

Time to face nuclear facts

The Defense Estimates of 1962/63 show:

- the strength of the RCAF in the current fiscal year will be approximately what it was last — somewhere between 51,000 and 52,000 men;
- the activities of the RCAF (Reserve), already very restricted, will be allowed to run down further;
- even less money than last year will be available for progress, that is, for new equipment, and by far the greatest part of what is available for new equipment will be absorbed by the current CF-104 program;
- the ratio between fixed costs and new equipment, which in the balmy days of 1952 to 1954 was a healthy one to one, is now an anaemic seven to three.

It is plain that the RCAF is expected to carry on as before. No change in the role of the service has been approved. If the old government, which drew up the 1962/63 budget, had formed anything like a clear picture of the new threat, it did not budge to meet it by an inch. It was still to be a picture of the big war, unleashed by an enemy attack on North America or Western Europe, fought with nuclear weapons and thus of short duration.

Even against that kind of threat the RCAF was, and apparently still is, expected to prepare itself more in theory than in practice. It is being equipped with nuclear weapons carriers. It is organizing and training to use them with the nuclear weapons that belong to them. But when, or indeed whether, they will get these weapons, the late government didn't decide. It merely arrived, after much soul-searching and vacillation, at a general policy which, toward the end of last February, was thus explained by the Prime Minister:

In time of peace, Canada wanted no nuclear weapons, at least not as long as the United States did not change its laws in respect to the custody and control of nuclear arms furnished to allies, and as long as there was hope for a disarmament agreement. It would be different if a nuclear war was actually launched. In that case, "nuclear weapons should be placed in the possession of Canadians."

This is a Solomonic, but quite unrealistic solution. It certainly bears no relation to the basic assumption, on which Canadian defense effort is based, that it is nuclear war which must above all be deterred, and that if we were engaged in actual warfare, it too would be nuclear.

Surely, any aggressor who decided to strike with nuclear weapons would do so only if he had a reasonable chance either of destroying the retaliatory forces of his victim or of repelling, or at least blunting to the point where it would not be all-destructive, the latter's counter-attack. Neither

is likely under present circumstances, but in any case it is utterly impossible unless strategic surprise is achieved. To count on any warning beyond the 15 minutes or so now available in North America against ballistic missiles (it is less than 3 minutes in Europe) would be quite unreasonable.

To count on a period of deployment or mobilization after the outbreak of the war, during which the nuclear weapons could be brought to the carriers, is outright preposterous. Only those nuclear weapons which are ready to fire deter nuclear war, not those which will have to be "placed in the possession" of the defenders.

All the efforts put into readying the RCAF for nuclear weapons are wasted unless these are actually available with the carriers. This would be, in practice, under the usual "double-key" arrangement on which the States quite understandably insists and is likely to continue to insist, and against which there can be no reasonable objections.

In this connection, it will be well to bear in mind that the efforts of which we speak are great and costly in material and human resources. One must not think, for instance, of the conversion of the RCAF Air Division in Europe from the air defence to the strike (i.e. attack with nuclear weapons) — reconnaissance role in terms of the last war when fighter squadrons were converted into fighter-bomber squadrons in a matter of a few weeks. It is more in the nature of a change of a way of life, a remodelling of the force from the organizational roots up.

A rejection by Canada of nuclear weapons — or an acceptance of them only in case of war, which amounts really to a rejection — would also mean that some of the new equipment obtained by the RCAF from the meagre funds available for that purpose would become totally unusable. How to employ the CF-104s would be a problem, albeit not an insoluble one. The Bomarc's with their extensive ground installations could be consigned without hesitation to the scrap heap.

This is not to say that we must now accept nuclear weapons because, perhaps unwisely, we procured the carriers for them. If there are to be no nuclear weapons — and I never could see, and I cannot see now, any cogent military reason for Canada having them — then what is needed is to stop following a path which has been trodden for too long without proper thought for why it was chosen in the first place, and without regard to where it is leading.

It would be better to let the RCAF collect the debris of these last years and build on a new policy foundation, than to make it use even more of its human and material resources to no good purpose.