

Finally, I stated that we had deferred the final decision regarding our planned 20 percent reduction in the number of aircraft in the Air Division in Germany. I might add that, in private discussions with several of my NATO colleagues, I learned that Canada's reassurance regarding the Air Division was particularly appreciated.

To clear up one or two misconceptions about the Air Division, I should like to remind you that the CF-104-equipped squadrons are dual-capable, and we have available now in Europe stocks of conventional ordnance for these aircraft. They are capable of making an effective contribution to the strategy of flexible response adopted by NATO a year ago. This is a conception that we support in principle and one that we have catered for in our committed forces. The Canadian Air Division is among the finest in NATO, and I should not hesitate to stand it beside any such formation in the world. Our CF-104 pilots, supported by the whole of the complex organization of the Air Division, have repeatedly taken the honours at NATO training competitions. The same applies to our ground forces in EUROPE - there are none better. When I spoke in Brussels, I mentioned that our military forces were all professionals, and I assured our allies that we were maintaining them at their high standard of equipment, training, and operational readiness.

On the defence side, the main purpose of the meeting two weeks ago was to reaffirm alliance resolve, in the aftermath of the Czech crisis, to stand together against aggression directed at any of its members, and to consult on specific measures being taken to ensure that the necessary defences are maintained. Canada joined with the other members of the alliance both in reaffirming this intention and in maintaining and improving Canada's defence contribution, as I have outlined to you.

While I am before you, I should like to say a word or two about Canadian security in relation to NATO. The major threat to the security of Canada and the Canadian people comes from the prospect of an intercontinental nuclear exchange arising out of a conflict of interest or of ideology between the super-powers. The forum where super-power interests most closely impinge on each other is Europe, and hence Europe is the geographical region where Canada's security is most in jeopardy. Thus, Canada's security is very closely interlocked with the security of Europe. These are inescapable facts of the world we live in. In the past, we considered it to be in the interests of Canadian national security to meet the challenge through our participation in NATO. How we meet the challenge in the future is one of the very important considerations of the defence review. But I ask you to remember this - the defence review cannot remove the challenge.

Perhaps I might finish by repeating to you my closing remarks to the Defence Planning Committee two weeks ago. At that meeting I said: "The Czechoslovak affair has demonstrated to all of us the importance of a collective approach to defence problems. Canada's history of the last half-century amply attests to our enthusiastic support of such an approach and has shown our willingness to make an effective contribution every time it was required. Collective security continues to be the guiding principle of Canadian defence policy."