

Oral Questions

that Canada's participation in these peacekeeping missions could not last indefinitely.

My question is directed to the Prime Minister. Could he indicate the government's official position on the presence of Canadian peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia, considering that the stance he adopted during the debate yesterday was ambiguous, to say the least?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has decided to maintain Canada's troops in the former Yugoslavia in the same configuration in which they are now. Every time changes occur, either in Bosnia or Croatia, there may be changes in troop deployment, and that is what the minister pointed out. However, Canada's presence in the former Yugoslavia will be maintained for the next six months.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, less than 24 hours before the current mandate of the peacekeepers in Croatia expires, could the minister or the Prime Minister tell us what has transpired from negotiations between UN officials and the Croatian government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are over there under UN supervision, and we regularly discuss with UN leaders to determine where our troops should be deployed. These discussions are going on all the time. The troops are now in two locations. For the time being we will stay there, but, as the minister said, we may be asked to move and replace troops at another location. We have had similar rotations in the past, and as the minister pointed out yesterday, there may be more in the future.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I trust that the UN's supervision is not absolute and that we still have some say in the conditions under which we operate. I have the following question for the minister.

I ask the Minister: Instead of inviting parliamentarians to take part in piecemeal debates, as he did yesterday, would he commit himself to a debate on a general definition of the terms and criteria for Canada's future participation in peacekeeping missions that exceed the narrow parameters of his bill?

[English]

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has been very accommodating over the last year and a half in terms of having these debates.

The debate last night was not a restricted one. The hon. member spoke rather eloquently and we appreciate support for the continuation of our troops in Bosnia and Croatia.

• (1420)

I do not think he can fault the government for providing opportunities for these kinds of debates. He also has the vehicle of opposition days if he wants to get into it in greater detail.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. Yesterday, the minister offhandedly minimized the importance of the many cases of suicide within the Canadian Forces, particularly among soldiers returning from peacekeeping missions, including those in the former Yugoslavia. The minister's attitude is surprising, to say the least.

How does the Minister of National Defence explain the fact that members of the military are more inclined to turn to outside help rather than use military resources in order to overcome their difficulties and adjustment problems upon returning from a mission?

[English]

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not say what the hon. member said I did. I was asked yesterday by one of the members of the Reform Party about an apparent increase in suicides, which is of great concern to us, at the base in Valcartier.

While it is true the suicide rate in the armed forces is lower than that of the population as a whole, there is no question that in the last year there has been a slight increase in suicides at the base in Valcartier.

Some preliminary work has been done on that to see whether there is any cause and effect. A Reform member yesterday asserted this had something to do with deployment in Bosnia and Croatia.

We cannot make that statement because there does not seem to be that tie in. Most of the suicides that occur, including these, deal with domestic reasons, family matters. We want to get more information, more analysis. That will require more extensive interviews. We will try to get full information for hon. members so they can have their fears allayed.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out to the minister that the suicide rate at the base in Valcartier alone is higher than in the population as a whole.

Does the minister not recognize that if Canadian soldiers returning from peacekeeping missions refuse to rely on the in-house resources available at the Department of National