

lot of things that I will not mention today because it is not the time to do it. So, when I was told, on short notice, that this debate would be resumed, I had to sit down and cleanse my thoughts because events have taken a decided turn. I have to wonder whether or not this House right now has a hell of a lot of relevancy for Canadians. We are sitting here after Canadian troops have been engaged in a war. We are still debating a motion which was put before this House, which I said at the beginning of the debate, was an intellectually dishonest motion.

An hon. member: That's right.

An hon. member: Right on.

An hon. member: A fraud.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): I will try my level best not to be partisan here because it is not a place to be partisan, but I think the people of Canada have to question the role of parliamentarians, of every political party, and of the relevancy of this institution.

We were on the brink of war up until yesterday, with every heart, every mind and every soul in Canada praying and hoping for a peaceful resolution. That is what everybody here wants and it is not a matter of party line. I know my colleagues in this House. Not one of them sought war. But the debate did not take place.

We still have this motion put forward and I am supposed to speak to it today. The motion talks about UN sanctions, UN resolutions and all this kind of thing. In actual fact, Canadians as well as members on all sides of the House were hanging by their fingernails when we should have been debating the potential role of Canada in the Middle East conflict. That is what we should have been doing, but we did not do it.

We were elected by our people to govern this country, in opposition or in government. I think one of the most important decisions we will ever make is whether or not we as parliamentarians send people to war for whatever reason: good, bad or otherwise. We were not debating it; we were debating some motion that had no relevancy.

I have received more calls from more people in my riding who are absolutely disgusted with what we have done in this place. They wanted to know why we could not for once drop the partisanship. They wondered why in the name of goodness, when we are dealing with life

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and death issues, we could not for once have a real debate here.

It is not a debate on GST, which may be important. We all wound ourselves up for that great debate, did we not? It is not a debate about taxation or about fiscal policy. It is a debate that has the real and irrevocable consequences that somebody, because of our decision, may lose his life or could come back injured. It is not something we can change, once the decision is made.

We are at war today. Suffice it be for me to talk about the frustration felt by me and I think by every member of Parliament over our inability to control those circumstances and situations that happened thousands of miles from here.

Our troops are at war. I and my colleague from Halifax come from an area that has a strong military tradition. As I have said before, men and women who were first sent over by this government to participate in enforcing the sanctions against Iraq primarily live in this area. They may not be from our area, but we have them based there. This is where the Canadian navy on the east coast is based. They have contributed greatly to the economy in our area and to the community.

When the sterile debates about what goes on take place, it is hard for me to raise myself above it and just say it is a matter of right or wrong, because it is a matter of people. I see them every day. When I go shopping, I see them.

What we need to do now is to understand truly what these people are doing for our country and for the Parliament. They have chosen to serve and are serving proudly. They are in the Middle East. Their families are terrified. Their kids are scared. But they understand that this was an eventuality when they joined the Canadian Armed Forces. They are serving proudly. I have talked to some of the families this morning. They are happy to see for once that the Canadian Parliament is unanimous in supporting the activities of those men and women in the Middle East.

I think it is a time for us all to reflect. It is a time for us to reflect on the impact of our decisions here in this place. We do not know how long this war is going to take. We hope it is over now. We pray that the loss of life is minimal. We want our men and women of the Canadian