

International Peace and Security

Unquestionably, the leadership of both the chairman of the board and the executive director have been important in that respect.

● (1640)

Another concern some of us had at the time the board was being set up was that it might render the activities of the Ottawa-based Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament unnecessary. It was felt at that time that the institute would somehow be getting into the area of activities already engaged in by the Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament. This has not taken place, nor do I see it likely to happen in the future. The centre has been doing a good job indeed on what one might call the day-to-day issues of peace and security, arms control and disarmament, and it has been issuing an excellent bulletin. As the Minister is aware, it has been giving excellent briefs with respect to the whole question of participation in SDI research as well. Through its bulletin, it has been keeping Canadians informed with respect to the debates taking place in the House of Commons and what transpired in the special joint committee this summer. The arms control centre has also been pretty active. However, as far as I can see, it has not been engaging in the type of broad-based research and public education activity that the institute we have been discussing today has been engaged in. That has been a plus as well. In a period of one year and a half, Canada has gone from almost zero in all fields relating to arms control and disarmament to having two very important and active, yet quite distinct, groups engaged in these matters. It seems to me there is no reason for concern with respect to the situation changing. The two bodies will continue to play an important role.

I am pleased to note that the conference which the Institute on International Peace and Security will be having in Ottawa will be with respect to the challenges to deterrents. With fairly substantial changes in American and possibly Soviet strategic doctrine, the whole question of the challenges to deterrents is of extremely grave importance right now. It is also significant at this time since the United Nations is about to embark upon a study of the doctrine of deterrents. It is a real first for Canada to have a Canadian institute playing a significant role in the examination and re-examination of the doctrine of deterrents and the challenges to that doctrine. It is very exciting indeed.

As I have said, a year and a half ago, apart from the work that was done in an isolated fashion in different universities, we had barely anything going on with respect to these matters. We now have a strong Institute on International Peace and Security researching in depth a number of important issues. We also have a companion Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament working more on the day-to-day issues.

It has been a pleasure to recall the discussions and sometimes arguments which we had when the institute was being created a year ago this June. It is also a pleasure to recall some of the differences which we reconciled and some of the amendments we put forward with respect to the proposed legislation at that time. With respect to those amendments, I might say

that the Liberal Government of the day wanted to see those amendments put in place. It is good to recollect that out of those debates and discussions in committee and in the House of Commons we saw emerge a strong, independent and independently financed Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize to the House and to the Minister for my absence. I am sure it is not the Minister's fault, but no one had advised me that the Bill was going to be considered in the House. I was attending my party's committee meeting, discussing similar issues, when all of a sudden I saw the friendly face of the Secretary for External Affairs (Mr. Clark). So I said: What is going on? And here I am, with another opportunity to speak to the House. I do not have many comments to make on the Bill, since I think these are mainly technical amendments that are justified. We should not, at this stage, criticize the substance of the Bill. On the contrary, speedy passage of the Bill is to be recommended. However, Mr. Speaker, since we so seldom have an opportunity in the House to raise certain issues, I think that when we have a Bill like this one, we should take advantage of that opportunity.

In recent months I twice had a chance to travel across the country, first as chairman of my party's task force on the Government's participation or non-participation in the United States Strategic Defense Initiative research program. I was really impressed, over the past four months, by the keen interest shown by Canadians, and especially by groups that took the trouble to prepare briefs—mostly opposing the plan—on the subject. The quality of these briefs was excellent, and Saturday I was delighted to announce I was happy with the Government's decision not to take part in the program referred to as "Star Wars".

There are those who object to this description. However, I would like to take this opportunity, without malice, I may add, to make it clear to the Minister that I would not like to find out that I had been had and the public as well, because I hope the Government is not letting in the back door what it says it will not let in the front door. I know that is certainly not the intention of the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I believe that Canadians are opposed, and the matter is related to disarmament and peace. The basic reasons why groups came to talk to us to voice their opposition to Canada's participation in President Reagan's strategic defense initiative are all part of the debate for which the Institute was created, and it was created largely to make it possible for Canadians to be well informed about what is going on both on the international and national scene with respect to the contribution of the Canadian Government and the Canadian people to peace and especially to disarmament, one of the great concerns of youth at this time.