

GOVERNMENT



OF CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 57/25

"SEARCHING FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE"

Address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, on the occasion of the Negev Dinner offered by the Montreal Jewish Community in honour of Mr. L.D. Crestohl, M.P., Monday, April 8, 1957

It was with great pleasure that I accepted your kind invitation to be here this evening. For more than one reason I have looked forward to the opportunity to address this distinguished audience. It is always gratifying to speak to a gathering of Canadians having a high sense of social responsibility and a devotion to the public good. It is a pleasure, too, to be present on an occasion when honour is being done to one of my colleagues in the House of Commons, and to be able to add my own word of tribute to those already addressed to Mr. Crestohl.

Many of you here this evening regard yourselves, I am sure, as active partners in the constructive tasks which the Government and people of Israel have set themselves. You have given much of your strength and your means, first to make it possible for an independent Jewish state to exist at all, secondly, to help consolidate Israel's hold on life, and, in the third place, to help it to achieve a status in the international community in consonance with the dignity of the Jewish people. Your first loyalty to your own country has not been prejudiced by loyal support for Israel.

It was exactly ten years ago, in April, 1947, that the question of the future of Palestine was referred to the United Nations General Assembly by the Government of the United Kingdom. From that time until the present it has been the constant aim of the Canadian Government with, I think, the hearty support of the people of Canada, both to assist and support the new state which emerged, and to find some way of helping to bring peace and happiness and an opportunity for uninterrupted constructive activity and harmonious living to the people of the Middle East.

At the time when Canada was first drawn into the discussion of Palestine's future, I remember that a committee of the United Nations General Assembly, over which I presided had before it the introductory statement of the United Kingdom representative: "We have tried for years to solve this problem of Palestine ... we now bring it to the United Nations in the hope that they can succeed where we have not". That was the point from which the United Nations effort started. There was at that time, as you all recall, a deep division of opinion in the General Assembly as to how the matter should be handled. I think no government dissented, or at least openly dissented, from the widely-held belief that the time had come for the Jewish people to have somewhere in the world a territory in which to rebuild a national life of their own. Those people, torn and persecuted by the Nazis in World War II, desired, for obvious reasons, to establish that territorial base in Palestine. To most non-Jews also, this point of view seemed acceptable and logical because there had already been laid in Palestine by Zionist effort, within the period of the mandate, considerably more than the mere foundation for a Jewish national home.

The problem which confronted us, then, was essentially this: On the one hand there was an Arab determination to fight in order to secure a single independent state in which at least two-thirds of the voters would be and would remain Arab. On the other hand, there was an equal determination by the Jewish Agency representatives to resist any recommendation of the General Assembly which did not give the Jewish element of the population control of one of the two states into which it was proposed that the mandated territory should be divided.

No matter what recommendation was made by the Assembly, therefore, it was tragically clear that conflict was only too likely to break out. For those of us who had worked through the United Nations meetings to secure a fair agreement on the future of Palestine, the question remained essentially the same at the end of the debate as it was at the beginning: Which of the proposed arrangements would impose the least injustice in the face of conflicting claims, and which gave greatest promise of being capable of providing a foundation on which the fullest development of both Arab and Jewish life was more likely to be possible?

I was among those who were very greatly disappointed that the Arab governments refused to see the positive possibilities for themselves in the partition plan which we worked out at the General Assembly in the autumn of 1947 with meticulous attention to detail and with constant concern for the rights both of the Palestinian Arabs and of Jews. Since there already existed in Palestine a large Jewish community, and since there was already a lack of harmony between Jewish and Arab views on a wide range of questions relating to their common problems it had seemed to us not impossible that the Arabs would consider it better after all in the long run to accept partition than to be in constant conflict with a vigorous one-third minority in a unitary state covering the whole of the country.

It seemed to us also, as it did to the majority of United Nations members, that the most logical and the simplest way of doing justice to both elements of the population of Palestine was to arrange a disposition of the territory which would give each element control over its own destinies. A plan to this end was recommended, and you know what happened. The Arab governments rejected it and took up arms to prevent it being carried out. But their appeal to arms failed.

The State of Israel came into being but, because of military operations, its boundaries were not the same as those of the partition plan. A truce was arranged by the Security Council. Later, on November 16, 1948, that Council called on the parties to the Palestine conflict to proceed from this imposed truce to the series of armistice agreements, which have helped, since 1949, to provide a framework within which, for seven and a half years, a return to open hostilities was at least avoided. The progress made by Israel in these seven and a half years, with your aid and with the aid of others like yourselves, has thus been made possible by this decision of the Security Council in an hour when prospects of a return to peace seemed dim indeed.

The next logical step, of an advance from the armistice regime to a peace settlement, has, as we know all too well, not yet been taken. There has been a fever of discontent in the area, attributable to the fears and dislocations caused by the sudden transition to new conditions, the effect of which may have been mitigated from time to time by external applications, but which has not so far been cured in any fundamental sense.

It was perhaps just as well that the United Nations was already familiar with the documentation in this case before the crisis came last autumn for, at the beginning of November, demands for United Nations action were presented without any opportunity for pulse-taking or the compilation of case-histories. Both remedial and preventive action seemed to be immediately necessary. We had to keep in mind that violence - however great the provocation - begets violence.

I know that you, as Canadians, look at the situation which has developed in the Middle East not only with a keen sympathy for the position in which Israel finds itself today, but also with a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of the peace of the world as a whole, which is the over-riding responsibility of our generation. Nothing, in the long run, can be satisfactory short of establishing peace and the rule of law, because in our day literally nothing less can assure the survival of the human race. It must be the main business of this generation to get on with that task, however discouraging, indeed however impossible it may seem to be.

In November last at the United Nations, then, it seemed necessary to act quickly and to improvise, to stop the fighting and prevent it spreading. What we resorted to was an experiment in United Nations intervention never before tried, and which still remains to be proven. Moreover, this intervention had, or should have had, the dual objective of first, bringing what might conceivably have become a general conflagration under control, and then turning men's minds to the removal of the causes which brought about the violence and thereby to secure the rule of law in matters relating to the area of conflict. In my own mind there has never been a moment's doubt as to the imperative relationship between these two things and our responsibility to do something about both of them. Nor has there ever been in my mind any doubt as to which is the more difficult of the two tasks. Events since November have made that clear. Peace is not merely a passive condition of absence of conflict. That, at best, is only hibernation, and it can mean something worse. Peace can be secured only by the agreed solution of problems between nations. It is an arduous and active adaptation to the pressures and changes that come with growth.

Last November, then, we had two things to think of at once - how to prevent the spread of violence and then to order things so as to prevent, if possible, its recurrence. For the latter, the Assembly stood firmly on the ground of full, not partial or prejudicial, but full compliance with the Armistice Agreement between Israel and Egypt.

It has been suggested lately, here and there in Canada, that since there have been many violations of this Armistice Agreement, it would be as well to scrap it. My own view, however, is that peace has not come to Israel yet because the orderly processes and the pacific principles prescribed in the Armistice Agreements have not yet been fully applied by the parties, each of whom has yielded to the temptation which assails all human beings to favour the rigid application of some clauses which favour its own interests while finding excellent reasons for slurring over or arguing away the immediate relevance of other clauses which are considered to be less advantageous to itself.

Particularly do I believe that the United Nations should try to take steps that will be effective in carrying out that part of the Armistice which forbids belligerent or hostile acts by either party. This seems to me to be basic to the whole question of compliance with the Armistice, and if it can be frustrated, for instance, by specious claims to prevent innocent passage for Israeli ships into and through the Gulf of Aqaba, or through the Suez Canal, on grounds of self-defence, justified by a technical state of war, then the rest of the Armistice Agreement means little.

But behind the Armistice Agreement, there is something even more fundamental, namely, the absolute necessity of the admission by Israel's neighbours, openly and sincerely, of her right to an honourable and secure national existence. Without this, how can there possibly be peace in the area? I would like to see that right confirmed by formal statements by every member of the United Nations, which would ensure also Israel's full right to protection, under the Charter, against aggression. Without some such assurances, how can the fears of the people of Israel be set at rest? And with those fears, how can there ever be peace? In this connection, may I quote what I said at the United Nations Assembly last February:

"The problem is basically one of fear, which breeds distrust and animosity and conflict. There has been fear on Israel's side of extermination by neighbours whose hostility to the creation and continued existence of their State has been strong and unremitting. It is difficult for people to act with the moderation and restraint through which wisdom expresses itself if they believe that they themselves live in the shadow of destruction and are uncertain about their very survival as a nation.

"The fear from which the people of Israel suffer, the fear which explains the violence of reprisals which they have taken against their neighbours, will be on the way to elimination when the Arab states are willing to recognize Israel as a sovereign state, and its right to national existence within accepted boundaries and under conditions of life tolerable to its people.

There is, however, a reciprocal step to be taken. Israel should reaffirm her determination to do whatever she can to remove the fears of her neighbours that Israel's existence is bound to mean expansion at their expense.

Again may I quote what I said at the UN Assembly in February.

"On the other side, however, there is also fear, which has led to extreme policies and to violence. Among the Arab states there is a deep and understandable apprehension that the displacement of population and the political tension already associated with a new state, most of whose citizens have come from abroad, a new state established in the midst of the Arab people may be followed by still further dislocations owing to the pressure of immigration into Israel, backed as that state is by strong international pressures and international resources. There is a fear that Israel will yield to expansionist ambitions, which is the counterpart of Israel's own fear of Arab intentions. This has bred in the Arab world animosity and violence toward Israel. When that fear is dissipated we may count on moderation in the attitude of Israel's neighbours toward that state. We cannot but agree that if Israel has a right

to live and prosper, freed from the fear of strangulation by its neighbours, the Arab states also have a right to feel confident that Israel will not attempt to expand its territory at their expense..."

It is, I think, entirely consistent with these views that I have expressed as to the necessity for doing our utmost to remove fear that we should have supported full compliance with the Armistice Agreement which was designed, and rightly, however faulty its execution, to prevent the imposition of the will of one nation on another by force.

At the Assembly, however, we realized that it was not enough merely to say "stop fighting and return to the Armistice arrangements". That alone would have been inadequate to the point of futility.

So we tried to follow up a cease-fire with other constructive ideas. The first was to put a United Nations Emergency Force, organized for the purpose and with adequate authority, into the area of conflict, between the opposing forces; to secure - I emphasize that word secure - and supervise the cease-fire and assist in restoring conditions of quiet. This has been a difficult operation, without precedent to go on, and with differing views on the exact nature and function and control of a Force coming from a number of governments whose views on Middle Eastern matters are not all the same. The Canadian Government believed that this Force should be given the broadest possible authority to carry out its functions. We have refused to agree that any state, even that on whose territory it is operating with the consent of its government, can control it or decide when its task is finished. That is a matter for the United Nations. If it turned out to be otherwise, then this country could surely not continue to participate in it. But this decision is one which we would take with the greatest possible regret, and only if we were forced to do so because we believe in the value of this Force. Elements of it stationed at Sharm al-Shaikh have already had a good effect on preventing interference with shipping in the Straits of Tiran, where there should be no such interference. It is also useful, I think along the demarcation line in preventing incursions, and this should make retaliation unnecessary. It is also strongly represented in the Gaza strip, and arrangements have been made for its activities there of a kind which should help it to keep reasonable peace on the line. Perhaps all these arrangements will not work out satisfactorily, but we must surely give them a chance and make sure that failure will not be our fault.

If the Government of Egypt were to refuse to co-operate in a way to make possible the effective functioning of this Force, which threatens no one and has only one aim, to protect the peace, then that Government would be taking a serious responsibility unto itself and its actions should be challenged and condemned at the United Nations.

But the Government of Israel has also a responsibility. It should, in my view, admit in principle the right of UNEF to be deployed on its side of the demarcation line, in accordance with arrangements to be negotiated with it by UNEF. I hope that it will agree to this.

There was one other matter, apart from UNEF, with which we were very preoccupied at the Assembly. We felt strongly that the Resolutions of the last Assembly governing the functions and powers and operations of UNEF, and, above all, those dealing with arrangements to follow the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egypt, should be spelled out with as much precision as possible, so we would all know, especially Israel, where we stood. Our position on this matter was made known to the Assembly and we put forward proposals to this end as clearly as we could. May I quote from what I said at the time.

"First there should be a firm pledge by the Governments of Israel and Egypt to observe scrupulously the provisions of all the 1949 Armistice Agreement. But when we talk about scrupulous observance of the Armistice Agreement, we should mean, not some of its provisions, but all of them. What are they?

"First, the establishment of an armistice demarcation line, which is not a political or territorial boundary, but which cannot be changed except by agreement between the two parties. Also the agreement prohibits any form of aggressive action, warlike or hostile acts, if you like, belligerent acts, or resort to force by the land, sea or air forces of either side. They establish the rights of each side to security and freedom from fear of attack.

"Second, the Secretary-General and the Commander of UNEF should make arrangements with the Governments concerned for the deployment of UNEF on the armistice demarcation line. ...

"Third, regarding the Gulf of Aqaba and Straits of Tiran, it should be agreed and affirmed that there should be no interference with innocent passage through or any assertion of belligerent rights in the Straits. ...

"Fourth, the United Nations should be associated to the maximum possible extent, and through detailed arrangements to be worked out, with the civil administration of Gaza."

We had drafted a resolution covering these proposals but we failed to secure enough support for it to justify putting it formally to the vote. Certainly delegations, notably that of the United States, thought that such a resolution could not secure the necessary 2/3 majority and that, therefore, we should sacrifice the better for the possible; that we should play more by ear than by note. Perhaps they were right, but I hope we don't get an earache in the process!

In any event, somewhat vague declarations and approval of reports of the Secretary-General took the place of clear and detailed resolutions. It was on these (on the whole constructive and useful generalizations) and especially on certain assumptions and hopes and expectations, received as a result of separate discussions with the United States, and which it is the particular responsibility of that country to make effective, that Israel withdrew her troops from Egypt and the Gaza strip.

I have heard it said that we pressed Israel to adopt this procedure and to rely on these assumptions as sufficient safeguards for her position after withdrawal. There is not one word of truth in this, even though we thought the assumptions reasonable. On the contrary, as I have said, we did our best, but without success, to convert such assumptions into United Nations recommendations covering United Nations administration of Gaza, deployment of UNEF on the armistice demarcation line, non-interference with shipping through the Straits of Tiran, non-discrimination in the use of the Suez Canal, and full compliance with all terms of the Armistice Agreement, including prohibition of all hostile acts. I am only sorry that we did not succeed in our efforts to get such a resolution through. Our failure, however, will not prevent us doing the best we can in the United Nations and as a contributor to UNEF, to pacify the area, and prepare the way for the peace settlement that must come.

Looking at the basic realities of the present situation, the following points seem to me to be important: (a) Israel is entitled to the security which she has not yet enjoyed; (b) the Arabs, who originally insisted that Palestine should be a unitary state, have for the past five years made it clear that they will now accept the principle of partition on two or three conditions. These conditions are far from being acceptable to Israel, though they do represent a step forward in that they do recognize that a State of Israel has come to stay. Perhaps that step can be consolidated and others taken if and when immediate tensions are reduced and if an atmosphere can be created more favourable to negotiation and to an ultimate peaceful settlement. I think that an important factor which might be used to this end is the stronger interest which the United Nations (apart from the U.S.S.R. and its satellites) has been taking in genuine peace for the Middle East. This is certainly a continuing asset which has not been exploited to the full extent of its capabilities for helpfulness.

One final matter I would mention, and one to which you have given much attention already, is the extent to which Israel's insecurity is increased by the continuing problem of the Arab refugees. I do not wish to say much about this matter this evening since it is a problem with many ramifications, but there remains the fact that Israel, which has always acknowledged the obligation in principle to compensate the refugees for their

properties, has not yet considered itself to be in a position to discharge this obligation, for reasons with which we are all familiar. It is clear that so large a number of refugees - 900,000 - cannot return to their former lands in what is now the State of Israel, whose total population has grown so rapidly that it already presses hard on the available resources to support it. Nor, in all probability, would many refugees desire to live in what would now be to them an alien country. Some such repatriation should be possible, however, as that which would be involved, for example, in the reuniting of families. For the rest, and that means the great bulk of the refugees, resettlement as an international operation, to which Israel, among others, would make a contribution, seems to be the only answer.

I look even further ahead to the day that, with peace established, with boundaries settled, the refugee problem liquidated, provision could be made for the economic development of the whole area, by projects such as the Jordan River scheme, worked out between Israel and its neighbours; and by others in which the international community could assist through the United Nations or otherwise.

First of all, however, there must be a political settlement, a peace settlement. Then, and only then, can the unhappy recent past, so full of strife and conflict, be replaced by a future of peace and progress for Arabs and Jews alike.

Canada must continue to play an active and constructive part to bring this about. Our reward will be the friendship and goodwill of a State whose people have already, by their exertions, their sacrifices and their progressive and democratic ways, earned our own admiration and support.

S/C