

## NATO

one was to be considered aggression against all, but the type and amount of assistance to be rendered were left entirely to the discretion of each member state. In time, however, a joint command was established and member countries in effect put their national forces under this joint command.

At the present time, as hon. members know, Canada has its first air division of about 4,000 men stationed in south Germany and its mechanized infantry brigade of about 6,000 men in north Germany. In addition, certain maritime and ground forces in Canada are allocated to NATO.

The North Atlantic Treaty was binding for 20 years, after which any member could withdraw on one year's notice. The 20-year period expires in August this year, so this is indeed an appropriate time to review our NATO commitment.

As hon. members know, the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence presented its report to this house on March 26. This followed extensive hearings in Canada and a two-week tour of the countries of western Europe. It is fair to say that in the course of this review it became clear that for every argument in favour of continuing our NATO commitments there was a counter argument, and vice-versa. Many of these arguments involved intangibles which are very difficult to assess. It is a subject on which the opinions of honest and sincere men may and do differ greatly.

Briefly, the committee report recommended that Canada continue its present NATO commitments until the mid-1970's when the main items of equipment for our air division and our mechanized brigade would require replacement.

However, the report specifically recognized the vital importance of making decisions with regard to future roles in NATO. Moreover, these decisions must be made promptly because of the time required to negotiate changes with our allies, to acquire new equipment, and to retrain our forces. However, the committee decided not to make specific recommendations on this subject until it could obtain more information with regard to alternative roles.

The cabinet's decision to remain in NATO but to make a planned reduction in our European forces went one step farther. With the air division in south Germany, in effect under U.S. command, the mechanized infantry brigade in north Germany, in effect under British command, and with neither of these two

Canadian forces being related to each other or to anything we are doing in Canada, members of the committee had doubts about the continued value of these roles. But the committee said in effect: We want more evidence before we make recommendations as to new military roles. The cabinet, which had been working on the problem for many months before the committee commenced its work, said in effect: We have sufficient evidence to satisfy us that our present roles in Europe are not right; our forces in Europe must be reduced, but we will work out the necessary changes, which will be phase two, in consultation with our allies. Personally, I welcome that decision and I think it is right.

● (5:20 p.m.)

This decision marks a vital change in Canada's defence and foreign policy. The Prime Minister declared emphatically that Canada's defence roles must depend upon Canada's foreign policy, upon the foreign policy of this country, not upon the foreign policy of the United Kingdom, the United States or any other country.

I think it is the failure of the Leader of the Opposition to understand the significance of this statement which has led to a great deal of his confusion with regard to the statement made by the Prime Minister and by members of the cabinet. In the past we have not always placed as high a priority on our own interests as we should have done. In the past Canada's foreign policy has too often been a policy of dependency. For years Canada relied upon the British fleet for its protection and Canada's foreign policy was determined by Great Britain. More recently Canada has depended upon the American nuclear deterrent and our foreign policy has been determined largely by the United States.

I choose to construe the Prime Minister's announcement, therefore, as a declaration of independence, a declaration that in the future Canada will have a more independent and self-reliant foreign policy than in the past. The Leader of the Opposition obviously wishes to continue the policy of dependency to which I have referred—dependency upon the United Kingdom, the United States or other countries. He argued in favour of dependency by condemning what we want to do as being a policy of isolationism. We reject this. We do want an independent foreign policy but we do not consider that this involves a policy of isolationism.