

*Special Debate*

addition, the NATO AWACS aircraft enforcing the no fly zone over Bosnia includes Canadians.

One must always recognize the daily acts of courage of individual peacekeepers. The threat of danger the Canadian personnel might encounter during the course of a day is what many of us here at home can only imagine. Their presence in this war torn region presents a risk to their lives and is a constant worry to their families at home.

• (2105)

One must always ask whether we can continue to make a difference. We know our presence in the Balkans has made a difference to the children, the elderly, the women and all other innocent victims of this cruel war.

Is the UN presence continuing to make a difference to the peace process? If the answer is yes, it is our responsibility to remain in the area. If little progress is being made toward peace, the government must seriously consider our current commitment.

The service of Canadian peacekeepers in Bosnia and Croatia has not been without its ordeals. In the last six months the danger to our Canadian peacekeepers has increased daily. Many Canadians have been shot at by snipers and non-UN soldiers. Several of them have been seriously injured.

In November, 55 Canadian soldiers were taken hostage and held against their will for over two weeks behind the confrontation lines of this war torn country. The time has now come to reconsider our commitment to the mission in Bosnia and Croatia. That is the purpose of the debate tonight.

In light of the increase in risk to the lives of Canadians we must come to a decision on whether to send neutrals to the UN peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia and we must consider our role.

We have not stopped the fighting but we have prevented the war from spreading to other regions. We have made accomplishments in the region and have made a difference to the lives of many families living in the midst of a horrifying war.

Canada's involvement is said to create the breathing space within which diplomats and political leaders can negotiate a peaceful solution to a bloody war. New developments have taken place since we last debated the subject in the House.

As the defence minister recently mentioned, Croatian President Tudjman stated that he wanted all UNPROFOR to leave Croatia. An agreement was worked out, however, and the details of these terms and conditions are presently being negotiated.

The dynamics are now changing and the UN forces are undergoing a restructuring process that will affect all participants in the UN mission. Under the new agreement Canada's role should be to continue to help implement a ceasefire

agreement worked out with the maintenance of borders and the maintenance of the all important humanitarian measures.

At the moment we have about 2,100 soldiers preparing to replace the personnel who have been in Bosnia and Croatia since their tour of duty began six months ago. We know they will continue the excellent work being accomplished in the region but it is dangerous work.

We have also had excellent leadership on the issue from the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I commend their efforts. A good number of my constituents' comments on Canada's peacekeeping strength and their determination to ensure the promotion of international human rights and our humanitarian contribution in the Balkan region are on the record of the ministers.

In closing, Canadians continue to see peacekeepers as an important contribution to the maintenance of international order and stability. The people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore will after careful consideration continue to support the involvement of the Canadian forces in this peacekeeping effort. After all, we are helping to ease the suffering of millions of innocent people.

I am confident we will continue to fulfil our international obligations through negotiations and peacekeeping to bring about peace in the Balkan region.

**Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents in Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt to participate in the debate this evening.

We on this side of the House realize that the final decision is the responsibility of the government. We appreciate that the government gave us the opportunity to be heard tonight on this very important issue.

The government said it would like to hear what we had to say in order to help it make the decision whether or not we should continue to maintain our present commitment in the former Yugoslavia.

• (2110)

Interestingly this is a take note debate regarding the rotation of Canadian forces. The hon. member for Red Deer earlier used the words of an Eagles song, one of my favourite musical groups. I am not sure which group sang this song: "Leaving on a Jet Plane". In actual fact the troops' bags are packed. They are set to go. On Monday they leave for Bosnia and Croatia in this troop rotation.

According to my calendar today's date is March 29. The commitment to the former Yugoslavia ends on April 1. Yet the government wants to consult Canadians by holding an emergency debate tonight at the 11th hour. We all know nothing can be done to stop that rotation from taking place.