

Oral Questions

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. I would also like to remind him that we have troops who have spent three and four terms in Bosnia. Will the minister admit that Canada has no more resources to commit, that we are stretched to the limit and that we should be out?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just asked the question was a participant and a member of the special joint committee. That committee made certain recommendations about the availability of Canadian forces and those recommendations were followed in the white paper. That means that in certain circumstances for conflicts of this nature we should have ready additional personnel if required. The white paper calls for that and those people are there. We are taking steps to address the fact that we have been engaged quite frequently in peacekeeping missions by putting 3,000 more ground troops into the sharp end.

Before the hon. member makes these outrageous assertions in the House of Commons, perhaps he should read his own committee's report, which he signed, and the defence white paper.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed at the responses from the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister today. Are we talking about the same conflict? When we listen to them we think "now we have them right where they want us". That is the situation we are in.

The Minister of National Defence said that Canada has no plans to send additional troops at the moment. This is what he said: "Unless there is a need for a withdrawal of forces under the auspices of NATO, and then of course we would be part"—

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to put his question.

• (1450)

Mr. Hart: Given that the minister disbanded the airborne regiment, Canada's sole rapid reaction force, what resources does he have left to send over?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I perhaps would not want to get into a convoluted answer to a convoluted question.

I will take this opportunity to say that one of the people who has been detained, hostage Captain Rechner, was contacted a few hours ago through a Serbian interpreter. He is in good shape and is well fed. He has been able to bring supplies from his own quarters but he is still being detained. He is no longer being chained to a pole.

I thought the House would want to know this. We remain concerned about Captain Lapalm. Of course the other people who are detained in Ilijas are in relatively good shape, as we have previously described.

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[Translation]

SECURITY INTELLIGENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the solicitor general.

If you consider that Michel Robert was appointed to the Quebec Court of Appeal, and if you add to that the fact that Jacques Courtois took ill and Rosemary Brown clearly lost interest, it would appear that the Security Intelligence Review Committee has become virtually inoperable. There is no one monitoring the activities of the Canadian secret service. While the cat is away, the mice will play and the spies will spy.

Does the solicitor general recognize that, for all intents and purposes, the Security Intelligence Review Committee is not functional and that there is therefore an urgent need to fill the vacancy and replace members who are no longer interested in carrying out their responsibilities?

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the allegation of the hon. member that the Security Intelligence Review Committee is inoperable. It is in the position to carry out its functions. There are a sufficient number of members there to fulfil the requirement of the law with respect to its quorum. However, the matter of the vacancy is under review by the cabinet. I hope there will be an appropriate step taken under the law very soon to deal with the vacancy.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in view of the reported case of former CSIS agent Pierre Laberge and the firing of his wife, will the Prime Minister—and this time my question is for him—undertake to fill these positions and consult the Leader of the Official Opposition before making any appointment to the review committee, as required by law?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Solicitor General has already answered this question. This position will be filled very shortly. I am very surprised at the official opposition for making such allegations, considering that hundreds of people have lost their jobs in Quebec City because they did not believe in the separatist option.