

Oral Questions

This morning I met with Mr. Rushdie and the group of Canadian authors who are extremely preoccupied by this problem. They think Canada could make another gesture and I would like to know if it would not be possible for the Prime Minister to make some time available today to receive these Canadian authors and Mr. Rushdie?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has already met on behalf of the government with Mr. Rushdie, who I understand conveyed publicly his gratitude to me on behalf of the government for the actions we have taken in his defence over the years.

The government has facilitated his trip here and is taking every precaution that we can on his behalf. As I say, the secretary of state had an excellent meeting with him this morning and hopefully there will be other occasions in the near future.

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PEACEKEEPING

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

During the almost two months that the House will be in recess thousands of Canadian troops will be serving in very risky circumstances in Somalia, Bosnia and other peacekeeping missions around the world.

Given the many unanswered questions and many unanticipated circumstances that these troops will face, I think the minister would agree that Canadians would want Parliament to be in a position to monitor these operations and to make sure there is a clear accountability for any decisions taken.

I would ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs if she would commit to putting into place a regular system of reporting similar to that which was introduced during the gulf war so that reports can be received by a joint committee of the external affairs and defence committees of this House. In this way any decisions, any changes, will be clearly reported to the Canadian people and Parliament will exercise its proper function of being responsible for the troops in these situations.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I find really interesting about this request for a democratic process in this House is that in all the months I have

been making public statements concerning the situation in Somalia, the first question asked by a member of the opposition was last week. It seems to me that if there was parliamentary interest, there was certainly means of raising this earlier.

Having said that, let me say we have spoken to the military and there will be public briefings on the situation with our troops. There will be briefings on the situation once it is determined when our troops are to be deployed and throughout that process.

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister and I remind her that this House was closed most of the time since last June so this is no time for sarcasm.

Yesterday the Secretary of State for External Affairs indicated that a decision is imminent concerning Canada's future peacekeeping role in Cyprus. Today media reports are rife with announcements that Canada will pull out half of our forces by next March and the remaining troops by December 1993.

Is the minister prepared to settle this question of Cyprus with proper debate in the House of Commons or must Canadians consult *Newsworld* as our forum for foreign policy?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, clearly it is the responsibility of the government to take these decisions on the advice of the military and on where Canada can most effectively deploy its military, whether it is through peacemaking or peacekeeping.

I am sure that the hon. member will be glad to know that his curiosity will be satisfied some time this week. We will say publicly what is our intention in Cyprus.

Hon. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. The hon. minister has opened new territory when she said we will ask for political advice from the military.

It is not for the military to decide whether or not we stay in Cyprus. It is a political decision. We would like to be consulted in that kind of political decision. It is our belief that we should not withdraw at this time.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the advice of the hon. member. It is a government responsibility to take that decision. He is right. It is a political decision which we take after consultation and upon discussion with our military people who advise us