

No. 61/10 Strengthening Canada's Preparedness

Statement by Prime Minister Diefenbaker in  
the House of Commons, September 7, 1961

... It will I believe assist Honourable Members in their discussions during the next few days if I, and the Minister of National Defence, inform the House at this time of certain decisions taken by the Government. This is not intended to take the place of the more comprehensive statements of ministers on estimates, including a statement I will be prepared to make on emergency measures when estimates dealing therewith are under consideration.

The international situation has deteriorated since we last met, and tension has increased. Much of this has arisen from the statements of Premier Khrushchov in respect of the intentions of the Kremlin and attitudes toward West Berlin, and allied questions. The Government, after consultation with allied governments in NATO, has come to the conclusion that certain measures should be taken to strengthen Canada's preparedness for defence both at home and overseas.

We have decided to increase the overseas and naval forces assigned to NATO as follows:

(a) To bring RCN ship complements up to the strength necessary for a prolonged emergency, the present complement will be increased by 1749 officers and men.

(b) Strengthen the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group in Europe by a total of 1106 all ranks, and make readily available in Canada 1515 as reinforcements.

(c) Strengthen the RCAF No. 1 Air Division in Europe by a total of 250 officers and men.

To allow for the strengthening of the Brigade and Air Division in Europe, and for further strengthening, over and above the foregoing, and Order-in-Council has been passed increasing the present ceiling on personnel strength in Europe from 12,000 to 14,000.

The increases to NATO-assigned forces will be accomplished by transferring fully-trained personnel now in home establishments.

In addition, to improve the general military effectiveness of our forces at home, and particularly those earmarked for the strategic reserve and available for use in Europe, it is intended to increase the strength of Army formations by 8950 personnel and Air Force units by 989.

These measures will require a total increase of approximately 15,000 in the regular forces, and it is intended to proceed immediately with the recruitment of this personnel. To authorize this increase under the National Defence Act, an Order-in-Council has been passed increasing the limit of the numbers in the regular forces from 120,000 to 135,000.

In the interests of maintaining the present high efficiency of the Brigade overseas it has been decided (as already announced), to defer until next year the return to Canada of the Black Watch Battalion now with the Brigade and its replacement by a battalion of the Black Watch from Canada.

These decisions will not have the effect of forming new units or formations but will bring up existing forces to a higher state of preparedness and will make more effective the armed forces' contribution to the civil defence emergency organization. It is hoped that these decisions will be regarded not as provocative but rather as a manifestation of Canada's intention to stand solidly with its NATO partners.

In reviewing our defences we have concluded that in the event of nuclear war there would be a need for a larger number of men trained in survival operations than we now have.

The militia has an effective strength of approximately 42,000 men. Should Canada be attacked, many more men would be needed for survival operations and for support of regular army field forces.

Consequently, the Government has approved a plan to increase the number of men trained to take part in survival and rescue operations should the need arise. It has been decided to train up to 100,000 men on special courses, each lasting six weeks. Approximately 25,000 will be trained on each course in existing military armouries across the country.

These courses will provide sufficient basic military training to maintain the discipline and response essential to the control and effective employment of such a force on operations, but emphasis throughout will be on the teaching of subjects essential for national survival.

During the period of their course, trainees will serve in the militia on a continuous "call-out" basis. They will receive normal pay, with subsistence allowance in lieu of rations, as given to a Regular Army recruit private of single status.

Physical requirements will not be as stringent as those now in force for the regular army, and standards of enrolment will be modified to permit acceptance of applicants between the ages of 18 and 50 years, married or single.

The first course is scheduled to get underway in mid-November. When the courses are completed, Canada will have a sizeable reserve of trained manpower essential to carrying out many tasks required for survival should it come under nuclear attack.

I would not want these measures to be interpreted as being taken in contemplation of an early outbreak of war but rather as insurance which any prudent Government, realizing the possibilities, must take as safeguarding precautions.



