

Clark: We Have an Obligation to End the Mid-East Arms Race

The following are excerpts from a speech delivered by Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark at a luncheon hosted by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on March 1.

Opportunity seldom arises without risk. And just as [the Gulf] War gives rise to a new opportunity — and obligation — to build an order based on law, so too it gives rise to risks we must confront with candour and conviction.

Those risks are real. There is the risk arising from deep popular resentment in the Arab world to yet another perceived intrusion by outsiders in their region. There is the risk of tension between the Arab states themselves, some of whom are with the Coalition, others of whom are not. There is the risk of continued enmity between Israel and her neighbours... There is the risk that security will be sought in...solutions that will not work in the future any more than they have in the past — the solutions of rearmament, of the endless pursuit of an always elusive balance of power. There is the risk that the United Nations will not be shored up, but will be shunned, treated as a cloak of convenience, a fig-leaf for national preference disguised as global principle.

We must act now to reduce those risks. That task will not be easy. Many of these problems exist not because of neglect but because of genuine difficulty. The solutions will be gradual. Many will be long-term. But we must start on that road now or history will judge our accomplishments in the Gulf as minimal — another opportunity missed, another challenge in which we failed.

Let me start with the principles of peace. I believe four apply.

First, peace will only be built if it involves the nations of the region itself...

Second, peace must be just and fair. The United Nations and international law have provided for recourse to compensation for aggression. But victory must not become a vendetta.

Third, a durable peace will require addressing the full spectrum of problems that plague that region. That

means dealing with other conflicts — including the Arab-Israeli conflict. That means addressing the symptoms of conflict — the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the arms trade, the constant chase for spheres of influence. And that means addressing underlying causes of conflict — the uneven distribution of wealth between and within societies, the lack of economic cooperation between countries and the fragility of political systems that need greater popular participation.

Fourth, and finally, peace requires the UN. After August 2nd, the world came to the UN to reverse aggression peacefully. After January 15th, when the search for peace had failed, the members of the UN resolved to reverse aggression through force. And now that victory is at hand, the members of the UN must use that organization to build a peace that works.

On February 12th, the Prime Minister put forward elements of a package of proposals which we believe begin to convert these principles to practice. We are exploring those actively — with the United Nations, with our Coalition partners, and with others inside and outside the region. I will not repeat them here. But I do wish to focus and expand on one of them: the obligation to end the arms race.

For 45 years the search for security in the Middle East has been pursued largely through the avenue of arms. That search has failed. It has been folly. Despite billions and billions of dollars spent on arms — what have we seen? We have seen five wars between Israel and her neighbours. We have seen Lebanon reduced to rubble.

And we have this war, a war in which 75 percent of the arms in the arsenal of Saddam Hussein came from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, who are mandated to uphold international peace and security; a war in which dozens of companies in the West helped give Saddam the capacity for chemical warfare; a war in which the costs to the Coalition of this conflict far exceed any profits that have gone into

Swiss bank accounts or national treasuries; a war in which our soldiers are shot at by guns that Coalition governments sold to Iraq.

Twenty-eight nations supplied both Iran and Iraq during their eight-year war. Between 1984 and 1988, the dollar value of major weapons exports to Iraq was higher than to any other country in the developing or developed world. During that same period, Middle Eastern countries occupied five of the top six spots as destinations for arms. The Middle East — much of it underdeveloped — has spent a larger portion of its gross national product on arms than any other region in the world.

And there is a worrying parallel phenomenon — the growth of new suppliers in the developing world, many of whom put few restrictions on their arms exports. Between 1984 and 1988, 99 percent of Syria's arms exports went to countries at war. Eighty-six percent of Egypt's exports and 40 percent of Brazil's also went to states in conflict.

This is all insane. It must end. If it does not — if the world continues to treat this region as an auction block and not a tinder box, we will have failed. The UN has imposed an arms embargo against Iraq. When this war is over, the UN must become engaged in a serious effort to control the sale of arms, not only to Iraq, but to that region and others. The difficulties here are enormous:

1. Every country is entitled to defend itself. But when does prudent defence become destabilizing offence? How much is enough?

2. Although arms can contribute to conflict, arms are also a symptom of conflict. Countries have real security problems to address. How can arms be reduced when unresolved conflicts persist?

3. Although Canada's economy depends comparatively little on arms exports, the economies of others are heavily dependent. How can they be convinced to accept more effective control and restraint?