

For over three years now, the UN troops deployed in the former Yugoslavia have been working valiantly to minimize the effects of the war on the civilian population and to keep the conflict from spilling over into the neighbouring countries. A number of soldiers have paid for these efforts with their lives, and I would like to pay tribute to them today. Nor must we forget the tragic death of Mr. Irfan Ljubijankic, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Our governments recognize and accept all the risks involved in peacekeeping operations. But this cannot diminish in any way the pain felt by the families of those who have died, or the anxiety felt for the soldiers who are there now carrying out the task assigned to them by the international community.

To illustrate the great concern felt by Canada over this issue, our Parliament yesterday held a four-hour emergency debate on the situation in the former Yugoslavia.

The dramatic events of recent days have crystallized public attention around the role played by UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They have also brought to the fore the question of whether the UN and the international community are really capable of promoting conditions that can lead to the cessation of hostilities and bring the belligerents back to the negotiating table. The parties to the conflict are very aware of the media impact of the current crisis on the voters in our countries and will continue to do everything they can to play on the frustration and impatience of public opinion.

So far we have been able to convince our publics of the importance of this operation, despite the periodic crises that have arisen. However, the use of hostages as human shields against NATO air strikes and the confrontations between UNPROFOR and the Bosnian Serb forces mean that this time we must seriously question the credibility of the UN forces and of the international community's efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

The present crisis brings us up against a number of contradictory aspects of the UNPROFOR mandate, mainly where the "safe areas" and the "exclusion zones" and the use of force to support humanitarian aid operations are concerned. The situation also brings to light the discordant nature of the actions taken by various players. The lack of a strong consensus in the Security Council and in the Contact Group, certain diplomatic initiatives that have been taken, the differing views among groups of troop-contributing countries, all these factors leave the door open for manipulation by the parties to the conflict. This way of doing things, too often dictated by domestic policy considerations and narrow national interests, cannot be allowed to continue.

At this crucial time for the future of UNPROFOR, Canada believes that three conditions must be met if the international community is to take back the initiative.