

respective Parliaments and their Houses of Commons, to reflect how they plan to cope with these changes.

If there is any statement that I have made since I have been in the House of Commons, I will make one now that I am very sure of. I am usually sure of the statements that I make in the House of Commons but I do not always have agreement from my colleagues. In this one I know some of my hon. friends would agree when I make the statement that never before in our lifetime have the changes in the international scene been so vivid in their effects as in eastern Europe during the final weeks and indeed the opening months of this decade, 1990. People in the satellite nations of the Soviet Union have been struggling to throw off their oppressive chains. That gives us a great feeling. It makes us believe and it makes us perceive that they are coming around to our way of living. They are coming around to our beliefs, to accepting our values, and wanting to do things our way. I am one of those who is slow in perception when it comes to those kinds of things.

So dramatic and unpredictable are these changes that the NATO Alliance—it is not in disarray but I can assure you if I were given the list of the top 10 items of discussion in the NATO forums, in the passageways and in the private offices among the ambassadors nationally and internationally, I would say that in that top 10 it would certainly be how are we going to reorganize.

Military planners, external affairs planners and people who write white papers are asking what is the future of military organizations. What is the future of Canada's military force in this new decade? I am not going to take this opportunity to give my views on the dishevelled, out of date, and inappropriate white paper. I must say in all fairness I have a certain sympathy for the Minister of National Defence, his planners, writers and strategists in producing a white paper today that will be valid in a couple of days time.

I could not get off this platform now without commenting equally that even before the situation in the world changed, there were many pieces of evidence to indicate that even as the white paper was written and the strategic assessment, as it pertained at the time, the resolve to discharge the promises to Canadians, to those military people in uniform who believed that some of

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their problems in the previous few years were finally going to be redressed were not. There was a great disappointment which I believe has not been overtaken by events but made even more complex and disconcerting by the international situation that we find ourselves in today.

It is really a poignant comparison when I look at this legislation as it affects and involves civilians in those areas where there are wars and compare it to the situation where civilian lives are lost in Canada and the military has an involvement in the saving of these lives and the possible avoidance in the loss of some of these lives. I speak with a certain amount of experience, happy experiences in some cases and sad experiences in other cases.

I make reference now to the over 9,000 search and rescue incidents that take place in Canada almost on an annual basis. It varies plus or minus 10 per cent but the going average is 9,000. These are marine incidents, air incidents and incidents of other kinds. In addition, of course, there are the mercy flights that almost inevitably involve the men and women in the Canadian forces that in many cases are very much instrumental in saving lives, in relieving grief, suffering and pain and, indeed, in the ultimate case, in saving lives.

We should remember when we are putting our back to the wheel in this kind of a bill, when we are looking at the concerns of humans, human dignity and human rights in other countries, that we not forget that we have first and foremost a commitment in our own country to make sure that we do whatever possible and to the optimum extent to shape our forces, the force structure, and the basing of these forces. That should be a major concern. It should supersede and take priority over budgets, dollars, politics and, yes, Mr. Speaker, over everything, because it concerns people and living in Canada in peace now, today.

• (1240)

It is in that context that I would once more ask the Minister of National Defence to make sure that the decision that was made with respect to the demise of the tracker aircraft and the rebasing of search and rescue forces out of the Summerside area be done in a very measured sense, and to make sure that the margin, whether it is 1 per cent, 2 per cent, 5 per cent or even a