

Adjournment Debate

[English]

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

NATIONAL DEFENCE—RENEWAL OF NORAD AGREEMENT—OPPORTUNITY FOR DEBATE

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, on February 6 I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) whether it was the intention of the government to permit a debate in this House, prior to May 12, of the entire question of the North American air defence agreement. I asked that question because on May 12 the present agreement is due for renewal, or termination. Before a decision of this magnitude is taken, I think the government should have the advantage of the advice of the House.

The Prime Minister's answer was to the effect that if the opposition parties really wanted to discuss the matter, they had opposition days available to them and should utilize one of those days for this discussion. I consider that to be a highly unsatisfactory answer. This is a matter of government policy and it is the responsibility of the government to bring its policies before the House for approval or denial.

My purpose in raising the question this evening is to secure an assurance from the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson) or his representative here tonight that prior to May 12, the day on which the NORAD agreement must be renewed in some form, or terminated, this House will have the occasion to debate the subject in order that the government may have the advantage of the advice of this chamber before making a decision of considerable importance to our nation.

The North American air defence command was established in the mid-1950s to counteract the threat of a manned bomber attack on the continental United States of America. I think it is time indeed to re-examine the whole premise upon which that alliance was based. In the opinion of most experts, the threat of a manned bomber attacked on continental North America is no longer extant. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the major threat to North America in the event of war, now has other methods of conducting an attack on this continent. It has intercontinental ballistic missiles in hardened sites resistant to a first attack. It has nuclear submarines equipped with intermediate range ballistic missiles. The Soviet Union and the United States of America combined have the nuclear capacity to destroy this world twice over.

Given that kind of situation, it is extremely doubtful that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics would employ its long-range bomber force to attack North America in a first strike. It has 195 aircraft capable of attacking North America and returning to the Soviet Union, and those aircraft travel at under 600 miles an hour. That provides simply too much warning for them to risk a first strike situation. When these bombers start to move, the whole United States retaliatory system would be activated. It does not make any sense at all that they would employ their long-range bomber force in that manner.

[Mr. Godin.]

The second strike employment of long-range aircraft is doubtful because a United States first strike probably would render the Soviet bomber bases ineffective. In addition to that, when you consider the efficacy of NORAD in that kind of scenario, should the Soviet undertake the first strike NORAD bases would be among their first targets. So the whole notion of an agreement designed to counter a manned bomber attack as being effective or useful becomes very questionable.

In order to maintain NORAD we are now involved in discussions and possible vast expenditures on an airborne warning and control system known as AWACS, in addition to discussions in respect of the purchase of an improved manned interceptor known as IMI and discussions about the purchase of over-the-horizon backscatter radar, all of which technical schemes involve expenditures beyond belief. All of them are designed to counter a non-existent threat.

Given the fact that a manned bomber attack on North America is unlikely in the extreme, I wonder why this country should continue to associate itself with an alliance designed solely for the purpose of countering that non-existent threat. I am quite prepared to admit that in order to assert its sovereignty, this country must maintain the capability of surveillance and interception within its airspace, but that kind of capability does not necessarily involve a formal alliance with the United States.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order please. The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Leonard Hopkins (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Defence): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the representation of the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Rowland) for a debate on NORAD. I think he will appreciate that any expenditure made by any country in the western world is worth the price of freedom.

I should like to remind the hon. member at this point that the deputy commander-in-chief of NORAD, Lieutenant General R. J. Lane, appeared before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence on March 2, 1973, and addressed the committee on the history of NORAD, its missions and its forces and facilities. At the same time, Mr. Kirkwood, the assistant deputy minister of policy, spoke briefly to the committee on the nature of Canada's contribution to NORAD.

Tomorrow morning at 9.30 the minister was scheduled to address the Committee on External Affairs and National Defence exclusively on the subject of NORAD. In fact, I believe the hon. member has already received an advance copy of the statement that was to be made by the minister. It is regrettable that the committee meeting had to be postponed late this afternoon. I have been given to understand that several members of the committee are participating in the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group at a meeting in the United States later this week.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence will be holding meetings shortly and the hon. member will be given an opportunity to express his views at that time, when the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson) will be present to answer any of his questions.