

*North-South Relations*

● (2050)

This raises at least two questions to my mind. We are continually being treated to philosophical statements in matters of defence, but we get very little of substance. In this instance, what does Canada consider a threat to its vital interests? In the absence of any definite statement from the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan) or the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Lamontagne), are we to assume that if any one NATO nation considers its vital interests threatened by, for example, an insurrection in one of the oil-producing countries of the Middle East, then we too would consider our vital interests threatened by virtue of our alliance, and thus deploy forces to the area?

This question is especially in need of an answer since the minister told reporters that Canada was willing, in principle, to contribute to a U.S. rapid deployment force in the Middle East. Why would we contribute to the RDF, and is this actual government policy? I have never received an answer to this.

The final communiqué of that NATO meeting also noted as follows:

National Defence planning should make provision towards compensating for changes in the availability of forces committed to NATO because of diversion or tasking on a national basis to carry out operations outside NATO's boundaries in support of the vital interests of allied countries.

Again, the question arises in light of this broad, insubstantial statement: What plans does Canada have? Will we increase our NATO commitment if European or U.S. forces are deployed elsewhere? Will we buy more tanks, increase the size of mobile command's forces in Europe or send more F-18s over? Will any increase in our European commitment come from our forces in being, or will the government allocate more resources to our overtasked, undermanned defence department? This is a very good question and no one seems to have an answer that they want to share with the House of Commons.

I would now like to turn to another one of our international commitments—peacekeeping. Canada has a good record in this area and, as has often been noted, Canada heads the list whenever a new peacekeeping force is being considered; as it should, because of the fine quality of the troops we have sent almost everywhere in the world on peacekeeping missions.

Mobile command is the service arm that provides the peacekeeping troops. Hon. members will remember that that is the command I spoke of earlier as being strained by manpower shortages. Currently, we have approximately 750 troops out on peacekeeping duties, and it appears we may be asked to contribute up to 1,000 more for duties in the Sinai.

The government's present policy is to have no more than 2,000 men out on peacekeeping duties at one time, so participating in the Sinai force appears to be within our means. But let us not forget that in the event of increased tension, it is Mobile Command's troops that have to be sent to Norway and central Europe.

Even when all is "quiet on the western front", to use an old phrase, Mobile Command feels the strain of deploying troops

around the world. Here is how Brigadier General Beattie explains the problem:

When one picks an infantry battalion, it goes as a unit . . . But, when one starts providing support troops, one has to denude a whole formation of all its support in order to provide a service battalion, for instance; and yet, if one takes a service battalion as such from one of the brigades, that deprives the brigade of all its support services. Thus, one should try to take elements from various brigades across the country in order to spread the strain rather than concentrating it in one or two areas.

I may be jumping the gun, worrying about our involvement in Sinai peacekeeping. The ministers to whom we look for direction in this area, the Minister of National Defence and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, cannot seem to agree between themselves. The Minister of National Defence has stated that any request for troops will be listened to sympathetically because he does not think "Canada wants to refuse to keep the peace in any way we can in any part of the world." The Secretary of State for External Affairs, however, is not so co-operative. He told reporters that he did not want to become involved in a process over which we have no control and which may not be going anywhere.

A former secretary of state for external affairs, Hon. Mitchell Sharp, set out eight precepts that he wanted to be followed before our troops went overseas on any peacekeeping duties. The first was that it should always be under the UN auspices. The one that is now the subject of discussion comes under the agreement reached among the United States, Israel and Egypt as a result of the Camp David talks.

If this keeps up, we will have 1,000 troops on peacekeeping duties in the Sinai before the Minister of National Defence and the Secretary of State for External Affairs know they have gone.

Canada has chosen not to stand alone in an armed world but has chosen to ally itself with like-minded nations. In return for increased national security, Canada must pay its dues. As our Prime Minister once said in his elegant style, "put up or shut up".

The men and women of our Armed Forces are doing the best they can with the resources available to them. As many witnesses before the Senate committee hearings have noted, it is a "can do" attitude. But that is not enough. These professionals need support—support from the government, and support from the people.

Changes need to be made within the Department of National Defence, structural changes and functional changes. More funds need to be allocated to the defence of this country. If we were unable to protect ourselves, we would be unable to follow a separate foreign policy, which means even our domestic policies would be under the control of foreign nations.

Too often, when constructive criticism is levelled at the defence policy of this country, the Minister of National Defence and his department close ranks as if under siege. Rather than look closely at the problems facing them, they adopt a "kitty bar the door" attitude for maintaining the status quo, as witness their recent decision to brief the senators on their personnel deficiencies but only if the meeting was held