

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member is inaccurate when he says that a Canadian forces spokesman confirmed.

An hon. member: It is in *The Globe and Mail*.

Mr. McKnight: The hon. member says it is in *The Globe and Mail*. Occasionally, without any disrespect to that fine paper, it does make a mistake.

I would say to the hon. member that the Canadian forces officer whom he is referring to said he could make an argument that protecting assets of nations that were collaborating in enforcing UN resolutions could be argued to be defensive.

That in no way says there has been a change in role. We are not involved in anything except those responsibilities that were outlined when the CF-18 squadron was sent into the Middle East. The Prime Minister, in announcing that decision, said that that squadron was there to defend Canadian vessels and assets, and those of other nations co-operating in the United Nations sanctions.

Hon. William Rompkey (Labrador): Mr. Speaker, I am assuming that the minister has confirmed that we have not, are not now and will not be flying escort for B-52 bombers. I understand that is what the minister has confirmed on the floor of the House today.

Let me ask him this: If war breaks out and if in addition to additional B-52 bombers, F-111s are sent, which our pilots have not been trained to escort, will additional CF-18s be sent to the gulf? Will our people be trained in proper procedures? Is this not still a contradiction and a change from the defensive policy that Canada has followed in the gulf so far?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, in the first part of my colleague's question he intimated that I confirmed. I confirmed nothing, as to the future tasks of the Canadian forces in their role in putting forward efforts along with other nations in supporting resolutions of the United Nations. What I did say, and I confirm to the hon. member at this time, that the CF-18 Canadian forces squadron is involved exactly as it was when the Prime Minister announced its deployment.

• (1440)

I will say to the hon. member, because he referred to training, that he knows, as well as other members in this House, that the Canadian forces pilots and their role and mission in NATO is that which allows them to have the training he referred to, to have the capacity and the skill. They are among the best trained pilots in the world, doing on behalf of Canadians what I am sure Canadians want them to do, and defending the United Nations and its resolutions.

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. There is in the Persian Gulf area right now quite an impressive array of force: 675,000 ground troops, 4,500 tanks, 150 warships, 1,500 combat aircraft and 13,000 combat vehicles for ground support. The co-ordination of such a force is an extraordinarily difficult task. Under the circumstances the method is recommended to be a United Nations commander with the United Nations chain of command.

Can the minister inform the House that such a structure and such a chain of command will pertain?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I am not too sure who the hon. member is referring to or who is making that recommendation that there be a United Nations commander and a United Nations command.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is fully aware as to the structures of command. The hon. member is fully aware as to how the NATO structure operates, which is similar to the structure under which Canadian forces and forces of some 30 plus other allied nations are operating in the Persian Gulf area.

The command is a national command. Tactical control, as he is fully aware, is occasionally chopped by nations. That means that tactical control of some Canadian assets may be under other nation. Tactical control of other nations' assets may be under Canadian command, but at all times the Canadian men and women who are serving at this time in the Persian Gulf are under Canadian national command.