

Special Debate

nars in the context of PAC, Regional Forum and the Organization for American States.

We are also working with the Organization of African Union to improve the capability of African countries to better contribute to peacekeeping operations and preventive diplomacy.

I do not want to finish my speech on Bosnia-Herzegovina without mentioning to all members that we have gone beyond peacekeeping. We are looking at conflict prevention. We are looking at reforming the United Nations so that our peacekeepers can be sent with a much clearer mandate.

• (1930)

I appeal to all members who will be taking part in the debate tonight, to the independent members, to the members on our government side, to the members of the Bloc Québécois, the members of the Reform Party, to help the government make this important decision. Let us put our partisan politics aside. Let us hear what our constituents are telling us. Then we can make a very knowledgeable, intelligent and the right decision for Canada and hopefully for bringing peace to that area.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege for me to participate in this debate today on the participation of Canada in peacekeeping operations, and the one under way in the former Yugoslavia in particular.

However, before I go any further, allow me to share a few thoughts, as the Leader of the Opposition did, on how this emergency debate was called by the government.

First of all, what does the motion before us say? It says: "That this House, in the light of the UN Security Council consideration"—which, by the way, has not been done yet—"of renewed mandates for UN forces in the former Yugoslavia, take note of the rotation of Canadian Forces serving with UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia".

Mr. Speaker, the deadline is March 31, two days from now. With a deadline days away, the government decides to call an emergency debate, with 24 hours notice, on this issue.

We do not have the slightest idea of what the terms and conditions of this mandate will be that the UN Security Council will review. As I said, while the current mandate regarding Croatia is due to expire on March 31, the Security Council has yet to make a decision on a new mandate. We do not have the slightest idea what is involved here, if, for instance, there will be a reduction in forces, as the Croatian government has given to understand. We do not know whether troop rotation will take place. We do not know. What we do know, however, is that the

necessary logistic arrangements have already been made for Canadian troops to be rotated on Monday. That much we know.

In order to be able to prepare for this debate for which the government gave us very little time, with only a few hours notice, we managed to meet briefly, less than an hour actually, just two hours ago, with officials from the departments of National Defence and Foreign Affairs. And that was only possible because we had requested to meet with them; otherwise, I wonder if any information would have been made available to us. We were fortunate to receive, minutes ago, a number of backgrounders from DND.

How do you expect us to be able to make any significant contribution to a fundamental debate like this one under the circumstances?

This debate aimed at renewing—even if the motion talks of "taking note" of—Canada's peacekeeping mandate in the former Yugoslavia is somewhat inconsistent with the conclusions of the Special Standing Committee Reviewing Canada's Defence Policy and especially the dissenting report drafted at that time by the Bloc, which defines a number of criteria to be met for our participation in peacekeeping operations instead of making decisions on a piecemeal basis, as the Leader of the Opposition said. Again, we are acting on a case-by-case basis and that is disgraceful, given the recommendations in the report.

This shows the arrogance of this government, which took for granted that the opposition would give the motion its benevolent support. Why did it take this support for granted? Because, as the Leader of the Opposition said, we have no choice. How can we, at this stage, withdraw from the former Yugoslavia?

• (1935)

The government, riding the wave, decided to call a debate at the last minute, just before the end of the mandate, and force parliamentarians to settle this matter, thinking that it would obtain the benevolent and unanimous consent of this House.

This debate is all the more surprising in that, on March 14, as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs rightly pointed out, the Minister of Foreign Affairs appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. As the parliamentary secretary rightly pointed out, the minister asked Reform and Bloc representatives to state their positions on the renewal of the mandate of Canadian peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia.

The minister said the purpose of his initiative was to avoid having to hold a debate in the House. We very spontaneously stated our position to the minister, without having had time to prepare. In spite of that co-operation, we find ourselves in a debate on this issue. I fail to understand the logic of this government.