

Government Orders

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Sherbrooke): Mr. Speaker, I want to also join colleagues who a few minutes ago remarked on the very high level of debate in this place with regard to this motion.

Yes, I have been here for some time and I want to corroborate that and say I am equally very impressed by the quality and the contribution of members on all sides of this House. In fact, it is very impressive to hear some of the new members of this place who are making very thoughtful contributions to an issue that is not an easy one.

I do not want to dwell on the history of all of this. Today, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and other members of this place have talked about how important peacekeeping and now what we call peacemaking has been for Canada.

It is truly a hallmark of our country. It is related directly to the contribution of a great Canadian who was our Minister of Foreign Affairs and went on to become a Prime Minister of this country. It is something that to members and citizens of this country is a matter of pride that we all share in that accomplishment and to the fact that this role that Canada has played has enabled our country to take an important place in international affairs.

• (2145)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, Canada plays a very important role in several international forums. It is something that defines us as a nation. Canada is a member of the Commonwealth, the Francophonie, the Organization of American States. Our membership in the OAS is quite significant in terms of our participation in efforts to resolve the Haitian conflict. Our involvement in all these forums reflects our view of the world and the role we hope to play in it.

Today's resolution is about Bosnia. I would like to briefly state our party's position on the main issues we are facing at this time, not only because we will have to make a decision regarding our participation as early as March 31, but also within the wider context proposed by the government.

[English]

Generally, there have been three issues raised with regard to our participation in peacekeeping, now peacemaking, efforts not only in Bosnia but around the world. The first one is the risk factor which has become greater than we have previously known it to be.

The second issue is whether or not we are doing our fair share. That has been raised many times today in this House. The third one is whether we can afford to continue to do it.

On the risk question, let me offer a quote by a prominent Canadian, General MacKenzie, who was the first person to go into this theatre for Canada leading our efforts there. He was

asked, before a committee, whether Canada should restrict itself to chapter 6 traditional peacekeeping only. His answer was quite elegant. He said: "You could do that, sir, but as a professional soldier I would be mightily embarrassed if you did".

The context of that reply is a view that I share. When we started with peacekeeping we experienced great birth pains through that period. We tend to forget them, but it was also a very high risk proposal back then. However, we persisted and Canada led the way. We forged a place for ourselves and we developed a concept that went on to serve the world. I say that because my sense is that today peacemaking is also experiencing its birth pains.

Yes, the risk may be different and greater, but, as General MacKenzie has said, if it is our commitment and our destiny to take this on and to forge that concept, then we must accept the fact that the risk is there and we as a country are willing to meet it.

In fact, when we look at Bosnia it is important to appreciate that we have accomplished a lot. Yes, I join with other members in this place in speaking about the contribution of all the men and women who have been active in that theatre. Some of them have been from my home riding.

Our previous Secretary of State for External Affairs, Barbara McDougall, wrote an article recently for the *Globe and Mail* on what this contribution has been about. I take from her comments some of the things that we should recognize and some of the successes we have had that have been quite significant. "The strategic objective of preventing the spillover of hostilities into other regions, such as Kosovo, has so far been achieved".

Second, "UN peacekeepers, including Canadians, have helped hold together an uneasy truce between Serbs and Croats in the disputed areas of Croatia". I do not want to seem to diminish the risk in what is happening there, but we have been fairly successful.

Third and most important, "lives are being saved in the humanitarian effort".

Here are three areas of real successes for us in this effort. I think we need to keep a perspective these.

As we move on to this risk that is truly greater, I think we will want to work toward continuing the efforts that others have started.

• (2150)

There are very few countries in the world that can take credit for developing the command, control and supply solutions to inherent problems of operating a multinational mission in the field such as multiple languages, cultural differences and different command structures.