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Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to rise in the House to represent the citizens of Fredericton—York—Sunbury. It humbles me when I consider just how many people will be affected by the outcome of the government's decision around this debate.

• (2330)

As this is my first opportunity, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I also wish to pay tribute to the Hon. Milton Gregg, the last member of both my riding and my party to be in this House. He was a representative of the government of the day and won the Victoria Cross in the Second World War.

I would also like to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Mr. Bud Bird. Mr. Bird has long served our region with dignity and diligence.

Finally I would like to note the recent passing of my Reform Party opponent. Jack Lamey was a worthy representative of his party. On behalf of all the residents of the riding I express sympathy to his wife Addie and the family.

CFB Gagetown, the largest military training base in Canada and by land mass the largest base in the Commonwealth, lies within my riding. I am sure members of this House can appreciate the significance of this debate for the people of Fredericton—York—Sunbury in general and for the people of CFB Gagetown in particular.

It is one thing to be concerned for family and friends serving in dangerous circumstances halfway round the world. It is appreciably worse when that risk is not accompanied by a clear sense of purpose or measure of effectiveness.

Hopefully this debate will serve to clarify Canada's position on the role of our country and others within the UN peacekeeping forces generally and in Bosnia—Hercegovina in particular.

I should say that we in Fredericton—York—Sunbury are pleased with the government's decision to have this debate. I would also like to commend the other parties and their leaders for both their co-operation and their participation. Their early intervention did much to establish the tone for this debate and I am certain Canadians will find it refreshing to know that we want to get things accomplished.

As I acknowledged earlier, constituents within my riding are particularly interested in this debate because so many of CFB Gagetown have, are, or probably will participate in peacekeeping engagements.

In light of this level of concern I wanted to ensure that I did not deal with the situation superficially. Sunday night I met with a number of interested parties wanting to advise me of their concerns. Participants ranged from former peacekeepers, one of whom was stationed in Sarajevo, students from the region

attending the University of New Brunswick, and others of the public who had called or written to express concerns.

Of particular note, we received a detailed presentation on a situation in Bosnia from a member of the military recently stationed in that region. I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Yann Hidiroglou, the deputy commander of the United Nations military observers, for his thoughtful and comprehensive briefing.

It was repeated throughout the meeting that the debate surrounding the situation in Bosnia has become too polarized. Arguments are generally aligned at one of two ends. Canada must be in Bosnia under any or all circumstances, or we must remove our troops because the situation is either too dangerous, too costly, or ineffective.

We must work together to find a more moderate middle ground solution. There are no easy answers but in identifying the balance we need to consider what the consequences could be if we decided to remove our troops entirely. We are after all citizens of the world.

We must recognize the possibility that a withdrawal might only be temporary. Troops might have to intervene again under conditions far worse than those that currently exist. As well, it is clear that our troops are able to get humanitarian aid through to those in need. The UN Commission for Refugees and the Red Cross are both on record as having stated that the food is getting through.

What about our international reputation? If the UN withdraws what impact will this have on future peacekeeping operations? Would this make it politically impossible for governments to keep forces in foreign regions? In the same vein how do we want to be remembered by history? We must consider what the scenario might be if we were not involved in Bosnia.

I believe a balance must be struck in order to achieve our desired middle ground. That balance begins with the recommitting of our troops. We must however recommit as a government that is willing to improve conditions for the men and the women on the ground.

I see a number of ways we can accomplish this goal. First, Canada as a country has great credibility as a nation of peace and peacekeeping. I believe we should rely on our knowledge and reputation in these areas and call upon other countries, many of which have closer ties than we with the belligerents to launch an appeal to warring factions and seek diplomatic solutions.

• (2335)

We must also review the criteria under which we have committed our troops and make amendments where possible to improve conditions, again calling upon our historical reputation and record. People are uncertain about our role in Bosnia, our purpose for participating and the value of the exercise. We need

to bring clarity to the situation and let people know everything which can be done is actually being done.

I conclude by stating that we need to recommit our troops to their involvement in Bosnia but not necessarily under present conditions. We must also commit to ensuring members of the military are properly and adequately trained, that UN field operations are politically supported by member nations. We must commit to provide the support needed to reduce risk.

As well both the government and the military need to communicate their purpose and decisions clearly so that everyone is aware of the objectives for both our troops in Bosnia specifically and UN forces generally. We will be holding future debates about Canada's military and peacekeeping roles. It is my hope that the precedent has been established for these debates.

I salute forces both now and in the past which served Canada for what will soon be 50 years in the area of peacekeeping. I also salute the families and friends of those involved in peacekeeping missions. I am sure they join me in acknowledging the excellence of our Canadian troops. Their excellence is why Canada's role in Bosnia is so critical.

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am indeed honoured to address the House today on behalf of the riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I think the people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore will join me in this debate and in the expression of congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, as well as to the Prime Minister for providing the opportunity for debate.

Peacekeeping is an activity Canada does as a country. It is an activity which gives us world-wide respect and makes us all proud to be Canadians.

Canadian soldiers have been involved in every United Nations peacekeeping operation since 1947. We have sent approximately 90,000 men and women to war-torn countries around the world. Peacekeeping and peacekeepers have represented us in areas like Korea in the 1950s; Egypt, 1954; the Congo, 1960–64; Nigeria, 1968–70; Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia in the early 1970s; Iran in the late 1980s; and in many Latin American countries between 1989 and 1992.

Canadian peacekeepers are currently in El Salvador, Cyprus, the western Sahara, Angola, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Korea and Cambodia. Of course they are currently involved in the former Yugoslavia. There are some 4,700 Canadian men and women with United Nations peacekeeping operations around the world. They comprise approximately 10 per cent of all peacekeepers on duty.

We greatly value our peacekeepers and take pride in our peacekeeping activities. We treat that very seriously. Obviously we have very practical reasons for being involved. Canada can prosper only if we are living in a stable and reliable world

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environment. I think most Canadians believe that peacekeeping is a valued activity. We had two Nobel peace prizes awarded, one to the late Lester B. Pearson and the other to the peacekeepers in 1988.

Given the international importance of Canada's peacekeeping efforts I would like to briefly discuss my two main concerns first, the priorities in terms of financing; and second, peacekeeping in this international context.

One of the concerns many have with peacekeeping is that Canadian peacekeepers be properly outfitted for the dangerous situations they often encounter.

• (2340)

This means that the equipment should be fully functional. They should have access to proper facilities and have adequate protection. All of this, of course, requires financial support.

The second concern I have is international commitment. If we as Canadians decide it is a priority for us to remain involved in peacekeeping, we must encourage collective, responsible action through the United Nations. I hope we would encourage other United Nations members to pay up their UN dues, to commit troops, to provide logistical and technical support and to honour UN resolutions.

Canadians cannot do it alone as we have seen in Bosnia where replacement troops for Canadians are not allowed to relieve our peacekeepers. We need a strong United Nations to which countries pledge, not only in word but in financial support, troops and technical terms.

Peacekeeping is one area in which we service the world. I sincerely hope we continue to do so. However, I only want us to continue to do so if we provide our peacekeepers with the necessary equipment to protect themselves while performing their duties as well as securing that stronger international commitment.

We live in a global village. We have our responsibilities in that global village.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, please allow me, on behalf of Winnipeg North, to echo the sentiments of those who have risen in this House and congratulated you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker, and also to the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, and our fellow members.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank the constituents of Winnipeg North for their renewal of confidence in last fall's election. It is a testament to this new Liberal government's commitment to seek the input of its citizens on matters of foreign policy that we begin in the early life of this Parliament with a very public debate on peacekeeping.