

*Special Debate*

particular case and the instance in the gulf more risky than heretofore.

I feel very conscious there are many watching us in the emergency debate this evening, particularly the families and friends of those young Canadians who are about to embark on this operation. I express to them—and I know I speak for all of my colleagues on both sides of the House—the appreciation we have for the dedication of their husbands, wives and relatives and indeed for their professionalism. They go forward in the mission we are debating evening with our full confidence and I hope with unanimous support that they are doing for Canada what Canadians want them to do. This is the crux of the debate here this evening. We are debating this matter so that Canadians can approve or disapprove of this operation and of future operations.

This operation is not as large in scope as the gulf operation but in risk, it is at least as great. In the opinion of many, the risk is greater. We have to be cognizant of that as we debate this motion.

There are some similarities with the gulf operation. I hope we can learn from that experience. First and foremost, we have to be very, very careful that we understand why there is support for this operation. Why are we supporting participation of Canadian troops, young Canadians in a far off land for humanitarian purposes?

A lot of us feel more sanguine, more clear on participation in this than we did in the gulf operation. It is not because there is civil disobedience and civil breakdown in a country. It is not because it is perhaps less difficult to confront disorganized warlords, a lot of them teenagers, than it is to face Serbian-trained Bosnians, a situation we were involved in a few months ago. It is because all other peacekeeping efforts have failed. It is because an entire population of a country is threatened by famine and it is because there is need to act now.

I believe that Somalia should be seen as a testing ground for a better United Nations operation. My colleagues and I had a lot of problems with the previous operation. Strictly speaking, it was not in any sense of the words a United Nations operation. The command was different. The control was different and the reporting mechanisms were different. I hope in this operation at least more tools of the United Nations mechanism will be put in place.

I understand that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has accepted there will be United States command. No doubt that gives President Bush more leverage to commit up to 30,000 American troops. However, I hope the United Nations mechanism will be in place so that at least the reports will go to the United Nations. My colleagues and I hope there will be more of the United Nations military committee organizations set up so that the operation will come into force.

My third concern is that we not ignore Parliament. As I said, this operation is different from the gulf operation. I certainly sense from Canadians a concern that we are getting into an area of peace building that is beyond what we were doing when we started in 1948 and progressed over these many years.

In the last two months I have communicated with four constituents who have been concerned about the safety of their children who are serving now. While there is risk, I assured them that the Canadian forces, because of their professionalism, the leadership of their officers and the understanding of their seniors, they will have the best support possible. Anything that can be done for them will be done, be it in Canada, afloat, in the air or on the ground.

I would like to assure them, in consonance with the concerns of my colleagues as espoused by my hon. colleague from Winnipeg—South Centre, because of the changing nature and the growth of this peacekeeping operation idea in practice there is a pressing need that there be something institutionalized to keep a watchful eye from a parliamentary viewpoint.

• (2120 )

We need to have either a combined committee of the Senate and the House or a combined defence and external affairs committee because as our troops embark on this operation, with Christmas coming, the House will unlikely be sitting for another month and one-half. I believe that calls into necessity more than any other time the need for a standing institutionalized system of parliamentary watch on this operation.

My next point is that we must have defined goals. Clearly the immediate goal is for humanitarian aid, to deliver medical and emergency supplies to those who are trapped without it. Otherwise we are looking at the death of two million people.