

Adjournment Debate

I am relatively assured that that will not happen, but, moreover, I want further assurance that the remainder of the Canadian forces, already on the verge of rust-out, will not be stretched beyond reasonable limits in the maintenance of combat readiness. That is more important now than it has been any time in 37 years, in my opinion. In particular, I would like to hear guarantees that the Canadian forces capital acquisition budget will not be tapped to help finance this operation, because there is a tomorrow and we have to be ready then, too.

More than anything else—and this is the underlying theme of my presentation this evening—this side of the House does not want to learn that the government is unwittingly laying more responsibility on the Canadian forces but giving them fewer resources over all to do the job. That would be a prescription for disaster. The Canadian forces will always have a can-do attitude, but I hope that they do not have to have that kind of can-do attitude until they just cannot do.

Finally, in the face of this discussion matter and, indeed, in view of the awesome defence cuts in conventional arms on both sides earlier this week, it is not unreasonable for Canadians now to expect to have some public input into what surely must be at least some defence policy strawman in preparation for a badly needed defence white paper.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Hudon (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank and congratulate my colleague from Bonavista—Trinity—Conception for the good words he had to say about the great job our Armed Forces are doing in the Gulf. I am just back from the Gulf. I was there last week and I had the opportunity to meet the Army, Navy and Air Force people who were sent there.

About the figures he quoted, he said that 25 per cent of intercepts were made by Canadians. I had 23 per cent, but we could always arrive to a compromise. What is more interesting to know, though, is that that much is done with less than 3 per cent of all the equipment presently deployed in the Gulf area. With only 3 per cent of the equipment, the Canadian Forces make 23 to 25

per cent of all intercepts. They are really doing a great job.

[*English*]

To come back to the question of my hon. colleague, I would like to reiterate the response given him when he asked this question in the House on October 22. At that time he was given an assurance that the men and women serving on behalf of Canada in the Persian Gulf are being provided with the resources they require to fulfil their mission. This situation has not changed.

I am sure all members will appreciate that the Persian Gulf crisis was not anticipated and, therefore, we had not made provision for such an operation in our defence budget for the current year. Therefore, the costs of the operation were being covered from the existing budget.

The Prime Minister has announced that Supplementary Estimates will be tabled in the House shortly by the President of the Treasury Board in light of our commitment to support our contingent in the Persian Gulf and as a result of additional unanticipated expenses related to the army being called out in aid of the civil power in Oka. Cost information for the Persian Gulf and Oka will be provided once the estimates have been made public.

There has been a considerable amount of speculation in the media on the cost of the Canadian forces participation both in aid of the civil power at Oka and in the Persian Gulf operation. Until such time as the Supplementary Estimates are tabled, it would be inappropriate to comment further on this issue. I am sure that the hon. member would not wish to fuel further speculation.

The forces in the Persian Gulf have had priority in terms of funding from different allocations. That means that, as far as current defence spending programs go, some effects were felt, even before additional funding was sought.

For example, in the operations and maintenance portion of the defence budget, activities not directly related to the gulf operation have been given a lower priority. Certain exercises have been cancelled. Allotted flying hours and ship days have been transferred from other activities to the Canadian forces in the gulf and some new defence contracts may have been delayed.