

NORAD—Canada-U.S. Agreement

setup of NORAD was first made. The press release at that time merely stated that through NORAD, this new headquarters, joint plans of procedure would be worked out in peacetime for immediate use in an emergency. The word "emergency" was used.

I feel, therefore, we are justified in saying, as we have said more than once in this House of Commons since last summer, that this arrangement was brought hastily into existence and that there was no indication at that time that there would be an opportunity for the kind of discussion concerning it which we are, at last, having this afternoon. One asks oneself, why this haste? There was no special emergency at the time the arrangement was made. The arrangement for co-operation in regard to air defence between the air forces of the two countries was working very effectively. This afternoon the Prime Minister indicated that, in so far as the Canadian side of this arrangement is concerned, it is merely being taken over by NORAD. If I understood him correctly, it will continue to be exercised by the R.C.A.F. until an actual decision is made that hostilities have begun. If these arrangements which have been working effectively over the years were working all right last summer, there was no justification for the kind of haste, the kind of sloppy procedure which was adopted in respect of this very important matter.

Then there were some new developments which, far from justifying the haste which was shown, might have warranted more careful consideration and perhaps some delay. I am wondering, therefore, whether the original decision made last summer to establish NORAD did take into account the entirely new strategic situation created by the inter-continental ballistic missile.

The Prime Minister made an important point this afternoon, in explaining his procedure, of the allegation that the previous government had, in fact, considered this arrangement and that they were on the point of giving formal governmental agreement to it; that they were only prevented from doing that by the approach of a general election.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Only encouraged.

Mr. Pearson: This was the inference which one must draw from his observations, that if the result of that election had been different and the government had been returned, approval would have been given almost automatically to this arrangement which had really been decided upon before the election. There does not happen to be any validity whatever in that reasoning; not the slightest. I shall explain why. Naturally, I know something about the original discussions concerning this kind of arrangement.

[Mr. Pearson.]

I know that in national defence they were discussing the integration of air defence headquarters over months and over years with their opposite numbers in Washington. I know that officials of the Department of External Affairs were asked to attend these preliminary official discussions. But I also know—perhaps the Prime Minister does not know it and perhaps he should be informed of it—that this matter was never considered by the Canadian cabinet in any way, shape or form at any time before June 10.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would the hon. gentleman allow me to ask a question?

Mr. Pearson: Yes.

Mr. Diefenbaker: He was a member of the defence committee. Did that matter not get determined by the defence committee? His name is given, I understand, as one present on that occasion. I am just wondering whether he took any part in it.

Mr. Pearson: I can easily answer that question. I do not think I am violating my oath as a Privy Councillor in attempting to answer it. I was present I think at all of the cabinet defence committee meetings of that time. There was no discussion in the cabinet defence committee of the North American air defence agreement at any meeting. The matter was put on the agenda by the Department of National Defence. It was not discussed. The reason why it was not discussed was indeed a very good one. There was in truth an election in the offing. I just wonder what my right hon. friends would have said if, with an election campaign beginning and with ministers scattered all over the country, the quorum of ministers in Ottawa had agreed to an arrangement of this importance on the very eve of an election. That was the main reason, of course, why the matter was postponed. We exercised a sense of responsibility which I hope my right hon. friend would have shown in the circumstances and we did not take action—we did not even discuss taking action—on the eve of an election. The Prime Minister shakes his head. However, I happen to have been present at these meetings and I know that this matter was not discussed by any cabinet committee or by the cabinet as a whole. Therefore to suggest that in all but name it had been approved by the previous government is not in accordance with the facts.

Another reason why it was not considered at that time is this. Even a cursory glance—and I think probably I was the only minister apart from the minister of national defence who even had a chance to know what was going on—at the documents, and that is all I had, was an indication of their importance.