

Oral Questions

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Defence. Given the reaction of the Secretary General of the United Nations after hostilities commenced last night, and given the announcement by White House spokesman Marvin Fitzwater that the coalition forces have joined the United States in the liberation of Kuwait, I would like to ask the Minister of National Defence whether the government considers what is going on now in the Persian Gulf a United Nations controlled operation, or does it not?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, part of the answer to the hon. member's question is that the authority for the activity that is taking place now, that of hostility and the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, falls under the auspices of the United Nations and the authority of the United Nations to the collaborating nations.

As the hon. member would know, Canada has tactical command of assets, materiel and personnel of other nations. That being said, the over-all command of the assets of all the collaborating nations involved in the hostilities in enforcing the UN resolution 678 to remove Saddam Hussein fall under the over-all command of General Norm Schwarzkopf. That being said, we must recognize that when Canada accepts tactical control and command of assets and personnel of other nations, naturally Canada has assigned the tactical control of its assets to the over-all command.

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I do thank the minister for his answer to my question. I believe I understand the interpretation.

I would like to ask the minister perhaps in another way, does the Government of Canada intend to ask the Secretary General of the United Nations to invoke the necessary measures in the United Nations charter to make this a UN-controlled operation?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, as the answer to the hon. member's first question dealt with the authority, he knows the only appropriate instrument to my knowledge within the United Nations charter at this time for this event happens to be the military committee. I think he realizes and understands the military committee of the United Nations has been inactive for several years. Because of

the cold war, that may change in the future, but it has not changed at this date.

I am sure the hon. member would agree with me that having national command, Canadian command of Canadian men and women and assets in the Persian Gulf, is much better than abdicating the command to a committee.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Many Canadians, while praying for the safety of our forces in the gulf, deeply believe that this war and Canada's participation in this war is a tragic mistake.

I want to ask the Prime Minister the following question: George Bush said last night that this war would not be another Vietnam. In view of this statement, will the Prime Minister urge Canada's allies, and in particular the United States, not to use nuclear weapons in any circumstances in this war? And will he further urge the United States and our allies to withdraw all nuclear weapons from the area to avoid the possibility of a devastating accident?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the particular hon. member becomes more irresponsible and more outrageous every day. He knows that there has never been any question of the use by the coalition of nuclear weapons in this conflict. He knows that, but he hopes that he might be able to create some fear among Canadians and so he poses that irresponsible question in this House.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister. He will surely recognize that if what he says is accurate there should be no nuclear weapons in the theatre of war.

Earlier in Question Period the Prime Minister stated that the Secretary of State for External Affairs will be appearing before the external affairs committee today or tomorrow. We welcome that assurance that he will be before the committee at this very critical time.

I want to ask the minister to confirm the earlier statement of the Prime Minister that he will be appearing before the external affairs committee today or tomorrow and to ask the minister specifically: Will he call for an immediate end to hostilities, for a pause for peace in this tragic war, if indeed the Iraqi offensive