

Troubled Future Faced by RCAF

Ever-increasing reliance on U.S. weapons and manpower for North American defense has been taken for granted in official circles for some time. There have been stories, leaked from sources within the cabinet, about the new concept in North American defense; of Canada getting out of the jet interceptor field.

Just how far U.S. thinking has gone was revealed early this week with the release of testimony before a congressional committee by U.S. defense planners. They said the F-108 when ready for service sometime in the early or mid 1960's would police the distant early warning radar line stretching across the Canadian arctic.

They might operate from the same four northern bases being prepared for use by aerial tankers of the U.S. Strategic Air Command.

The encouraging factor in this testimony is what appears to a U.S. decision to push the potential battleground much farther north than it has been. This was an idea that Avro executives tried to sell the RCAF and the Government during the Arrow campaign.

At the present time the northern limit of the aerial battlefield extends across Canada roughly from north of the top end of Vancouver Island where it is bulged northward by the RCAF interceptor squadron at Comox to the north end of Lake Winnipeg, dipping south through James Bay and then slightly north again over Quebec and Labrador.

This is a limit imposed by the range of interceptor aircraft, Bomarc and their ground control systems. Most of the western region above the Canadian prairies is within the range of Bomarc, other missiles or interceptors based just south of the border. And on the eastern flank, the United States has interceptor squadrons on leased bases in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The dip in the middle is created, of course, by the geographical thrust south by Southern Ontario. To fill this gap, two Bomarc bases are being erected in Northern Ontario and Quebec. If these bases and whatever fighters are ultimately used to supplement them fill the gap, there should be no immediate requirement for further missile bases.

These limits mean the main battleground at the present time is in air space over Canada's major cities. And attacking bombers or missiles could not be expected to have a fail-safe device on their nuclear weapons in case they were shot down.

Indications that a request will be coming from the United States for permission to send the F-108 to far northern bases must be interpreted as a move to push the potential battleground as far north as possible.

But, again, it is also the herald that the United States wants to extend greatly its participation in defense over Canada. The reaction to Friday's announcement seems to be that since the Government has gone as far as it did, it is likely to go the rest of the way and welcome further elements of the USAF into Canadian skies and Canadian bases.

These aircraft would be operating under NORAD and under procedures to which Canada had already agreed. Mr. Diefenbaker used this same argument in another but similar context on Friday.

Some of the kindest words about the Government's decision from inside the services hinge on the same reason for which the Government is being most criticized outside.

The RCAF is said to be relieved that the break was a clean one; that there was no token make-work order which would have meant creation of a costly supporting establishment for a small number of Arrows.

Some benefit should accrue too to the men of the RCAF Maritime Command who have earned a reputation as the best airborne sub-hunting force in the free world. They have done it quietly in the shadow of the glamor of the interceptors and of the Arrow controversy itself.

By the end of the year they will be flying 35 Canadian-built Argus aircraft, keeping their Neptunes, on which the U.S. sub-hunters rely, as second stringers. The sub-hunting role is assuming always increasing importance with the buildup in the threat of missile-launching submarines.

The RCAF's other main role of the future—in addition to manning the Bomarc or other missile and radar bases—would seem to be transport work. But obviously there should be a greatly decreased requirement for air force manpower which now numbers 51,000 persons in uniform.

The same conclusion may well be reached for the navy

and army. The decision to equip with nuclear weapons would seem to have that written into it.

The cost factor will be always vitally important. And there is no comfort here for the other services in the end of the Arrow program, the end of the air force era.

Even with only \$50,000,000 in the estimates of the next fiscal year to cover cancellation charges on the Arrow, there was no extra money available for major new programs for the army or navy. And the full financial weight of the Bomarc and associated programs has yet to be felt. Only \$10,000,000 of the \$100,000,000 minimum Canada must spend as its one-third share in the next three to four years on Bomarc, etc. was included in 1958-60 spending program.

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92