

Private Members' Business

hostage and humiliating us. We have a Prime Minister who in effect simply tries to ride the middle and more or less agrees one day to go one way and another day to go the other.

We do not have leadership in this area, and we certainly are letting our peacekeepers down because of it. Meeting with people as recently as today, that has been reconfirmed by people who have been there as recently as two days ago. To begin with, the government has overextended our commitments to peacekeeping while simultaneously cutting back on the defence budget. The results have been most unfortunate. For example, we have troops who go out on peacekeeping missions with equipment that would be considered antiques by many nations.

Compounding this, we have Liberal defence cuts that have very much limited the availability of trained personnel. This means that for missions such as the one in Bosnia we have to keep sending the same people over time and again. How do members think our soldiers feel as they are posted back to Bosnia for the third or fourth time? What about their families? What do members think their reaction is when they see Canadian peacekeepers being targeted by all sides in that conflict? What do they feel, knowing that Canadian troops are regularly taken hostage at gunpoint by the very people they were sent to help?

We must decide what we are going to do, and this bill helps us to do that. We must specialize. We must pick our areas. We cannot be everything to all people. And of course we must make sure we have a clear mandate and the equipment to deliver on that mandate.

There is no peace to keep in Bosnia. There is also no humanitarian mission to speak of. The only thing the UN is successful at is being used as a pawn by the warring factions. The government should have recognized this long ago. Canada should never have renewed our commitment to Bosnia in March, considering the ridiculous situation our peacekeepers are in. The Reform Party warned the government and we asked for this withdrawal since before last Christmas, but the government did not listen.

Our proud peacekeepers were not sent to Bosnia to be hostages. They were not sent there to be forced to helplessly watch murder and torture, since their mandate does not allow them to stop it. They were not sent there to be shot at by the very people they are supposed to be helping to find peace.

The Bosnian mission has disintegrated beyond repair. While the government buries its head in the sand and wrings its hands in indecision, it is up to private members such as my hon. colleague from Fraser Valley East to speak for the people of Canada and to stand up for the interests of our peacekeepers.

Bill C-295 does what the government should have done long ago. Instead of trusting the safety and lives of our peacekeepers to the twist of fate, this Parliament must set down criteria to condition our involvement for future missions. These criteria should outline what is acceptable and what is not. This is what Bill C-295 does. Most important among these criteria is that Parliament have the right to choose what peacekeeping missions Canada will participate in.

It is not up to the Prime Minister to snap his fingers and expect that everyone will do what he wants. We supposedly live in a democracy, not a dictatorship, although the recent tactics of the Liberal Party on Bill C-68, Bill C-85, and Bill C-41 really have me wondering if that is true.

It is amazing that we are told, "If you do not agree with us, backbenchers, stay home. Forget about the people at home. The party knows best. We will take the message from Ottawa to the constituency."

• (1825)

We waste time talking about \$2 coins and three most important bills like this are left for us to talk about in six hours' time on third reading. We keep all of these people in line by giving them travel perks, by constituency spending, and by committee activity.

Beyond the basic idea of parliamentary approval, members of Parliament will need specific information upon which to base their decision. Without knowing the specific objectives and duties of the peacekeepers, how can members know how to vote? Without knowing the duration and the maximum cost of the mission, how would Parliament decide on the best course of action? These questions will be answered if Bill C-295 is passed.

Another key aspect of this bill is that it clearly spells out that Canadian peacekeepers shall be neutral and not engage in combat. This may seem obvious, but from watching the crisis in Bosnia it seems like the UN has taken sides. This is unacceptable. You cannot join the war you are intending to stop. This is why we have concerns about the strike force, about the whole concept of that strike force and what it is going to do. I guess we would have to applaud the government on the go slow action of recommending our involvement in this whole strike force idea. To escalate the war is certainly moving further and further away from the mandate, which we do not believe exists there any longer.

Another vitally important criterion for the good of our peacekeepers involves the reasonable use of force. Again referring to the ridiculous situation in Bosnia, we see how this has been a major failing in the past. We have had troops that have not been able to defend themselves properly. We also have troops who have been forced to watch helplessly as civilians were massacred because their mandate did not allow them to do anything