

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST —

ISRAEL-LEBANON, APARTHEID, P.L.O., IRAQ-IRAN, NAMIBIA, ETHIOPIA... all conjure up images of conflict and turmoil. Yet, this area of the world is fascinating. Rich in history and culture — Mecca, Jerusalem, the banks of the Nile — intellectually stimulating in every way; a posting to this part of the world could prove to be one of the most rewarding you could have.

We have 29 Canadian missions (meaning over 300 Canadians) representing our interests in this part of the world. With a geographic area this immense and diverse, where does one begin? Then, once begun, where does one stop so as to limit it to a manageable amount? It seemed an impossible task. Yet, after discussions with, and assistance from, Joseph Stanford the ADM for this geographic area (plus Marc Brault, Michael Bell and Steve Hibbard, in the African and Middle East Bureaus) it somehow all fell together.

THE MIDDLE EAST

The crossroads of the world — of pressures, of tensions, of civilizations. This relatively small area of the world seems to have a disproportionate impact on the rest of the world — on world economies, through control of the world's most important oil reserves; on world security, should their conflicts (Arab-Israeli, Iraq-Iran, Lebanon internal) spread to surrounding countries.

We have eight embassies in this area — Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt (for cultural and political reasons it is considered a part of the Middle East), Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. (Our

embassy in Tehran was closed in 1980 after the now famous "Canadian Caper".)

An Overview

With three major conflicts going on in this sensitive area of the world, our primary concerns are political and economic. In terms of trade, our major import from the region is petroleum, but we are also involved in development co-operation (46 million in 1981) particularly in Egypt and the Sudan, with modest amounts being expended in Lebanon, Jordan and North and South Yemen.

Immigration comes primarily from Egypt and Lebanon.

The Mediterranean

Starting with the success story — Egypt. Now that Israel and Egypt have made peace, Egypt is concentrating on restoring its place in the Arab world. Consequently, our relations with that country are extremely good in every respect — political co-operation, development assistance, trade and an open dialogue.

Israel, despite the turmoil around it, remains a relatively safe, secure place to be. There is a large, active embassy staff, that is benefiting from the kaleidoscope of cultures that is available to them. Politically, our position is that we support the right of Israel to exist within secure and recognized boundaries. We also, though, support the rights of the Palestinians to a homeland in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Overall, our relations with Israel are extremely good.

In Beirut, the situation is not as positive. We have just reduced the number of our permanent staff from 20 to 10, as it appears

that there is little prospect for an early return to normal in that city. Most of those who have been moved, have been redeployed to Amman, Jordan, (the responsibility for Syria has also been reassigned there.) In addition, in Jordan, we are beginning a modest program of developmental co-operation and it is hoped that a broadly based bilateral relationship with that country will continue to evolve over the coming years.

The Gulf

Despite the on-going war with Iran, our people in Iraq are in no immediate danger. They have, of course, been well briefed as to evacuation procedures, but trade and diplomatic relations proceed basically as usual.

In Saudi Arabia, we are in the process of moving from Jeddah to a new (and very impressive) Canadian designed complex in Riyadh. Due to its position as the homeland of Islam, plus, to its vast oil wealth, this country plays a particularly important role in both the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Also in this Gulf area, because of its strategic position and its potential for trade, we have two other embassies — one in Kuwait, which has active trade and political interests and one in Abu Dhabi, which has just opened and should be fully operational by the end of this year.

A POSTING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This is the place for the "intellectually curious". There is so much to be learned — so many cultures and religions to be studied, — in this "cradle of civilizations". Yet, there are also concerns. Concerns about internal and external conflicts but also about such concepts as the role of women.

Islamic societies view women differently than western societies. There is an enormous spectrum of how the various countries enforce Islamic laws, but presently the countries of Saudi Arabia and Iran are the most restrictive. In other countries, such as Egypt, and Jordan, there are few evident restrictions on the activities of western women. For "liberated westerners" though, being unable to drive in Saudi Arabia or unable to venture outside without an escort, or having to always be covered from neck to toe, could initially be difficult to accept.

As a whole, however, these countries have so many positive aspects, that it is possible to sublimate specific concerns and benefit from the cultural and historical riches available. From among those who have been posted to the Middle East, most would agree that overall, it was a rewarding and certainly an intellectually stimulating experience.



- Francophone embassies in Africa
- ★ Francophone "offices of embassies" in Africa
- Anglophone missions in Africa
- ▲ Embassies in the Middle East