

Arab-Israeli War

hostilities—hostilities, Mr. Speaker, that in the end can be of benefit to no one. Perhaps Canada could encourage Israel to accept this kind of offer. Certainly, we all want to see an end to bloodshed, but we want everyone to be able to live in dignity and safety. Whatever we do, it is time for Canadians in high places to act as statesmen and not from political considerations which may affect them in their individual constituencies.

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, in following the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart) may I say that, as always, he spoke clearly and no doubt with a great deal of conviction. Yet throughout his speech he failed to direct his mind to any approach or action that we, as Canadians, should consider in order to end this tragic war. I think I can say on behalf of all hon. members that casting back in history and blaming all the actors on the stage of time will do nothing to stop the fighting. That should be the end to which we ought to direct our minds tonight. My hon. friend said that the only possible course for Canada is one of objectivity. I say no, that is not a course: it is a stance, or attitude, and a commendable one, and from that vantage point a decision must be made and a course of action determined.

All Canadians ought to deplore this war, and I believe the majority do. But in a finite world, living as we do in a community of nations, we cannot be indifferent to the outcome of this war. No matter how objective, detached or neutral we try to be, in one way or another, consciously or unconsciously, Canadians are in their own minds asking three specific questions. I suggest the first is, how did this war start? Second, what are the objectives of the belligerents. Third, how can it be stopped? The answers to these questions must determine the attitude Canada takes toward this conflict and to the parties engaged in it.

● (2210)

I say, and I say it very carefully, in matters as grave as this we cannot indulge in the luxury of having no opinion. As I said, we are a member of the community of nations as established, however imperfectly, in the United Nations. On this issue, with its potential for disaster and its ultimate questions of international morality, we cannot abdicate our responsibility to make our own decisions as to what the parties to the conflict ought to do both in the short-term and in the long-term. I cannot say too strongly that to have no opinion, to try to abstain from any position, is to abdicate completely that responsibility which is ours as a member of the United Nations and as a nation that prides itself on its sovereignty and high purpose in the world.

When we ask, how did this war start, I do not mean what are the causes. For that we must search history, and such a search hardly concludes with an answer that satisfies anybody, let alone the belligerents. However, as to what happened the facts are clear and uncontroverted. They are, on October 6 the armies of Egypt and Syria attacked Israeli forces in the Sinai and the Golan Heights. This ended an uneasy truce that had existed since 1967. Put simply, Egypt and Syria deliberately chose to ignore the provisions of United Nations resolution 242 and decided to forgo a negotiated settlement in favour of a resort to

[Mr. Stewart (Cochrane).]

armed conflict as a means of settling the differences existing between Israel and themselves.

The second question is, what are the objectives of the belligerents? The Israelis are fighting because they have no choice. The enemies of Israel are fighting either to restore the boundaries prior to the 1967 six-day war or to extinguish the state of Israel. I say the Israelis are fighting because they have no choice. If the objective of the Arab states is to restore the old boundaries, those boundaries leave Israel in a hopeless position to defend itself, lacking other guarantees which are presently non-existent. If the objective is the extermination of Israel, the question answers itself.

Out of this, one thing is certain. Only one side in this conflict has the option to withdraw, to cease the immediate hostilities. That, of course, is the stronger side. There is an old saying that it takes two to make a fight. What is often forgotten is the equally true observation that in an unequal contest it only takes one side to end it. That option, as I have said, is only open to the stronger. It ought to be plain that of the belligerents in this case, the Arab states are now the stronger militarily both for the present and no doubt the future, at least with the continuation of present conditions and circumstances. I refer, of course, to the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Arab nations and their ability to acquire supplies of modern weapons.

As other hon. members have pointed out, there is a deadlock. While we would wish that at an early moment both sides could simultaneously agree to a ceasefire, such an event is unlikely. One side must make the first move. That must be the side with the least to lose by such a move. In my view, Israel cannot unilaterally withdraw from engagement, that is, make the first move without risking the elimination of the Israeli state.

But there is such an option open to the Arab countries. Such a move could be made with no risk to their continuation as viable nations and would be greeted around the world with admiration which would redound to their international credit. Such a move would clearly indicate that the Arab nations agree with this country that Israel has a right to exist, not just for the moment but indefinitely into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we should do everything possible to persuade the Arab nations and the other nations of the world, including the Soviet Union, that if the immediate fighting is to stop without further bloodshed, someone must make the first move. And the first move in this case must arise from the magnanimity of those who are immediately and potentially the stronger.

The question of borders, the question of refugees and other questions such as the relations between Israel and its neighbours must be negotiated. If the negotiations are to be successful, both sides will have to compromise or alter present strongly held positions. But the weaker cannot disengage in the absence of some meaningful assurance from the stronger. It is, I believe, this message which Canada must carry to the belligerents so that a new start and, perhaps, a real start can be made to establish peace between nations on both sides of this conflict whose friendship with Canada is to our mutual advantage and is the profound desire of the Canadian people.