



Bulletin

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MR. SHARP REPORTS ON MIDDLE EAST

Reporting to the House of Commons on November 19 on his recent visit to the Middle East, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Mitchell Sharp, made the following statement:

...Canada has been closely concerned in Middle Eastern affairs since we participated in the activities of the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, which drew up the Palestine partition plan of 1947. We voted for the United Nations resolution setting up the State of Israel in 1948. Recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist remains an essential feature of our Middle Eastern policy. At the same time, we try to maintain an objective approach to the current problems of the area. Our essential objective is that all states there should be enabled to live in peace and security, free from threats of war or territorial encroachment.

For two decades, Canada has had military personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the area. Canada is also the third-largest contributor to the United Nations agency working for the relief of the Arab refugees.

Our Middle Eastern policy has found expression largely through the United Nations in New York. It was there that we took part in the steps which led to the birth of the State of Israel; it was there that the United Nations Emergency Force was established. More recently, as a member of the Security Council, it was there that we took part in drafting Resolution 242 of November 1967, the resolution that we feel offers the best available framework for progress toward peace in the area.

My visits were a reflection of our long involvement in the affairs of the Middle East, in response to

invitations from the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Israel and the United Arab Republic, and in return for visits paid to Canada by the Shah of Iran, the President, the late Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, and the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Republic. More particularly, I wished to learn at first hand the attitudes and policies of the governments concerned with regard at the Arab-Israeli conflict.

DIRECT CONFRONTATION

I return from my visit both saddened and discouraged. Prime Minister Meir and President Nasser both told me that they seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is very hard to see how useful negotiations can begin when the preoccupations of the parties are in direct confrontation. Israel is preoccupied with the security of its boundaries and its insistence upon direct negotiations with its neighbors. The United Arab Republic is preoccupied with the withdrawal of Israel to its pre-1967 boundaries and the fate of the Arab refugees. I can see no immediate resolution of this confrontation.

When I went to the Middle East, I had no solution to offer and no proposals to make; I went to inform myself on the situation as seen by Iran, a nation which does not take sides, and by the two main protagonists. In every country visited, we were received with great courtesy by the head of state, the principal minister and the foreign minister. In each country, the heads of state and their ministers devoted many hours to concentrated conversations. The views I expressed in outlining Canadian policy