

THE SENATE

Thursday, December 1, 1994

The Senate met at 2:00 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

BOSNIA

UNITED NATIONS—FUTURE ROLE FOR PEACEKEEPERS

Hon. B. Alasdair Graham: Honourable senators, I have a few brief words to say about the situation in Bosnia.

I am tired of all the criticism being heaped on the United Nations as of late. I wish to emphasize that I am unequivocally proud of our peacekeepers. In spite of the present imbroglio, I remain a very deep believer in the peacekeeping traditions of our country.

We must remember, honourable senators, that we are presently involved in a situation which is infinitely more difficult and dangerous than anything we have previously faced. In a word, Bosnia is an assault on all the conventions we have traditionally associated with our global peacekeeping capacity.

Let us face it, honourable senators, we have a very extensive range of ideas on the table to improve the UN's capacity to deal with peace and security, the best known of which were outlined in the Secretary General's important contribution entitled, "An Agenda for Peace." However, for a variety of reasons we have not had the time or, in some cases, the will to restore and revitalize the institutions of the UN in such a way that it can deal effectively with the sheer enormity of the global crises which presently confront us.

Honourable senators, over the last few years the menu of disaster which the UN has been asked to respond to has been simply too extensive for the organization to bear. I have many thoughts on this. For example, I believe that regional organizations must begin to play their own respective roles in settling local instances of ethnic and national conflict. For the time being, however, we need some breathing space to improve and, so far as it is possible, perfect the machinery of the world body.

Honourable senators, it is important to remember that the Bosnias and Rwandas of this world have been matched by the Cambodias, the El Salvadors, and the Namibias of our time. Disaster, of course, always upstages success. That is a sad reality, but one we must keep in mind while we consider the significance for the United Nations.

Many would argue today that the West should retreat from the Balkans, which is, in a way, reminiscent of the sad retreat at Dunkirk. Those who feel this way do so on the basis that the United Nations has failed in Bosnia; that the dream of

UN peacekeeping is now a nightmare; in effect, that the Bosnian tragedy has degenerated in such a way that there is no future role for us to play there.

Let us think about this for a moment, honourable senators, and let us think about it seriously.

The Hon. the Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt, but the honourable senator's time has expired.

Honourable senators, does the honourable senator have unanimous consent to continue?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Graham: Honourable senators, I am urging you to think about this matter very seriously. The United Nations has been required to serve in an area where ceasefires have been irregular and cynically violated, and where no front line really exists. I might add that in our present world, the tendency is to take every piece of nasty business to the world body, the United Nations. As I said earlier, the menu of disaster presented to the United Nations is simply too much under the present circumstances.

Honourable senators, if we consider Bosnia, we see that the UN has really become, as one analyst put it, "an insurance policy against disaster." In other words, the UN did what it could to lessen the implications of a brutal conflict on the citizens of that region. It tried to support damaged economies; it was a conduit for food and equipment, which ensured that women and children were sometimes fed and protected, and that some of the disastrous exchanges on battlefields were sometimes less disastrous. I emphasize the word "sometimes," honourable senators, because sometimes is better than never. Honourable senators, one thing is certain: We have saved lives. We must continue to save lives.

If I might put it this way, the United Nations, despite its shortcomings, is today a mirror of sanity in hell. In another way, we can say that the United Nations provides a glimpse of the possible. Without that mirror of sanity, without that glimpse of the possible, the people of Bosnia will lose all hope. What is even worse, honourable senators, perhaps because, for the time being, we in the West must serve as the agents of reconstruction for the United Nations, is that we could lose all hope.

In other words, a psychological crisis of failure will beset western capitals at a time when we need all our collective energies and strengths to fashion better decision-making institutions for the future at both the regional and international levels.

Martin Woollacott of *The Guardian* put it this way, in what I thought was a brilliant analysis of the situation, in an article that was reprinted in yesterday's *Globe and Mail*. He was reflecting on the possibility of retreat: