

Supply—National Defence

a column with missiles because it would be moving; it would be much easier to use missiles against ground and stationary targets such as airfields. So in addition to the reconnaissance role which would be performed by this aircraft it would also have the power to attack targets of opportunity as they arose.

If we were to go one step further and take a longer view, this is all part of the contribution to the deterrent which makes it quite obvious to the Russians that it is not worth while launching their attack through western Europe because we have the means of locating and attacking their columns if they advance; and if we are equipped with the latest weapons of attack, the destruction to advancing columns might be very, very heavy. So it is as part of our western deterrent, part of our endeavour to preserve the peace, that we are equipping these aircraft and having them prepared for this new role.

Mr. Pearson: Before the minister leaves that point, may I ask him whether it is part of his argument—and I think he has just said this; perhaps he would elaborate on it—that missiles are less effective against moving targets than this type of strike reconnaissance plane?

Mr. Pearkes: I think my words were that it might be more difficult for missiles to attack a moving target. Obviously there is more flexibility with aircraft than there is with a missile in its present state of development, when it is designed as a ground to ground weapon.

Regarding the maintenance of the squadrons which are in France, it is perfectly correct that at the present time we have the headquarters of the air division and six squadrons located on French soil. The other six squadrons are located on German soil. There are alternate air fields selected for these squadrons so that in a period of operations or in an emergency these squadrons could be moved to a different air field. It would not be a very difficult matter if it were found necessary, in the hypothetical situation which the Leader of the Opposition presented, to move the six squadrons which are in France to German air fields and double up there or occupy other alternate fields; or it might be necessary to move them somewhere else.

So far as we know at the present time however, it would be the intention of the Americans to maintain their pipe line to their French bases. The bases will probably remain, and there are other aircraft of the United States air force in France which would not be equipped with nuclear weapons. So

that at the present time, while we are looking into the various possibilities and thinking about this matter, no firm decision has been reached as to what would be necessary, and it is not necessary to make a firm decision until we know exactly what course will be taken by the French government and by the United States.

Mr. Pearson: Perhaps I might complete that part of my question by saying I devoutly hope, as I am sure the minister does, that this contingency will never arise and that the French and United States governments may be able to solve their difficulties with regard to this important problem of the control of NATO atomic weapons. But I assume that if the difficulty does arise and the United States has to make arrangements to take most of its squadrons out of France, the Canadian squadrons could if necessary, be moved to other air fields; or, if they were kept in France, they would still be on a United States pipe line even though it might be a little more difficult and expensive than the present arrangement.

Mr. Pearkes: That is correct. No decision has been reached, nor could it be reached, to move them at the present time. I think it would be most undesirable to move them now, because I share the hope expressed by the Leader of the Opposition that the two governments principally concerned will be able to reach a satisfactory agreement.

Mr. Hellyer: I wonder if the minister would be good enough to let the committee know whether the Lockheed F-104 was in fact the plane he recommended as his selection to the cabinet defence committee.

Mr. Pearkes: Mr. Chairman, I cannot disclose, and I do not intend to disclose, the discussions which took place in the cabinet defence committee, and I am not going to say whether I recommended it or whether anybody else recommended another plane. The matter was thoroughly discussed, and on military, operational and economic grounds the selection was made. It was a cabinet decision. Naturally all members of the cabinet thoroughly endorsed that decision.

Mr. Pearson: May I ask the minister whether the chiefs of staff recommended more than one plane to the cabinet defence committee.

Mr. Pearkes: The chiefs of staff made an appraisal of the value of several planes, and the pros and cons were considered by them with respect to each of the different types and they made a recommendation.