

It would, of course, remain open to Canada to act unilaterally. But a unilateral decision to withdraw forces could have significant political consequences. It could start a chain reaction by exerting pressure for similar action on the governments of the other members of the alliance, which are just as concerned with the cost of providing defence forces. It could damage the fabric of co-operation. It could do harm to Canada's good name with its allies. It could cause our allies to ask themselves whether we were making a respectable contribution to maintaining security in the world.

I do not say that these considerations are necessarily of lasting validity. The Government is not insensitive to the argument that Canada's contribution should be made from bases in Canada. Indeed, Canada provides a battalion, which is stationed in Canada, to what is known as the ACE Mobile Force for use on NATO's northern flank. The day may come, with changes in technology or strategy, when it would be feasible and satisfactory to ourselves and to our allies to make our entire contribution from Canada. But, in the meantime, Canada, as a responsible member of the international community, cannot fail to take into account the political consequences of unilateral action to withdraw forces from Europe.

Type of Canadian Forces

If one agrees that Canada should continue to make an appropriate contribution to NATO forces in Europe, it does not of course mean that the character or level of our present contribution should remain static. Obviously, our contribution must relate to changing requirements. If, for instance, it should prove possible to reach agreement on mutual reductions of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces, this could affect the level of Canadian and U.S. forces in Europe. This is not, of course, the only arms-control measure which we seek in Europe. Indeed, as I have already indicated, the Government will support efforts to improve East-West relations and to achieve disarmament agreements, thereby increasing our security in Europe and in the world.

The specific form of our contribution is under continuing review and has, in fact, changed significantly over the years. One example will, I think, suffice to illustrate my point. In the middle Fifties, Canada provided 12 squadrons of F-86 interceptor aircraft to NATO. These were replaced in the early Sixties by eight squadrons of F-104 aircraft, six squadrons of which had a strike role and two a reconnaissance role. This year, as a result of attrition, we are reducing the number of squadrons of strike aircraft from eight to six. At some time in the 1970s, all the F-104 aircraft will be "phased out". At the appropriate time in the future, the Government will have to decide what position to take on a "follow-on" aircraft.

It will be apparent that changes of weapons of the kind I have illustrated are of necessity gradual. First, each national contribution represents only a part of the total forces available to the NATO commanders, and adjustments in these contributions must be "phased" into the overall plan. Secondly, the expense of modern weapons is such that a commitment, once the equipment has been procured and the training completed, cannot lightly be abandoned in favour of another commitment requiring new equipment and training.