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NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY THE
HONOURABLE ALLAN J. MACEachEN,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, TO THE
CANADA/ISRAEL COMMITTEE.

OTTAWA

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When I addressed the annual conference of the Canada-Israel Committee just over a year ago, I observed that I was looking forward to visiting the Middle East again, including Israel where I had last been in 1976. As you well know I was able to make my planned visit to the region last October. I would like today to share with you at least some of the impressions I brought back from this area, for I'm quite aware that developments there are of great interest and concern to you as they are to me.

Of course my trip was one which recalled many happy associations from the past, and in this sense was an eminently rich and rewarding experience. There was, of course, also another side: a sharpened awareness of the frustrating complexity of the troubles with which the leaders and the inhabitants of the area have so long had to live. This was driven home to me again, both by what I saw in the countries I visited, and during the discussions I had with my hosts in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Let me speak first of the pleasurable aspects. Prominent among them was the time I spent in Israel, an occasion to sense again the dynamism and vitality of this young nation with which Canadians have been so intimately associated since its birth. I found the recollections of the past no less poignant, and the energy with which the people of Israel face the future in no way diminished. This vigour and dynamism cannot fail to serve as a source of inspiration to Canadians and citizens of other countries who visit Israel.

I also found, as I had confidently expected, that the friendship and understanding which have always inspired relations between our two countries and peoples remain healthy and vigorous. Fundamental to our relationship is the unchanging and unquestionable commitment of Canada to the security and well-being of the state of Israel, to its right to share a peaceful existence in the Middle East with its Arab neighbours.

Of course our relations, relations between Canada and Israel, have evolved and expanded tremendously since those early days after 1948 when the regional political dimension, indeed the very survival of Israel, almost totally dominated our mutual pre-occupations. The friendly and forward-looking discussions which I was able to have with Prime Minister Shamir reflected the breadth and stability of the Canada-Israel relationship. While we spoke a good deal, naturally enough, about the current troubles of the region, and especially the relentless violence in Lebanon, we found cause for some satisfaction with the steady growth of economic relations, technical co-operation and cultural exchanges between our two

countries. We were encouraged by what had been achieved, optimistic about the future and confident that our longstanding relations would continue to flourish and prosper.

Significant progress has been realized during the past year. You will recall that at your last annual conference, I announced the allocation by the Canadian Government of funds to help with the establishment, in co-operation with Israel, of an institute to promote co-operative industrial research and development in both countries. I recall you were very pleased with that statement. In addition to proceeding with this project, to which the visit to Canada last June of Israel's Trade Minister, Mr. Gideon Patt, lent additional impetus, new departures have since been made in other areas. We sent technical delegations from the Department of Health and Welfare, and from the Department of Communications, to Israel last December. They had extensive discussions with Israeli officials, with a view to increasing co-operation in health and medicine, and in the field of communications. Both areas hold promise of mutually beneficial results from closer co-ordination of our efforts. Another field in which we are moving toward expanded co-operation is film production. A film co-production agreement has been in force for many years, and Canada has now proposed that this be expanded to take account of recent film and television developments. Talks have been started about amending the agreement with this objective in mind.

A further bond which reinforces Canada's traditional friendship with Israel is our mutual commitment to the principles of democratic government. I don't think we can ever overlook this. This democratic system was demonstrated in practical fashion during my visit last autumn, by the fact that I met with both government and opposition leaders and like Canada there was hardly unanimity. There were differences in the healthy democratic society that is Israel. When we look at the number of countries with democratic systems they are few indeed.

Of course, the constant flow of visitors in both directions between our two countries, the elaborate pattern of human exchanges between our people, is one of the fundamental links between Israel and Canada. Indeed it seems to me that this human dimension is unique in Canada's international relations. Here too, we have recently taken a significant step forward. By an Order-in-Council passed at the beginning of this month,

the Canadian Government abolished the requirement for citizens of Israel to obtain visitor visas when they travel to Canada. Since the waiving of the visa requirement will free some 50,000 Israeli visitors annually from the need to obtain visas to come to this country, it represents a very substantial facilitation of the vital human interchange which is the very fabric of our bilateral relationships.

All this to say that we are moving ahead, with goodwill and energy, in further enlarging and strengthening the already extensive pattern of exchanges between Canada and Israel. There is always much more to be done, but we are on the right road and moving in the right direction. I don't think at times, in our preoccupation with regional conflicts that we ought to overlook paying close and constructive attention to the bilateral relationship. These are fundamental and ought to be continued. My assessment of my visit to Jerusalem was that it was an exchange of views among friends. I think this view was shared with my interlocutors in Israel - the Prime Minister, Defence Minister Arens and President Herzog. Following my visit, Prime Minister Trudeau received a letter from Prime Minister Shamir describing our talks as friendly and constructive and that we had surveyed a whole range of problems in our area and the various facets of Canadian Israeli relations. In that communication, Prime Minister Shamir went on to express the hope that, as a result of this tour d'horizon, there will be ongoing discussion at government level with a view to strengthening our relationship, especially in economic matters, where there is room for improvement and undoubtedly great potential. I agree with Prime Minister Sharmir on the great potential for future cooperation in economic matters. I regard bilateral relations to be of supreme importance.

If the bilateral scene we reviewed together was encouraging, our examination of regional problems produced a more sombre assessment. In Israel as in the Arab countries I visited, I found anxiety and doubts, and an almost tangible sense of frustration that peace has remained so elusive while violence recurs only too easily and too frequently. As you will remember, I was in the Middle East when the vicious terrorist assaults on the headquarters in Beirut of the United States and French contingents of the Multi-National Force took place. In fact I had been in Beirut the day before. These senseless outrages, so costly in innocent lives, were very much on our minds as my Israeli hosts spoke of their concern about dangers to their country's security, through Lebanon and

in other quarters. Since then, further terrorist acts within Israel, in Kuwait and elsewhere have provided recurrent grim reminders of the fragility of such stability as can be found in the region. We cannot but emphatically deplore this relentless recourse to violence which compounds the impasse from which we must escape.

I talked about Lebanon in every capital. I certainly talked about Lebanon in Israel. Indeed this was among the main subjects of my discussions. Some of the problems we examined are, unfortunately, no less troubling today, although much has happened in Lebanon since my visit. We have seen recurrent violent hostilities, interspersed by fragile cease-fire arrangements. Elements of the Multi-National Force have been progressively withdrawn. The agreement of May 17 last year between Israel and Lebanon has been abrogated, a development viewed by the government of Israel as perpetuating threats to security along its border with Lebanon. Prime Minister Shamir in a letter I received from him last week reiterated that Israel has no wish to keep its forces in Lebanon a day longer than necessary, but must look to the safety of its population by ensuring that Lebanese territory is not used as a base for terrorist operations. This same concern was underlined during my meetings with him last October in Jerusalem. I can readily appreciate this preoccupation of the government of Israel about the security of its territory and its people, a preoccupation which we take fully into account in our continuing attentive evaluation of Middle Eastern developments.

Events in Lebanon also figured prominently in my conversations in Damascus. This was my first visit to Syria and my first opportunity to hear from the President and the Foreign Minister their appreciation of the situation. There I was told that at first-hand the restoration of stability in Lebanon is important for the security of Syria, particularly given the proximity of Israeli troops to its capital. It was pointed out to me also that Syria had traditionally played a prominent role in the political life of Lebanon, and was relied upon to sustain the legitimate interests of factions which considered themselves discriminated against. In response to this, I underlined Canada's concern that Syrian influence should be exercised in a constructive and responsible manner for peace. There should be no doubt about that. I made this point directly to President Assad. That Syria plays a substantial role in the affairs of the area is clearly a given which must be taken into account. When I met with the President of Israel, Mr. Herzog, I found his analysis of Syria quite

enlightening to me because he was of the view that Syria was a major element in the area. He certainly had the opinion that at some point, somehow, a way must be found to talk to Syria.

I should tell you that I found the President of Israel to be quite a terrific person. I'd never met him before and maybe my appreciation of him increased when I discovered that he was a Gaelic speaker. He was brought up in Ireland and spent a good part of his life there and acquired a facility in the Gaelic language. But you don't meet very many statesmen in the world today who speak Gaelic and here I was with the President of Israel, both of us Gaelic speakers. We exchanged some views in Gaelic. He in his Irish Gaelic and I in my Scottish Gaelic. I should read a report of that part of the conversation, which of course was not written by me. It stated that "by the end of meeting the President of Israel and the Deputy Prime Minister had established excellent rapport. The President recalled serving in World War II with Canadians and his visits to Canada. Then the President and Deputy Prime Minister tried out their Gaelic on each other". The report goes on to say the results were mixed, as Irish and Scottish versions are apparently not that close. "Fortunately, the rest of the meeting had taken place in English". That's just a bit of a side comment about what I regarded as a very interesting discussion with the President, not only on the problems of Syria but the problems of the region as a whole.

I don't think that there is any doubt in any of our minds that the restoration of stability and peace in Lebanon, and the alleviation of the anxieties of its neighbours, require a national political reconciliation, equitable in the eyes of all the factions involved, and accepted by all of them. Only thus can we realistically hope for the emergence of a stable and broadly based government able to exert effective control over the whole of Lebanese territory. We do not yet know what results may follow from the latest round of political talks which has just taken place in Lausanne, but in any event there is so far no assurance that even a reasonable minimum of stability in Lebanon - the essential first step in securing its national sovereignty and territorial integrity - is in sight.

I have spoken of Lebanon not only because its intractable troubles are of concern to you and to me as Canadians, but also because what has been happening there over the past several years reflects and underlines some of the fundamental elements of the broader Arab-Israeli

conflict. The constructive first move comes hard for the parties to agonizing years of conflict. There is the same suspicion and apprehension dividing the parties. There is a reluctance to venture the first step toward reasonable accommodation, lest this be taken undue advantage of by the opposing party. Finally, in Lebanon as with regional issues, we have seen the tragic reliance on the use of military force rather than resort to peaceful negotiation to attain innately legitimate objectives.

Of all the impressions I brought back from my recent visit to Israel and its neighbours, the most fundamental is a reinforced conviction that peace through negotiation is essential and remains possible - a peace which gives Israel secure and recognized boundaries, and the Palestinians a homeland in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As Prime Minister Shamir eloquently observed in a toast he pronounced during my visit, "coexistence and peace are inevitable" given the realities of demography and geography in the Middle East.

In re-affirming that negotiation offers the only feasible route to the eventual peace and stability which all the peoples of the region so desperately need, I in no way nor do I want to under-estimate the magnitude of the difficulties to be overcome, the perceived problems and even dangers for each party in moving toward the negotiating table. I am well aware that for the parties involved, after the experience they have gone through, even a patently fragile and temporary condition of relative security may appear marginally preferable to volunteering the first move in a process where concessions from all sides will inevitably be required. It is all too clear, however, it must be clear to you and to me, that if the relentless spiral of violence and retribution is to be broken, real risks must be taken for peace. That such risks can lead to dramatically positive results has already been concretely demonstrated in the peace resolutely forged between Israel and Egypt. If other elements of conflict and tension in the Middle East can be progressively tackled with similar comparable courage and imagination, I don't think we need to despair of yet finding the constructive solutions which have so long eluded us, and at such cost to the peoples of the region.

From my talks on the peace between Egypt and Israel I concluded that neither country had fully realized expectations of that peace, but I don't think that either country would withdraw from that peace.

I profited by my visit to the region to review at first hand the circumstances to which the various elements of Canada's Middle East policy relate, and thus to evaluate the continuing validity of the basic elements of Canada's Middle East policy. I explained Canadian positions on major issues to my interlocutors in the five capitals I visited, and welcomed their reactions to our approach. You know the main elements of our policy - we have rehearsed them together frequently and it is not necessary for me to repeat them as we know them to exist. I explained them and discussed them with my hosts in the Middle East, and it is true that they did not always agree with the stand adopted by Canada on contentious issues. Our luncheon chairman said that at times even two Cape Bretoners can disagree, when he remarked that the Canada-Israel Committee and the Government of Canada may disagree on certain aspects of policy. That element of disagreement could be found in my tour as well. What I did find, and I say this quite honestly, what I did find reassuring was that my interlocutors did understand quite well what our policy was. I believe they also understood that it is balanced and fairminded. I returned to Canada with the view that it wasn't necessary to go back to the drawing board, that our attitudes to the problems of the region were sound. There was no need to review everything we had been doing, because I found that the principles under which we had been operating with countries in a different situation serve Canada well in Canada's effort to build bilateral relations in the area, and serve well and give impetus to our concern that we do everything possible for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace.

I know that if there is any concern of the Canada-Israel Committee and its members, it is the achievement of a just and comprehensive and lasting peace. I know that in respect of this particular objective, our unrelenting search for means of furthering the cause of peace and thereby the well-being of the people of Israel - the Canadian Government enjoys the unqualified support of the Canada-Israel Committee. Hence my particular satisfaction that I've had an opportunity today to share with you some of my anxieties, and to express to you my persistent hope that reason and peaceful accommodation may yet triumph over bitterness and violence.