

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON SOVIET THREAT TO NATO

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. It relates to a contradiction between the policy of the Government of Canada and the policy of the government of the United States concerning NATO, policies apparently in each case based upon different interpretations of the same NATO document regarding growth of the Soviet threat.

President Carter, on the basis of that document, has said that the military lead the west once enjoyed has been reduced, whereas the Prime Minister, presumably on the basis of the same document, said that he does not think worry about the threat is supported by documents before NATO. Will the Deputy Prime Minister explain that contradiction?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I do not have either document before me, but I did attempt to reconcile what the hon. member regards as a contradiction. In the one case, obviously, the President of the United States was referring to the growth in the military capability of the Soviet Union. NATO itself has undertaken a study of the long-term trends in that respect.

I believe what the Prime Minister was talking about—which is quite a different matter—was the political atmosphere, or whether there would be a return to the atmosphere of the cold war. I think there is quite a difference between those two points. That is the distinction I draw between the threat in terms of military capability and the threat in terms of political atmosphere or the cold war atmosphere, and I believe it is to the latter the Prime Minister was addressing himself.

● (1417)

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, that is a nice attempt at a distinction. The Deputy Prime Minister spoke of two documents. There are not two documents, as nearly as we can gather, there is only one. The difference does not occur in the documents; the difference is between the interpretations of the significance of those documents by the government of the United States and the Government of Canada.

Just to clarify to the House, can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether it is the official position of the Government of Canada that the Soviet arms build-up in central Europe does not indicate that the Soviet Union is moving toward a harder line in its dealings with the west? Is it the government's position that there is nothing in the Soviet build-up for Canada to be concerned about?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, that would not be the position of the Government of Canada. The position of the Government of Canada would be that any build-up in Soviet strength would be a very serious matter indeed, and it is for

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that reason that Canada has within the past several years taken a number of important decisions in order to maintain its contribution to NATO at a very high level.

Mr. Hees: You mean, like half of what we promised originally.

Mr. MacEachen: At the present time, there is before the summit leaders in Washington a long-term review which was previously put before a meeting of the defence ministers, and that military analysis is one with which Canada will concur in a statement to be made by the Prime Minister in Washington today.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, that leaves open why the Prime Minister is saying one thing in television interviews and another thing in official statements. The advantage of that is that it is getting the international community accustomed to what we have had to put up with in Canada for a long time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The Deputy Prime Minister spoke about the build-up which the Soviets have established not only in Europe but also a build-up of Soviet activity, directly and through the intermediary of Cuba, in Africa. What we want to know in this House of Commons, because the Deputy Prime Minister characterizes this as very serious—

An hon. Member: You are speaking for yourself.

Mr. Clark: A member on the Liberal side says I speak for myself. It may well be that Liberals on that side are not worried about Canada and its role in NATO, but we on this side of the House are.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: What we want to know, here in this House of Commons, from the Deputy Prime Minister is, what does the Government of Canada intend to do? What steps does it intend to take in face of this very serious, to use the Deputy Prime Minister's words, build-up of the Soviet threat in Europe and in Africa? Will he tell the House of Commons what steps Canada intends to take, or do we have to wait again for word from Washington where the Prime Minister is speaking?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, it is not necessary to wait for word from Washington, either directly or indirectly.

Mr. Hees: You will make up a story here.

Mr. MacEachen: Canada has continued to give its support to the NATO alliance as an absolutely indispensable deterrent and an absolutely indispensable assurance of our security. That view will be reiterated today by the Prime Minister and his colleagues in Washington. My hon. friend will realize that over the last several years we have taken some very important steps in order to strengthen our participation in the NATO alliance. At the NATO summit, which I attended with the