

Oral Questions

Minister acknowledged in the House yesterday that a security gap did, in fact, exist.

How can the Deputy Prime Minister say, as he did in the House yesterday, that "The security arrangements were those that could best achieve security for the Embassy"? How can the provision of one outside security guard from a private firm be considered to be adequate security?

Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree with the futility of the statement of the Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs when he said: "There is no defence against these types of attacks"? Has the Government thrown up its hands?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): No, of course not, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. gentleman knows that, whatever degree of security is provided in any given circumstance, if breached, it compels one to the logical conclusion that it was not enough. Wherever there have been similar instances throughout the world, despite far more intensive security arrangements than those which exist here, and in far different circumstances, when they are breached, they are breached. One must question the adequacy whenever there is a breach.

With respect to the satisfaction which the right hon. gentleman mentioned, the arrangements at the Turkish Embassy were very recently reviewed, indeed as recently as last month. At that time the Turkish Embassy expressed satisfaction with the security arrangements. It would be inappropriate to make any assumption other than that the Turkish Embassy, in expressing satisfaction, was expressing the views of the Turkish Government.

PROTECTION OF EMBASSIES—RCMP REPORT

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I find it rather sick that the Solicitor General yesterday, in defending the Government's measures in protecting that Embassy, descended to a criticism of the former Liberal administration. By way of preamble, to match the time you allowed the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra):—the previous Liberal administration left the new Government new legislation, namely, Part IV of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, which gave the Government more enforcement procedures. In the 1984-85 Estimates, the Government brought before Parliament a \$14.1 million item which improved security systems and measures at foreign embassies. The former Solicitor General, the Hon. Member for York Centre, ordered a report from the RCMP which he did not receive—contrary to what the current Solicitor General has said—but the present Government received it the moment it was sworn into office. That report recommended the upgrading of the physical protection of embassies in Ottawa. Why then, in view of this reinforcement, was no action taken?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the exchange we had yesterday, and the one today, will be kept on a non-partisan basis, having regard to the nature of the incident, which is historic for Canada, which occurred yesterday.

With respect to the report to which the right hon. gentleman referred, that report came out in June of last year and it was acted upon.

In response to his first question, I indicated to him that the security arrangements at that particular Embassy were reviewed as recently as last month. It was with the results of that review that the Turkish Embassy concurred.

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Again I re-emphasize that, as tragic as the events of yesterday were, one can question the adequacy of security, whatever the degree, whenever that security is breached. The whole matter is now under intensive review with respect to the circumstances of yesterday and how we can best address the provision of security to all of our embassies in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have noted the Deputy Prime Minister's remark about the non-partisan aspect of security measures, and that would have been the procedure followed in this House had not the Solicitor General decided to open up the question, dodge responsibility for his Government, and try to lay it on a previous Government. I am suggesting quite clearly to the Deputy Prime Minister that this Government failed to act quickly enough to implement the report with the money which had been left at the disposal of the Government. Yesterday's attack should have been anticipated in view of the previous incidents having to do with the Turkish Embassy. It is clear that the terrorists seized that Embassy rather too quickly and too readily.

Therefore, my question to the Deputy Prime Minister is: did the Government fail to act on the specific measures suggested by the RCMP in that previously mentioned report, to upgrade the protection for the Turkish Embassy and other embassies? And if action was taken, when was it taken? The Deputy Prime Minister mentions a month ago. I would like a little more specific response to the general nature of that report.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Well, Mr. Speaker, the right hon. gentleman is not going to get specific details of that report. He knows full well that it would be prejudicial and inimical to the interests of security itself—

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): If we get some straight answers, then security will be improved.

Mr. Nielsen:—to be discussing that kind of detail on the floor of the House of Commons. I have said twice now, in