

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today with a deep sense of humility and great pride. The humility is in the wake of those great Canadian orators and architects of our history who have stood here and shaped the course of Canadian history by the very debates and the decisions that they have made on issues such as this, on occasions when the debates have taken on the same amount of emotion, the same amount of dignity, and indeed the same amount of passion.

I stand here with pride which is in the reflection that this forum of legislative debate represents human liberty as we know it in Canada in its purest form yet devised. Here in the House of Commons, in Parliament, is centred the hopes and aspirations and the faith of the entire Canadian people. I know they are watching tonight, and I know they are trying to place semblance of order and sense in what is being debated.

I want to add also that I do not preach as an advocate for any partisan cause, because I believe the issues are fundamental and reach beyond the realm of partisan consideration on this side and on the other side of the House.

They must be resolved on the highest plain of national interest—and I stress “national interest”—if our course is to prove sound and our future is to be protected.

I trust that you, Mr. Speaker, and those watching and listening to this debate will do me the justice of receiving what I have to say as solely expressing the considered viewpoint of a concerned Canadian. Therefore, I address the House with one purpose in mind: to serve the best interest of our country.

For any civilized society to commence full scale war—that is what we are talking about here—surely requires that every viable alternative be exhausted first. Given the horror of destruction, disorder, and death that war necessarily entails by its definition, it must be the final resort.

I am not suggesting that the use of force should be ruled out. In fact, in the final analysis there are compelling circumstances that may demand a final, bloody solution to this crisis. But have those circumstances presented themselves yet? That is what this debate is all about. The issue is judgmental.

Although I was impressed by the speeches of the Prime Minister, my leader, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre on this issue, I have heard very little evidence that would convince me that the course of action that we take and decide today is clear and based on firm evidence that could be refuted in this, the highest court in the land.

The issue is what is in Canada's best national interest. There were a number of things in this debate that were in our interest. To begin with—I am not going to recite the history—it was in Canada's interest that the United Nations condemned the Iraqi assault on Kuwait. We in the House supported it.

It was in Canada's national interest to have multinational forces in the Persian Gulf. That received our support. It was in Canada's national interest to have economic sanctions against Iraq in a hope of convincing them to get out of Kuwait. We supported that.

It was in Canada's national interest to have the Canadian forces involved in the Persian Gulf to enforce these UN resolutions and that also received support from the House.

Now that Hussein, the master of brinkmanship, in the light of all this action does not blink, we want to resort to force. Is that in Canada's national interest?

No matter how I look at this issue and no matter how my emotions take me, whether it be to use force or to continue sanctions, because that seems to be the Y that we are at right now, I always have to bring myself back to the same question: What is in Canada's national interest?

To my mind, the debate on economic sanctions has not been satisfactorily resolved. I have evidence, suggestions, and ideas like others on what the embargoes can do. My latest information—you can draw your own judgment—is that the Bstockpiles in Iraq as of the end of September would last anywhere from four months to ten months.