

Government Orders

members will take it lightly because it is very important that we underscore our commitment for them and the aims of the United Nations and peacekeeping in general.

In Canada this support for peacekeeping I believe is still there. We have heard about opinion polls that say Canadians want our people to withdraw. After hearing some of the comments from the other side and hopefully some from this side today, I think they will realize there is more to it than simple withdrawal and some of those concerns have already been expressed.

• (1225)

It is up to us as elected representatives to make the hard decisions about what Canada, and by extension our Canadian forces, should do. Peacekeeping continues to dominate our operational activities and this poses special challenges for the Canadian forces who must balance their peacekeeping commitments with their other national and international commitments.

Achieving this balance is not going to be easy. Our current peacekeeping and related missions are considerable in terms of both the sheer geographic reach of the Canadian forces and the different types of operation and commitment involved.

At the same time as the complexity and the cost of peacekeeping missions increase, here at home we are faced with the hard realities of declining budgets and reductions in the regular force. I made statements on that earlier and members will be hearing more about that as the weeks go on.

Let us face the truth. The more we cut back in our defence budget the more we restrict our ability to perform these essential peacekeeping tasks along with our other military obligations.

If Canadians wish to continue to be leaders in the field of peacekeeping and continue to make this important contribution to stability in troubled regions then Canadian forces must be adequately trained and appropriately equipped. In other words, they must be combat capable forces.

Finally, Canadians must accept the risk involved in sending our troops abroad to areas of recent or ongoing conflict.

We have seen where UN peacekeeping has been. While we cannot predict where it will go in the future it seems likely there will be a continuing need for UN involvement in the world's hot spots at least for the next few years. This will pose many challenges for us on the government side and for all Canadians. I invite members to think very carefully before they advocate a hasty withdrawal from the former Yugoslavia and perhaps reflect upon the continuation of our peacekeeping in general.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Tremblay (Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, we are very happy to take part in this debate on Bosnia, but the minister of defence will agree that the financial aspects will be dealt with in a few weeks, maybe as early as next week, when the budget comes down. For the time being we have to limit ourselves to our commitment to peace in the world, and especially in Bosnia.

Does the minister not think that considering a unilateral withdrawal of our troops, like the Prime Minister did, when those same troops under the United Nations mandate were responsible for disarming the Bosnian people, is rather unrealistic? Can we honestly say, after having disarmed the Bosnians, that we are seriously considering a unilateral withdrawal?

I understand how difficult the situation is and how difficult it is to find a solution. Nevertheless, we already acted in a certain way, particularly toward the Bosnian people, and the minister will admit that it is rather difficult, indeed impossible, to withdraw now and leave the Bosnian people at the mercy of the Serbs.

Mr. Collenette: I would say, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member answered his own question. He underlined a very important point, and I hope other members will also give me their opinion on that point.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, as I said a few minutes ago, when I went to Croatia, I met our troops in the southern part of the country where problems abound. The commanding officer over there, Colonel Marc Lessard, gave me a briefing on the situation. Once again I would like to pay tribute to the courage of the soldiers working in that region and in the other parts of Croatia and Bosnia. Colonel Lessard mentioned some problems which I hope the minister will look at closely in order to find a solution. We talked about three main problems: first, the insufficient number of soldiers at BATCAN I. According to Colonel Lessard, they need more people, 49 additional peacekeepers for example, to increase our infantry sections from 9 to 10 persons. Second, they need mechanics, cooks and other people if they are to do their work properly. Third, there seems to be a problem with the vehicle pool and with supplies.

• (1230)

Having given the minister the details I ask him to promise he will seriously consider Colonel Lessard's requests concerning the resources our military in Croatia need to accomplish their important task.

[English]

Mr. Collenette: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member functioning as a go between with our members on the ground in