

Oral Questions

their mandate is redefined. We have decided not to send additional troops for the time being.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it will be noted that I spoke of heavier equipment and more effective weapons and that the answer remains: "We have not made any decision". And so we are still in the dark. This is indeed worrisome, Mr. Speaker.

When decisions guiding international action in Bosnia are made by the contact group, how does the Prime Minister explain Canada's sending the fifth largest contingent to Bosnia and Croatia without being a member of the contact group, unlike the United States and Germany, which are members without having sent a single peacekeeper there?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I explained that 25 countries are represented with troops in the former Yugoslavia, and that most of them are not in the contact group. These countries include Spain, Holland, Denmark, Canada, Pakistan and others that are there.

We are in contact with these people at the moment, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is in contact with his counterparts in the group. A NATO meeting was held this morning; there will be another one tomorrow, I think. And there is talk of a meeting of defence ministers on the weekend. So the Minister of National Defence will be there, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is already there. I said that, as regards the Canadian position at this point, there is no need to send new equipment; what we have there now is satisfactory.

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The public is concerned about the fate of the 380 peacekeepers, including 10 Canadians, held hostage by the Bosnian Serbs as well as 45 other Canadian soldiers surrounded by the Serbs. The base in Valcartier has received 1,200 calls from relatives concerned about the safety of the soldiers deployed in the former Yugoslavia.

Given that the public worries about the fate of our peacekeepers in Bosnia and that negotiations to secure the release of the Canadian hostages have yet to produce concrete results, how can the government be so vague—like the Prime Minister's response—about its position on the current crisis in Bosnia, when France, Great Britain and the U.S. have already announced concrete actions? These soldiers' families want concrete actions and decisions.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said that we participated in all the weekend discussions. I have been in contact with the leaders of the governments

that have troops over there, like Great Britain and France, and with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Some of our soldiers are in a difficult position but they are not very far from the base in Visoko, and we are in contact with those who have been captured and those who are in a non-mobile position, so to speak. Two Canadians are held outside that area, one of them in Pale, and we were able to communicate with him in the last few hours.

Unfortunately, we have not heard recently from Corporal Lapalme, who is in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, and with whom we are currently trying to establish contact. So far, however, we can assure the families that we are staying in contact with everyone involved, with the exception of Corporal Lapalme, and we are doing everything in our power to ensure that they remain alive. Our current approach is probably the best way of securing their release as soon as possible.

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is also for the Prime Minister.

Given that everyone agrees that the peacekeepers' mandate should be redefined—although the Minister of National Defence was unable to do so yesterday—and that we are waiting for the United Nations' response, how does the Canadian government propose to redefine the UN mandate of Canadian peacekeepers?

[English]

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said we took an initiative on that. Last week we discussed the mandate with the United Nations.

I will repeat in the House that we have to make sure troops are not spread around like they are at the moment. We would like them to be concentrated in places where they can defend themselves and be defended by other people at the bases. That is the main preoccupation. When they are alone in observation towers, for instance, they are in some difficulty because they cannot readily defend themselves.

That is exactly what the UN is considering at the moment, to give peacekeepers a role more in relation to the means they have. The troops are under the command of the United Nations there and the secretary general is supposed to present new guidelines to the security council possibly later today.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in the last 24 hours the UN's mandate in the former Yugoslavia is being shifted from a focus on peacekeeping to aggressive peacemaking.

• (1425)

Britain has announced it will be sending 5,000 more troops. France is committing an aircraft carrier and helicopter gun