

early start on negotiations with the Warsaw Pact countries for balanced reductions of Forces. Unfortunately, efforts in this direction were thwarted by the tragic events of last August. The unwarranted invasion of Czechoslovakia gave all member nations cause to reflect on the adequacy of the alliance defences, and it was apparent during our meeting two weeks ago that a consensus had developed. There was general agreement that the new situation called for increased vigilance and a qualitative improvement wherever possible in currently committed forces. The Czech crisis created a mood of caution and concern, and re-emphasized the need for defence preparedness in the face of an uncertain future.

In my statement to the Defence Planning Committee, which you will recall is the Council-level committee of the 14 member nations participating in the integrated military command organization, I supported the consensus that qualitative improvements in our committed forces would constitute reasonable and prudent action at this time, and I discussed several measures that we are taking along this line.

For example, I mentioned the four helicopter-equipped destroyers and the two operational support ships now under construction. Since there has been some discussion about these vessels and their relation to NATO I should like to explain to you our present plans for employing them after their construction is completed and they are commissioned into the Canadian Armed Forces. First of all, although support ships contribute a great deal to NATO's anti-submarine capability by enabling our ships to spend a higher proportion of time on active operations, they are not normally earmarked to NATO but remain under national command even in wartime. On the other hand, the four new destroyers would in the normal course of events be earmarked to the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) when they become operational. When this takes place, we plan to remove four of the older destroyer escorts from the list of forces now earmarked to SACLANT and retain them in the Canadian Forces for North American defence purposes only. Thus we are not at this time planning any increase in the number of ships committed to SACLANT, nor are we planning any extension in the normal area of operation of our NATO committed maritime forces (for example, in the Mediterranean), and our allies have been fully informed of our present intentions. The new destroyers will, of course, provide significant qualitative improvement in SACLANT forces. In discussing our contribution to SACLANT, I also referred to our destroyer-modification programme, and pointed out that this too would lead to qualitative improvements in NATO's anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

I drew attention to our programme of re-equipping the Brigade Group in Germany, and indicated that we were giving high priority to its completion. This programme includes, for example, a substantial number of new reconnaissance vehicles, some new counter-mortar radars, a large number of new wheeled vehicles, and completion of the stockpiling of certain kinds of ammunition.

I pointed out that our reserve forces would be enhanced through improvements in training facilities and increased training intensity, and that we intended to continue the training of reserve personnel with the Brigade in Europe.

I announced that we had decided to participate in the 1969 exercise of the NATO ACE Mobile Force (Land) in the northern regions of Norway, as we had done on two previous occasions. We shall be providing a battalion group for this exercise, and we shall at this time also practice the strategic air and sea operational deployment of the unit to Norway.