

Backgrounder

CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO MARITIME CONFIDENCE-BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Launched in Madrid in October 1991 with the United States and the former Soviet Union as co-sponsors, the Middle East Peace Process is a major international effort aimed at resolving the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a two-track process consisting of direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbours — Jordan, Syria and Lebanon — and the Palestinians, and of multilateral negotiations involving more than 40 regional and non-regional countries sitting in five working groups.

Canada is an active participant in the multilateral phase of the Peace Process which was launched in Moscow in January 1992. In addition to chairing the Refugee Working Group, Canada participates in the other four working groups — Arms Control and Regional Security, Economic Development, Water Resources, and the Environment — and is also a member of the Multilateral Steering Group which reviews the work of all five groups and plans future meetings.

The purpose of these talks is to complement the bilateral negotiations by focusing on issues of regional concern and taking concerted action in addressing them.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES: CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION

Recognizing Canada's consistent contribution to regional peacekeeping, active participation in the Arms Control and Regional Security Group, and naval and coast guard expertise, the Group asked Canada to lead its examination of the applicability of Maritime Confidence-Building Measures (MCBMs) in the Middle East.

MCBMs were seen as a potentially productive topic because, of all the spheres of military rivalry in the Middle East, the maritime arena is generally regarded as the least contentious. Because there are relatively few Middle East disputes of a purely naval character, it was reasoned that it might be easier for concrete steps to be taken in the maritime sphere at the beginning of the process.

After consultations, Canada proposed that initial considerations should centre on two specific measures: enhanced regional co-operation in maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) and the elaboration of the basic framework of a regional Prevention of Incidents at Sea (INCSEA) Agreement.