

*Government Orders*

ideas of going about planning our defence business, both our policy and our budget, in a different manner.

I want also to say at the outset that if I say anything that alarms or confuses people, I apologize for that. Certainly that is not my intention. While I do sit on this side of the House, it is not my intention this morning, although I can do it and have done it, to be partisan. On any views that I express, I would ask my colleagues on the other side of the Houses to bear that in mind.

Looking at the what, Mr. Speaker, by way of review, just very quickly, right now as I stand in this House of Commons and if my information is correct as of last night at nine o'clock, we have 1,488 members of the Canadian forces, men and women, in the Middle East. They are deployed in three ships, HMCS *Athabaskan*, *Terra Nova*, and *Protecteur*. I am delighted to say parenthetically that at one point in time in my career I managed to have these three ships under my command.

We have an element of the CF-18 fighter squadron now based in Qatar in the Middle East, essentially from 409 squadron, but I know there are elements from 421 squadron and I believe some from the air maintenance squadron, number one air maintenance squadron and indeed perhaps even elements of the other squadron in Germany, that is 439.

Why did we take this action in Canada? I think it is very important to understand at the outset why we are there. There have been all kinds of accusations made as to why we participated in this. I would like to think of this with a clear and objective mind and the best way I can put it—and I wrote it down last night—is that, in my opinion, we took action not out of national hunger for conflict, but presumably out of the moral responsibilities shared by committed nations to protect the world from a very evil force.

I believe that we cannot remain silent in these kinds of things because peace is more than just the absence of war and its preservation by our world system and world order extracts an obligation.

I am delighted, as a Canadian and as a former member of the Canadian forces, to see that we as a country exerted and extracted this obligation from the Canadian people. We met our commitment and I think we did it

proudly and effectively, as you may judge from my comments that may follow.

I would say that that is my opinion, and I would be less than honest with myself and my colleagues on this side of the House if I did not say that I believe the Canadian public would have been better informed and the idea of precisely why we dispatched at that point in time the members of the ships' company and their support force would have been clearer to the Canadian people if there had been a debate in the House of Commons.

I can understand the preoccupation of the government with wanting to get on with it. In fact, the hon. associate minister of defence last night, and I believe rightfully so, in her mind at least, indicated that there really was not time for parliamentary debate. In any case, the debate, as required by the National Defence Act and the rules of how we run this country, would have taken place by the time they had reached the war zone or the defence zone, the hot zone, if you like Mr. Speaker. I accept that, but I certainly would be concerned that had we had a debate in time before the ships reached the zone and had the decision and the vote been, in the unlikely instance quite frankly I believe, then we would have looked rather silly in the international scene if we had had occasion to recall these ships.

• (1150)

I do not fully buy her argument, although I know where the motivation came from. I will speak briefly to that later, Mr. Speaker.

How did we do this? I think we did it for a number of reasons, but how we did it I think is interesting. I have stood in the House of Commons, I have stood in uniform, I have stood on the bridge of my destroyer, I have stood in public forums and, quite frankly, I have been embarrassed by the way that the Canadian forces have been maligned and by a confusion of the state of equipment with the state of the personnel. I do not think it was an intentional confusion. I think it was a conclusion that perhaps had been drawn or wrongly concluded, or wrongly inferred from the logic that may follow from that sort of premise. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that absolutely nothing is further from the truth.

I am referring not just to the uniformed members, of our men and women and their leaders and their subordinates, but I am also referring to the often unsung members of the Department of National Defence, those who are not in uniform and who indeed are, in their own