

Government Orders

In trying to answer some of those questions I think we have to test weapons that can carry nuclear warheads because we will also be, at some point in our future sad to say, faced with the possibility that we may have to intercept those types of weapons as they come into our air space. I think it is very important that we have defensive capabilities against those weapons.

I also point out that there are many places in the world, such as the former Soviet Union—the hon. member was talking about who is the enemy—and I think many places in the former Soviet Union, particularly now with the rise of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in Russia, should all give one pause when we talk about how peaceful the world really is.

Having said all that, and considering there are many places in the world that are not likely to become liberal democracies any time soon, countries that have the capability to produce nuclear weapons and all kinds of other weapons, does the hon. member agree that we should be prepared to intercept those types of missiles that could come from some of those countries?

Mr. Caccia: Madam Speaker, I would be glad to answer the question by the member for Medicine Hat.

If the cruise missile were a weapon of interception, he would have a valid question. But the cruise missile is not a weapon of interception, it is a weapon of attack, it is a weapon to deliver, if necessary, warheads. Therefore his question is invalid because he is addressing the wrong weapon.

As to intercepting weapons which come into our Canadian space, we would have to use other weapons but certainly not a cruise missile because that is not the intent or the qualification of that weapon. It is used to attack and deliver nuclear warheads to certain specific targets in other countries.

● (1825)

The member for Medicine Hat failed to demonstrate to us that this is the weapon he would rely on in order to intercept, but more importantly he failed to identify the enemy for us. He very vaguely mentioned that there could be an attack. I urge him to identify the enemy for us. I submit to him that collectively the enemy is us and our fear. It is time to stop talking like cold war cavemen and cavewomen because we are living in another decade.

The agenda has shifted very rapidly. It is no longer the agenda on how to prevent a strike or an attack that we should be concentrating our time and energy on. It is how to prevent the elements in the global community that have to do with, as I mentioned, poverty and environmental degradation, that have to be addressed and the energies of governments need to be focused on that agenda.

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me once again to rise in this Chamber and take part in the debate on the policy of government which has implications for our defence policy.

First, I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the leadership of the government for giving all members of this House the opportunity to express our views on this topic. Much has been said this afternoon about our defence policy. Some believe it might be redundant. Others say there should have been a policy set out which we could have debated.

I served some time in provincial legislatures and in this House and I believe this is what most members of the House with whom I have associated over the last number of years wanted to do. Today we are putting forward our views. We do not all agree. We all have different opinions. This is allowing us to state our opinions and hopefully to give the minister, the department and the government our ideas. It makes it easier for them to come forward with a policy which at that time will be debated. That is what we are doing here today.

We all appreciate this new and open policy toward the House of Commons, this great institution to which we have all been elected. All hon. members agree that the respect being shown to us by the government is certainly in contrast to what we have seen here over the last number of years.

The question which has been put before us is a complex one, a question which cannot be answered in the course of a one day debate, or even in a week long debate. It is a question that arouses all sorts of passions in all hon. members and indeed in the public at large.

The question has been asked today, why we would talk about this when we have signed the agreement with the United States? We have an agreement that has been talked about here by people who are much more eloquent than I. If for some reason we cancelled the agreement or we agreed to let it go ahead without debate such as this I am sure that all hon. members who have been in public life any amount of time would realize the uproar this would cause in the media and in the public at large.

I mentioned yesterday during the debate on peacekeeping that the time has come when we must assess the role of our armed forces both in Canada and abroad. We must provide them with the direction which is necessary in a troubled world. We must have a multi-level approach in our defence policy and we must always be sure that our defence policy is sufficiently adaptable to conform to a changing world.

● (1830)

As I noted yesterday, the world has vastly changed from what it was five short years ago. When the Berlin wall came down and the communist regimes in eastern Europe fell there were those among us who proclaimed that peace was at hand and that total victory in the cold war belonged to us. Unfortunately not all of the world's problems have been solved these past five years.