

*Special Debate*

In Croatia we have 770 peacekeepers; combat troops engaged in traditional peacekeeping, looking at the ceasefire areas and preventing skirmishes.

We have another operation in the southwest part of Croatia, on the coast, in Primosten, just north of the larger city of Split, where we have roughly 265 troops. They are logistics troops and represent the logistics battalion.

We also have a separate operation, which is actually a fifth operation. It is an air operation that has Hercules flights from Italy to Sarajevo to keep the airport open. There have been 1,600 flights. Roughly 11,500 people have been transported to and from the airport and 26,000 metric tonnes. That is an achievement in my mind.

Last but not least we have in the Adriatic coast a Canadian destroyer with 265 Canadians as part of the 15 nation, 21 ship force enforcing the arms embargo. This operation is one of which, despite what the opposition parties say, we are very proud and will continue to be.

● (1945)

We have been involved in this operation, if we include its beginning, from September 21, 1991 as we have in most UN operations that have ever happened in the world. That we have a reputation that is enviable is an understatement. We have heard all of it before in the House.

The question for debate tonight is whether we continue the mandate. Before I address the question I want to comment on something the hon. Leader of the Opposition said and something the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said.

The Leader of the Opposition said that he deplored the fact that we were speaking so late, that it essentially gave no choice to Parliament. The hon. member for Verchères said that he would like some comment from this side of the House on why we are having the debate so late.

I remind the House that the Leader of the Opposition was a member of a government that deployed troops and committed Canada to the gulf war without as much as a word of discussion in the House of Commons. That was absolutely despicable. All Canadians thought it was outrageous.

To have the Leader of the Opposition criticize the government for having the fourth debate on peacekeeping in 18 months plus other debates, one of which took place last week on defence, is absolutely disgraceful, outrageous, misleading and intolerable.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands complains that we are not having a debate on this matter. When it was put forward at the meeting last night I understand there was some question in the Reform Party whether it wanted to debate it. Whether or not the Reformers are being childish because it was at this point in time I do not know. It was not until late in the

evening that they decided they would have the debate. I do not accept these complaints.

I want to make another point with respect to the opposition. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands spoke about renewing the mandate. He did nothing but moan about the Canadian forces and talk about morale.

If members of the opposition parties, particularly the third party, would refrain from taking brown envelopes from disgruntled people and using them on the government to reduce the credibility of the very credible actions that are taking place from day to day, I would suggest the morale of the Canadian forces, whatever state it is in now, would be a hell of a lot better.

I do not mean for the hon. member from Saanich—Gulf Islands to be a target; in fact we are quite good friends. He debated and complained about the state of equipment in the Canadian forces. We just finished a 10-month discussion on defence where all these matters were brought out. They were part of the white paper. They were addressed in a report to Parliament and are being addressed in the white paper.

I know he wants to be on record as to his knowledge of defence. He has made his point. I will make my point that we are aware of these deficiencies and the government is addressing them, including 3,000 more peacekeepers to make sure that the rotation is better than it was.

The mandate is a hard judgment to make. The support for peacekeeping in my constituency and in those parts of Canada to which I travel, including 10 months on the standing committee's defence policy review, was very strong. I sense that today it is not as strong as it was six months ago. I suggest the reason for that is the perception that we are not making any headway.

How can we expect significant progress to be made in a country where conflict has been ongoing for almost a thousand years? I do not pretend to understand all the politics. I doubt if all of us in the House, if we were put together, could understand what is happening there.

Where does that leave us? Should we not renew our mandate as 1 of 35 countries because we feel progress has not been made in peace?

● (1950)

There is more to it than that. We are supplying humanitarian aid. We are supplying hope to a country where hope is hard to come by.

I remind everybody in the House, particularly the members who were with me 10 months ago as we spent some time in Bosnia and Croatia, of a mental institution in a town called Bakovici where many inmates were murdered, raped, tortured and mutilated. The remaining inmates, the poor souls, we saw them. They were being protected by members of the Canadian