

# Clark gives solid performance on whirlwind Mideast tour

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Joe Clark heaved a sigh of well-deserved relief as he rose from his seat at his final news conference last night at the end of a four-country tour of the Middle East.

In 11 days, the External Affairs Minister had met one king, two princes, one sheik, two presidents, two prime ministers and an assortment of foreign ministers and other officials.

It was an extensive and carefully modulated tour that by all accounts achieved its objectives: Mr. Clark learned a great deal; he spoke on Canadian policy clearly and consistently in every country he visited and, true to his word, did nothing dramatic. He made no serious errors.

With his performance, he appears finally to have rid himself of the monkey that has been on his back since his ill-fated Middle East trip and the Jerusalem embassy fiasco of 1979.

While not everyone would agree with the newspaper Ma'ariv, which greeted Mr. Clark's arrival in Israel with an editorial describing him as "a foreign minister of sweeping imagination and vision," it is fair to say he was very well received at every stop on his tour.

His officials were clearly pleased. His speech Saturday night at a dinner given by Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir was in many ways the culmination of efforts to insert Canada more actively into the Arab-Israeli dispute.

During his short remarks, he reaffirmed Canadian policy, which calls for "a homeland" for the Palestinians on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza strip, and lauded a recent statement by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres that recognized the Palestinians "as a people." Both of these remarks are known to have made his host uncomfortable.

Mr. Shamir responded by taking issue with Mr. Clark after the dinner. He told reporters the Palestinians are not a separate people but are part of the Jordanian nation. "I see the Jordanian-Palestinian people as a united people," he said. "They have their country, they have a state that belongs to them."

## ANALYSIS

The West Bank and Gaza are not part of their homeland, he said. "These regions belong to another country. These regions are under our control."

In his news conference yesterday, Mr. Clark said he "went the extra length" to make these points "specifically and on the record" in Jerusalem in order to drive the message home. "That was done deliberately. I think that Canada's position is known."

While many observers had expected a less polite address, one that went into more detail on the nature of a Palestinian homeland and placed more emphasis on Israel's need to make progress on this front if it wants Canada's support to continue, the speech did make its point.

Mr. Clark told reporters that "putting our position firmly but not stridently" was the most effective way of making progress. He rejects the idea of putting pressure on Israel now, arguing that it is enough to articulate Canada's different approach. He added, however, that

"there are times when one has to move that forward, to take another step. We will judge when that time might come."

Throughout his trip, Mr. Clark emphasized that Canada cannot be the architect of any Middle East solution but can contribute to one. He said yesterday that the best way to do that now is to contribute to the economic stability of the region.

He repeatedly cited Canada's contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees — in Jordan he opened a Canadian-financed school for refugees — and pointed out the mission-administered funds that Canada's embassies are using to help alleviate some of the region's suffering. In Israel, he noted, most of the money is going to directly help Palestinians in the occupied territories.

"We are going to be looking at the possibility of expanding the range or nature of Canadian development activities" in the region, he said.

On Saturday, Mr. Clark visited the West Bank town of Bethlehem for talks with Mayor Elias Frelj, who asked for more aid for the Palestinians of the occupied territory. To those who said such assistance only bestows a blessing on the

state of occupation, the mayor retorted, "What is better, to starve the people or help the people?" It is a view Mr. Clark clearly shares.

If there was one thing that stood out on this trip, it was the absence of meetings with Palestinians, whom Mr. Clark has repeatedly said are the key to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He did meet Israeli sociologist Meron Benvenisti, who has conducted extensive demographic studies of the occupied territories, and Canadian relief workers in the area.

At every stop along his way, the minister was asked whether he would consider changing Canadian policy on dealing with the Palestine Liberation Organization. And, at every stop he reaffirmed that until the PLO renounces terrorism and accepts Israel's right to exist, Canada will not officially recognize it. It will, however, continue to talk to the PLO on a less-than-ambassadorial level because, as he explained to Mr. Shamir on Friday, "they remain a force to be dealt with."