

Oral Questions

We had certain agreements as to what was going to occur this morning, and that turned out to be a surprise to us different than what we expected, which disappoints me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, you can well understand that my cabinet colleagues will have commitments that they made and meetings they have to attend.

I have no problem agreeing to an extension of Question Period for the benefit of the opposition, if in turn it will acknowledge that some of my cabinet colleagues will have to leave. They may not be here for their questions.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair has made it clear that we cannot continue without consent. Is there consent to continue?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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PERSIAN GULF

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

Canadians are very concerned about the extent to which our policies in the Persian Gulf are being driven not by our Canadian-UN peacekeeping role, but rather by election strategies in the White House.

I ask the minister to confirm that our squadron of CF-18s in the gulf has come under the effective tactical control not of Canadians but of a U.S. air combat director aboard a U.S. cruiser. Will the minister indicate what concrete efforts Canada is taking to bring all troops in the Persian Gulf under effective UN command and not under U.S. command?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, without for a moment agreeing with any of the premise of the hon. member's statement, the Canadian squadron of CF-18s is under a tactical control.

The hon. member should understand what that means. That means there is information fed through at least three separate vehicles to a controller. The command of the aircraft is strictly under the command of a Canadian.

Our allies who we work with in the gulf understand fully Canada's rules of engagement, and therefore they have been informed prior as to what commands Canadians can accept or reject.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, quite clearly it is the U.S. that is calling the shots in terms of tactical control.

My supplementary question is to the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Ten days ago, the minister deeply alarmed Canadians with his dangerous sabre rattling talk of Canadians dying in a gulf war.

I want to ask the minister whether he now recognizes that as U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, has said: "War would be a bloody and costly effort. We ought to give all other options, including the embargo, a chance to work." Does the minister recognize and agree with that and, most important, will the minister now finally agree that no offensive military action should take place in the gulf without a clear United Nations mandate and, most important, without a full debate and vote of the Parliament of Canada?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, there is a curious irony that a party that is so deeply anti-American as the New Democratic Party is should find itself capable only of believing a proposition when it comes from the words of a United States senator.

Of course I support the view that was just quoted, by Senator Nunn. I have been saying that, as members of this government have, for some time. Indeed, the reason that we are there and the reason that we are making it clear that we intend to follow through on Canada's commitment with respect to sanctions and with respect to moving Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait is precisely because we know that he does not believe paper tigers. We know that he will only take seriously the threat of action by Canada and by other nations if it is clear that we intend to follow through on the actions that we have forecast. Of course, we would prefer to do that through the United Nations.

That is why Canada has been working so very diligently, and with some substantial effect, to try to achieve unanimity within the United Nations. We are still doing that. We would prefer a United Nations command, but we do not want Saddam Hussein to believe that the world will simply walk away and there will be no carrying forward on the positions that have been taken in the