

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Mulroney: Kuwait may seem a remote place geographically and culturally, but so did Manchuria in 1931, Abyssinia in 1935, and Czechoslovakia in 1938. While, in the thirties, these were little known places, in the nineties they figure in our history books as the stepping stones to World War II. In each case what has been described by a leading historian as “a profound pacifism, an almost doctorinaire insistence on peace regardless of the circumstances” led the League of Nations to turn a blind eye to aggression—and the world paid a price in millions of avoidable deaths in World War II.

What is happening in Kuwait has direct and substantial effects on Canada's interests. As a country with a comparatively small population, with two superpowers as neighbours, and with our own limited military capacity, Canada's most basic interest lies in the preservation of international law and order. The United Nations and its charter are essential to the rule of law and to the respect of the integrity of small countries by larger neighbours.

[English]

The architects of the United Nations—and Canadians were among them—were determined “to make absolutely certain”, as Lester Pearson wrote in 1945, “that never again should an aggressor be permitted to strike down one nation after another before the peace loving nations of the world organize and take concerted action against it”.

The fundamental purpose of the United Nations itself, as proclaimed in Article 1 of its charter, is “to maintain international peace and security” by taking “effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace”.

That is in the founding charter of the United Nations itself. Those are the principles that we pledged to uphold when we helped found and subscribed to the fundamental precepts based on the notion of the respect for international law almost 50 years ago.

[Translation]

With the exception of Korea, the UN has been prevented by the cold war from either suppressing acts of

aggression or preventing them, as the Suez crisis, Vietnam, Afghanistan and the Arab-Israeli wars, among dozens of other conflicts, make clear.

Today, with the extraordinary unanimity that has accompanied the relaxation of east-west tensions, the authority vested in the UN by its architects—including Prime Ministers King, St. Laurent and Pearson—can be exercised by our generation to preserve international law and order.

Saddam Hussein's challenge raises the stakes for the UN. Because, while this crisis provides an opportunity for the UN to play the role Canada has always wanted it to play, regrettably it also provides an occasion for the UN to fail to do so. And if the UN were to fail to do so, a large part of the principles, objectives and efforts of 45 years of Canadian diplomacy would have been for nothing.

Our generation, having ignored the lessons of history, could be condemned to re-live some of history's darkest chapters. Saddam Hussein would become an example for other potential bullies, making the world an even more dangerous place than it is already. Nations would be left alone to defend themselves against aggression and a new arms race would be launched.

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The UN—designed to prevent a return to the rule of the jungle—could go the way of the League of Nations, and this at a time when international problems—from the environment to human rights to debt to development to drugs to the protection of children—can only be resolved collectively, and when a credible, effective UN has never been more necessary.

These are not abstract issues to Canada. They are not someone else's business. They are direct, vital Canadian interests, and they are engaged fully in this question. The UN cannot be allowed to fail at this critical moment in history.

[English]

The argument is made by some that Canada should hold itself back now in order to play a peacekeeping role later. Were Saddam Hussein to succeed in his annexation of Kuwait, he would be in a position to threaten the entire Middle East, and he is in the process of threatening individual nations as we speak.