering his meetings with other world leaders. This allows us to reconsider the results of the initiative and to reassess the place of Trudeau’s intervention in the international history of the Cold War and of Canadian foreign policy.

**Trudeau’s Two-Track Strategy for Dealing with NATO**

While Trudeau had periodically expressed concerns over nuclear disarmament and the deterioration of East-West relations in the late 1970s, his interest in these issues, and indeed in foreign policy more generally, has fairly been described as ‘sporadic’. By 1983, Trudeau’s reputation as an anti-nuclear ‘peacenik’ at home had been undermined by his
decision that year to allow the Americans to test air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) in northern Canada; this sparked widespread peace protests comparable to those in Europe focused on Euromissile deployment. In May 1983, Canada received a delegation led by then Soviet Minister for Agriculture, a certain Mikhail Gorbachev, who stated publicly in Ottawa that Trudeau’s decision to test ALCMs ‘would introduce an element of destabilisation’ to East-West relations and make war more likely. Trudeau privately told Gorbachev that the Cruise tests were a ‘side issue’ and confidently assured him that the tests ‘would not affect my image as a dove – a peacemaker’. By the autumn of 1983, however, Trudeau’s image as a peacemaker was being steadily eroded by waves of peace demonstrations, where Trudeau was consistently depicted as a warmonger.

According to Trudeau, it was not the Canadian peace movement but rather the Soviets’ downing of KAL 007, a Korean airliner, on 1 September 1983 that jolted him into action. That month he convened a ‘Task Force’ of advisors to develop a peace initiative aimed at reducing tensions between the superpowers; importantly, this Task Force bypassed the ministries of External Affairs and National Defence and answered directly to Trudeau. He insisted that ‘any initiative has to be predicated on adherence to NATO[’s] two-track decision and confirmation to test cruise’ missiles in Canada. Indeed, while on a trip to Athens on the eve of the KAL incident, Trudeau had publicly distanced himself from the proposal of Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou to delay deployment by six months to allow more time for negotiations and thereby reduce East-West tensions, on the grounds that this would undermine the dual-track decision. An appeal made to Trudeau on 20 September by a delegation led by Canadian MP Douglas Roche to join what would become the Six-Nation Initiative was rebuffed on the same grounds; this initiative ultimately saw the leaders of Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden and Tanzania issue a joint statement calling for a world-wide freeze on testing or deploying nuclear weapons.

The day after Trudeau rejected Roche’s invitation, the Prime Minister and his Task Force met to discuss the broad outlines of his own possible peace initiative, with Papandreou’s intervention providing an initial model. To give this venture credibility, a number of specific proposals were chosen to constitute the initiative. The most high-profile
proposal was the convening of a conference of the five nuclear weapon states (the US, the USSR, France, Britain and China) to agree on strategic arms limitation. While existing studies have accredited this proposal to Trudeau’s advisors, this very idea had in fact been floated by the French President, François Mitterrand, at his address to the United Nations General Assembly in late September 1983, although he outlined the daunting preconditions which would have to be met before France could agree to participating in any such meeting. Taking note of Mitterrand’s conditions, the Canadians nevertheless included the proposal in Trudeau’s initiative. The idea of developing a new NATO negotiating position at the long-stalled Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) negotiations in Vienna was included, although Trudeau was told that such a proposal ‘is [already] being taken by the Germans’. He expressed his annoyance that ‘the Germans [were] faster than us’, before concluding ‘while we’re not the father of this idea… why don’t we put it in my’ initiative anyway. The proposal was duly included, albeit without any attribution of paternity. A plan for a meeting of foreign ministers at the MBFR talks in Vienna in 1984 was also adopted, along with additional measures on strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty, high-altitude systems, and geographic mobility, despite Trudeau’s misgivings that these were ‘esoteric’ and ‘so technical… that not many politicians could carry a brief for this’.

Newly declassified Canadian documents make clear that Trudeau’s peace initiative had a two-track strategy. The first track consisted of winning support from NATO leaders in Europe for these measures and for the general plea to ‘change the trend line’ of East-West relations, in order to then exert pressure on Reagan. In Trudeau’s opinion, Canada had proven itself a loyal member of NATO by backing missile deployment in Europe and agreeing to test Cruise missiles in Canada. In his view, with these decisions he had amassed political capital within NATO which he now intended to spend: ‘having paid our dues we should use our membership in NATO to insist on the importance of the first of the two tracks (i.e., [the] negotiating track), arms control and then arms reduction’. He wanted to focus the initiative on swaying the most powerful members of NATO, specifying that the ‘people we are looking to influence are Thatcher, Reagan, Mitterrand and Kohl’. As Trudeau later explained to Thatcher, ‘Reagan had shown himself on earlier occasions to be
open to persuasion by other elected political leaders’. xxvi ‘If his principal allies maintained pressure on Reagan regarding the importance of East-West dialogue… Trudeau thought the President, particularly in view of the domestic implications, would be prepared to move’. xxvii This was what we may call the first track of Trudeau’s strategy: coordinating leaders across NATO to put pressure on Reagan to tone down his anti-Soviet rhetoric and seek better relations with Moscow.

While publicly voicing his support for NATO strategy and the deployment of Euromissiles, he privately disagreed with some central components of NATO strategy, arguing that ‘there’s something wrong with the logic of flexible response and first use… we should attempt to examine this but not in a way to appear to destroy or weaken NATO’. xxviii These were the central pillars of NATO’s defence strategy in Europe: given the overwhelming superiority of the Eastern bloc in terms of conventional forces, NATO’s credibility depended on its willingness to use nuclear weapons against Soviet-backed conventional forces in the European theatre. The Warsaw Pact, on the other hand, had adopted a policy of ‘no-first-use’ of nuclear weapons, and at a summit in Prague earlier in 1983 called on NATO to adopt an analogous policy. For NATO, the idea was a non-starter, since it was believed that it was precisely the threat to escalate any clash by resorting to nuclear weapons that could deter the Soviets from marching westwards in Europe. Nevertheless, the idea had been advocated by retired American officials including George Kennan and Robert McNamara, both of whom Trudeau met at the end of October. They told the Canadian Prime Minister that ‘a “non-first-use” declaration by NATO’ would significantly reduce East-West tensions, and Trudeau instructed his team to ‘thoroughly stud[y] this ‘very worthwhile’ proposal. xxix

His advisors recognised how controversial such a suggestion would be, however, with one official warning that proposing such an ‘ill-conceived’ idea would ‘do irreparable damage to our Alliance relationships’. xxx Si Taylor, the Head of Canada’s Delegation to NATO in Brussels, was more constructive when he warned that ‘any attempt to attack [the] doctrine [of first use] head-on risks defeat. In such circumstances, successful attack on [the] doctrine of first use has to be indirect and subtle. [A] campaign would need to be conducted
initially without even openly admitting its real object’. xxxi Canada’s ambassador in Washington, Allan Gotlieb, agreed that NATO’s strategy needed to be renewed, although he was ‘somewhat uneasy with Canada taking this initiative… given our historical record and geographic position’. Pointing out that ‘it’s more relevant to Europeans who have weapons on their soil’, he argued that ‘we should look at stimulating European thinking rather than pursuing a change ourselves’. xxxii Gary Smith, a key member of the Task Force, recalled that the question of a review of NATO strategy was raised with ‘second-tier’ members who were thought to be more likely to support the idea. xxxiii Crucially, this second track remained secret, and Trudeau avoided raising it in public declarations related to his initiative and in private meetings with ‘top-tier’ NATO states in Europe. Trudeau’s initiative thus had a two-track strategy: he would publicly endorse NATO and appeal to Western European leaders to urge Reagan to improve relations with Moscow, while simultaneously trying to prompt his European partners to instigate a full-scale review of NATO strategy.

Having notified his NATO counterparts several days beforehand, Trudeau publicly launched his peace initiative with a speech at the University of Guelph, near Toronto, on 27 October. Dutifully reiterating Canada’s commitment to NATO and to its dual-track decision, he provided a cursory outline of the specific proposals contained in his initiative before announcing that he would travel to Europe to discuss his initiative with other NATO leaders. xxxiv The Canadian press was broadly supportive, and few reported that Trudeau was confronted by dozens of peace protesters as he tried to leave the venue after his speech. xxxv

Despite the centrality of the peace initiative in Trudeau’s mind, for Canada’s allies it was in fact only the second-most important announcement pertaining to NATO that emanated from Canada that day. In Montebello, Québec, some 500 kilometres away from Trudeau in Guelph, Ontario, the Ministers of Defence of nearly every NATO country had gathered for a two-day meeting of the High Level Group (HLG) of NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). For more than a year beforehand, the British NPG delegates, supported by their West German counterparts, had called for the Alliance to make a
substantial and unilateral reduction in the number of nuclear warheads it had stationed in Europe. During 1983 American opposition to the idea was gradually overcome, briefly leaving Canada, paradoxically, as the main opponent of the idea. At the meeting on 27 October, the NPG agreed upon the ‘Montebello Decision’ to unilaterally withdraw 1,400 warheads from Europe while simultaneously modernising NATO’s remaining nuclear weapons in Europe. For the British and German governments, which had both won re-election earlier that year against left-wing opposition parties who were against deployment, it was hoped the announcement would shore up support for deployment and ‘be effective in helping to combat the anti-nuclear movement in the autumn’. Indeed, that very week three million anti-nuclear demonstrators had taken to the streets across Western Europe – and in 40 cities across Canada – and it was hoped that the Montebello Decision would help counter the demands of the peace movements. Si Taylor described the decision to Trudeau as ‘the biggest news since the 1979 dual-track decision’ and urged Trudeau to refer to it in his Guelph speech. Canada accordingly lobbied the other NATO members to allow the Montebello Decision to be made public the evening of 27 October, the first day of the NPG meeting, rather than at the end of the meeting on the 28th, so that the announcement would coincide with Trudeau’s speech. Trudeau thus announced the Montebello Decision in his Guelph speech, although the NPG policy is inexplicably absent from all existing accounts of the peace initiative. Ultimately the Montebello Decision came to be seen as ‘the pivotal event’ in the debate over nuclear weapon modernisation in NATO, as it was used to justify radically upgrading theatre nuclear forces despite the headline-grabbing commitment to drastically reduce the overall number of warheads in Europe. As such, it fit with Trudeau’s stance of supporting the dual-track decision while making a dramatic appeal to improve East-West relations. At Taylor’s urging, Canada later circulated the Montebello Decision at the UN while Trudeau pursued his peace initiative.

**Seducing the Europeans: Trudeau’s ‘Peace Mission’ to NATO capitals**

Virtually all existing studies of Trudeau’s peace initiative have understandably focused on the Canadian perspective of the project and have been based primarily on
Canadian sources. Given the international nature of the initiative, however, it is necessary to look at non-Canadian archives to gain a fuller understanding of how other NATO members perceived the project and how Trudeau tried to win them over. This is especially important given that the success of both tracks of Trudeau’s strategy hinged on the response of Western European governments. Drawing on newly declassified archival documents from six NATO member states, this article allows us to assess European reactions to Trudeau’s project. Moreover, Trudeau’s private exchanges with his counterparts provide new insights into the Canadian initiative and its proposals.

For the first track of winning European support for the initiative to then exert pressure on Reagan, Trudeau had identified Mitterrand, Kohl and Thatcher as essential. Of these leaders, François Mitterrand, the Socialist president of France, was perhaps a logical partner for the left-leaning Trudeau. Yet there were important differences between them on defence issues, with Trudeau recognising that Mitterrand was ‘much more hawkish than’ him. Indeed, Mitterrand’s stance on East-West issues during the first years of his presidency was marked by rapprochement with Washington, confirmation of Alliance solidarity, and firm criticism of Soviet actions. Mitterrand broke with his predecessor, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, by voicing French support for NATO’s dual-track decision (although France, not being part of the integrated military command of NATO, was not bound by the decision) and he had condemned Giscard’s efforts to maintain détente with the Soviets following the latter’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In one memorably withering attack of Giscard’s Soviet policy, Mitterrand dismissed him as Brezhnev’s ‘little telegraphist’. It was not a promising sign, then, that in assessing Trudeau’s initiative in the autumn of 1983 Mitterrand’s advisors concluded that ‘M. Trudeau’s understanding of East-West relations is not dissimilar to that of M. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’.

Mitterrand’s counsellors warned that ‘Canadian leaders have a rather abstract view of East-West relations and of European issues’ and worriedly described Trudeau’s policies as amounting to ‘appeasement at any price – in short, a position close to pacifism’. Importantly, they also warned that Trudeau was acting chiefly ‘for domestic political reasons’. His political situation at home was indeed bleak; fifteen years after first
becoming Prime Minister, he faced a looming election in 1984 and a poll published the very day he launched his initiative revealed his Liberal Party was a staggering 28 points behind the Progressive Conservative opposition, led by Brian Mulroney.

The French assessments of Trudeau’s specific proposals were largely dismissive, but their key concern had to do with the timing of Trudeau’s intervention, fearing that Trudeau’s initiative might weaken the resolve of Western European governments to deploy Euromissiles that autumn as scheduled. They also warned the ‘real question… is less what value M. Trudeau’s ideas have, than when to present them given what use Moscow can make out of them’ as propaganda demonstrating divisions within NATO. Given that, from the French perspective, Trudeau’s ideas were half-baked and threatened the success of deployment, the Foreign Ministry advised Mitterrand to urge Trudeau to go off and ‘reflect further on his proposals, which would give them more value when the time comes’.

It was with these briefings that Mitterrand met Trudeau on 8 November. The timing of the visit was awkward in itself, as Mitterrand was in the midst of hosting President Chadli for a four-day state visit – the first by an Algerian President to France – meaning a brief lunch meeting with Trudeau was all that could be squeezed into Mitterrand’s schedule. In response to Trudeau’s proposals, the president accepted that ‘if it would commit [participants] to a new disarmament process, he would not refuse to attend a five-power meeting’, though he stressed that such ideas could be explored only ‘after the installation of the Pershings’. This was not surprising, since the idea for a five-power conference in the medium term had already been advanced by Mitterrand himself at the UN. During his brief meeting with Trudeau, however, it seems that he did not fully restate his preconditions for such a conference. As a result, the Canadians astonishingly concluded that Mitterrand had abandoned his earlier preconditions and now fully accepted Trudeau’s proposal. Canada’s ambassador in Paris, who was present at the meeting, gushed that Mitterrand’s ‘remarks turned out to be more positive than any earlier French declarations could have suggested. It is no exaggeration to speak of French support for this initiative’. Accordingly, several recent studies of the peace initiative that rely on Canadian documents erroneously claim that Mitterrand supported Trudeau’s proposals.
At the Paris meeting, Trudeau also explored the idea of having foreign ministers attend the opening of the new Conference for Disarmament in Europe (CDE) in Stockholm in January 1984; while this had not been one of his proposals before his trip to Europe, it emerged belatedly as an important pillar of his initiative. Despite being depicted as a novel Canadian idea in the existing literature on the peace initiative, the origins of this proposal are also surprisingly non-Canadian. Trudeau had in fact spoken to Claude Cheysson, France’s Foreign Minister, in late September about Trudeau’s still-developing idea of sending foreign ministers to the MBFR talks in Vienna. That proposal had little appeal to the French minister, not least because the French were not present at the MBFR negotiations, and Cheysson instead ‘suggested not in Vienna but that there should be ministers in Stockholm’. He then told Trudeau of his own plan to ‘make the CDE [France’s] showpiece’ by inviting foreign ministers to attend the opening in January 1984, when France would be holding the rotating presidencies of both the North Atlantic Council and the Council of the EEC. Noting that Cheysson ‘seemed quite determined’, Trudeau had agreed at the time to send the Canadian foreign minister to Stockholm.\textsuperscript{lv} This French initiative fit into the broader policy of Western solidarity that characterised the first years of Mitterrand’s presidency; earlier in 1983 Paris hosted a NATO ministerial meeting for the first time since de Gaulle had withdrawn France from the Alliance’s integrated command in 1966.\textsuperscript{lvi} While the MBFR meeting had remained one of Trudeau’s proposals when he launched his peace initiative in Guelph, by the time he arrived in Paris less than two weeks later he had dropped the idea and instead appropriated Cheysson’s suggestion of having foreign ministers at the opening of the CDE as a central proposal of his own evolving peace initiative. When Trudeau met Cheysson in Paris on 8 November, the latter affirmed that he had been active on the CDE issue and that his Soviet, British and German counterparts would all attend; he was also confident that the remaining EEC members and the US would follow suit.\textsuperscript{lvii} Remarkably, this means that the two most notable proposals of Trudeau’s initiative, namely the five-power conference and the attendance of foreign ministers at the opening of the CDE, were in fact both originally French proposals. It was perhaps not surprising that the Quai d’Orsay concluded that there was ‘nothing original in M. Trudeau’s concepts’.\textsuperscript{lviii}
Convinced that Mitterrand supported his initiative, Trudeau met West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on 10 November. Interestingly, Kohl had met with Margaret Thatcher on 8 and 9 November, as part of an Anglo-German Summit. In their wide-ranging discussions of East-West relations and Euromissile deployment, Trudeau’s initiative did not warrant so much as a mention, even though they would both be meeting with him later that week to discuss his proposals.\textsuperscript{lx}

The initial German response to Trudeau’s initiative was guarded. Although the dual-track decision had largely originated with Kohl’s predecessor, Helmut Schmidt, the latter’s Social Democratic Party had since adopted a stance opposing the deployment of Euromissiles on German soil.\textsuperscript{lxx} While Kohl’s Christian Democrats won the March 1983 elections decisively on a platform that included deployment, anti-nuclear movements continued to swell in Germany; on 23 October an unprecedented 300,000 protesters demonstrated against deployment in Bonn alone. Against this backdrop, with the Bundestag due to debate and formally authorise deployment in late November, a Canadian peace initiative was seen as inopportune. When Canadian officials contacted Paris and Bonn to schedule Trudeau’s visit, the chancellor quickly wrote to his French counterpart expressing his ‘fear that M Trudeau will try to launch… an untimely initiative… which would complicate matters for the FRG and would render more difficult the decisions which have to be taken’. He asked Mitterrand to help delay Trudeau’s visits to Paris and Bonn until ‘after 21 November, the date of the debate in the Bundestag’. Despite Kohl’s worries that Trudeau’s visit might embolden peace activists or undermine support for deployment, Mitterrand responded that he could not delay Trudeau for such a long period, adding that ‘if Trudeau wants to say whatever he has to say, he’ll do so anyhow’.\textsuperscript{li} The Germans grudgingly confirmed Trudeau’s visit for 10 November.

The West Germans received Trudeau warily, noting on the eve of his visit that ‘it is still unclear what concrete steps and measures Trudeau intends to propose’. Like the French, they surmised that ‘Trudeau is also pursuing tactical election goals with his initiative’, noting that ‘even a partial success of Trudeau’s initiative, coupled with an
economic recovery, could significantly improve Trudeau’s prospects in new elections.\textsuperscript{lxii} Despite Trudeau’s belief that Canada had ‘paid its dues’ to NATO by allowing ALCM testing, the Germans, like the French, found Canada’s contributions to NATO to be underwhelming, noting that the percentage of its GDP spent on defence meant the country was ‘still in second-last place among NATO countries’.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Given the looming debate on deployment, Kohl’s priority in meeting Trudeau was maintaining Western solidarity and support for the scheduled deployment that autumn. Kohl was nevertheless also much more amenable than either Mitterrand or Thatcher to maintaining high-level dialogue with the Soviets; he had visited Moscow earlier in 1983 and the German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had recently met with his Soviet counterpart in Vienna. Kohl made clear that ‘we share the Canadian desire that everything must be done to keep this dialogue going’.\textsuperscript{lxiv} The most surprising priority identified by Kohl’s advisors heading into the meeting with Trudeau was to ‘attract [Trudeau] to our central idea for CDE (especially for participation of foreign ministers in [the] opening session)’.\textsuperscript{lxv} Just as Cheysson had been rallying foreign ministers to attend the opening in Stockholm, Genscher had been putting pressure on his opposite numbers in the EEC and the US to take part, and Kohl now sought to win over Trudeau to this idea. They did not yet know that Trudeau had already appropriated the idea from Cheysson and planned to raise it with Kohl. As both parties came to the meeting with the same objective, this was an easy point of agreement.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

In response to the idea of a five-power conference, the West German position was to ‘welcome [it] as a medium-term perspective’, with the caveat that ‘we do not want to push France and Great Britain!’\textsuperscript{lxvii} Unlike Mitterrand, Kohl did not suggest any preconditions for such a conference, although both European leaders stressed that any such meeting could only take place after deployment and obviously depended on support from the five governments concerned, rather than Germany. If the Canadians had been pleased with Mitterrand’s reaction – in part because they did not grasp his objections to Trudeau’s proposals – Kohl’s response was even more encouraging. Yet Kohl’s support was less substantial than the Canadians likely realised; he agreed with Trudeau’s proposals on the
CDE and MBFR negotiations because they replicated Germany’s existing positions. On
the more contentious five-power conference, Kohl’s response was positive but qualified –
he recognised that the decision was not his to make and refused to put pressure on other
NATO leaders to advance Trudeau’s plan.

Pleased with their meetings in Paris and Bonn, the Canadians headed to London.
The UK had been added to the itinerary belatedly at Thatcher’s request; as Trudeau would
see her at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Delhi later in
November, he thought it unnecessary to visit her in London. Her invitation was interpreted
optimistically by the Canadians as a sign of her support for the initiative, a view that was
reinforced by their superficial reading of Thatcher’s recent speech at the Conservative
Party convention in Blackpool: the Canadians seized upon Thatcher’s call for more
dialogue with the Soviets, ignoring her insistence that this dialogue must be ‘hard headed’
and could only take place ‘when the circumstances are right’.\textsuperscript{lxxviii}

The course of the meeting between the two prime ministers was guided in part by
inaccurate briefings. Trudeau had been assured by the Canadian High Commission in
London of Thatcher’s ‘enthusiasm’ for his ‘serious, apposite and timely initiative’\textsuperscript{lxix} The
British response to the Canadian proposals, on the other hand, was shaped partly by a
briefing provided to Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials by de Montigny
Marchand, the Canadian Deputy Secretary for External Affairs. This was an unfortunate
choice, as Marchand had been opposed from the beginning to Trudeau’s ‘naïve and
misguided’ peace initiative.\textsuperscript{lxx} Following their meeting with him, the FCO reported that ‘in
many cases’ Trudeau’s proposals were ‘untimely or unsound’. Marchand also ‘made it
clear that the Canadians expected [the proposal for a five-power conference] to be rejected
in fairly short order’; no members of Trudeau’s inner circle would have agreed, but it does
explain in part why the British were so quick to dismiss the idea.\textsuperscript{lxxi} Further information
was provided by the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, who warned that Trudeau was
likely motivated by a ‘wish to retrieve the fortunes of the Liberal Party by following a
policy which he believes appeals to a great number of Canadians’. He added that ‘most
Canadians… believe that [Trudeau] has substantial international prestige’ – a belief that
seemed to confound the High Commissioner.\textsuperscript{lxii} The FCO concluded that ‘the evidence suggests that the proposals were cobbled hastily and without benefit of detailed commentary by security experts in Ottawa, i.e. they show few signs of having been thought through properly’.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Unsurprisingly given these briefings, the meeting did not go well. Trudeau opened with the hopeful statement that ‘he believed that he and [Thatcher] were on the same wave length with regard to the general approach to East-West relations’.\textsuperscript{lxiv} Thatcher proceeded to reject Trudeau’s proposals on false grounds: she had been briefed that Trudeau demanded a reduction in the British and French nuclear arsenals. Although the Canadian government had sought to include French and British deterrents in arms control negotiations earlier that year, Trudeau had since made clear in his Guelph speech that Canada had abandoned this position.\textsuperscript{lxv} An exasperated Trudeau ‘suggest[ed]… that before [Thatcher] destroyed his arguments she should first listen to them’ – but to no avail.\textsuperscript{lxvi} She consequently ruled out the idea of a five-power conference, asserting ‘she did not find this proposal attractive. It needed much more thought’.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

Hoping to find success with some of his other proposals, Trudeau turned to the CDE and suggested that they work to open it at summit level, with heads of government attending rather than foreign ministers, given that ‘almost everyone has agreed to send foreign ministers’ already.\textsuperscript{lxviii} ‘Even if the idea of a summit was a pipe-dream’, he explained, it was ‘good politics to reassure people that we were… working for peace’, adding that he ‘was not seeking a big breakthrough in East-West relations’. Thatcher chided him that ‘it sounded as though Trudeau was trying to arrange in Stockholm an event like Tito’s funeral. People might see through the hollowness of the idea’. Trudeau responded that ‘the better analogy might be Brezhnev’s funeral. If Reagan had attended, that would have sent the right signal’.\textsuperscript{lxix} Despite Thatcher’s obvious aversion to the idea, Trudeau’s advisors puzzlingly recorded that ‘Mrs Thatcher was clearly intrigued by Mr Trudeau’s suggestion of a Heads of Government [kick]-off to the CDE’ and that ‘Trudeau was impressed by the extent of agreement between them’ on this point.\textsuperscript{lxx} As with the
meeting with Mitterrand, the Canadians seem to have ignored the reservations expressed and misread heavily qualified statements as support for the proposal.

In one rare point of agreement, Trudeau warned that with East-West relations in such poor shape the Soviets ‘could start a nuclear war by accident’ and Thatcher concurred that ‘something could go drastically wrong through misadverntence [sic]’. The timing of these observations is particularly interesting: 11 November marked the climax of the Able Archer NATO exercise that simulated a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union by the Western Alliance. Many historians have argued that this NATO exercise was misinterpreted as the first stages of a genuine attack on the Soviet Union, prompting Soviet leaders to consider launching a pre-emptive nuclear strike against the West. Despite their common assessment of the risk of accidental nuclear war, which happened to coincide with this supposed war scare, Trudeau failed to convince Thatcher that his initiative would be helpful.

The brief meeting had its share of uncomfortable moments. A frustrated Trudeau bizarrely defended the Soviets’ downing of flight KAL 007 by suggesting Canada would have done the same thing, exclaiming ‘nor would he have cared [about shooting down a civilian airliner] if in similar circumstances a suspicious aircraft had flown over Canada with unknown intentions’. Thatcher, meanwhile, trivialised the consequences of nuclear war, observing that ‘one had to remember that things were growing again one year after Hiroshima was attacked’. It was a disquieting note on which to end the first leg of Trudeau’s peace mission.

In addition to Paris, Bonn, and London, Trudeau also visited the other NATO members where Euromissiles were to be deployed: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. A short meeting with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican was also arranged for its ‘obvious public relations benefits’. It was with the leaders of these countries that Trudeau explored the second track of his peace initiative: prompting a revision of NATO strategy, a controversial proposal he had studiously avoided in his meetings with the leaders of larger NATO states. His visit to Brussels coincided with the Belgian parliamentary debate and
vote on deployment, and at his meeting with the Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens, and Foreign Minister, Leo Tindemans, they ‘had difficulty disguising the effects of a largely sleepless night’, having been stuck in the Chamber of Representatives until 3am the night before debating deployment. At this meeting Trudeau urged the Belgians ‘to reassess the principle of “no first use” or of “no early use”’. He added that ‘what the West needed was a new Harmel Report [a 1967 NATO document setting out the Alliance’s principles] which would readapt our doctrines to new realities’. While Tindemans had been briefed that Trudeau ‘was seeking peace at any price’, Martens responded that he was ‘fully in agreement with the initiative and the Prime Minister’s proposals’.

In Rome, Trudeau started his meeting with the Italian Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, and Foreign Minister, Giulio Andreotti, with the same contentious appeal: ‘NATO must re-examine its military strategy of forward defence as well as the Harmel Report, in light of the deployment of the Euromissiles’. Trudeau added that this reevaluation of NATO strategy must ‘take into account the concept of “no first use”’. Despite earlier indications that Craxi would support Trudeau’s position, Craxi offered only a non-committal ‘agreement in principle’ with Trudeau’s aims. The Canadian Ambassador in Rome, who took part in the meeting, suggested that Craxi’s hesitation was due to a pending debate on Euromissile deployment in the Italian parliament, demanded by the Communist Party, and Cabinet divisions over how Atlanticist Italy’s foreign and defence policies should be. The Canadians also sounded out the Dutch ‘on the continuing validity of NATO’s strategy of forward defence and flexible response’. The reply was that NATO strategy ‘could be due for review, but only next year’ after deployment.

This timeframe also coincided with the appointment of a new NATO Secretary General. Joseph Luns, whom Trudeau derided as ‘telling Reagan he’s God incarnate’, was due to step down in 1984, and it was during Trudeau’s peace mission that he received confirmation that Lord Carrington, Thatcher’s Foreign Secretary from 1979 until 1982, had been named Luns’ successor. Trudeau, who had used Carrington’s phrase ‘megaphone diplomacy’ in his Guelph speech to characterise East-West relations, insisted on ringing Carrington to congratulate him, with the phone call taking place just moments before
Trudeau’s meeting with Thatcher on Downing Street. Trudeau enthused that Carrington’s appointment was ‘great timing for us in NATO’, while Carrington assured Trudeau that ‘he was fully supportive of what the Prime Minister was attempting to do’. It was hoped that Carrington might be amenable to launching a review of NATO strategy, provided such a request would be made by a European member state.

**Grasping for Results: Concluding the Initiative**

Upon his return to Canada, Trudeau wasted little time reporting back on his ‘mission’. He chose to do so not in the House of Commons, but at a Liberal Party fundraiser in Montreal, which gave a partisan air to the overall peace initiative; this was not lost on European observers, who found in this confirmation of suspicions that the whole undertaking was motivated by electoral considerations. They also noted that Trudeau encouraged speculation in Canada that he was in the running for a Nobel Peace Prize by including a clumsy reference to Alfred Nobel in his Montreal speech. More worrying, however, was Trudeau’s claim that every NATO leader he had met in Europe ‘clearly expressed their support for [his] initiative’; tellingly, this passage had been drafted before he had even taken his trip to Europe and the text remained unchanged in light of his meetings. Three days after this speech, Cheysson publicly stated that ‘the French were not interested in five power negotiations on disarmament’. Mitterrand also reiterated his preconditions for such a conference in a television interview, while the Quai d’Orsay reassured an anxious Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary, that ‘these conditions are such that the French do not expect them to be met in the foreseeable future’. This was a blow to Trudeau’s claim that France supported his initiative, but he was undeterred and continued to repeat it anyway. Mitterrand finally wrote Trudeau a firm letter ‘to remind [him] of France’s position’. The British also started to question whether Trudeau’s seemingly harmless initiative might actually do further damage to East-West relations, pointing to the ‘danger if Mr Trudeau were to put his detailed views on arms limitation questions to the Russians, and imply that they commanded general assent in the West’, as this would ultimately expose divisions within the Alliance.
Trudeau continued his ‘peace mission’ by attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Delhi in late November, which he combined with a visit to Beijing where he put his proposals to Chairman Deng Xiaoping. Initial hopes that China might endorse the initiative were dashed when Deng rejected the idea of Chinese involvement in a five-power conference until the superpowers had reduced their stockpiles by half.\textsuperscript{xcvii} The one partial success Trudeau had at the CHOGM came in the form of the summit’s communiqué, the so-called Goa Declaration on International Security. While earlier that same month Trudeau had indicated that ‘pronouncements in CHOGM communiqués and separate declarations… tended to be soon forgotten’ and that ‘he did not attach much importance to’ them, he embraced the Goa Declaration – largely because he had little else to show for his initiative.\textsuperscript{xcviii} The text of the declaration gave a general endorsement to Trudeau’s efforts for peace, but to none of his specific proposals.

Kenneth Kaunda, the Zambian Prime Minister, suggested that Trudeau’s initiative would be more effective if it were to include several other Commonwealth leaders ‘instead of leaving this initiative to him alone’. While Trudeau responded that he ‘welcomed the idea’, he quickly rejected it on the grounds that bloc-to-bloc negotiations at the CDE and elsewhere meant that the initiative had to be led by a NATO member.\textsuperscript{xcix} Ultimately, two Commonwealth members – India and Tanzania – instead joined the Six-Nation Initiative that Trudeau had turned down in September. Margaret Thatcher, the only other NATO leader present in Delhi, again distanced herself from the initiative and was distraught by the Goa Declaration; writing to Reagan after the meeting, she apologised for what ‘is by no means an ideal document but you should have seen the earlier versions!’\textsuperscript{c} Trudeau, meanwhile, used the Goa Declaration perversely to claim that Thatcher supported his initiative. At a press conference shortly after the summit, Trudeau claimed that the Goa Declaration meant that all Commonwealth leaders – including Thatcher, whom he named specifically – supported the idea of a five-power conference.\textsuperscript{ci} While the Canadians may have genuinely misinterpreted Mitterrand’s position on the five-power conference earlier that month, Thatcher had left them in no doubt of her objections to the idea, which she reiterated at the CHOGM; Trudeau’s claim that she now supported it was willful deception.
It was against this backdrop that a meeting of NATO’s foreign ministers at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) took place in Brussels on 8-9 December. Trudeau had written to his fellow NATO leaders in November asking them to support just two specific proposals. The first was that the opening of the CDE be attended ‘at a high political level’, an ambiguous phrasing that left the door open to convening the conference at summit level. While Trudeau had floated the possibility of sending heads of government to Stockholm with Thatcher and, by phone, with Reagan, he quickly dropped the proposal when it was pointed out to him that the opening of the CDE clashed with the visit of Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang to Ottawa. Henceforth Trudeau simply reverted to the French proposal of sending foreign ministers to Stockholm. The other Canadian proposal was that NATO review its current position on MBFR. Neither suggestion was controversial, and US Secretary of State George Shultz confirmed that, after months of French, German and even British lobbying, he would attend the opening of the CDE. From the British perspective, these decisions were inconsequential:

The Canadians, driven by Mr Trudeau’s initiative… hanker after… dramatic initiatives in such unpromising areas as MBFR. Here the imminent opening of the CDE was a blessing since it was possible to channel these desires into decisions that ministers should attend the opening in person and that East-West policy and the state of the MBFR negotiations should be examined within the Alliance, without commitment to particular initiatives.

Just as Trudeau had embraced the Goa Declaration as a major victory for his initiative, the Canadians celebrated the minor concessions won at the NATO ministerial meeting.

Seemingly more promising than these agreements on CDE and MBFR was a proposal introduced by Belgian Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans. Following his meeting with Trudeau in Brussels the previous month, Tindemans started developing his own initiative which by early December was ‘at a very early stage of evolution. While not necessarily agreeing completely with Trudeau, Tindemans shared the latter’s concern over the state of East-West relations’. He suggested that one ‘possibility might be to ask Lord Carrington, on assuming office as Secretary-General, to turn his mind to this question’. At the NAC meeting, Tindemans put forth a proposal, explaining that ‘the Harmel Report
of 1967 was still valid but while it spoke of defence and dialogue he would add now firmness and a mechanism for the control of tensions’. Tindemans was supported by the Italian Foreign Minister, Andreotti, who agreed ‘that there should be a new Harmel Report’. Shultz concurred that ‘Tindemans’ proposal for an in-house review’ of NATO strategy ‘was constructive’, and it was endorsed by the NAC.

It is difficult to assess just how influential Trudeau’s meetings with Tindemans in Brussels and Andreotti in Rome may have been in bringing this review about. Given the widespread opposition to Euromissile deployment in Belgium, Tindemans’ proposal allowed him to respond to such opposition by demonstrating that he was working to improve relations with the Soviets. The Belgian Foreign Minister certainly acknowledged that his thinking had been influenced by Trudeau, and the content of his proposal is strikingly similar to what Trudeau set out to his Belgian interlocutors during his ‘peace mission’ the month before. Nevertheless, the review of East-West relations fell short of the root-and-branch review of NATO strategy hoped for by Trudeau and NATO’s first-use policy remained unchanged.

Following this limited success with the second track of his strategy, Trudeau’s first track led him to meet with President Reagan. His initial plan of winning over influential European NATO members to then exert greater pressure on Reagan, however, was in tatters. By the time Trudeau arrived at the White House on 15 December, his proposals could be neatly divided into two distinct categories: on the one hand, two relatively unambitious proposals had already been secured the previous week in Brussels; on the other hand, his remaining proposals had been firmly rejected by key allies. Reagan was briefed by his National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane, that Trudeau’s ‘proposals have not generated enthusiasm abroad or increased his global stature’, yet ‘through a carefully orchestrated media campaign, Trudeau has portrayed himself domestically as a major player in international politics whose views on global security questions are widely solicited and respected’. McFarlane noted that ‘while we have troubles with many aspects of his proposals, we should indicate support of his intention to… reduce global tensions’. The President was accordingly advised that the Administration should ‘steer a careful
course in our response, neither demonstrating enthusiasm for his initiatives nor denigrating them, either of which could enhance his domestic political standing’. cx

Under the circumstances, the meeting with Reagan went astonishingly well, though precisely because Trudeau declined to discuss any of his specific proposals with the President. Trudeau’s advisors had urged him to take this approach on the grounds that Reagan was uncomfortable with detailed policy discussions, and they warned that any mention of technical issues would immediately prompt Reagan’s advisors to step in and take over the discussion. cxii The other reason, of course, was that none of Trudeau’s remaining proposals had found decisive support amongst Canada’s European allies, and that the Reagan Administration had sent clear indications that it disliked Trudeau’s proposals; the State Department dismissed the initiative as ‘poorly timed and unlikely to win strong support from our Allies’. cxiii Indeed, Trudeau himself confessed to Reagan at their meeting that ‘he knew that there was little chance for many of these [proposals], particularly the five-power nuclear conference which was not received enthusiastically abroad’. cxiv

Trudeau consequently opted for a different tactic in the Oval Office: flattery. Not only did he praise Reagan’s stance on defence issues, saying he had ‘wisely sought to correct American military deficiencies’ inherited from the Carter Administration; cxv Trudeau also celebrated Reagan’s economic policies, which the Prime Minister asserted ‘had demonstrated the health and resilience of our economic system’, cxvi adding that he ‘wondered why… “Reaganism” [was] perceived so poorly in the world arena’. cxvii Following these compliments – which directly contradicted Trudeau’s public criticisms of Reagan’s policies – Trudeau floated the idea of arranging a summit between Reagan and Andropov, arguing that such a meeting ‘can be useful as a get-acquainted session’. He also cautiously raised the review of NATO strategy, remarking that ‘the world is… interested in hearing why [Reagan] cannot accept the concept of “no first use”’. cxviii Neither suggestion elicited a positive response from Reagan and Trudeau quickly relented.
Having seemingly abandoned his remaining proposals, Trudeau’s main point to Reagan was that while the President had mentioned the need for peace in some of his recent speeches, notably in the Japanese Diet on 11 November, this message was not getting through to the Soviets. In short, Trudeau urged the ‘Great Communicator’ to better communicate this message of peace.\textsuperscript{cxviii} The Prime Minister concluded the meeting by declaring ‘most foreign leaders have an erroneous impression of President Reagan and Trudeau indicated that he would strive to see that this false image was corrected’, particularly in Moscow.\textsuperscript{cxix} While Reagan’s advisors found Trudeau’s approach patronising, Reagan reportedly responded positively to the Prime Minister’s suggestions. Following the meeting, the Canadian Embassy conveyed that the President ‘was enormously taken by the notion that the Prime Minister take to Moscow, the Third World and European capitals the message that Reagan really wants peace’, calling Trudeau the ‘most apt communicator of [the] signal Reagan wants dialogue and peace because his independence from [the] USA line is well known’.\textsuperscript{cxx} Given the unreliability of the Canadian assessments of some other NATO leaders, it is unclear how accurate this assessment was; Reagan had been briefed by McFarlane that ‘we do not want Trudeau to assume the role of mediator, middleman or negotiator between the superpowers’, and Trudeau himself had publicly stressed he would not play the role of a ‘go-between’.\textsuperscript{cxxi} Indeed, the popularity of the initiative among Canadians rested largely on Trudeau’s perceived willingness to stand up to the hawkish Reagan Administration in pushing for peace, an advantage that would quickly disappear if Trudeau were to become Reagan’s mouthpiece. Despite Reagan’s reported enthusiasm for having Trudeau explain his peaceful intentions to world leaders, this failed to materialise and the Canadian leader’s calculating praise of ‘Reaganism’ remained behind closed doors.

Trudeau had hoped to conclude his peace mission with a visit to Moscow, but with Soviet premier Yuri Andropov’s ill health preventing any possible meeting, Trudeau instead visited Prague, East Berlin, and Bucharest. Following the meeting with GDR leader Erich Honecker, the East German authorities claimed that ‘Canada disagreed’ with ‘a number of dangerous features of the policy of the Reagan administration’ and celebrated the lack of solidarity within the Western Alliance.\textsuperscript{cxxii} In Prague, meanwhile, Trudeau ill-
advisedly publicly suggested that he favoured the adoption of a ‘no-first-use’ policy by NATO, which infuriated the French in particular. Trudeau also gave a speech at Davos, where he dismissed the Montebello Decision as merely replacing ‘quantity for quality’ of nuclear weapons in Europe, which further annoyed Canada’s allies. One French diplomat concluded that ‘it is as though, unable to end his peace mission with a visit to Moscow at the end of 1983, M Trudeau has been reduced to improvising… in order to maintain attention in Canada for his mission… The charm has worn off’.

At Trudeau’s meeting with Margaret Thatcher in November 1983, the British Prime Minister had chided him that what he really wanted from his initiative was something like Tito’s funeral; Trudeau replied that Brezhnev’s funeral would be a more appropriate analogy. In the event, they had to settle for Andropov’s. On 9 February 1984, the very day Trudeau reported the results of his peace initiative to the House of Commons, word arrived that the Soviet leader had passed away. Trudeau attended Andropov’s funeral in Moscow, as did Thatcher and American Vice-President George Bush. Yet the contact these Western leaders had with the new Soviet leader, Konstantin Chernenko, at the funeral was minimal. With Bush, this seems to have been limited to a simple handshake; Thatcher’s meeting with Chernenko lasted two minutes, while Trudeau’s lasted fifteen. Trudeau’s final foreign policy venture ended with a whimper, and shortly after his return to Canada he announced that he would step down as Prime Minister and retire from politics.

**Conclusion**

The Canadian peace initiative was a major foreign policy project by a NATO member state in response to the crisis in East-West relations in the ‘Second Cold War’. This article allows us to reassess both the nature of the initiative and its consequences, as well as its importance in the broader international history of the Cold War. One point that emerges from the various assessments of the Canadian initiative by NATO allies is that, despite Trudeau’s stated backing of the dual-track decision, Canada’s allies viewed the initiative as a potential threat to the scheduled deployment of the Euromissiles in late 1983. Facing widespread public opposition to deployment and determined to demonstrate
Western solidarity in the face of domestic and indeed Soviet opposition, allied governments found Trudeau’s proposals inopportune and feared they would project an image of Allied disunity at a crucial moment of the Cold War. This response by Canada’s allies was understandable, and it has been noted in one recent study. Yet the French suggestion that Trudeau rework his policies and relaunch them the following year was impossible for Trudeau to accept for a very simple reason: his own political career was rapidly coming to an end. He had initially insisted that the initiative be wrapped up by the end of December, just two months after its launch; it was the inability of a moribund Andropov to receive visitors that caused the initiative to drag into February 1984. The cobbling together of the initiative at short notice had also justified the sidelining of the Departments of External Affairs and National Defence from the planning stages and execution of the initiative. For Jean-Jacques Blais, the Canadian Minister of National Defence at the time, this was a serious flaw and it does seem to have weakened the initiative significantly.

By drawing on previously unused archival evidence, this article has shown that the Europeans characterised Trudeau’s proposals as derivative and underdeveloped. Furthermore, his reliance on a small circle of advisors rather than the array of career diplomats and defence experts at his disposal also helps to explain the repeated misreadings and inaccuracies in the Canadian accounts of the Europeans’ positions.

Furthermore, NATO leaders saw the Canadian initiative as little more than an electoral ploy that would allow Trudeau to survive the next election rather than a plan to make substantial progress on international issues. While previous studies have noted that Canadian and indeed American critics of the initiative saw it as simply a tool for Trudeau’s re-election, this article has revealed how pervasive this view was in European capitals and how this decisively shaped international responses to Trudeau’s mission. In November, NATO leaders were briefed that Trudeau’s flailing Liberals were nearly thirty points behind in the polls with an election looming. While Trudeau’s advisors liked to present him as an elder statesman, for his counterparts in NATO the appropriate description would instead be a lame duck. Tellingly, barely a week after Trudeau’s visit to the White House, the State Department started arranging a visit to Washington by ‘the probable next Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney’, noting his party ‘now leads… [the] Liberals by more than 2 to
Paradoxically, viewing the initiative as a domestic electoral scheme may have kept NATO leaders from criticising the initiative publicly, as they considered that to do so would be meddling in Canadian domestic politics. Yet this underlines the extent to which Canada’s allies failed to take Trudeau’s initiative seriously. At the end of 1983, the West German Foreign Ministry reiterated what they called Trudeau’s ‘fundamental leitmotiv’: “foreign policy is the extension abroad of national policies”, confirming their view that this supposed foreign policy initiative was little more than domestic electioneering.

Most existing studies of the peace initiative have tended to characterise it not as a tool for re-election but instead as a return to Canada’s role as an altruistic ‘helpful fixer’ between the great powers, arguing that the initiative was ‘well meaning and undoubtedly sincere’, even if ultimately unsuccessful in its quixotic aims. Yet this depiction is at odds with many of the actions Trudeau exhibited during his peace mission, and which can be better appreciated from a multi-archival source base. His serial appropriation of proposals from other governments (most often from the French) and attempts to pass them off as his own was unlikely to win over his counterparts abroad, and his proposals were rightly described as unoriginal. He also consistently refused advice that quite possibly would have made his initiative more effective – whether by delaying his project until after deployment, by joining forces with other Commonwealth leaders, or even by working with Reagan to communicate to other leaders that the American president wanted peace (if indeed this last proposal was genuine). Moreover, by drawing on non-Canadian records of Trudeau’s meetings with NATO leaders, this article has revealed his proclivity to publicly misrepresent the views of other leaders regarding the peace initiative, as well as the blatant discrepancies between his private and public statements regarding his intentions. This suggests he was more interested in eliciting a positive response from his Canadian audience than in achieving genuine progress with other world leaders. But while the Europeans suspected Trudeau was seeking to use the initiative for re-election, it is more likely that the outgoing Prime Minister was motivated by considerations of his legacy. Having previously stated that he would not seek re-election in 1984, Trudeau spent the summer of 1983 reflecting on his time in office and
on his legacy. Throughout that year, Trudeau had been targeted domestically as a warmonger by peace activists for allowing Cruise missile testing on Canadian soil. The peace initiative allowed him to end his career campaigning for peace on his own terms, in which the tangible results of his peace mission were less important than his rhetoric on peace. This explains the incongruence between Trudeau’s private assurances to NATO counterparts that he ‘was not seeking a big breakthrough in East-West relations’ and his public declaration in Canada that he sought nothing less than to bring about ‘a new climate of East-West confidence’. This proved to be perhaps the most significant outcome of the peace initiative – it restored and cemented Trudeau’s reputation as a ‘peacemaker’ which remains a central part of his legacy. His decision to allow Cruise missiles to be tested in Canada – which Gorbachev had warned would make nuclear war more likely – has meanwhile faded from memory.

In the final assessment, it is clear that the initiative was unsuccessful in its aims. Sympathetic accounts have highlighted the attendance of foreign ministers at the opening of the CDE, and the concomitant bilateral meeting between Shultz and his Soviet counterpart, Gromyko, as a major contribution of the initiative. Even critical accounts attribute this breakthrough to Trudeau, while arguing it was ‘the only… one of Trudeau’s proposals to meet with success’. This article has shown, however, that this was initially a French plan and that Trudeau had already signed up to it in September 1983, well before the launch of his own Canadian project and his later appropriation of the French plan. Upon being briefed by Cheysson and then Kohl in November on their progress, Trudeau could accurately convey to Thatcher that ‘almost everyone has agreed to send foreign ministers’ already. Trudeau’s push to have ministers attend the CDE came only after the outcome had already been determined; rather than being proof of the initiative’s success, this example instead reveals how little impact Trudeau actually had. Ultimately, the second track of his strategy proved more successful than the first, as it encouraged, and may perhaps even have prompted, the Belgians to propose a review of NATO strategy. The results of this review nevertheless reaffirmed NATO’s commitment to its existing strategy which Trudeau had sought to revise.
Yet the emergence of this Belgian initiative at the end of 1983 points to the ultimate importance of Trudeau’s intervention in the broader history of the Euromissile Crisis. The existing literature presents the initiative as a unique project and suggests that Trudeau, as the doyen of NATO leaders, was impelled to take exceptional action internationally due to his ‘reputation and… experience’. Recent studies of the peace initiative have maintained that ‘Trudeau was the first’ leader to press ‘the Western Alliance to reach out to its Soviet adversary’. While the peace initiative was indeed exceptional in terms of Canadian foreign policy, in reality it was part of a much broader trend in international affairs during the Euromissile crisis. In the weeks preceding the launch of his own initiative, Trudeau had been invited to join two other high-level ‘peace initiatives’: Papandreou’s attempt to delay deployment and the Six-Nation Initiative. While these two examples provided a precedent for Trudeau’s actions, he in turn influenced others, notably Tindemans’ initiative for NATO to review its East-West strategy. Moreover, Trudeau borrowed heavily from French and, to a lesser extent, West German proposals when assembling his own initiative. By December 1983, British officials in the FCO grumbled about the propagation of ‘over-hasty initiatives aimed primarily at dealing with current domestic political problems in one or another alliance member state’; far from being exceptional or trail-blazing, Trudeau’s was seen as simply another of these ‘ill-prepared’ plans in response to the rising tensions between East and West in the latter part of 1983. While there is a significant literature on ‘bottom-up’ peace activism during this period of the Cold War, there is a lack of comparable studies of ‘top-down’ peace initiatives launched by world leaders during the Euromissile Crisis, a development on which further research is much needed. The fact that leaders in NATO capitals from Ottawa to Athens and Brussels made recourse to high-level peace initiatives reveals an understudied phenomenon of how disparate governments, Trudeau’s chief among them, responded to the anxieties that emerged during the ‘Second Cold War’.

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1 Nikolaj Petersen, “Footnoting” as a political instrument: Denmark’s NATO policy in the 1980s, *Cold War History*, 12:2, 2012; S. Victor Papacosma, ‘Greece and NATO: A


v Bothwell and Granatstein, *Pirouette*, 381.


x EXTOTT PPR to Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, ‘Summary of meeting Delvoie and Japan Embassy’, 1 November 1983, RG25 25337, LAC.


xiv ‘Soviet Parliamentary Visit to Canada under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. PM’s Discussions with Mr Gorbachev. May 18 1983’, 20 May 1983, FCO 46 3584, TNA.


xviii ‘Trudeau news conference in Athens’, 30 August 1983, MG26 O 23 11, LAC.


xliii Ibid.


xlv Ibid.

xxvi ‘Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Canada at noon on 11 November at No. 10 Downing Street’, FCO 82 1331, TNA.

xxvii ‘Record of a conversation between Prime Minister Trudeau and Prime Minister Thatcher on November 11, 1983 at 12 noon at 10 Downing Street’, 15 November 1983, RG25 25337, LAC.


xxx Brian Herman to Louis Delvoie, 21 September 1983, RG25 25336, LAC.

xxxi Si Taylor to External Affairs, 19 September 1983, RG25 25336, LAC.

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Dupuy to Task Force, 8 November 1983, RG25 25337, LAC.

Donaghy, ‘The Ghost of Peace’, 45; English, Just Watch Me, 597. Others, notably Bothwell and Granatstein, have presented Mitterrand as more sceptical of the initiative. See Pirouette, 369 and Trudeau’s World, esp. 370.


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xcvii PM Delegation Peking to IDDZ, 30 November 1983, RG 2525338, LAC.

xcviii IDDZ to Canadian High Commission in Canberra, 4 November 1983, RG25 25337, LAC.


ci ‘Transcript of the Scrum given by the Prime Minister following a meeting with leaders of the United Arab Emirates’, 29 November 1983, FCO 46 3616, TNA.


ciii Belgian Embassy (Ottawa) to Foreign Ministry, 28 November 1983, 17.967, MAEB, Brussels.

civ UKDEL NATO to FCO, ‘NATO Ministerial Meetings’, 12 December 1983, FCO 46 3346, TNA.

cv Jackson (Brussels) to Sir Geoffrey Howe, 5 December 1983, FCO 46 3346, TNA.


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