

REPORT FROM THE HILL



The Gulf War

■ The prospect of war in the Persian Gulf absorbed much of Parliament's attention to peace and security issues during the autumn. On 25 October, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark told the House of Commons, that while the government preferred offensive action against Iraq to have UN Security Council endorsement, lack of unanimity in the Council would not restrain Canada from joining in a show of force. Opposition parties immediately labelled Clark's words inflammatory. NDP Leader Audrey McLaughlin suggested that the Minister's statements could "have serious consequences for the safety of Canadians being kept hostage in Iraq." The same week an additional 250 Canadian Forces communications and command specialists were dispatched to the Gulf region to support the UN-sponsored embargo against Iraq, raising the total number of Canadian personnel there to 1,700.

On 19 November, an informal delegation of MPs visited Baghdad in a personal appeal for release of the Canadians. Initially, the government opposed the idea, but ultimately a Conservative Member, Robert Corbett, was permitted to join Liberal Lloyd Axworthy and Svend Robinson of the NDP in the unofficial mission. Their task proved frustrating and often tedious, but it did result in the announcement on 28 November, that five of the forty-five hostages would be released.

Joe Clark began an official visit to the region on 23 November. He stopped in Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel (where meetings were arranged with both government and Palestinian leaders). The Min-

ister reported briefly on his trip to the House on 28 November as part of a more comprehensive speech moving a resolution in support of UN efforts to ensure Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. In the lengthy debate which ensued, both the Liberals and NDP offered amendments opposing the use of force against Iraq, at least (in the Liberals' case), until further consultation with Parliament. The emergency debate came on the eve of an emergency UN Security Council session on 29 November (where Joe Clark represented Canada), which authorized (Resolution 678) the use of whatever means were necessary to remove Iraq from Kuwait.

Resolution 678 was subsequently endorsed by the House of Commons the same day (29 November) by a vote of 111-82, over strong objections from both opposition parties. One of their principal concerns was that Parliament should be consulted about any decision by the government to participate in offensive military action.

On 10 December, Mr. Clark appeared before the House External Affairs Committee. He indicated that the government would carry out "the speediest possible consultation with Parliament with regard to any development." The Minister also allowed that "there are a series of issues that have been made more urgent by Iraq's act of war against Kuwait." These included the type of regimes in many of the states of the Arab world, extraordinary differences in income between the poorest and the richest people in the region, competition among different rulers for leadership of the Arab world, and the question of the Palestinians. But he rejected any precise linkage between the crisis and the Palestinian question.

Parliament adjourned on 19 December until 18 February. As the deadline for Iraqi compliance with UN Resolution 678 drew closer, the Cabinet's special new "war committee" decided to reconvene

Parliament for an emergency session on 15 January. The Prime Minister immediately moved, "That this House reaffirms its support of the United Nations in ending the aggression by Iraq against Kuwait."

The lengthy debate which followed featured the first appearance in the Commons since his December by-election win of Liberal Leader Jean Chretien. On 15 January, he proposed an amendment by adding to the final phrase of the government's resolution: "through the continued use of economic sanctions, such support to exclude offensive military action by Canada at this time." More significantly, Mr. Chretien declared that the minute war broke out, Canadian troops should be called back - that they were there only to enforce the embargo. The following day, his predecessor as Leader, John Turner, argued strongly in the House that Parliament had a duty to support the UN resolutions and, therefore, the resolution the government had proposed.

Immediately before Mr. Turner spoke on 16 January, both the Liberal and NDP amendments to the government's original resolution were defeated. The NDP had proposed a sub-amendment to that of the Liberals which deleted all the words after the word "sanctions" and substituted: "such support to exclude the involvement by Canada in a military attack on Iraq or Iraqi forces in Kuwait." The NDP sub-amendment was defeated 210-39, with the Liberals voting against it, while the Liberal amendment was defeated 134-116.

The debate reflected an intense and somber consideration of the issues. It continued through the actual outbreak of hostilities on 16 January at 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. In the evening session, following remarks by the Prime Minister acknowledging the latest development, Mr. Chretien announced that "all Canadians have the obligation to stand united

under the circumstances" in backing up the Canadian troops. He was followed by NDP Leader Audrey McLaughlin who also indicated support for the troops, but insisted that they should only be used in humanitarian actions and not in combat.

In a 22 January vote on the government's main motion, almost all of the Liberal MPs were in support, while almost all of those opposed were NDP members. They were joined by four Liberals, three Bloc Quebecois MPs and an independent - the motion passed by a vote of 217-47.

Committee Work

■ The House Defence Committee issued a report on 8 November entitled, *Maritime Sovereignty*, which recommended the government purchase conventionally-powered submarines and install sonar sensors in Arctic waters to help guard Canada's northern sovereignty. The NDP's defence critic, John Brewin, questioned the need for submarines, suggesting instead that Canada lease submarines from another country, pending a full review of future defence needs.

■ The House of Commons External Affairs Committee struck a Sub-Committee in the fall, under the chairmanship of Walter McLean, to consider the question of the renewal of the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) Agreement between Canada and the United States, which expires in May 1991. Irreconcilable differences prevented both the Sub-Committee and the full Committee from concluding a report about the period and terms of a renewal. The only recommendation made to the government concerned the need for a comprehensive public review of Canada-US defence cooperation in the first two years of any renewal period. □

- GREGORY WIRICK