

NATO

proud as the United States, and it likes to do small things in a big way, giving them particularly a Canadian identification.

● (8:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

And he was quite surprised.

In times of peace, even when it seems uncertain, we should assign our armed forces to more correlated roles, and give them functions within peace organizations, or with the United Nations.

That would help to coordinate the work of the Army, the Navy and Air Force.

It is all very nice to go to Europe to Halifax, to win trophies and competitions—and at this stage, I wish to praise our brigade, our air division in Europe, and our Canadian Atlantic Force—but it is important to know, considering the tactics and present constitution of NATO, whether we would win if a war broke out.

Mr. Speaker, it is time we stopped taking pride in winning competitions because the ribbons we earn are costly for Canada. I agree, to give NATO credit for that, because as a rule, I believe in NATO and recognize its merits.

Surely, the balance of forces in Europe has been partly responsible for the absence of conflicts on the continent for the past twenty years. But by promoting that organization alone have we really made progress as regards détente and dialogue?

Will the arms race become a permanent thing? Will confrontation on the continent be a current thing 20 years from now, when our children have taken over? I hope Mr. Speaker.

That is why the fact that Canada is presently reviewing its defence policy, particularly as regards our participation in NATO, takes on a special importance, because Canada is thereby showing that it is truly concerned with the problem of the Atlantic Alliance. That is why everybody is concerned, everybody wonders if it will weaken NATO, which may serve to remind our allies that this international Alliance must do more to reduce the risks of this confrontation in Europe.

Up until now, it seems we have always asked at various meetings and various levels: where do we stand? And now, the moment has come when we must ask ourselves where we are going.

Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I have never really been satisfied with the report of

[Mr. Laniel.]

the committee on external affairs and national defence, of which I am a member. I have nothing to say against its general contents, but I am very disappointed with the third part, which contains recommendations that I see as very timid and conservative, especially as to the future role of Canadian Forces. I realize that the door is still open, because it seems that the purpose was to appease those who wanted some change, and they were somewhat taken in. Moreover, I had no intention to submit a minority report.

However, I wish I had been able to convince the members of the committee—and I tried to do so—to include a recommendation suggesting that Canada should indicate officially to her allies her intention to change the role of Canadian forces in Europe, and to enter immediately into discussions on this possibility.

In my opinion, the Canadian armed forces must become a more homogeneous, ultra-mobile conventional military force where the three services, the army, the navy and the air force, must operate jointly. This kind of military force would give us more flexibility in the use of our troops for NATO, the North American defence and the United Nations.

Even if we wanted to recall our heavy brigade and our air division, we would not know what to do with them. This operation would be costly and useless. I do not mean that we have made a mistake when we accepted our present commitments, but today we must start to think of altering them. If we only had ultra-mobile troops for multiple purposes but without nuclear weapons, a reduction of our forces in Europe would have less disastrous consequences and would not bother everybody.

Due to the possibility of a decision to carry out the complete withdrawal of our forces—I do not advocate this today, but it could happen if conditions changed—I say that it would be possible to take such a decision without completely disorganizing the European defence under a single command.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by stating some of my views on the defence policy of Canada. I do not pretend that I have in hand all the facts which would enable me to justify my conclusions and I do not know whether our allies would accept them. It is their problem and not mine. This is why I wish to respect all the same the views of others. I feel that it is time to alter our defence policy. Let us not be diffident at least with our allies.