

# Defiant Heseltine puts job at risk

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By CLIVE EDWARDS and ROBERT PORTER

DEFENCE Secretary Michael Heseltine put his Cabinet job on the line last night over the Westland helicopters affair.

He restated his opposition to the ailing company's U.S.-backed rescue package only hours after Industry Secretary Leon Brittan told the Commons that the Government backed the deal.

Mr Heseltine still wants Westland to accept a package from a European consortium — and threw down the gauntlet in a defiant press conference.

He made it clear that Westland's rejection of the European package would endanger the streamlining of the Continent's helicopter industry and destroy agreements that could mean significant savings in Britain's defence Budget.

His defiance puts him on collision course with Mrs Thatcher, who supports the U.S. deal.

But he side-stepped a suggestion that he might resign, saying: 'I don't think that's a relevant question.'

He also tried to play down personal divisions by saying: 'There is no way I am going to become involved in any bitterness and language which will heighten tension.'

## Hopes

He stressed again that the MoD has no money and no use for the Black Hawk military helicopter which Westland will build with the American Sikorsky company.

In the Commons, he had sat stony-faced while Mr Brittan spoke.

Mrs Thatcher now faces an open Cabinet split.

Mr Heseltine will now be pinning his hopes on the Westland shareholders' meeting expected on Thursday, where there may be influential opposition to the American deal.

Colin Welch—Page Nine



Still fighting: Heseltine