

Heseltine brushes aside resignation questions

By Rodney Cowton, Defence Correspondent

Mr Heseltine last night brushed aside questions about possible resignation after his defeat at the hands of Mr Brittan over the Westland issue.

He told a press conference in his office at the Ministry of Defence that questions about resignation were "not relevant".

He had no interest in trying to project any personal attitude. "No way am I going to become involved in bitterness, or recriminations, which would heighten tensions."

It was clear that Mr Heseltine remained angry about the Westland situation, appearing tense and often uncharacteristically pausing for long periods before answering questions about his attitudes to the Government's position.

He said the Government had not expressed a view in favour of either the European or the Sikorsky offer.

The impression he created was that though he was unlikely

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actively to intervene in further support of the European offer, he would be satisfied if the Westland shareholders were to favour it.

He denied that he had been isolated in the Cabinet in seeking a European solution to Westland's problems. He had been authorized on Monday of last week by colleagues in a Cabinet committee to see if a European partnership, including British Aerospace, was available.

He said the European companies had made it clear that if Westland adopted their offer, and if at any time it was considered desirable for the shares they acquired in

Westland to return back to British ownership, they would bring that about.

He would not comment directly on the merits of the two deals offered to Westland.

Meanwhile Mr David Horne, managing director of Lloyds Merchant Bank, who is acting for the members of the European consortium, said it remained their intention to present their offer to the Westland shareholders.

To seek approval for its preferred solution of working with the American company, Sikorsky, and Fiat of Italy, the directors of Westland will have to call an extraordinary general meeting of shareholders