

bours. Canada stands by those who seek to affirm the Charter of the United Nations, and signal that such gross violations of the charter will not be tolerated.

That is why I was surprised to hear the member for Victoria saying that Canada should act independently of the United Nations, when it has indeed been the very history of our country to support the United Nations in these efforts for international peace. This example is a unique example where the United Nations has indeed been able to bring together east and west on this issue. We should be doing everything we can to support the United Nations efforts.

I would like to assure the House and Canadians that the government considers the deployment of our Canadian forces abroad to be a matter of utmost seriousness. As such, any discussion of our participation in the multinational effort to support the United Nations' efforts to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait also compels us to conduct a very sober assessment of the Iraqi military capabilities.

On the whole, from the information that we have available, the reinforcement of Iraqi forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq would appear to have as their objective the consolidation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. These capabilities are impressive, but I must emphasize that a thorough assessment of Iraq's posture—something that is being conducted on an ongoing basis by my department—shows that our air and naval personnel are not at undue risk in performing their duties under their current mandate.

The size and the deployment of the Iraqi ground force contingent make it well positioned to defend Iraq's gain in Kuwait. However, in the event of hostilities, Iraq would likely find that the task of co-ordinating and resupplying its forward-deployed troops to be beyond its current capabilities. In addition, allied air and naval superiority would go a long way in addressing Iraq's ground force advantages, while the morale and training of many Iraqi troops in Kuwait also remains a major question mark.

I have alluded to some of the capabilities of the multinational forces that have been deployed in the gulf. Upon closer examination, the composition of these forces reflects an unprecedented degree of international consensus on the need to provide a substantial military underpinning to the United Nations efforts to compel an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

Government Orders

At the moment, over 30 countries have committed, or have indicated their willingness to commit, military assets in support of the UN effort, while some 24 countries have currently deployed these resources in and around the Arabian Peninsula.

The diversity of the coalition is striking. The Secretary of State for External Affairs mentioned this as well. There are western countries, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. There are Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Morocco, and even Syria. There are non-Arab states with substantial Muslim populations such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as a number of African countries including Niger and Senegal. Additional support has come from the new democracies of central Europe—Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland.

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This remarkable array of countries has contributed forces which are formidable in and of themselves; these are capable of deterring further Iraqi aggression and enforcing strict implementation of the United Nations embargo. The manpower total for these multinational forces currently exceeds 300,000 and is expected to grow to some 500,000. Some 17 countries have deployed over 110 ships in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Red Sea. Allied air power is prodigious, with over 1,500 aircraft deployed from 11 countries. As I mentioned earlier, allied forces enjoy overwhelming naval and air superiority and this will substantially redress the Iraqi advantage in ground force capabilities in the event of hostilities.

The contribution of the Canadian forces to this effort has been prompt and significant. The Canadian naval task group has been assigned to a critical zone in the Persian Gulf, and although our three ships comprise less than 3 per cent of the total multinational naval deployment, our personnel have been involved in more than 20 per cent of the activities surrounding the enforcement of the maritime embargo. Our squadron of CF-18s has also carried out its air defence role with great proficiency. If I may echo the remarks of the all-party group from this House which visited the Canadian forces contingent in mid-November, Canadians can be very proud of their men and women who are serving in the gulf.