

*Oral Questions***EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

In recent days we have seen the release of British, American, French and Russian hostages from Iraq. By their own admission, Canadian officials have indicated that they have been unable to secure the release of Canadians still held in Iraq, including those with illnesses and our diplomats from Kuwait.

I would like to ask the minister if he has any special measures that he proposes to undertake to release Canadian hostages, for example, sending a special emissary to the Iraqi government or special committees of Parliament or whatever means to try to provide for the release of Canadian hostages, many of whom are being held under duress.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will remember that Canada was the first country that was able to arrange the release of large numbers of persons in Iraq and in Kuwait by chartering an aircraft.

We took out not only Canadian nationals but also others. That started a practice that was of sufficient concern to the Iraqi government that it stopped permission for that practice later on.

I would be prepared, naturally, to seriously consider any proposal the hon. member or other members of the House might make with regard to ways in which we could help more Canadians who are in Iraq or Kuwait against their will to come home, providing that that was consistent with the very strong position that Canada and other countries have taken in support of the common actions of the Security Council of the United Nations.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence.

It has been reported that the government is now planning to change the complement of ships or crews that are presently in the gulf in the immediate or near term.

Can the government confirm its plans? In particular, can we get assurances from the minister in the spirit with which we have been approaching this to have Parliament consulted before any final decisions are made as to these plans relating to our forces in the gulf area?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, there are several alternatives that have been examined by military leadership as to replacing the ships' complements or replacing the ships.

We had hoped the hon. member would understand that this is neither adding to nor detracting from the commitment that Canada has made to enforcing UN sanctions and deterring aggression. Now that he has raised the question, it is important that I be allowed to answer it because of the concern that dependants of Canadian men and women who are serving would have because he has raised the question.

I can inform the hon. member that the government will be rotating ships' complements on the three vessels that are there. He will know that we cannot replace the *Protecteur*. He will also be aware, Mr. Speaker, that the *Athabaskan*, which is one of the DDH class, would have to go into the TRUMP program so we will put in its place the *Huron*. It would not be cost-effective to equip one ship, strip it, equip another ship and have it stripped.

• (1440)

The *Terra Nova* is a long-serving vessel and will continue to serve. It will remain where it is. We believe the most cost-effective thing that we can do is rotate the complements. To the dependants of those men and women, I would say that the duration of the stay of the Canadian forces personnel will not be longer than necessary. They can anticipate, although there will be varied times, that the ships' complements will be returning home, after a stay of from five to seven months.

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ENERGY

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of energy and is related to gasoline pricing.

In February 1990, oil was selling at \$25.97 a barrel here in Canada and gasoline was selling that same month at 53.8 cents per litre.