

Government Orders

We are not a part of that evolution, not at the decision table. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs gave a very detailed explanation of what is going on, blow by blow, chronologically, at the political table, with respect how our allies are dealing with the circumstances in Bosnia–Hercegovina.

Should we then be considering just simply this question of peacekeeping, or should we be addressing peacekeeping per se?

I know you want to give me just another moment to close off, Mr. Speaker. That is the unfortunate part of having only 10 minutes to speak. I will use the next 55 seconds to close off.

• (2205)

What we should do as a House is draw our attention to some of the good initiatives that have been proposed by both sides of this House. For example, I am pleased to have presented a proposal in 1989 to convert one of our military bases into an international peacekeeping training centre. For my colleagues on the Reform side this would have generated some \$80 million a year and provided nations throughout the world with an opportunity to avail themselves of the expertise, both military and paramilitary, for application in peacetime and in conflict resolution throughout the world.

That idea did not receive all the attention it deserved but Canadian Forces Base Cornwallis is still being considered. Mr. Speaker, I know that you will allow me to encourage my colleagues on the government side to reconsider and to focus on a re-evaluation of where we should be. We should be where our obligations have taken us. Let us discharge those and then focus again on how to best to utilize the materiel and expertise we have built up.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eleni Bakopanos (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, this being my first speech in the House, I would like to start by congratulating you on your appointment to the chair. I would also like to thank my constituents of Saint-Denis for giving me their support. I am very proud as a Canadian and Quebecer of Greek origin—the first woman of Greek origin to be elected to this House—to be representing them here, today.

[English]

The riding of Saint-Denis is in many ways a microcosm of what Canada is today. With cultural communities representing every corner of the globe, the issue of peacemaking or peacekeeping is of great concern to my constituents and the reason that I rise before you today.

[Translation]

I am convinced that the Canadian peacekeepers presently in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, and especially in Bosnia, should not be withdrawn.

[English]

Canada has a very important role to play in resolving this conflict. To pull out now would be abandoning our responsibility to the international community and moreover abandoning our ideals as a nation which pioneered the concept of peacekeeping. We have come a long way from the failure of the League of Nations in preventing global conflict to the far more successful formula for peacekeeping established in the United Nations. Crises will exist but we must never give up searching for solutions to prevent conflict.

With its long and distinguished tradition of peacekeeping, Canada has a moral responsibility to help bring about a solution by easing the level of tension and mistrust that has plagued the former Yugoslavia. No enemies are irreconcilable if they can learn to know and respect each other.

[Translation]

It is a well known fact that the United Nations peacekeeping operations are in serious trouble in some places, the former Yugoslavia and Somalia in particular. However, we can say that, on the whole, peacekeeping operations have had a positive effect. For example, while Mogadishu remains tense and unstable, the rest of Somalia is demonstrating a tremendous recovery capacity. Is it not marvellous to realize that, thanks to the United Nations peacekeeping operation, Somalis are no longer dying of starvation? And what about the remarkable success in Cambodia? That country went through a long and traumatic period, but can now look forward to a better future.

[English]

As I mentioned, there are several difficulties that UN peacekeepers and especially our own troops are encountering in the former Yugoslavia. Perseverance, not withdrawal will lead to a positive outcome, the outcome that we have been working toward for nearly two years.

[Translation]

Our peacekeepers are now playing an essential role, preventing bloodbaths. There would no doubt have been many more civilian casualties had it not been for them. To pull them out at this time would trigger an escalation of violence.

• (2210)

Besides, in assessing the value of our peacekeeping action, we will have to be careful not to trigger hostilities which would only get our troops bogged down in that conflict.

[English]

The action in December of the four European union states which established diplomatic relations with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia have increased the possibility of yet another outbreak of violence in the Balkans. It is the same premature recognition of Bosnia–Hercegovina that contributed