

Mr. Speaker:

I want to address the House this afternoon about one of the strongest and most enduring traditions of Canadian foreign policy, our commitment to peacekeeping. Almost 40 years ago, in the midst of international crisis in the Middle East, the Canadian Foreign Minister, Lester B. Pearson, first developed the modern concept of peacekeeping. That idea defused an explosive international crisis, and led to a peaceful disengagement of warring parties under the United Nations flag.

Since the creation of the first United Nations Emergency Force in 1956, under the leadership of a Canadian, Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. Burns, there have been 26 other UN peacekeeping missions. In every case Canada has participated in some way. Canadians have served with distinction in all 16 peacekeeping operations currently under way in the UN. More than 3000 Canadians are currently deployed in eight international operations, while helping the UN Secretary-General with the planning of two other missions in which some 700 Canadians might eventually be called to serve. This is a unique record of achievement of which all Canadians should be proud.

A decade ago, the UN had only three active peacekeeping missions, involving very few troops. But the end of the Cold War, the outbreak of ethnic and nationalist conflict, the new co-operation among the members of the Security Council — these factors have changed the peacekeeping equation. The United Nations has been empowered to act where once there was stalemate. As a result, the UN is now becoming the instrument of international co-operation which was the world community's hope in 1945. The Security Council is now using peacekeeping as a central instrument to bring about peaceful change, particularly in countries ravaged by civil war.

Canada is one of the UN'S strongest supporters. Next week, at the United Nations, I will be putting forward suggestions for making the organization more responsive to a new era in which peacekeeping and related tasks will become even more central to its mandate. But we've also recognized in recent months, pending the implementation of these vital reforms, that the UN has more peacekeeping mandates than it can realistically handle, involving a variety of tasks which the international community is ill-equipped to manage.

It therefore seems a useful time to take stock of the situation, and to ask ourselves a series of questions about peacekeeping. What are Canada's national interests in the new era of peacekeeping? How should we play a role in the more diverse and demanding era which is now confronting us? How should we deploy our very valuable resources abroad at a time of fiscal constraint at home? How should we support the UN in a time of transition to new and more demanding tasks?