

economic relations with the countries of Western Europe, the world's fastest-growing region during the last decade.

Paradoxically, it is Europe's prosperity which has encouraged people in Canada to argue that Canada can now safely withdraw forces from Europe and make our future contribution to NATO from Canada. We must not ignore the relationship between our contribution of forces to the security of Europe and the continuing importance in our national life of maintaining the strongest possible connections with individual European countries. Our military contribution is now relatively much less important than it was when the European nations were weak. But it is still part of the collective effort. It is important not only as a demonstration of our continuing commitment to the alliance but as a contribution to European stability which vitally concerns us, and the preservation of which is vital to the preservation of peace. In this situation, the Government sees no alternative at the present time to Canada's continuing to make an appropriate contribution to NATO's forces in Europe. The acceptance by the countries of Western Europe of our participation in their councils rests essentially on the modest but effective military contribution we make to the security of Europe, which in turn represents an important contribution to our own self defence.

The principal threat to North America, however, now and for the foreseeable future, as I am sure my colleague, the Minister of National Defence, has already explained, comes from the growing Soviet arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Defence against these ICBMs is both technically difficult and enormously expensive, but some progress in missile defence has been achieved in recent years. Members of the Committee will be aware that the United States has recently announced its intention to deploy what it calls a "thin" ABM system directed against China.

The position of the Canadian Government on the proposed missile defence system was stated by the Prime Minister on September 22 at a press conference in these terms, and I quote:

"We have no intention at this time of taking part in any such ABM system."

That is, the "thin" ABM system which was announced by the United States at that time. He went on:

"Naturally, we are keeping the matter under careful review. We do not wish to commit the Government to any particular course of action in the future as to what might be the best solution to the security problem that Canada will face."

While the principal danger to North America comes from the ICBMs, there is also, as the Minister of National Defence has pointed out, a substantial threat from manned bombers. The existing Soviet long-range bomber fleet is not large and it is assumed the number will diminish somewhat over the next decade. But nevertheless it continues to be there, and continues to be a substantial threat. In spite of this diminishing trend, these bombers will continue to pose a serious threat to North America throughout the next decade.