

Statement

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Notes for a speech  
by the Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
at the Annual Conference of the  
Canada-Israel Committee

OTTAWA

March 10, 1988.

Secretary of State  
for  
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État  
aux  
Affaires extérieures

Canada

This is my third appearance at an annual meeting of the Canada-Israel Committee since becoming Secretary of State for External Affairs. I could hardly express more graphically my recognition of the CIC as a representative vehicle for the views and concerns, the hopes and dreams of so many Canadians who correctly identify our relationship with Israel as a cornerstone of this country's foreign policy. Canada's commitment to Israel, the nation and the ideals upon which it was created, has been a central feature of that policy ever since the birth of the State of Israel.

The appearance here last night of Prime Minister Mulroney, the first such attendance by a Canadian Prime Minister in the 16 years of existence of the CIC - speaks eloquently of his sensitivity to your concerns and aspirations.

In this the 40th year of the State of Israel, Canadians recall with pride that we were present at the beginning and before the beginning. Our efforts of those early days at the UN on behalf of the new Jewish state, spoke of the fundamental Canadian belief in an effective multilateral system within which the fledgling Israeli nation could develop to its full potential. Few Canadian leaders were as passionate in their feelings for Israel as The Right Honourable John Diefenbaker, the man who sparked the interest in politics of so many in the government and who shaped many of our perspectives in fundamental ways, including an enthusiasm for the generosity and idealism of the Zionist vision. It was so close to the dream he held for Canada. It is interesting and important to note that Prime Minister Mulroney speaks out instinctively and eloquently at critical moments in the evolution of Israel and the Jewish community. His record of friendship and leadership is unsurpassed.

I recall this to remind you that a strong Canada-Israel relationship has long been an inherent part of the fabric of the Canadian world-view. I do not intend to dwell on bilateral relations as I did with you fifteen months ago, but let me mention a few points to illustrate the vitality of those links.

- Trade between our two countries has been increasing steadily. Canadian exports stood at \$146 million last year, a 15% increase over the previous year. These gains are based on the strong commercial links which have been forged and which continue to expand.

- More significant still, Canada and Israel are now exporting a greater volume and variety of finished goods to one another than ever before. And we have broadened the nature of our relationship through exchanges of technological know-how.
  
- I am also pleased to report progress in the implementation of my agreement of April 1986 with Mr. Shamir, who was then Foreign Minister, that Canada and Israel should cooperate in development projects in the Third World. That has led us to explore how each country might best contribute to a training centre in Cameroon, in co-operation with that country.

Your Government of Canada and the Government of Israel are committed to building upon what have become mature, mutually beneficial relations; links that complement the extraordinarily close person-to-person bonds which are the hallmark of our relationship.

But as worthy of comment as these developments undoubtedly are, my wish to be with you today stems rather from a shared sense of the gravity of the moment, as daily we watch events unfold which affect the well being and the future of the Jewish nation. Many of you have devoted a good portion of your lives in support of Israel. The idea and the ideal of Israel claim an important place in your hearts and your minds as they do for other staunch friends of Israel, Jewish and non-Jewish. I feel part of that experience.

Despite the effort and the fidelity of its friends, Israel still is not at peace with its neighbours. Indeed, now, in the territories it has occupied since 1967, it is wracked with turmoil of a nature it has never before experienced. Since early December, Israeli forces have been engaged in a bloody and demoralizing conflict with Palestinians living in Gaza and on the West Bank. Violence in the occupied territories, committed by either side in the dispute, tears at our conscience and our hearts as it tests our convictions.

Many of you have contacted the Prime Minister or myself to comment on the wrenching events of these past three months. Some 2000 Canadians have so far taken the time to write to one or the other of us. A good proportion of these letters are thoughtful. Most attempt to be constructive. Quite a few were obviously painful to write. Their common denominator is concern, and the expectation that their government, while ever mindful of historical circumstances, nonetheless will be forthright in addressing what they regard as a critical situation in a positive manner.

In partial response, let me speak plainly. Human rights violations such as we have witnessed in the West Bank and Gaza, in these past agonizing weeks, are totally unacceptable, and in many cases are illegal under international law. The use of live ammunition to restore civilian order, the withholding of food supplies to control and collectively penalize civilian populations, the use of tear gas to intimidate families in their homes, of beatings to maim so as to neutralize youngsters and preempt further demonstrations, have all been witnessed these past months. UN officials, Red Cross observers, international teams of doctors and lawyers, to say nothing of the media, report that these actions almost certainly are deliberate instruments of the so-called "iron-fist" policy, designed to re-establish control by force and by fear. These actions appear part of a logic of containment pre-dating recent disturbances. Too often it has manifested itself through breaches of the rule of law, including administrative detentions, officially sanctioned recourse to what is called "moderate physical pressure" on detainees, and a policy of settlements in the occupied territories, contrary to international law.

Such acts, no matter the historical context or provocation, are shocking to Canadians - as indeed they are to so many Israelis, who have been dismayed and distressed by images of their citizens - soldiers implicated in events that, before the Palestinian uprising began, many would have said were unthinkable. Those acts have been denounced, including in this country by an all-party delegation of the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade which last month was in Israel and the territories. As I reflect on these actions, I have no doubt but that they have deeply pained the vast majority of the CIC membership as indeed they have many other Canadians.

There have been suggestions that events reported by the media were "myths" based on a few instances only of breakdown in discipline. Certainly the lack of adequate training for maintaining civil order and the youthfulness of some of the Israeli troops have combined to worsen the situation. But here surely, we have to face some inescapable facts. I am not unsympathetic to the views of many friends of Israel, who regard media reporting of recent events as unfair "snapshots" of a complex issue, the history of which is all too easily overlooked in these times of turmoil. Yet here, surely, the painful incidents are vividly before us every evening on television. Unhappily, they are not fabrications, to be addressed through greater media control.

Your Government of Canada is mindful of the plight of Israel, of its legitimate security needs, of its fears, engendered by the hostility and past aggression of its neighbours, of the conundrum it faces in the occupied

territories, of the legacy of hatred and mistrust that must be addressed to achieve reconciliation and peace with the Palestinians. We are also, however, at one in our commitment to a single human rights policy, which reflects the basic values of Canadian society and whose principles we seek to apply universally. From this perspective we call on Israel's political leaders to show vision, compassion and the strength to make the decisions required to ensure that Palestinians are treated more humanely, that human rights are respected in the territories. One step the Israeli Government could take immediately is to accept that the provisions of the Geneva convention relating to civilians in occupied territories will apply to its own administration.

A blunt truth that has emerged starkly from recent events is that Israel's chief adversary and challenge is the Palestinians, not her Arab neighbours. The implications for the peace process are fundamental. My discussions with the leaders of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt leave me in no doubt that they genuinely want a just and lasting peace, and to that end are willing to lend their assistance in negotiations. They too, however, have taken note of recent developments in the occupied territories and may be expected to be increasingly reticent in coming to an agreement unless it is clearly acceptable to the Palestinian people and its leadership. Leaders such as King Hussein and President Mubarek want to be helpful, but it is entirely beyond their power to bring peace to the occupied territories.

In focussing on recent Israeli actions, I do not for a moment mean to suggest that blame is to be found on one side only. We all condemn the abhorrent terrorist attack on the bus in southern Israel just days ago and the murder of passengers on it. It also serves as a sharp reminder that the cycle of violence must be broken on both sides. Palestinian leadership in the past has failed to seize opportunities, to take the necessary risks required to bring about peace. As in Israel, Palestinian leaders have to overcome deep division within their ranks and exhibit wisdom, moderation and vision if peace with justice for its people is to be achieved. Both Israelis and Palestinians seek a solution providing security and freedom to live in their own distinctive political and social systems. Progress in that direction could be made if Palestinian leadership took the bold step of announcing formally its acceptance of the independence and territorial integrity of Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied since 1967. Steps by the Palestine Liberation Organization to accept unequivocally United Nations Security Resolutions 242 and 338 could have a dramatic impact on Israeli

public opinion, altering the whole equation of the peace process. Of similar significance would be the unambiguous acceptance of these resolutions on the part of Israel, an acceptance which is now confused by Likud's intransigence on the very principle of territorial compromise.

In a very real sense, the popular uprising in the territories has been a watershed. A generation bred under occupation has declared its determination to resist. One fears that physically crushing it could have even more tragic results than the persistence of unrest. There is no turning back. A policy of indefinite control over the land without an acknowledgement of the rights of its inhabitants has been proven a failure. For the Palestinians, tolerable living conditions can never compensate for the absence of dignity and the freedom to order one's affairs according to one's own values.

From an Israeli perspective, a growing number of thoughtful spokesmen, such as Abba Eban, who was the guest of your last meeting, point out that demographic trends alone lead relentlessly to a situation where territory controlled by Israel will sooner or later either cease to be Jewish, or cease to be democratic. Obviously neither development is acceptable. The status quo ante, therefore, offers no acceptable solution whatever, to either side.

This is how I view the situation today. What Canadians are asking is: "Can Canada do anything about it?" Let me outline what we see as the Canadian approach to the Middle East in the present crisis. We must begin by acknowledging that Canada is not a super power and that our role in the Middle East is limited. This government has always been particularly attentive to avoid the Middle East conflict becoming a source of division in Canada. Part of our concern about the situation in the occupied territories comes from the realization that it gives rise to intense positions that could pit Canadians against one another. Out of a sense of the importance of Canadians continuing to talk to each other, we have developed the idea of a seminar to be held this Spring under the auspices of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, to bring together individual Canadians of diverging points of view on these issues.

On the subject of dialogue, I am proud to recognize and encourage the CIC's contribution to setting a responsible, civilized tone to the debate of Middle East issues in Canada. I urge your organization to establish and maintain as many contacts as possible with persons and groups of different points of view on the challenges facing Israelis and Palestinians today. We will continue for our part to engage

the CIC and other interested groups in constructive discussions about Canadian Middle East activities. I would ask you not to lose sight of an abiding goal of this government of Canada; to identify the practical measures that are needed, and on which Canadians can agree, and which would make a useful contribution to a peaceful and just solution to the conflicts of the region.

We are convinced that the basis exists for the continued pursuit of a constructive Middle East policy on which a broad range of Canadians agree. Let me suggest five priorities and outline what we have done and intend to do about them.

First, support for the right of Israel to exist within secure and recognized boundaries, is a keystone of Canadian policy. I am satisfied to note that domestically no significant body of opinion challenges this fundamental assumption. Canadian support for Israel means that we will stand behind Israel and support the principle of universality whenever Israel's participation is challenged in international bodies. It means we will support Israel's right to a fair hearing whenever its policies are challenged. But, as I have already indicated, support for Israel does not mean its leaders or its policies are immune from criticism.

A second emphasis of our policy is the profound desire of Canadians that the human rights of Palestinians be respected. We have made clear our view that Palestinians have legitimate individual and collective rights, including those to a homeland within a clearly defined territory, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the right to participate fully in negotiations affecting their future. I have sought also to ensure that we give tangible expression to our concern for their plight through modest, but not insignificant humanitarian and developmental assistance, in addition to representations on their behalf. This support, from a country well-known for its commitment to the secure existence of Israel, is a statement of our views on the nature of a peaceful settlement.

In 1988, a growing international and Canadian consensus takes the position that it is time to establish a peace of mutual recognition, based on territorial compromise and respect by Israelis and Palestinians for each other's legitimate rights. The government of Canada encourages this view and our policy will continue to reflect it.

A third feature of the Canadian approach is to minimize rhetoric and, whenever possible, to emphasize practical action. Peacekeeping, best when it is discreet, illustrates this approach. Canadians understand the value of our contingents in three peacekeeping operations in the region and are proud of their accomplishments as we are proud of Canadian development assistance, including to Palestinians in the territories and refugee camps.

A fourth focus of Canadian involvement in the region is human rights. I believe Canadians see these rights as being neither divisible nor negotiable. We have spoken to them in many parts of the world. In many of these cases we have had the interest and cooperation of the CIC and its constituent organizations. I very much hope we may come to develop a similar understanding about the treatment of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. I raise this in the belief that there should be frankness between us on a subject which inescapably is now on both of our agendas. The long term health of the Canada-Israel relationship depends upon our facing these and similar issues squarely.

Finally, mindful of our own injunction against outside prescriptions, may I say a word about the fundamental preoccupation for regional peace which unites us today. Canada has long called for the active involvement of the United States and welcomes the determination of Secretary Shultz to explore the means of moving the peace process forward and with the urgency it deserves. It was in this spirit that Prime Minister Mulroney recently wrote to Prime Minister Shamir urging him to be forthcoming and imaginative and politically courageous in responding to the new American peace initiative. It is only in this way that Israel may be clearly seen to be prepared, from a position of strength, to take those risks which are required if peace is to be achieved. We encourage those Israelis who have demonstrated the courage to support this process.

Canada is firmly of the view that peace hinges on territorial compromise. Security Council Resolution 242, which expresses the principle of the exchange of land for peace, offers the best hope of breaking the vicious cycle of violence and of achieving resolution. The leadership of Israel well knows that this is our position, and that it represents the honest assessment of a friend. Palestinian leaders likewise know where Canada stands. Events in the West Bank and Gaza have demonstrated that intransigence on the issue of land offers at best a costly illusion of security. It promises a future of strife and, ultimately, a crisis of identity for Israel.

I ask members of the CIC to join their government and to carry a similar heartfelt message to their friends in Israel at all levels of society. For my part, I undertake to convey a related message to Palestinians with whom we are in contact, that a confirmation of their own willingness to recognize the existence of the Israeli state, and thereby themselves to accept territorial compromise, could be of momentous importance as the deadline for critical decisions approaches. I will again call upon Palestinians to resist the all too easy path of violence and to seek instead peaceful solutions to their longstanding problems and grievances.



The process of mutual recognition can no longer be delayed.

We must pray that the peoples of the land of miracles dare to dream of reconciliation; that their children will be freed from the nightmares of violence and destruction, and parents from the incubus of hatred and revenge. Let this troubled hour yield to a new dawn and may the 40th year of Israel be remembered as the year of peace.