

# I INTRODUCTION

Hardly a day goes by without some event in the Middle East catching the newspaper headlines. Since the end of the Second World War more continuing violence and conflict have occurred in that region than anywhere else in the world. Increasing amounts of ever-more modern weapons have flowed into the area, making it one of the most heavily armed parts of the globe.

Canada's contacts with the Middle East have developed in an unusual way. Most of Canada's international relationships have grown from links based on geography, immigration, trade or membership in the Commonwealth. Canada's initial Middle East involvements came from none of these factors but resulted instead from its early prominence in the United Nations combined with the stature of Lester B. Pearson in its councils. As a result of Canada's UN activities, the first experience of the Middle East for significant numbers of Canadians has been as participants in a series of peacekeeping and observation missions.

The increasing dependence of the world on imported oil gave the Middle East, which had become the major international supplier of oil and gas, a new strategic importance. Conflict among countries of the Middle East involves the risk of cutting off vital oil supplies and has the potential of severely damaging the world's industrialized nations. With substantial energy supplies of its own, Canada is much less dependent on imported oil than many of its allies in Europe and it has become even less dependent through conservation and substitution measures. However, it lives in an interdependent world and Canadians must continue to be concerned to help to maintain the stability of the Middle East.

The enormous revenues that have flowed into the oil producing countries of the Middle East have changed these societies dramatically, enabling them to undertake a massive development of their economies. Most of this development has been based on imported products and technology. Trade opportunities in the region have grown significantly especially since the 1970s, after oil prices shot up. Canada has been late to enter these markets, but in recent years both government and industry have begun to make vigorous attempts to share in these new opportunities. However, while Canada is now quite widely represented throughout the region and a few Canadian firms have been highly successful there, its share of the area's trade is still modest.

It is noteworthy that Canada's relations with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa have not previously been the subject of serious examination by either a Senate or a House of Commons Committee. Over the years, there have been parliamentary studies of Canada's relations with Europe, with the United States, with the USSR, with Latin America, with the Caribbean, with the Pacific rim countries, with some of the countries of southeast Asia, with the Commonwealth,