

Foreign Policy

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I was not suggesting that there was any reason. I was simply told through our ambassador that it was not possible because of other arrangements that I presume the ambassador had made. The request came late, as indeed it did to all those I have seen. It was only late Friday that it was agreed I should go to New York. However, I know that there have been consultations outside the United Nations involving the Soviet union, and I would hope that these would have constructive and satisfying results.

I do not believe there is anything more I can say about this situation. We all recognize how serious it is, particularly the sensitivity in the Gulf of Aqaba. I would sincerely repeat the plea made by the Secretary General of the United Nations to all the parties concerned that this was an occasion when restraint and caution should mark their efforts and their examination of the situation.

Mr. Nesbitt: Mr. Speaker, would the minister permit a very brief question at this point? A few moments ago the minister referred to President Nasser's declaration that Israeli ships would not be allowed to enter the Gulf of Aqaba, nor would ships of other countries carrying strategic material. Has there been any indication to our government that the United Arab Republic would demand to search ships to see whether strategic material was aboard, and was there any indication as to what would comprise strategic material?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): My understanding is that two ships have already gone through. I might mention in passing that the United Nations convention of April 29, 1958, on the territorial seas and contiguous zones provides for the right of innocent passage. This treaty has been signed and ratified by 33 countries. It has not been signed or ratified by Saudi Arabia or by the United Arab Republic. It was signed by Canada. It was not ratified by Canada for reasons, as my right hon. friend will know, that had to do with our negotiations regarding problems involving the law of the sea. But there is no doubt in my mind that this convention is declaratory of international law, which provides for innocent passage in respect of international waterways.

My right hon. friend came back, as he had every right and indeed as he has a duty to do, to discuss the problem of Viet Nam. This question has been the subject of persistent interrogation, and rightly so, in this house now for two and a half years. I would simply remind the house, and I do this not by way of

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

defence of any kind of response that I make to questions, that in all the parliaments which I have studied questions on international affairs are put following written notice. I have not taken refuge—

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is what the rules say, but you have not followed that course yourself.

Mr. Martin (Essex East):—in this perfectly legitimate response that I could make, because I felt that we were entitled in this house to the fullest explanation which a minister in my circumstances and having my responsibilities could give. I think the record of this house and the record of the external affairs committee will show that the government's policy has been stated over and over again in the only way in which it can be stated having in mind the nature of our role on the commission, the nature of diplomacy itself. In the interests of achieving what one hopes one might achieve as a result of the contacts which the government has in respect of a matter so delicate and important as the war in Asia, I hope this will be understood.

But I should like to repeat again that Canada is not a belligerent in this war. Canada did not start this war. On the government benches we have said that it is not the intention of this government to commit troops to that war. I have said in answer to questions that our commitment in that regard could only arise pursuant to an obligation inherent in the charter of the United Nations. That continues to be our policy. Because it has been said that in the long run more is to be gained by quiet diplomacy, the government has been charged, as my right hon. friend charged today, with refusing to give this house and the country information which it was entitled to have. I know my right hon. friend too well, however, to take all of his observations with the same serious intent that he would have me bestow on those observations. I have sat in this house with my right hon. friend a long time. I know his technique just as well as I am sure—

Mr. Monteith: We know yours.

Mr. Martin (Essex East):—he has admirably watched my technique.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I saw a report the other day that my right hon. friend said how dangerous a thing was quiet diplomacy. One could almost imagine him conjuring up