



Statements and Speeches

No. 83/2

CANADIAN RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Statement by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Ottawa, February 17, 1983

...The first major interest I should like to comment on is peace and security. This has pre-occupied us in our view of the Middle East throughout the postwar period, at times to the virtual exclusion of other interests. As a western country we certainly have had a stake in that area's stability, as the Middle East is adjacent to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) area and is at the meeting point of three continents with the risk of super-power confrontation.

The Arab-Israeli dispute is not the only intractable and dangerous problem. The war between Iran and Iraq continues to threaten regional stability and the supply of oil through the strait of Hormuz. Despite the enormous costs of that war to the disputants, it is fortunate that the conflict has not spread throughout the Persian Gulf and beyond. Canada has supported international mediation efforts to end the war and, in order not to exacerbate the situation, has not supplied arms to either side. Other conflicts and threats of conflict persist in undermining regional security and in impeding development: e.g. the Western Sahara, and major differences among a number of individual countries.

In response to peace and security problems in the area, Canada has made a major UN peacekeeping contribution over the years, both in developing the peacekeeping system and in providing forces and observers. About 250 Canadians are serving with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO) which has observers in Israel and neighbouring Arab countries, including Lebanon.

Trade

The importance and growth of trade over the past few years warrant emphasis. The area provided a market in 1981 for \$2 billion in goods, plus some hundreds of millions of dollars in services, up close to 50 per cent over the 1980 figures. Figures for 1982 when available should show continued growth. Many countries shared in this trade, but Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Libya and Israel should be especially mentioned. Some of our exports are particularly attractive as they comprise high-technology products or other manufactured goods and services. The Middle East and North Africa still represent one of the best potential markets and one that we must take advantage of. Trade can usefully be reinforced by co-operation in other fields, e.g. education, which helps form future decision-makers who know Canada;
