

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

I therefore wish to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether today, he can give all Canadians the assurance that any decision involving the offensive use of our forces against Iraq will not be made without consultation and debate in this House and without a resolution by the United Nations.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am glad the question was asked, because everything will be clearer after the questions by the hon. member from Winnipeg, since the questions put by the Leader of the Opposition indicate that the Liberal position is not clear.

However, I must point out to the hon. member—and I believe he is well aware of this—that there is a possibility that one of the permanent members of the Security Council might exercise its veto within the Council. It is therefore possible that a veto would make it impossible to act under the auspices of the United Nations. That is why we are now and in fact have been from the outset, negotiating carefully and diligently to find a way that would make it easier for Canada to arrange for a system that would make use of the auspices of the United Nations.

I hope the leader of the opposition is not about to say that Canada's commitment to being against the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq is something we are prepared to set aside if China, for instance, were to exercise its veto in the Security Council. That would be irresponsible, and that is not our position.

[*English*]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs a related question, which he also knows is very much a concern to Canadians, dealing with the question of hostages.

We have now had statements by two U.S. cabinet ministers, Mr. Cheney and Mr. Baker, that Canada had been contacted about sending a high level delegation to Iraq to seek the release of hostages. We now have a statement from the state department spokesman, Richard Boucher, saying that President Bush and the Prime Minister in fact have talked about this matter yesterday.

I want to ask the minister what is going on. We have denials from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs. We have assertions by the Americans that discussions are taking place.

Have we been contacted? Has there in fact been discussions with the Americans about whether to send a delegation? In fact, and perhaps most important, are we going to do something other than having our own officials in Baghdad make contact? Will we take special measures to seek the release of Canadian hostages presently being held in Iraq?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I had thought the member was going to pursue the line of questioning commenced by his leader, but I certainly can understand why he did not.

There are two questions at issue here. One has to do with a report out of the United States suggesting that the foreign minister of Germany and I had been invited by Saddam Hussein to visit Baghdad. That is false. I have not been invited. I have no expectation that there will be an invitation for me to go to Baghdad.

There was a question as to whether there had been conversations between the President and the Prime Minister. The hon. member will know that there have recently been visits, among others, by the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Heath, to Baghdad and that there have recently been discussions with regard to the treatment of French citizens who are in Iraq.

The Prime Minister and the President were involved in a conversation the other day having to do principally with the acid rain question. It is entirely natural that they would have discussed this phenomenon that had involved France and that had involved the United Kingdom.

With respect to things that Canada might do, the hon. member asked a very helpful question the other day. I gave him an answer which I repeated in committee today, which I think and hope is helpful, that if there are serious practical proposals put forward by him or anyone else as to means by which Canada can help come home some of the remaining Canadians who are in Iraq or who are in Kuwait, and if that can be done in a way that is consistent with the Canadian support for the UN Securi-