

Soldiers of Peace

Canada's traditional role as one of the world's most experienced and reliable peacekeepers was upheld when it joined the coalition forces in the Gulf last April after international contributions to the United Nations Iraq/Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) were announced. Not only was Canada among the more than 30 nations supplying personnel to UNIKOM, but its contingent of 300 was by far the largest, making up one-fifth of the 1440-strong force.

In announcing Canada's contribution, former Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark stated, "Canada has been a firm supporter of the United Nations in its quest for peace and security in the Gulf region. Our willingness to be an active supporter of the UN during the Gulf crisis has in no way diminished our ability to act as peacekeepers."

Clark expressed satisfaction that UNIKOM is the first force in United Nations history to include personnel from all five permanent members of the UN Security Council, an indication of the growing effectiveness of the world organization in dealing with issues of peace and security.

Canada also agreed to a UN request to provide a senior officer to serve as the Deputy Chief of Staff Operations with UNIKOM. The Canadians will serve in the observer force for up to one year.

Deployed within a demilitarized zone straddling the Iraq/Kuwait border, UNIKOM's mandate is to deter violations of the ceasefire agreement, to observe potential hostile activities, and to ensure that there are no military personnel or installations belonging to either country in the zone. Recognizing that the task was made more difficult — and dangerous — by the presence of many unexploded mines and ordnance left over from the Gulf War, the UN asked the Canadian government to provide a military field engineer unit to clear the area and make it safe for the peacekeepers.

It's a job the Canadian Armed Forces are familiar with. They gained experience in Pakistan at the end of the Afghan War, instructing Afghan refugees on ways to recognize and defuse explosive devices.

Within days of the announcement, 250 members of the First Canadian Engineers Regiment of Chilliwack, British Columbia, along with about 50 other members of the Canadian Armed Forces, began departing for the Iraq/Kuwait border. The demilitarized zone is about 200 km long, extending up to 10 km into southern Iraq and 5 km into Kuwait. In addition to clearing the mines and dismantling fortifications, the Canadian UNIKOM members are also building roads and setting up water purification plants.



Facing the Future

The years ahead will test the resolve of the United Nations as it confronts the complex problems of the Middle East. The liberation of Kuwait demonstrated what can be achieved through unity. It is a victory for the United Nations and a victory for world order, and that is what Canada has been working to achieve.

Canadian troops
hard at work.

The future may bring peace and prosperity instead of poverty and war to the nations of the Middle East. In large measure, that choice lies with the people of the region and their leaders, but the UN has shown a determination that individual nations will remain free to shape their own destinies without interference from beyond their frontiers. ❖