

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire
d'État aux
Affaires
extérieures

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**NOTES FOR A STATEMENT BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON HIS VISIT TO THE MIDDLE EAST**

**OTTAWA, Ontario
March 15, 1991**

Mr. Speaker,

Over the last seven and a half months, the Kuwait crisis has riveted our attention and has engaged much of our debate.

Today, Kuwait is again a free country, though deeply scarred by its ordeal.

I visited free Kuwait five days ago. I raised over the Canadian Embassy there the flag our diplomats so reluctantly took down when they were forced, by lack of food and water, to leave on October 19th.

I wish now to report to the House on that trip which began, deliberately, with a call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York and which took me to Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iran, as well as Kuwait and the United States. I met with the leaders of those countries, and with the Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Italy, and leading Palestinians from the occupied territories.

In Jordan, I visited the headquarters of UN agencies working with the casualties and the consequences of the conflict. The Canadian government is contributing to many of their activities, but I want to draw the attention of the House, and Canadians, to the fact that we contributed \$550,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for humanitarian assistance for the children who are victims of the conflict.

My colleague, the Minister of National Defence, and the Chief of the Defence Staff, also visited Bahrain, Qatar and the field hospital at Aljubayl, to express the gratitude of Canada to our troops and to other countries which hosted them.

My purpose was to look beyond the liberation of Kuwait to the issues this crisis has underscored. The fundamental problems remain, but there are now new possibilities which need to be nurtured.

My interest, as the Foreign Minister of Canada, was everywhere understood and welcomed. As a member of the Coalition of countries who, through the United Nations, came to the aid of Kuwait, Canada's commitment to the liberation of Kuwait was clear.

But Canada also represents a lifetime of commitment to the United Nations. My primary mission was to try to ensure that the sort of world consensus which emerged to free Kuwait be further mobilized to prevent such aggression in the future, and to strengthen the chances of enduring peace and security. That is the first lesson of this crisis.

There are other lessons. As the Prime Minister said on February 8th, one such lesson is that reckless transfers of arms must come to an end. Canada's commitment and record on arms control entitles us to place this item high on the world's agenda. I reviewed with leaders of other countries some of our proposals to reduce the flow and risk of arms. Progress, of course, will be slow, but everyone I met in the immediate aftermath of a decade of conflict in the Gulf acknowledged the need to address this problem, and to do so practically and persistently. In some Gulf countries, the immediate reflex may be to buy new arms to deal with threats they believe will continue. That underlines the need for countries like Canada to advance proposals like those the Prime Minister set out.

But for real peace and security to emerge, and for arms transfers to diminish, the underlying causes of tension have to be resolved. These tensions -- many of which relate to enduring disputes between Israel and her neighbours -- were a major topic of my discussions.

No one in the Middle East has forgotten a moment of history, and there is a lot of history to overcome. There is now, however, an opportunity -- now, but not for long. The world must not lose it.

Many of us have said that the recent events have changed the Middle East forever. Canada's purpose has been to make those changes for the better -- to strengthen the United Nations, to increase the control of arms and to reduce the risk of war, and to resolve the tensions at the root of insecurity in the Middle East.

I congratulated Mr. Perez de Cuellar, on behalf of the people of Canada, for his resolution during this crisis. He thanked Canada for our support, and believed that Canada had set an example for other states by our determination to settle this crisis through the United Nations.

He informed me that the United Nations is poised to police the separation of forces, once an official request is received from the Government of Kuwait.

He also urged us to try to heal some of the wounds of this crisis by helping leaders with whom Canada has close ties -- such as King Hussein of Jordan. He was concerned about the Palestinians whose leadership had been so criticized, but whose rights represent a continuing challenge to the reputation for fairness and effectiveness of the United Nations.

Indeed, this issue dominated many of my subsequent discussions.

On my way to the region, I also met with Secretary of State Baker, just before he embarked on his own tour. He shared our view that there is a psychological moment of opportunity to be seized on the agenda for arms control. His immediate concerns were with the arrangements for regional security which would enable the United States to withdraw its ground forces from the theatre and bring the troops home. Even as we spoke, of course, the Foreign Ministers of the Gulf Co-operation Council were meeting in Damascus with the Foreign Ministers of Syria and Egypt to reach agreement on the stationing of Syrian and Egyptian ground forces in Kuwait, to replace Coalition ground forces, once a definitive ceasefire with Iraq was arranged.

I believed that my trip to the area should begin with the Government of Kuwait. The Emir of Kuwait was still in Taif, in Saudi Arabia, where he had spent the occupation. His appreciation for Canada's contribution to the liberation of Kuwait was heartfelt. The Emir was deeply concerned at the damage to his people and to his State. Plans are already beginning for the massive reconstruction of Kuwait and I welcomed the clear assurances that the expertise of Canadian companies will enjoy opportunities commensurate with the important role Canada played in liberating Kuwait.

Mr. Speaker, the senseless damage to Kuwait must be seen to be believed. Across the limitless desert landscape burn innumerable fires, each set deliberately with powerful charges of high explosives. Downtown, on the waterfront, are burned-out building after building, looted store after store, museums, homes, things of value or merit, trashed. This wasn't war damage -- this city was put to the torch in the last 48 hours of occupation.

For the Kuwaitis, the ending of sanctions against Iraq is therefore a major problem. Should oil exports again earn revenues for Iraq when Kuwait remains crippled? On the other hand, Iraq itself is badly damaged and needs to finance its own recovery. One idea being explored by countries of the region is the dedication of a proportion of Iraq's oil revenues to repair the damage Saddam Hussein has done.

Much will depend on what kind of regime survives in Iraq. Saddam Hussein is now being challenged by his own people. But through the force of arms and oppression he can cling to power. As long as he does, the countries of the region will be wary of his designs, and will want continued sanctions on anything enabling him to rebuild his armies.

In Kuwait, there is a mood calling for change in the way the country governs itself. The Government says it is anxious to open up the regime, to institute more democracy. I encouraged that development, and urged that particular care be

taken to allow the reintegration of Palestinian residents of Kuwait, many of whom -- most of whom -- were intensely loyal to Kuwait.

Almost everyone with whom I met indicated that the Palestinian problem is the key issue to be resolved in the region.

The answer will have to be found in greater security for all States of the area. The issue has three essential elements which all must be respected. They are the security of the State of Israel, the rights of the Palestinians and territory. Sequence and relationship -- who goes first, and what is tied to what -- could consume thought, discussion, and negotiation for years. Meanwhile the despair of the refugee camps would find more radical expression and the arms race would go on.

I sought in my discussions in Jordan, Syria, Israel and the home of a leading Palestinian Faisal Hussein, to promote appreciation of the need to build confidence in the collective ability of states and peoples to live together in acceptance and security. Eventually, a healthier state of mind can be built. There is not a lot of time. The countries and peoples concerned could make gestures, take initiatives, not of a kind which bear upon their fundamental security interests, but which build up a habit of working together. This is the message I left with all those with whom I met.

Could not Lebanon be the theatre of such action to further strengthen the authority of the government of Lebanon?

Could some progress be made on water projects?

Can peoples see their welfare in terms of a shared and more harmonious future instead of a bitterly divided past?

It is not clear they can. But that is the best way to build trust.

Much time is devoted to technique -- to whether it should be an international conference, at the United Nations, or not at the United Nations, or whether it should be separate bilateral negotiations, and whether discussion between the Palestinians and the Israelis should be part of that or separate, and in any case, who should represent the Palestinians, and so on. On that point, Mr. Speaker, Canada can only agree with the Secretary-General of the United Nations -- the Palestinians should be represented by the organizations or representatives they choose. Our distaste for the support for Saddam Hussein by the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) should not disqualify Palestinians from coming to their conclusions on

what we have always said was fundamental -- their right to choose their own leadership in the search for realization of their legitimate rights.

As I said in Jerusalem to the Prime Minister of Israel, we are among the closest friends of that country and will not let it be put at risk. As the Prime Minister said on February 8th, and as President Bush said a week ago, there is no security in geography.

I also went to Iran, Mr. Speaker.

My meeting with President Rafsanjani was productive. Of course, we discussed problems -- human rights and hostages, for example -- but we did so in a way which gave me hope we can work well with Iran.

These countries are all neighbours of Iraq. They are not disinterested in the outcome there of the uprising. Indeed, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have brought together, in Lebanon, the leaders of the various groups representing the masses of people wishing to be done with Saddam Hussein's tyranny, not just the Shiite majority in the south, and the Kurdish minority in the north, but others as well. We have always said that the future of Iraq is up to the Iraqis.

Mr. Speaker, I have been encouraged by all the leaders I spoke with. They do want a durable peace in the region. They are, however, not yet ready to move beyond the liberation of Kuwait to address the age-old problems on which they have been so long divided, except with wariness and distrust. But move they must.

Or the arms race will spiral.

And the United Nations will lose the lustre of its concerted action to liberate Kuwait.

That would be our common loss.

Mr. Speaker, by its nature, this is an interim report to the House, and I will be coming back to the Standing Committee as early as next week.

My conversations last week gave me a more direct understanding of attitudes in a region whose conflicts are deep and dangerous. They reinforced Canada's ability to play a constructive role in calming those conflicts, and in using the end of a war to begin a real peace. I know that all Members of this House share our commitment to that goal.

As our ships head home from the Gulf, proud of our contribution to one victory, we are seeking now to address the sources of that conflict. Last July, no one foresaw the invasion of Kuwait, or the unprecedented response of the United Nations. We cannot foresee the developments of the next several months, except to say that they offer a real chance to resolve the most intractable conflict the world knows, and it is in Canada's interest to make the most of that opportunity.