

Government Orders

had too many instances of people's lives being left to the mercy of dictators and despots.

Today, people say that if we had intervened in many of these situations earlier, we might have saved millions of innocent victims. When one considers the events that have already occurred in Bosnia with the United Nations presence, imagine what a future without the United Nations intervention would mean for the people of Bosnia. One wonders if today's ethnic cleansing will become tomorrow's genocide.

I do not believe that Canadians are prepared to condemn the people of Bosnia to such a fate. Our intervention, no matter how troublesome or frustrating, certainly is preferable to permitting the genocide of one or more of the ethnic groups in Bosnia.

It is obvious that the only acceptable way to resolve this conflict is through negotiation. Unfortunately, it appears that the various factional leaders have little incentive to resolve the issue.

Some would even suggest that the presence of the United Nations peacekeepers has provided the leaders of the various factions with an excuse not to come to a quick resolution. They would suggest that all sides should experience the effects of a full scale war so they can fully appreciate the horrors of such warfare. This they argue would give the negotiators the incentive to reach a peace agreement. Perhaps it would, but what would be the cost in human lives?

Tens of thousands of Bosnians have already lost their lives in this conflict and thousands more will likely die. However, the toll would likely have been in the hundreds of thousands without our involvement. Unfortunately we must wait for the various leaders to reach a settlement on their own.

Canada and the rest of the international community must continue to pressure the warring factions to reach an acceptable peace. We have to impress upon these leaders that military victories resulting in territorial gains will not be internationally recognized. We have to impress upon them that the prize for their aggression will be a total isolation from the world community.

I think that Canadians recognize the fact that Canada cannot afford to be the peacekeeper to the world. It is a credit to our military that we are in such popular demand for the role. Our reputation as peacekeepers is unparalleled and it is a good reputation to have. Nevertheless Canada does not have the money to send its troops into every dispute.

Reality dictates that we have to pick and choose our assignments. The planned review of the Canadian Armed Forces is a good step in determining the extent to which Canada should be involved in these missions.

Canadians are going to have to decide just what resources we are prepared to commit to these endeavours. It is a noble role but such nobility does not come cheap. It is the Canadian taxpayer who will have to decide the extent to which they are prepared to underwrite these missions. However, this is for future roles.

• (1915)

The reality of today is that rightly or wrongly Canadian troops are in Bosnia. It is also reality that this is not a great situation to be in. We have asked our peacekeepers to attempt to keep a peace that does not exist. As our troops attempt to keep three warring ethnic groups from killing each other, we have found that we are ending up being hated by all three sides. We really have entered into a classic no win situation.

Critics of Canada's presence in Bosnia can probably list dozens of valid reasons why we should not be there. In return, I can offer only one good reason why we have to remain. It is for the simple reason that without us the situation would be a lot worse. These people are dependent upon the UN force to keep them alive.

It is an unfortunate reality but Canadians are showing a greater concern for the fate of the Bosnian people than their own leaders. This concern or compassion may force us to make an occasional impractical decision, but it is also a virtue that makes this country such a wonderful place to live.

Canadians have been fortunate to face precious little political violence in their history. We do not have to worry that when our children are outside playing in the snow some artillery shell is going to land in their midst and kill them. Perhaps it is for this reason that Canadians should be in Bosnia.

We need to do whatever we can to help the rest of the world achieve peace. We must keep a window open for negotiations to take place in the hope of a peaceful resolution. We have to show them that we care.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Surrey—White Rock—South Langley on her intervention in this debate.

This is an important debate in the House of Commons. I am pleased that we are starting off in such a fashion. It allows members to rise without fear of retribution by party whips when they take the personal positions they feel on this very important issue. I commend her on her remarks. They were delivered very well and there was a lot of substance to them.

I have a concern that I want to share with my colleague who just made her remarks. As I said earlier, I support the peacekeeping mandate of the Canadian forces over and over again. Indeed I commend the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces for the excellent job they have done over the last number of decades. However the reality is that in this current situation the United Nations has found itself to be desperately wanting in