

Once that was done, the international community was faced with the question of how to resolve the situation. It is extremely difficult because the situation is very unstable.

The member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca pointed out some of the difficulties in that area. There is an enormous amount of tension. Politics does make strange bedfellows, and sometimes it makes estranged bedfellows.

The coalition that has come together uniquely and for the first time in our history to deal with the situation in the Middle East is a very fragile one, and when trying to identify the appropriate moment in history to decide that sanctions are not going to be effective and that it is appropriate to take additional steps to enforce the desire of the world to have order, and to deter aggression.

It is important to recognize that it is a very unstable situation. The cost of not acting is very high. Therefore, I think the actions of the United Nations made a great deal of sense when, after imposing sanctions, after countries of the world were prepared to go into Saudi Arabia to prevent further expansion of Iraq, the countries of the United Nations through the Security Council set a deadline because the situation was very clear. Either Iraq had an intention to abide by the resolutions of the Security Council, or it did not.

The problem with the analysis of sanctions is that there is an assumption there were sanctions in fact to intrude on Iraq's warmaking capability and that Iraq would withdraw from Kuwait. I think that is a highly questionable assumption.

On the contrary, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has pointed out that whatever the effect of sanctions are on Iraq, they have not been on its warmaking capability or on the strength of its military.

It is also naive to assume that were sanctions to begin to have that kind of effect and to begin to bite on the military capability of Iraq it would lead Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. The coalition that is in the Middle East now to deter aggression is unstable. There are many conflicting issues. The Middle East conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours is only one of them.

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The tension between the Arab Muslims who live there and the non-Arab Muslims who are there as part of foreign troops is also part of a very destabilizing difficult situation. Saddam Hussein has everything to gain by time because it enables him to pick his moment to try to destabilize the coalition. I can quite imagine what would happen if he began to feel that things were getting a little bit tight in terms of the interdiction of shipping, and it is a very loose set of sanctions. There certainly are back doors and very large holes in the sieve in terms of key military capability. It is not at all clear that such a situation would not in fact lead Saddam Hussein to take a desperate military act in the hopes of destabilizing the coalition and making it impossible for it to act. The longer the international coalition waits, the more difficult it is to act with cohesion because the more its internal inconsistencies will come into play.

• (2040)

We have a very rare and fragile situation there. It is a situation that has been made possible by a reduction in tensions in the cold war. I was very touched by the member for Mount Royal's reading of the letter from someone who had witnessed the events before World War II. It is appropriate not to overdraw historical analogies, but it is also important to learn the lessons of history.

Will we stop and think that one of the reasons the United Nations has been unable to function as an effective deterrent to aggression for the last 45 years is because of the legacy of the cold war? That legacy of the cold war is a legacy whereby tens and tens of millions of people have lived under a dictatorship and under oppression in the countries of eastern Europe.

I was born in 1947 right after the war; I am 43. There are people my age who have never known freedom and the reason they have lived under those situations is a direct result of the inability of the international community to deter aggression in the late 1930s.

We talk about the cost of not deterring aggression. It is a cost that is worn often by generation after generation. It is that direct cost of failing to deter aggression in the late 1930s which subsequently rendered as a result of the post-war regime whereby, as a result of World War II, the highly undemocratic Soviet Union was able to take over much of eastern Europe, countries which had been democratic prior to the war.