



Statements and Speeches

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THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

A Statement by Ambassador W.H. Barton, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, at the Sixth Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, New York, January 11, 1980

Editorial note

The question of Afghanistan was debated at meetings of the United Nations Security Council from January 5 to 9. Following a veto on January 7 by the Soviet Union of a draft resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from that country, the question was then referred, by procedural resolution, to an emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly. This emergency session, the sixth in United Nations history, was held from January 10 to 14. It culminated in the adoption of a resolution calling for an "immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan" by a vote of 104 (including Canada) to 18 against (Afghanistan, Angola, Bulgaria, Byelorussia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen, Ethiopia, German Democratic Republic, Grenada, Hungary, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Mozambique, Poland, Ukraine, U.S.S.R., Socialist Republic of Vietnam) with 18 abstentions (Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Congo, Cyprus, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India, Madagascar, Mali, Nicaragua, Sao Tome, Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia). The Canadian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador W.H. Barton, stated the Canadian position in an address to the United Nations Security Council on January 7, 1980 and then again before the Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly on January 11, 1980. Following is the text of Ambassador Barton's statement to the General Assembly:

We are gathered here in extraordinary session because the territorial integrity and the political independence of one of the members of this organization has been infringed in complete disregard of the fundamental principles of the Charter. We are gathered here because a great power — the Soviet Union — has, in default of its special responsibilities and in defiance of principles that are binding on all, invaded and occupied a smaller and non-aligned neighbour nation. We are gathered here because the exercise by the Soviet Union of a self-protective veto has rendered the Security Council incapable of exercising its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The grave breach of international peace which has been committed by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan cannot and must not be ignored. The notion that, by doing so, we would be interfering in the internal affairs of a member state is, surely, one of the most fantastic ever to have been advanced in the councils of this organization.

It is well to probe into the arguments used by the Soviet Union and its friends in Kabul to justify the military intervention that has taken place. The assistance of the Soviet Union is said to have been requested by the Afghan leader who has not been

allowed to live to regret it. This assistance has also been represented to many of our governments as consisting of "limited military contingents" which will be withdrawn once external aggression has ceased. Such claims are difficult to reconcile with the facts of the situation, which show nearly 100,000 Soviet troops — larger than the total armed forces available for the defence of Canada — to repel an "external aggressor" who is nowhere to be seen.

No, the facts are that the Soviet forces are not battling an external aggressor; they are battling Afghans who, for the crime of resisting an alien government imposed on them by undemocratic means, are being branded as counter-revolutionaries. There can be no justification for such action. The international community cannot condone such a transparent attempt by a great power to extend its sway over a smaller neighbour who has represented no threat to the security of the Soviet Union. If each of us were to interpret our security concerns as requiring conformist regimes along the length of our national borders, the Charter of this Organization would, indeed, be reduced to a scrap of paper.

The consequences of the Soviet intervention for the people of Afghanistan are evident enough. But our primary concern here is with the threat this action poses to international peace and stability. It is not surprising that other non-aligned countries, in the region and elsewhere, feel threatened; that they are asking themselves: whose turn will be next? In a region of the world which has been afflicted by endemic unrest and conflict, the Soviet action adds a particularly dangerous dimension to an already serious situation. We must stand ready to give our collective support to all efforts which may be undertaken by the countries of the region to bolster their national security and territorial integrity. In this organization, in particular, we must record our complete rejection of the motives for Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. We must, in the words of the procedure that has been invoked to convene us here, unite for peace.

What the Security Council was prevented from doing, we must now set out to do here. The world community that is represented here must condemn the U.S.S.R. action in Afghanistan as a clear violation of the basic principles of the Charter. We must demand the immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan of all Soviet troops. This surely is the first essential step to restoring stability in the area and to enabling the Afghan people to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination.

We are not asking the impossible. We are asking of the Soviet Union what the Soviet Union would ask of any other state if the roles were reversed. We are concerned about the impact of the Soviet action on so much that we have accomplished by working together here and in the other agencies of the United Nations. The climate of international confidence has been badly shaken. The indivisibility of detente has been challenged. Relations between many of our countries and the Soviet Union are going to be under increasing strain as we try to make it clear to the Soviet Union that it will not be held immune from the consequences of its actions. The lessons of history have left their imprint on us as they have on the Soviet Union.

My delegation wholeheartedly supports a firm judgment by this Assembly against what has happened in Afghanistan. While we recognize that resolutions of this Assembly have no mandatory force, we submit that a resolution to this effect will carry the judgment of the large majority of the nations of the world and that, as such, its political and moral value cannot be casually dismissed and ignored. If the many past initiatives of the U.S.S.R. on non-intervention and non-use of force are not to be emptied of their content, now is the time for that country to live up to its professed beliefs. Only in total respect of one another's sovereignty and independence will we be able to continue striving for international co-operation and understanding.