

*Oral Questions**[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it has been reported today that diplomatic sources and federal officials are deeply concerned that Canada's peacekeepers will be targeted by the warring factions in Bosnia and Croatia.

They say Canadian combat troops are entering one of the most dangerous conflict zones at a time when tensions are rising and fighting is escalating.

• (1125)

Given the government's expressed concern for the safety of our peacekeepers, why are we now sending more troops to Bosnia and Croatia?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that a variety of scenarios can exist on peacekeeping missions, particularly one of this nature where the requirements of the peacekeepers are so varied and different, whether it is in Croatia or in Bosnia.

He also knows that the Canadian forces have a number of contingency plans to counter any of these operations. We are prepared. We have contingency plans. He also knows that it would not be appropriate to divulge the contingency plans on the floor of the House of Commons. I see he is nodding, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the government's ad hoc approach to peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia is unacceptable. It is sending our soldiers into a war zone with no criteria to judge when that mission is accomplished.

We are heartened to hear that the military is drawing up secret evacuation plans but it should not need to because the government should not be placing our troops in danger for what looks to be a futile cause.

What criteria has the government established to decide when our troops are to be withdrawn?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps if the hon. member had a conversation with the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, who voted in favour of our troops in Yugoslavia, he may be enlightened as to what it is we are thinking about.

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): We still did not find out the criteria, Mr. Speaker.

The last time the government renewed our mandate in the former Yugoslavia, the minister said he would reconsider our participation if the situation on the ground changed. The situa-

tion did change. Canadian soldiers were taken hostage and the minister was powerless to act. Instead of learning from the past, the government is making the same mistake again.

Lord Owen is right. Our peacekeepers are the best in the world. The government should not be putting them into obvious danger. Will it reconsider its decision and move to withdraw Canadian peacekeepers now while it has the chance?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to correct what I said, there was no vote when we debated this a few nights ago.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca gave an eloquent discourse which indicated why he as a member of the third party supported our troops in continuing to discharge their mandate like the other 34 countries in the United Nations, no matter how tough it gets.

We don't quit when the going gets tough.

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*[Translation]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

This morning, we learned that five Airbuses bought in 1992 by the federal government from Canadian Airlines International, at a cost of \$250 million, are grounded eleven months per year. At the same time, the government has a \$45-million-a-year contract with that company, to transport military personnel.

How can the minister tolerate such a waste and, at the same time, hit the poor so hard by slashing \$307 million in this year's budget for social housing, and over \$6 billion in the UI program, in the last two budgets?

[English]

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question of the hon. member. Perhaps I could inform him and the House that the Canadian forces cannot afford to buy aircraft both for strategic airlift and for normal administrative movement of the troops.

The choice is to use either the airbus for strategic airlift and to contract out for administrative flights or to reverse it and to contract out for strategic airlift and use the airbus for administrative flights.

The hon. member may not be aware that we cannot rely on commercial aircraft for strategic airlift in time of crisis. We have decided to opt for using the airbus for strategic airlift, humanitarian purposes and for those things for which contingency plans are drawn up and may be required at a moment's notice.