

*Government Orders*

why it cannot be resolved, but that is beyond what we can do in the House.

When discussing why we are there, the military aspects of our involvement, naturally we on this side of the House rely very much on the competent minister we have in charge as Minister of National Defence. I am glad he is in the House this evening to listen to the debates on both sides in order to formulate some opinion on what we should do.

I thank the minister for insisting that this is a free and open debate for every member of Parliament to voice their own individual concerns. I am also very pleased to compliment his parliamentary secretary to whom we look for guidance in military matters because of his many years in the military. In his second career he chose to join us in the House of Commons, bringing his wealth of military experience with him. There are some very good resource people on whom we base our information.

The question really comes down to why we are there. Why are we in Somalia? Why are we in most other troubled areas in the world?

Yesterday we welcomed in the House the President of Haiti. He was a democratically elected president of a democratic country. The military of that country chose that he should not be allowed to exercise the democratic principles his country wanted him to exercise. As a result he is a president without a country because the military will not let him perform his duties.

• (1900)

When one thinks of that aspect one says how lucky we are in Canada. It could never happen in Canada. Because of the military in this country and because of the democratic process that we have, there are very distinct lines and the military always responds to the people of Canada through the Minister of National Defence and the cabinet.

Logically when decisions are made at this level I suspect that with any proposed action to assist our allies or to make a contribution to the United Nations or NATO, the Minister of National Defence would first meet with the chief of staff to discuss the proposed role in which our military would become involved.

The first issue to be ascertained naturally, as I spoke earlier, is whether it is for humanitarian grounds, peacekeeping or peace-making.

Once the minister sets out very clear terms on what our objectives should be, the chief of staff I assume would then confer with his assistants and colleagues in the department of defence and the military on how best they could fulfil the mandate on the order of the defence minister and the cabinet and, through them, the people of this country.

I think the role of the military is to analyse the degree of success of their mandate and what commitments they will have to come back to before they accept that responsibility when they meet with the minister and talk about the necessities of fulfilling that mandate. What is the required manpower? What is the required equipment? How long will it take to fulfil the obligation and to bring whatever action there will be to a satisfactory conclusion?

I think at that time if one could imagine what the decision making process would be, the political arm swings in and makes that fundamental commitment to the military personnel to say that it will provide the manpower, the equipment and the funding necessary to do the job.

I think at that particular period of time the role of the political arm or the role of the politician and the cabinet and the minister, other than being reported to on a daily basis, really turns itself over and those in charge of the military operation take most of the responsibility once that fundamental decision, or what I call the first order of command, is made.

That preamble of getting into that position leads me to reflect on why we have our military people in this troubled land today.

Let us reflect on what has happened in this House over the past little while. In the last government we had a Minister of National Defence who was perhaps preoccupied with other things. We had another Minister of National Defence toward the end of the term. During that period of time we had the chief of staff appointed ambassador to Washington and another chief of staff was appointed. When we came to government what we saw there had been a little dysfunctioning or disorientation.

What I am suggesting today is with that logical background of events that have taken place at this time I would respectfully request that our minister consider removing our forces from that troubled area and reassess our position with respect to our future role in providing military assistance to the troubled area about which we talked today and many of the troubled areas which I am sure will arise in the future.

I suggest we should define our role as to whether we are peacekeepers and if we are peacekeepers let us train our military as best we can and equip them as best we can.

I would like to close with a comment on how proud we are in this country that our military people in the former country of Yugoslavia are performing so admirably and that every Canadian is very proud of the role they are playing. I hope that our minister and our Prime Minister and all of us in this House say that it is time for us to get out and reassess our position.

• (1905)

**Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley):**  
Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to address the House