

Ref: Canadian Dimension, Dec.-Jan., 1963-64

BEYOND THE NUCLEAR ARMS ISSUE

By C.B. McPherson

Political versus Military Defence

Any discussion of Canadian policy that goes beyond the question of Canadian acquisition of nuclear arms should start from the proposition that the military part of Canada's foreign and defence policy is of virtually no importance compared to the political part of it. By the political part of Canada's foreign and defence policy I mean the part concerned with great-power disarmament and reduction of world tensions -- the actions and statements of the Canadian Government in disarmament conferences, in the United Nations, and in meetings and diplomatic exchanges with other governments.

That the political part is far more important than the military part, and that the military part should be judged by its effect on the political part, can easily be demonstrated.

Given the destructive capacity of present nuclear weapons systems, the defence of any country requires the prevention of nuclear war. This assumption is made by all the nuclear powers. It is the assumption underlying and justifying the policy of deterrence.

Canada's possible military contribution to the Western deterrent is of rapidly decreasing importance. The Western deterrent consists of (i) U.S. strategic nuclear weapons (ICBMs, Polaris submarines and SAC manned bombers), (ii) U.S. and NATO tactical nuclear forces in Europe, and (iii) U.S. and allied conventional forces in Europe.

The U.S. strategic nuclear weapons are by far the most important part of the Western deterrent. Changes in military technology in the last few years (concentration on hardened ICBM bases and on Polaris submarines) have reduced the value of any possible Canadian military contribution (which could only be a contribution to the defence of U.S. bases) to an insignificant amount, and will reduce it still further.

U.S. and NATO tactical nuclear forces in Europe, to which Canada could make a small military contribution, are already of very doubtful deterrent value and will become useless as soon as France has her independent nuclear force.

U.S. and allied conventional forces in Europe will continue to be needed. Canada could make a military contribution there, but the effectiveness of such contribution has to be measured against the alternative of a Canadian military contribution to UN Peace-enforcement forces.

Mutual deterrence is the only defence both East and West now have, but is inherently unstable and increasingly likely to start rather than prevent nuclear war. Each side must seek improvement in speed and accuracy of its nuclear destructiveness. The swifter the weapons, the greater the threat of war by human