

Dear Mr. Speaker:

During his visit to Europe, the Prime Minister was asked whether the Government would be maintaining Canadian troops in the former Yugoslavia in the spring. The Prime Minister replied that no decision would be made until the matter could be debated in this House.

The importance of this matter dictates that it be the subject of a serious consultation among the elected representatives of the people. Our decision, whatever it may be, will have a heavy impact on our future role in peacekeeping, our foreign policy and our defence policy. We must also bear in mind that the position we take will affect our relations with friendly countries.

The Government's position on the broad question of the place of peacekeeping in Canada's foreign and defence policies is well-known. We are on record as stating we intend to "strengthen Canada's leadership role in international peacekeeping." In the upcoming foreign and defence policy reviews we will be examining a variety of ways in which this can be done, many of which were elaborated in the "Red Book." While all members of this House are, I am sure, familiar with the Red Book, an illustrative list of these ideas would include a re-examination of the notion of stand-by forces for peacekeeping, a look at the training of peacekeepers, and a look at our procurement policies.

Any debate on peacekeeping must begin by placing the issue in the context of Canada's historical contribution in this area and of the tremendous upheavals that are affecting the nature of peacekeeping operations.

Ever since the initiative taken in 1956 by former Prime Minister and then-External Affairs Minister Lester B. Pearson, Canada has been closely associated in the minds of Canadians and of other countries with leadership and expertise in peacekeeping. For years we have participated in the overwhelming majority of the peacekeeping operations mandated by the United Nations Security Council. We continue today to contribute to most of the missions, including the more difficult ones. As you know, the Government has clearly stated its conviction that peacekeeping is a very important component of Canada's contribution to the multilateral system and to the preservation of peace in the world.

Canadians have always believed in the value of promoting multilateral mechanisms for security and crisis management. Peacekeeping is one of the most important of these mechanisms. Our approach to peacekeeping is rooted in a wider view, which seeks to promote the prevention of conflicts before they begin, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts already under way.

Over the years, Canada has developed guidelines governing its participation in peacekeeping operations. Let me summarize them: