

A drama is unfolding in the Persian Gulf. It is dangerous and we do not know how it will end. But how it ends will have crucial consequences for international order and for a Canadian foreign policy dedicated to shaping that order to meet our interests. The consequences could be positive; they could be negative. One thing is clear: they will be enormous.

This is not a movie. This is a situation where war is possible. If it comes to war, there will be thousands of casualties -- soldiers, men and women, children. There is a real risk that weapons of mass destruction will be used. There is a real possibility that the conflict could spread beyond the Persian Gulf. There is a certainty that the international economic order will be dealt a damaging blow. Energy prices for Canadians and everyone else will go sky-high. And we should not rule out the possibility that young Canadian soldiers -- women and men -- will not return to this country for celebration but will stay there for burial.

As Canadians blessed with prosperity and peace for so many years, we tend to think that serious wars don't happen any more -- not the kind of wars which harm us, or our neighbourhood or our interests. When we see combat and bombing on the television news, they are other people's wars.

What may happen in the Gulf is not about other people. Canadians are there. Canadian interests are engaged. The global economy and political structure are at stake. Neville Chamberlain said of Czechoslovakia, before another war, that society was "a far away country of which we know little." Well, Chamberlain was wrong then and we know the consequences. We cannot be wrong again. In this modern world, Kuwait is not far away. It is right around the corner.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq has given rise to a rare united front of nations, who demand that Iraq withdraw and respect Kuwait's sovereignty. That view is not a partial view, not the view of a few. It is the view of East and West, North and South, Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim. Sanctions have been imposed by near-universal consensus. The enforcement of those sanctions has been agreed. Military forces from 25 nations are in place to enforce UN sanctions and to deter aggression. Forces from Argentina and Australia, from Syria and the United States, from Egypt and England.