

Beyond this humanitarian effort, it is often pointed out that Canada's presence in Bosnia has served to demonstrate our continuing commitment to act with our NATO allies in the promotion of European security. It also demonstrates to the world that Canada is a nation that is prepared to carry out its international obligations under difficult circumstances, while others are merely willing to offer advice from the sidelines.

At the same time, serious questions must be asked as we debate our continued participation in UNPROFOR. Is there a reasonable prospect of any progress in the peace process in the foreseeable future? Will sufficient humanitarian aid continue to get through? At what point will the danger to our troops outweigh the benefits of our presence there?

At the recent NATO Summit the question of the dangers faced by our troops was the subject of much debate. In particular, the topic of air strikes as a means of relieving the pressures on our troops was prominent in media reports of the Summit. Because some confusion seems to exist in the public mind, I would like to take advantage of this timely opportunity to clarify the Government's position on the subject of air strikes, and our understanding of the procedures in place for their authorization.

Essentially there are two distinct scenarios for air strikes. The first envisages the case where UN troops are directly under attack. In this specific case, NATO agreed in June that the Commander of UNPROFOR could call on the UN Secretary-General to authorize an air strike to assist UN troops where they are under attack. The fact that the UN Secretary-General would be the ultimate authority for an air strike under these conditions was insisted upon by Canada, in view of the highly charged political considerations that would surround such a decision. There would be no debate within NATO before the strike was carried out, as time would be of the essence.

The second type of air strike would be intended to remove an obstacle to UNPROFOR's performance of its duties in circumstances where there is no direct threat to UNPROFOR troops. The proposed air strike would thus be less time-urgent. Under these circumstances, the Commander of UNPROFOR would submit a request for such an air strike to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who must give his authorization. The request would also be discussed in the North Atlantic Council of NATO. The North Atlantic Council must agree to support the request.

Mr. Speaker, the North Atlantic Council operates by means of consensus. Therefore, no decision to launch an air strike under these circumstances could be made unless all of the allies agreed to it. Canada's position on this question is well-known and would guide our representative to the North Atlantic Council in such debate.