

Oral Questions

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of National Defence. I want to get back to this business about who is running the show.

Yesterday the Minister of National Defence suggested to me that in the absence of a United Nations force commander that the principles of the well established NATO command and control structure could apply. I would remind the minister, of course, that NATO is headed by a military committee, as he well knows, and a chairman of that committee. The chairman is the boss.

In the Persian Gulf situation, who is going to be the equivalent? Who is going to be the boss? Who is going to be in charge?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the function of the multinational forces has taken place since August 2 when several nations, now totalling some 30, made a decision to support the United Nations resolutions, starting with resolution 660.

The coordinators, equivalent of the military committee in NATO, have been the national commanders representing their countries in that area.

If the hon. member wants to draw an equivalent to SACEUR, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who is an American general, it is an American general who is co-ordinating in Saudi Arabia in conjunction with King Fahd, the protector of the two holy mosques.

In the other areas in the gulf, because of the presence and the size of the assets that are there, the co-ordination is done by an American admiral.

• (1440)

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his response.

If I understand it properly, McArthur ran the Korean war, Eisenhower ran the D-Day operation and I think there is an example there. One cannot run a war without one person being in charge. I am still not sure who is in charge.

I would like the minister to clarify it for the Canadian people. Are we working for the Americans, the Saudis, or just who is going to run the show?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, since the outset of the Saddam Hussein attack of Kuwait on August 2, Canada has been working toward peace and security in the world, and we are serving the United Nations and the people of Canada at the present time in bringing that about.

Mr. John Brewin (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the question of the role of Canadian forces in the gulf.

The minister has not clearly answered the question. He has ruled out a brigade group but he has not dealt with specific and clear questions, particularly in respect of the role of the CF-18s. Senior military officers say the role has not yet changed. The Minister of Justice has said that no decision has been made as to a change in role.

Will the minister tell this House and the Canadian people whether there will be any change in the role of the CF-18s to a role in support of the military attack that is now being contemplated against Iraq in Kuwait?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, if hostilities commence, the Canadian forces personnel in the fighter squadron will continue to do the job that they are doing at the present time. That is, flying combat air patrol over Canadian vessels and those assets of the allied nations or the collaborating nations in the region.

Mr. Benjamin: What are the assets?

Mr. McKnight: An hon. member asks what the assets are. They include everything that happens to be in the gulf and everything that happens to be an asset on land in Saudi Arabia.

Mr. John Brewin (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, the minister has confirmed by his last answer that this government is plunging Canadian troops into an offensive war that is immoral, that is wrong, and that does not have the support of the Canadian people.

When will the government listen to the Canadian people?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the hon. member about collective security, if I could.

The hon. member is suggesting that Canada has changed its role. Yes, there has been a change in the circumstances. Up until January 15, last midnight, there was a pause for peace which started with resolution 660 of the United Nations and went all the way through the 12 resolutions, concluding with resolution 678.