

NATO

Leader of the Opposition that we are being as frank and honest as it was possible for us to have been under the circumstances.

We said that the planned and phased reduction in our forces in Europe will be made in consultation with our allies. We have not undertaken to consult our allies on whether or not we should reduce our forces in Europe. This decision has been made by the government and is not, as such, negotiable. However, we will be consulting our allies about how this decision is to be put into effect. This is no more than the responsible behavior to be expected of this country.

The other NATO nations may wish to make adjustments arising from Canadian reductions in strength in Europe, and we will certainly want to carry out our plans causing the least possible difficulty to our allies who are also, it should be remembered, among our oldest and closest friends in the international community. As a matter of fact, under cross-examination at a press conference in Washington I said it was not our intention by our action to weaken the alliance, and that remains the policy of Canada.

Without attempting any general definition, let me make even more clear what we mean by consultation in these circumstances. As we work out how we are going to make the planned and phased reduction of our forces in Europe we will keep our allies informed, listen to their views, and discuss the matter with them. The problems they face, and the views they express, will be taken into account in our decision-making process, but eventually the decision can only be made by the Canadian government, having regard to our national interests, our capacities and our objectives.

● (3:10 p.m.)

In the course of his remarks yesterday the Leader of the Opposition seemed to be confused about the timetable of our decision-making process with regard to the planned and phased reduction of our forces in Europe. He tried to ridicule the apparent conflict in the statements made by the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cadieux) and myself on the decisions and when they would be made. This, I suggest, is a confusion of his own making. I expect that my colleague, the Minister of National Defence, will explain this timetable more fully in the debate. I shall content myself by setting out in the most general terms the steps as we expect them to occur.

[Mr. Sharp.]

Mr. Stanfield: Explain what you said at Washington.

Mr. Sharp: I will—all consistent with the government's policy. The decision in principle about Canada's future in NATO was announced on April 3. That was the first decision the government made. The NATO defence planning committee meeting in May will provide an occasion for us to outline in general terms to our allies how we propose to proceed with our program of planned and phased reduction of our forces in Europe. As I said, we have to make a decision before we put a proposal before our allies. We have to make that decision and there is nothing abnormal about that. This is the normal process of decision-making on force commitment in NATO which leads to the annual meeting of foreign and defence ministers in December when each country is required to make firm force commitments for the following year. So each of us was speaking about the respective decisions and was speaking within the terms and text of the NATO treaty. If my hon. friend does not know what is in the treaty, he should read it.

Mr. Stanfield: I read it.

Mr. Sharp: The fact that the decision-making process with regard to our military presence in Europe is still going on while the basic decision to stay in NATO could be announced on April 3 shows clearly how defence policy flows from foreign policy. We had to assess the importance to us of our membership in the alliance having regard to our other responsibilities and areas of interest. We had to make our own judgment of the usefulness of NATO to us as a means through which we can contribute to international stability and as an important element in our relations with Europe. We had to study NATO's capacity as an instrument for increasing contacts and improving relations with the U.S.S.R. and its associate states. These are by no means all of foreign policy considerations that went into our review of our place in NATO, but they are among the more important. It was only after we had dealt with all these and other foreign policy questions that we could turn our minds to the effect of our political decision upon our defence arrangements.

Foreign policy decisions must take into account Canada's position in tomorrow's world. The 1970's will be a period of accelerating economic, technological and social change, accompanied by persistent