

Our strong support for Israel does not mean that we cannot maintain and further develop good relations with the Arab peoples, who themselves have made such major contributions to our civilization. Those Arab countries I have visited, and those others whose representatives I have met, have expressed a strong desire for friendship with Canada. They have said this is so because we are a highly developed Western country with a tradition of close relations with the Third World but without a history of colonial activity. Our dual linguistic heritage is also of interest to these nations, some of which use English and others French to exchange ideas with the Western world. With their geopolitical importance at the crossroads of three continents and with their new found economic strength the Arab states have emerged as increasingly important members of the international community. In a world of growing interdependence the importance of mutual understanding and co-operation is self evident. I believe Canadians appreciate this. On their side, the Arab leaders I met did not expect that Canadian policies would parallel their own, nor did they expect that we would move away from our traditional friendship with Israel. They did ask, however, that when we take positions affecting the Middle East, we should bear in mind basic Arab aspirations and concerns. This attitude, in my view, is both understandable and reasonable.

I think there is an increasing awareness in Canada of the Palestinian predicament.* As a result of the conflict of 1948-49 many of the Palestinian people, who only thirty years earlier had constituted the great majority in the territories that subsequently became Israel, left their homes and property and took refuge in neighbouring Arab states. More followed as a result of the 1967 war when Israel took control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan and Egypt.

*Before proceeding further I believe a note of explanation would be helpful. Until the 1920-22 period Palestine was not a clearly defined unit. Under Ottoman rule the area had been divided into a number of administrative districts whose boundaries bore little relationship to subsequent political entities. At the San Remo Conference in 1920 the victorious World War I Allies made Britain the Mandatory power for the territories known today as Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jordan, giving the area the name Palestine. This decision was recognized by the League of Nations in 1922, as was the British creation in 1921 of the Arab Emirate of Transjordan which has since become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Transjordan in 1922 had a total population of about 300,000 Arabs over half of whom were nomadic. The Palestine Mandate west of the Jordan River, had a population at the same time of about 750,000, of whom approximately 84,000 were Jews, with almost all the remainder being Arabs, whose descendants today are commonly referred to as Palestinians.