

Government Orders

In the broader perspective of the current debate on our policy on peacekeeping operations, I would favour setting up a multinational force, with Canada contributing more specifically to the mission logistics, an area in which we have developed expertise and which would give us a defensive rather than an offensive mandate.

I believe it would also be appropriate to table regularly a clear and detailed report on our participation in international missions.

Finally, by giving our troops better instruction in the history, culture and traditions of the countries where they will be sent on peacekeeping operations, we can avoid situations of the kind we experienced in Somalia and also in the former Yugoslavia, where not knowing the customs of the country is a major source of friction and undermines the effectiveness of the operations of our troops.

I want to thank you for your attention, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend those members of my riding who have volunteered to help resolve a crisis situation that requires patience, tact, a profound sense of history and, we might as well admit it, a little luck.

[English]

Mr. Harold Culbert (Carleton—Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, I extend my very best wishes as you confront the many challenges ahead in this 35th Parliament of Canada. I offer my personal congratulations on your election and appointment as Deputy Speaker.

• (2240)

I also extend my warmest appreciation to the many helpful members and staff of the House who provided assistance to me and my staff as we prepared to represent the constituents of my riding of Carleton—Charlotte. I am very proud to stand here today as their elected representative. I am humbled to have been honoured with their trust. It is with great enthusiasm that I look forward to working together with my colleagues in the House of Commons as we attempt to build a better tomorrow for all Canadians.

On behalf of the constituents of Carleton—Charlotte I wish to recognize the many Canadian veterans for their distinguished service. There are many veterans and active duty servicemen and women from the Carleton—Charlotte riding who have served our nation with pride. These men and women have been instrumental in establishing our leadership role in United Nations peacekeeping efforts. It would be negligent and irresponsible for us to turn our backs quickly on these achievements and the fact that our servicemen and women continue to work to maintain this leadership role made possible by our distinguished veterans.

After careful consideration of the many occasions where Canadian servicemen and women have fulfilled their peacekeeping obligations, I encourage my colleagues to recognize the many international successes they have achieved. They have successfully promoted international democracy while being recognized around the world as partners in peace.

Canada is a peaceful nation which commonly provides humanitarian aid. Let us not lose sight of this priority. We may have to review our role with the United Nations. We may have to review concerns with our Canadian defence and foreign policies, but I hope we will continue to respond to the needs of troubled nations for many years to come.

I respectfully request that my hon. colleagues give due priority to the most important concern of the day, and that is the safety and security of Canadian peacekeepers. When we are confronted with a threat to their security we must immediately protect Canadian servicemen and women and we must assure their families of their safe return.

This is certainly not the first time, and I sincerely doubt it will be the last time, there has been a threat to the security of Canadian peacekeepers abroad. Although I would like to encourage the House to give due consideration to the defence and peacekeeping policies, I believe we must first protect those who made sacrifices for us all.

Recent events in the former Yugoslavia have clearly demonstrated the importance of ensuring the protection and security of Canadian peacekeepers when considering future commitments. As many nations forge ahead in search of peace and democracy economic repression often causes hardships which require humanitarian aid. We must address these needs of our global neighbours with a sense of steward-like responsibility.

As a partner in the effort to bring peace and democracy to the citizens of Bosnia—Hercegovina we must give consideration to this tragedy by continuing to provide humanitarian aid to those in need, not by professing to be an expert on this international crisis but by assuming a responsibility for our servicemen and women and for our role on the international stage as partners in peace.

• (2245)

While protecting Canadian interests we must also consider the interests of the citizens of the former Yugoslavia who are without security, electricity, food and water. If there remains a possibility of being a partner in this effort under more secure conditions, then we must continue on.

We have the good fortune of being protected by the Canadian Armed Forces, one of the most respected and well-known peacekeeping forces in the world. We should recognize this good fortune by giving proper consideration to the advice of our military leaders. Perhaps it is time we stood behind those who stand behind us. We should work with our military leaders to facilitate the protection of the Canadian peacekeepers so that