

Oral Questions

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer. I have a supplementary. He did not answer the question.

The minister talks about the NATO structure. I am very familiar with that, but I would remind the minister that that NATO structure was designated. It exists, it is in place and it has been for some time. The operating procedures are very cut and dry. I and everybody involved understands them.

I can accept that while we have command and control in the Canadian sense in essentially a peacetime operation, although it is tense in a designated sector, in a predictable assigned task of three ships, 24 aircraft and 1,816 men and women. But war is unpredictable. I am not quite as convinced that with such an array of forces that even though we could have Canadian command of the forces in the gulf that we could in any way, shape or form have Canadian control.

I will ask the minister then, in the consequence of his attempt to answer my previous question, to now confirm that while the forces will definitely be Canadian commanded, it is possible that they will be under the control of the Americans or the Saudis.

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, it is not my responsibility, nor would I attempt to explain to the hon. member tactical control and national command. I know I do not have to explain it. He understands it. He is nodding his head. Mr. Speaker, that answers his question.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people are deeply concerned that our government is leading our country into an American-led war which would have consequences in human, in ecological, in economic and in geopolitical terms, which would be absolutely disastrous and which could involve the use the nuclear, chemical and biological warfare.

In view of the fact that last night the chief of defence staff confirmed that our troops would be involved in defending American ground troops in Saudi Arabia in the event of war, will the Prime Minister not heed the concerns of Canadians who are saying to this Prime Minister and to this government: "we do not want Canada to be dragged into a war. If there is to be a war

Canada should be playing a peaceful role. Our troops should not be involved in that war. We should be playing a humanitarian role and bringing our troops out of that theatre of conflict"? Will the Prime Minister not take that stand on behalf of all Canadians?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, even by his standards the hon. member is extreme in the statements that he makes.

For one thing, in his characterization of the countries involved in this conflict, he knows that much of the dramatic and dynamic leadership of the coalition comes in fact from Arab countries that have a particular worry about peace in their region precisely because it is their region, and also of course from other powers with great military capacity such as France, the United States, the United Kingdom, and others. I am sure he does not intend to mislead, but the consequence of his statement would be to mislead Canadians as to the nature of the coalition and I am sure he would not want that to happen.

He would also know, when he speaks of bloodshed and when he speaks of the terrible consequences of war, that there are terrible consequences to the *status quo*, to the situation now. That is not simply the situation in Kuwait where there has been a country pillaged in the process of being pillaged more. It is a consequence throughout the region sadly and tragically, I believe, that was evidenced last night by assassinations in another part of that region.

It also holds the threat for other nations, nations anywhere in the world where violence is possible—and those are legion—that if the United Nations cannot be effective here after all the actions that have been taken by the United Nations then those regions which are also hot spots that could explode will be left without the capacity of an instrument like the United Nations working with the authority to try to stop that kind of danger.

We are not choosing between a situation in which there would be bloodshed on the one hand and absolute peace on the other. That is a fairy tale. We are dealing with a situation of grave danger. What we have to do is find a way in which we resolve that danger in a way that not only—

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps we should go on to the next question.