

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

THE DEBATE OVER NUCLEAR WARHEADS

After the NORAD agreement, the United States moved to station 56 Bomarc-B anti-aircraft missiles at Canadian NORAD sites. The missiles were equipped with nuclear warheads. In 1960, when Canadians became aware that there were nuclear warheads in the country, there was an uproar. Should Canada adopt nuclear weapons? Was this a result of United States' domination of Canadian defence policy?

Both the Canadian and American governments had to agree to put the armed forces on any alert, but the NORAD forces were clearly under an American commander. The atmosphere became even more tense when federal Civil Defence authorities distributed pamphlets with plans for making underground shelters. These shelters were to protect people from nuclear fallout. While experts debated on whether these shelters would serve any purpose, about 2400 were built in Toronto alone, at a cost of about \$4000 each.

Anti-nuclear protesters, convinced that the arms build-up would not stop the Soviets from attacking the West, demonstrated across the country. People understood that a nuclear war could mean complete and utter destruction.

The controversy over nuclear weapons in Canada led John Diefenbaker, who had become prime minister in 1957, to refuse nuclear warheads for the Bomarc missiles. He felt that arming the Bomarcs with nuclear warheads would set back the hopes for nuclear disarmament in the world. He preferred storing nuclear warheads south of the border until they were needed. His opponents argued that Bomarc missiles without nuclear warheads were useless.

The question became critical during the **Cuban Missile Crisis** in 1962, when the world came dan-

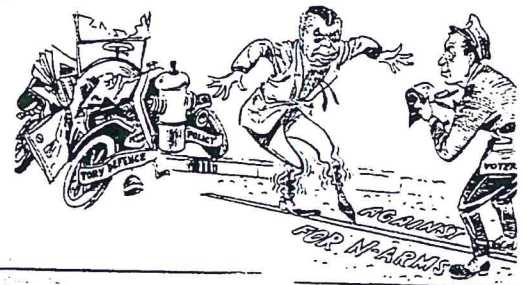


A Civil Defence fallout shelter is inspected by Metro Chairman Fred Gardiner in Toronto in 1960. Canadians took the threat of nuclear war very seriously.

gerously close to nuclear war. Cuba was a communist country. The Soviet Union had installed missiles in Cuba. From the Cuban launch sites, missiles could attack most major American and Canadian cities. The United States demanded the Soviet missiles be removed. It blockaded the shipment of Soviet military equipment to Cuba.

The United States asked Canada, as its defence partner, to put all Canadian forces on alert. War was the next step. Canada hesitated to put its forces on alert, causing a deep rift between the American and Canadian governments. Canada's Bomarc missiles were still not armed with nuclear warheads.

Diefenbaker accused the United States of pressuring Canada. He also accused Liberal leader Pearson of flip-flopping on the issue of nuclear arms. Pearson had opposed nuclear missiles in Canada, but in 1963, decided that Canada had an obligation to accept them. After Pearson was elected as prime minister in 1963, the Bomarc missiles were armed with nuclear warheads. The issue highlighted the controversy in Canada over fears of nuclear attack on the one hand, and the desire for a strong anti-nuclear policy on the other.



1. Do you think Canada should have accepted the nuclear warheads?
2. How would you have reacted to the Cuban missile crisis if you were living in Canada in 1962?
3. Do we face the same threat of a World War III, even more destructive than World Wars I and II today?