

Nuclear Armaments

The primary role of NATO is to safeguard the security of member nations by deterring aggression. This Government believes, as do other alliance Governments, that our collective nuclear deterrence strategy has been a critically important element in maintaining peace in the East-West context for over 40 years.

Canada has voluntarily shouldered the obligation to contribute to the capability of the alliance to implement its strategy of deterrence. As I have mentioned, this has involved a less onerous burden for us than for several other alliance members who have accepted the deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory. It would neither be consistent with our alliance membership, nor with our own security interests, for Canada as a matter of principle to attempt to dissociate itself from any or all aspects of the nuclear deterrence strategy.

Deterrence will remain an essential element of our collective defence until there is much greater progress in reducing levels of armaments, particularly strategic nuclear weapons, and in building a more secure world.

Arms control and disarmament is also an essential element of our national security. The Canadian Government, like other alliance members, recognizes the desirability of moving toward reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. Also important is the achievement of balanced reductions of conventional weapons. The fact that a U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. INF agreement, that will eliminate all intermediate-range nuclear weapons on a global basis, is virtually within reach is a significant milestone in the arms control process.

The U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. negotiations began as a result of an alliance initiative. The progress in the negotiations has, in no small measure, been due to the ability of the alliance to maintain a consistent, co-ordinated approach. The alliance is similarly providing strong support for the efforts of the two superpowers to negotiate major reductions in their strategic nuclear arsenals.

As we move toward a less nuclear world, the conventional balance of forces gains an importance. In this area, too, Canada and other NATO countries are co-ordinating their efforts to bring about negotiations with the objective of maintaining security through balanced reductions of armaments.

Canada has been able to make a serious and constructive input to these important arms control negotiating efforts, in which we have a direct interest, because of our presence at the table as an alliance member. Without that continuing direct opportunity to act and react, Canada's influence on such events would be dramatically reduced. Even in multilateral arms control forums much of Canada's credibility and capacity for influence is derived from our alliance membership, which signals to others our level of knowledge about and direct involvement in the activities of key deliberative forums. To the extent that we decline to assume our share of the

collective defence burden, Canada's ability to influence events as an alliance member would likewise be diminished.

The question therefore must be asked: What would really be achieved by declaring a nuclear weapons free zone? In many respects nothing would change. Canada would remain a country without nuclear weapons and with no direct involvement in the manufacture and maintenance of nuclear arsenals. However, by suggesting that we should dissociate ourselves from key aspects of the collective defence strategy of the alliance, Canada's credibility and influence with our traditional European partners, not to mention the United States, would be significantly diminished. Our own security would certainly not be enhanced and could, in fact, be compromised. Such a declaration, furthermore, simply turns a blind eye to the realities of today's interdependent world. This interdependence is just as real in the area of national security as in other areas.

Finally, I would like to make the Government's views on the question of a world referendum on nuclear disarmament perfectly clear. Although a global expression in favour of nuclear disarmament would be fine in itself, it would not be a substitute for the negotiation of effective international arms control agreements. The call for a referendum fails to recognize that meaningful progress in reducing levels of nuclear weapons must be the product of negotiations among Governments. There are no short cuts or substitutes for the negotiating process.

Even if such a referendum were to be held, it is not clear how the results should be interpreted in view of the global diversity of political systems and approaches to freedom of expression. Furthermore, practical considerations, such as the enormous expenses associated with such an undertaking at a time when the United Nations is attempting to avert financial crisis, would present a serious constraint. When the uncertain benefits are compared with the staggering costs, the utility of such a referendum is highly doubtful.

It is for all these reasons that I have cited that I would strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to vote against this motion.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, evidently, the Hon. Member for Leeds—Grenville (Mrs. Cossitt) had not much time to reflect upon the statement that she read a few minutes ago. If she had, I would be inclined to think she would not have made it. She would not have made it because she would have come to the conclusion that, in Canada, were it not for the Cruise missile testing we would be already a nuclear weapons free zone. That has been the policy of successive Canadian Governments, that is what we have been aiming at for decades except, as I said, for the fact that we did test Cruise missiles and are still testing them.

● (1720)

She would not, as she did in the conclusion of her speech, make this spurious argument about the cost of a referendum; this terrible, dangerous cost which, compared to the arms race