

Government Orders

World tensions which have come and gone in cycles seem again to be on the rise.

There are many places around the world today, as has been said, where military activity is going on. This has been mentioned many times today. Relations between some of the former republics of the Soviet Union are hostile to say the least. The situation in the Persian Gulf area is, as we all know, far from settled.

Several other trouble spots have appeared around the world causing all of us great concern. There is the new nationalism and old ethnic hatreds arising in many parts of the globe and who is to say in what place or by what spark a new and dangerous conflict may be touched off.

What I am saying is that the changes we approached with such optimism only five years ago have not automatically brought about a new world order, nor have they brought about a guarantee of peace in our time. We always hope that Canada will be at the forefront of seeking the diplomatic solutions to the world's problems, but we must, I fear, be prepared in case these solutions fail.

I do not envy the Minister of National Defence for the decisions which he will have to make in the coming year or two because the sad state of the Canadian economy and the huge deficit is going to cause problems with long-range planning and with maintaining the defence establishment which we have at the present time.

I know from his remarks over the past few days that the minister is struggling with the long-term defence policy and with the decision which he will have to make. That is why I urge on this matter that we take a long-term look at the question and not force precipitous action on the minister, action which may not be in the long-term interest of Canadians.

I spoke yesterday about the fact that the high point of Canadian prestige abroad came at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956. The high point of Canadian military power was at the end of World War II when this nation had mobilized and fought as a full participant in that conflict.

Since that time our military capacity has declined and we have come more and more to rely on the protection and the technology of others for our defence. We were from the beginning a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a member of the North American Air Defence Command. However we have allowed ourselves to be more and more dependent upon others, particularly the United States, for the technology which we need for defence.

Looking back for instance at the cancellation of the Avro Arrow fighter plane in the late 1950s, we might be able to see a starting point toward our eventual military decline. Since that time our military technology has been tied more and more to

the United States and we have depended on them to provide us with the largest advances.

I do not intend to engage in a philosophical debate over whether or not we should be that dependent. What I am saying is that the practical realities of geography and economics dictate that our defence policy be tied closely to theirs. It is, in the words of a former Prime Minister, like sleeping with an elephant; you are very aware of every little move.

As we look over the deficit projections for the next year or two, it becomes rather obvious that we will be unable to start many new initiatives in the defence field ourselves. Therefore we will remain as long as we retain our present defence and diplomatic policies very closely tied to our American friends.

That brings me to the main point of this discussion: Should we or should we not allow the testing of cruise missiles over Canadian soil?

• (1835)

What I attempted to do by way of my introductory remarks was to establish my position rather pragmatically. We should allow the tests to continue while the Minister of National Defence, this House and the relevant committees study our overall defence policy. It would be folly to cancel these tests now when we do not know where our long-term policy is going and we do not know where the political situation around the world is leading us.

After saying that, I hope hon. members do not take my remarks as those of a hawk, to use that old term. Rather I hope they see them as the legitimate concerns of someone who watches the world scene and our armed forces with a great deal of interest.

We need to develop a clear direction and a clear defence policy. For the moment I think it would be in the best interests of this nation if the agreement were allowed to continue until such time as our government has decided on our future defence policies.

As I stated yesterday the fundamental cornerstones of Canadian foreign policy have not changed substantially over the years. We are still committed to defence and collective security with our allies. We remain committed to arms control and disarmament and we are committed to peaceful resolution of disputes.

We must not therefore take any hasty action which would fundamentally alter our policies without that careful examination I noted earlier. I know other hon. members hold strong views in this matter and I look forward to hearing them along with all the others.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is the first speaker today to look at the issue from an angle that is close to my heart.