

*Special Debate*

Throughout the first two months of 1995 the agreement held with only minor violations. By late February violations had increased and most observers do not expect a ceasefire to last beyond the next few weeks. We hope that common ground may be found between the parties whereby an agreement may be extended. One can only hope that these negotiations begin very quickly.

On the current diplomatic situation on the UN mandate, it is useful to set the tone. This is the backdrop by which we will perhaps redeploy our troops starting next week.

● (1835)

President Tudjman, after considerable pressure, very courageously decided to re-evaluate his original thinking. He agreed to a continuation of an albeit smaller UN reformulated presence, a different kind of mandate. It is more along the traditional peacekeeping lines that Canada participated in during our years in Cyprus whereby we work the line between two hostile factions.

President Tudjman envisages a new independent force to be established. This new mission should help to implement the ceasefire agreement and it should assist in the implementation of the economic agreement, the one I mentioned earlier. It should also put in place elements of the existing UN peacekeeping plan for Croatia. That continues to be accepted by both parties, including the maintenance of UN presence on international borders as well as confidence building and humanitarian measures such as assistance to refugees and displaced persons, protection of ethnic minorities, mine clearance, convoy assistance and the like.

As the current UNPROFOR mandate expires in two days, the UN must reach some kind of agreement on the renewal of its presence. The United Nations is now working very closely with all the parties involved to reach a workable agreement on this continued UN presence. Canada has been a party to many of these discussions.

The UN secretary-general has proposed three distinct missions in the region to meet the unique circumstances in Croatia, Bosnia and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

Canada's position is that we say to Canadians we know their feelings of pride in Canada in trying to assist in this very difficult situation in the heart of Europe. Canadians have been quite happy to do their part with their continued presence in both Croatia and Bosnia. We also understand that Canadians are becoming a little bit concerned that this deployment not be open ended and that we not continue ad infinitum.

I think we were in Cyprus for about 29 years. We do not plan to be in Bosnia and Croatia for 29 years. We on the government's part are obviously re-evaluating our commitment to the region.

We do not want to walk out on our allies, on the UN. We have all been in this together. We believe there can be a negotiated settlement.

From a Canadian point of view, we hope that we can start to reduce our presence in the region somewhat but at the same time try to continue the good work we have been involved in. In other words, we believe that perhaps with a reformulated mandate in Croatia and a heightened Canadian presence there, we may be able to more effectively contribute in that area. That would be for the UN to decide whether or not it wants us to continue in both theatres, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, or whether or not it wants us to concentrate our efforts in Croatia.

These are the questions with which we are grappling at this time. Canada certainly is willing to continue to do its part in the region. We feel it is incumbent upon the government to listen to the views of members of Parliament.

As I said, two battalions of the Royal 22nd Regiment are ready to deploy. We have about 2,100 people in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia. We have another 400 to 500 in the area generally, the UN observers, the people with Operation Sharp Guard on our ships, and the people who have been involved in the airlift operation of supplies to Sarajevo. We have quite a commitment in the region.

Before I conclude, I want to underscore Canada's willingness to be flexible in helping the UN address the concerns. I also want to underscore the fact that Canada's commitment in this particular operation cannot last indefinitely.

● (1840)

We believe Canadians want us to review our participation. They welcome the views of parliamentarians to see whether we should continue with this particular rotation for another six months and perhaps talk about scaling down in the fall after we have further discussions. Perhaps the Croatian force itself, the idea of it, will become a bit more mature and well defined.

Perhaps the best posture for us to take is to continue with this rotation. As I said in the House the other day, we do have flexibility. We could decide not to rotate. We could keep some of our troops there for a number of weeks while alternate arrangements are made. Obviously, getting so close to the wire with a number of scenarios unfolding, especially with the new force in Croatia, we feel that may be very difficult to do from the point of view of the UN. We do not want to let the UN down.

However, we do believe we are coming very close to the point when Canada has to make some significant changes in its commitment in the region. We welcome any ideas the UN may have for continued Canadian presence which will demonstrate to Canadians that we are just not there indefinitely performing the same valuable functions, but that we are making progress