

Above all else, we all must remember that first and foremost, the well-being of our troops and our civilians in the Middle East is our No. 1 priority. Likewise, the families and loved ones of our troops and civilians in the gulf must be accorded the kind of consideration and access to information which they so clearly deserve.

That is why I proposed today in this House that the federal government introduce a special hotline so that families can communicate directly to someone with knowledge about the whereabouts and well-being of their relatives and friends who are directly involved in this conflict in the gulf. I hope the government, particularly the Secretary of State for External Affairs, will accept that recommendation which I made to him this afternoon.

• (2040)

We owe as much to our people who find themselves in the Middle East in the middle of a war that they did not ask for but must now fight. We owe it to those whose devotion and commitment to Canada gives them the strength and the courage to fight for it and for the principles they believe in. We owe it to those who may never see their loved ones again and for whom the desert will be an unmarked grave. Let us resolve to do whatever we can to focus on peace to end this conflict as quickly as possible. Let Canada be the leader in achieving a constructive conclusion to this terrible conflict.

Mr. Alex Kindy (Calgary Northeast): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's speech. I would like to emphasize that there were signals given to Mr. Hussein by the Americans which certainly indicated that the United States considered the border dispute between Kuwait and Iraq none of their concern.

I would like to quote the United States Ambassador to Iraq, April Galspie, who saw Mr. Hussein on July 25, just a week before the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. In discussing that matter with Mr. Hussein she said and I quote: "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait". Naturally this was a very strong signal to Mr. Hussein that the Americans would not get involved in that conflict.

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So there is certainly a responsibility of that ambassador in giving the wrong signal to the Iraqis and now we see the tragedy. I hope that in the future ambassadors are going to consult the State Department before giving such an opinion.

I would like to ask the hon. member what his opinion is on the question of a Middle East peace conference that has been requested for many, many years by the world powers, including the Soviet Union and the Arab world. Does he feel that this problem of a peace conference in the Middle East would have prevented the tragedy that we have today in the Middle East?

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. Before coming to the last question he posed, I would just like to make a few remarks to elaborate the point that I was trying to make with respect to the behaviour of the United States immediately prior to the August 2 invasion of Kuwait.

The point that I want to make is not a condemnation of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East or anywhere else, but U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East for many years has been exercised in the form of signals and nuances. That is the way it has been carried out, presumably, to achieve some form of regional stability. It has obviously not always worked. The point I wanted to make is when we contemplate an action such as that which was undertaken last night, we have a very difficult problem in generating and sustaining the commitment against the hostilities that may result. In democratic countries we have to deal with that problem. The United States felt it in spades in Vietnam in the 1960s. That is point I wanted to make, particularly in terms of the decision to go ahead and launch this attack and for Canada to just jump right in afterward.

To return to the peace conference question, the peace conference which has been proposed for many years as a vehicle for achieving a resolution of the Palestinian question is, of course, the thorny issue at the centre of the Middle East problem. I endorse it as a good idea, independent of whether in fact there was a conflict and independent of the Iraq invasion of Kuwait. I think the peace conference is a good idea but it is not at all linked to what has happened in Kuwait.