

Special Debate

Canada when he was its ambassador for two years and when he was in charge of distributing food to the starving in Ethiopia.

I hope Canada will get the same reputation in Somalia as we have in Ethiopia. It was very heart-warming when the embassy car would stop at the stoplights or if we were walking along the street the children and elders would be whispering or shouting Canada, Canada. I hope we will leave the same kind of reputation in Somalia.

Canadians have watched the scenes of horror in Somalia and I am sure that we all agree that something must be done to get humanitarian aid to the starving. The main question is what is the best course of action?

Last Thursday the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 794 which calls for an unprecedented effort to ensure the proper delivery of emergency relief supplies throughout Somalia. This decision is the first in which the United Nations has intervened in a country's internal affairs with a mandate to use offensive force if necessary. In my opinion, this is the most significant decision taken by the Security Council since the gulf war.

Since 900 Canadian lives are going to be placed on the front lines of this extraordinary relief effort, the decision to send our troops deserves close examination and debate by this House. Our task as members of Parliament is to reflect the concerns of all Canadians, especially the families of Canadian forces personnel who are sacrificing Christmas at home and who must accept the risk that our ground forces will be far more vulnerable to attack than our participation in the gulf war.

I am naturally concerned, therefore, that the Secretary of State for External Affairs announced last Friday that Canada will participate in this U.S. led force without consulting Parliament first and not announcing it in this House when she had the opportunity.

The hon. member for Northumberland in Question Period on Friday asked the secretary of state whether we would be committing troops or not. The secretary of state had a golden opportunity to make that announcement in this House. What did she do? She ran out to the media and made the announcement to them. Despicable behaviour.

Security Council Resolution 794 is a significant departure from our conventional understanding of peacekeeping. In fact, we are breaking new ground with the risky and untried proposition of peacemaking. My party supports this decision of the United Nations to take firmer action in Somalia but we must be convinced that this is the best course of action to get food and aid to the starving and the ill in that country.

What about the promise by President Bush to pull U.S. forces out by next January? Where does that leave the multinational force? Where does that leave the Canadian troops? Where does that leave the neighbouring Ethiopian forces that, with limited resources, will also be participating?

We are intervening in a civil war without any guarantee that the prime motivator of this action, the United States, is willing to finish what it starts. We could be faced with another protracted conflict, the likes of which could go on for years. We risk diving into an open-ended conflict with no game plan after mid-January. Do we really think that we can solve all of Somalia's problems in less than two months? Is it fair to the people of Somalia to restore the peace for one day and then hastily retreat out the back door? I would like to know the government's game plan before we commit to a multinational force. Clearly there is a need to finish what we start in Somalia.

I agree with taking the first step. If we do so, we must be prepared to take the responsibility of ensuring long-term security in the region. Otherwise all our efforts will be wasted on the warlords who will resume the war as soon as the multinational force departs from the country.

It is also not clear to me who is responsible for the financial commitment to restore the vital infrastructure and the democratic institutions in Somalia. Is it simply expected that the United States will stick the international community for the bill as it always has done with the United Nations? The Secretary-General, I understand, is authorized to set up a fund to pay for the operation and that is fair. However, I must ask the United Nations, why are Canadian taxpayers paying \$14 million per annum for our troops in Cyprus? I just visited these troops a week ago.

Is it fair that the countries who commit the troops and other resources are the ones that pick up the tab or