

Inquiries of the Ministry

terms. Now it has to be discussed with the military committee and this is what we have started to do. I cannot be precise with respect to numbers. There has been a lot of speculation. No doubt my hon. friend is also speculating. Some speculations may be accurate. I do not know. We will find out when the discussions have been terminated.

Mr. Stanfield: Will the minister be definite and tell the house whether the size of the reduction proposed by Canada is yet to be determined and that this matter is still under reconsideration by the government of Canada?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): My hon. friend uses the word "reconsideration". I have used more prudent words.

Mr. Stanfield: You certainly have.

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): What is being done now is that the general proposal made by Canada is being studied by the military committee. Of course it involves a few options. We are open to suggestions. I am not trying to conceal the facts. I am trying to be as truthful as I can. It is very difficult at this stage to indicate the numbers precisely. We should get away from the notion we must always count heads in military forces. Some changing concepts have intervened since the war in Viet Nam. We are trying to incorporate these new concepts into the kind of force we want to provide.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister whether the statement that the air element will be initially equipped with CF-104's implies that the Canadian proposals envisage the phase-out of the CF-104's, and the withdrawal of the air division and its replacement by reorganized air support for our mobile force?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I am talking here of a three-year plan, and obviously the CF-104's will phase out by themselves after that. This is why I say the initial plan is to use the available planes, but in what configuration I cannot anticipate. It may be conventional, it may be a strike role, it may be reconnaissance, but here again this has to be determined. This is not assured yet. It is the current phase, and until consultation has determined this, we cannot indicate exactly what it will be.

Mr. Brewin: Did the government proposals to the NATO allies as to the change of role

[Mr. Cadieux (Labelle).]

state that this mobile air transportable combat group will be conventionally rather than nuclear armed?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Of course the combat group itself would be conventionally armed.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Loibinière): Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of National Defence tell us whether the federal task force which was supposed to make a study of the future of our relations with Europe and of our defence policy has considered the financial aspect of the changes contemplated by Canada?

Hon. Léo Cadieux (Minister of National Defence): As far as the armed forces are concerned, certainly yes, Mr. Speaker.

The first of these considerations was to assess the budget that would be available and we proceeded from there. Naturally, every financial implication has to be considered when it comes to such a reappraisal.

Mr. Fortin: I would like to ask a supplementary question.

Mr. Speaker, since the financial implications have already been studied, I wonder whether the Minister of National Defence would be willing to tell the members of this house what they are so we may be in a position to appreciate the financial cost of the changes contemplated by Canada?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, the changes we are contemplating provide for cuts. According to our estimation, and assuming that the inflation rate is kept down to about 5 per cent, and that the strength of our forces remains unchanged, the national defence budget will have increased by about \$300 million within the next three years. Thanks to the reappraisal, we may, hopefully keep to the present level, i.e., \$1,814 million for all three years.

[English]

Hon. J. A. MacLean (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, can the minister say whether any proposals have been made by Canada as to how NATO should fill the deficit created by Canada's withdrawal or reduction of forces?

Mr. Cadieux (Labelle): We have not talked in terms of deficits, Mr. Speaker. I think it should be pointed out that here we are talk-