

the smaller countries in NATO. If we did withdraw our forces where would we be? I am not saying that the Soviet Union is bent on aggressive war. It is not. No country is bent today on deliberate nuclear war. But the fact remains that Soviet military strength is stronger today than it ever has been, and would be foolhardy, it seems to me, and unstabilizing, to put it another way, for us to be unilaterally disengaged.

Senator O'LEARY (*Carleton*): Mr. Minister, I think if I were to ask all the questions I would like to ask arising out of your statement, we would be here until Kingdom Come, and I don't want to hog the time of the committee. Senator Brooks asked in part one of the questions I want to ask. About three weeks ago the British Secretary for Defence, Mr. Healy, stated that in his opinion—which I suspect was the opinion of his military advisers—the thought of a conventional arms war in Europe now was inconceivable—that any war would be a nuclear war. And on that peg he hung the argument that it was time for Britain to withdraw some of her forces from the Rhine, and for the further reason of some financial arrangement with Bonn which Bonn was not carrying out. Furthermore in recent weeks there have been several very powerful voices in the Congress of the United States which have been advocating withdrawal of American forces. What effect has that had on the thinking of the Canadian Government with respect to our forces?

Hon. Mr. MARTIN: It has had a great effect on my thinking. First of all I think the first question you put is essentially a military one, and it would be presumptuous of me to deal with it—that is the relative importance of conventional as opposed to other kinds of forces. I would also point out that Britain has a great balance of payments problem. Her over-all balance of payments problem is a very serious one, although her recent austerity program has improved the situation somewhat.

Britain has threatened to move some of her forces from NATO partly on economic grounds. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Callaghan, has embarked on a policy of cutting down Britain's military commitments all over the world—in Aden, Singapore, and so on. It is not for me to say what Britain will do. However, I would regard the withdrawal of British forces, apart from normal reductions that must be the basis of discussion with all of Britain's partners in NATO, as a serious thing. I do not believe they will take place in the substantial numbers envisaged; but if they did, I would regard that as a very serious development. In my judgment, it would be a great effect on NATO.

Likewise, a decision by the United States, for one reason or another, to withdraw substantial numbers of its forces, apart from consultation, would be serious. In fact, a unilateral decision of any country in this area would be very serious and would have great consequences.

However, I would say that as far as I know there is no danger of this happening as far as the United States is concerned. Of course, I am not now speaking for the British Government, but I do not believe that the British interest in NATO is such that it would promote any unilateral action of this kind. This does not mean that I do not appreciate that Britain's balance of payments problem is a very serious one, and I hope—

Senator O'LEARY (*Carleton*): Might I interrupt to say that is not the only reason given by Mr. Healy. He gave as the main reason the contention that any war in Europe now would not be a conventional arms war, but a nuclear one.

Hon. Mr. MARTIN: That may be Mr. Healy's view, but his view, important as it is, must be put within the collective strategic defence arrangements of the organization. No one country makes any decisions with regard to the strategy of NATO; it is a matter of collective decision under SACEUR, and each of us has individual views about which power it should be accorded. This is a decision not made by any one government, but by NATO speaking collectively.