

*Special Debate*

tive. Our foreign commitments must be in harmony with our domestic needs. Therefore we must be sure when we support peacekeeping that we are operating in Canada's best interests and within the very real financial constraint that must be the primary concern of any good government.

We must pick our spots and we must choose wisely. Today's debate should be a step in that direction. One thing is clear. Canada can no longer be the 911 phone number for the world or for the UN. As much as we want to help others, this desire is tempered by the fact that we cannot be all things to all people. Therefore it is better that we help effectively in a few cases rather than spread ourselves too thin. In this way Canada can protect its own vital interests and provide the most effective help for the international community.

As we examine the issue of peacekeeping it is worthy of note that since the end of the cold war the demand for peacekeepers around the world has sky-rocketed. If the past few years have taught us any lesson it is that instability will continue. New hot spots will continue to crop up and Canada must be ready.

If more requests come from Africa, Southeast Asia or the former Soviet republics, how will Canada respond? Clearly Canada must establish criteria to test the importance of each request for our help. While this is a sensitive issue and I do not claim to have all the answers, I would argue the following could be considered by Parliament when deciding whether to approve of peacekeeping missions.

First, the conflict's impact on the state of international stability is an obvious test of whether Canada should get involved. If the conflict has a serious potential to escalate or destabilize a whole region, we should consider it seriously when making our decision.

• (2000)

Second, geographical ties are very important. For reasons of regional stability, the world would be a better place if countries co-operated to make sure that their own part of the world remained stable. Where peace does break down, regional organizations should co-operate to make things right. After all, it will be the member nations of such regional groups that have the greatest interest in restoring stability. For logistical reasons as well, proximity is an important factor in determining whether a country can respond to a crisis in a timely and effective manner.

Third, humanitarian considerations must also be taken into account. While Canadians want bang for the buck they also want Canada to maintain its tradition for compassion.

Fourth, our prior commitments must be given more weight than is the current practice when determining what else we are going to do. We only have so many troops and a limited amount of high quality equipment. We owe it to our troops to be fair in

our decisions where to send them and to make sure that we do not overcommit our forces. They are the Canadian forces, not the Canadian foreign legion.

Fifth, Canada's economic ties are an important factor in determining how willing Canadians should be to commit their resources.

In conclusion, the time has come for us to take a step back to reorganize ourselves. The first thing we have to do is withdraw from the former Yugoslavia. Canadians have been looking for a negotiated peace there for three years but none is on the horizon.

If the UN sees value in continuing the peacekeeping mission, then it is time for some other UN country to hold the fort that Canada has so admirably defended for so many years. Our troops should be congratulated and brought home to their families.

Once we withdraw from Bosnia and Croatia and before we send our troops on yet another indefinite mission with uncertain dangers and at an unknown cost, let us establish a credible set of criteria upon which we can depend to make sure that we pick our spots wisely. Canada can still be an innovator and a leader in the area of peacekeeping, but we have to make some difficult choices and we have to make them now.

**Mr. Bill Graham (Rosedale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is with a great sense of privilege and responsibility that I rise in the House to debate this extraordinarily important subject this evening.

I feel particularly responsible, given the incredible role our troops are playing in the former Yugoslavia. I sense like every other member of Parliament the responsibility we have toward those marvellous men and women for what they are achieving in that difficult part of the world.

In trying to understand this matter, I have asked myself four questions. I think we should consider them when we discuss whether it would be appropriate to withdraw our troops at this time or to continue the mandate until a more orderly type of withdrawal can be achieved with either the whole of the United Nations forces or of our own troops.

The four questions are these: Are our troops performing an important role where they are? Is their contribution special? What would be the consequences of their withdrawal? How are our overall interests served by their presence there? Let me take the time to examine those issues.

Is the role of our troops in the former Yugoslavia an important one? To that I think every member of this House would have to reply an unqualified yes. Looking at the area of peacekeeping, our troops have performed an exemplary service I would say at the core of the United Nations operation in the former Yugoslavia. They have had a great deal of success. Of course there have