

STATEMENTS
AND
SPEECHES



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Notes for an address
in the House of Commons by
the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney,
Prime Minister of Canada,
on the situation in the Persian Gulf

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Affaires extérieures et
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Canada

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask all Members of this House to support Canada's efforts, as a member of the United Nations coalition, to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. I do so, Mr. Speaker, on the basis that sometimes war is necessary to secure peace. The war in the Persian Gulf did not begin on January 15th but, rather, on August 2nd, when Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait, brutally and without provocation.

Saddam Hussein's action threatened the entire region. It gave the world community the choice either to do nothing, as it had so often done in the past, and acquiesce in the occupation by Iraq of a country one-tenth its size. Or to respond. The world responded. The world decided to act within the framework established 46 years earlier in San Francisco, a framework Canadians helped build -- the United Nations.

The world did not use force immediately to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression. Rather the response was both measured and prudent, giving diplomacy a chance to secure the peace. From the beginning of August to the end of November, 12 resolutions were passed by the United Nations Security Council ordering Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. Almost all of these resolutions were passed unanimously. This unity of purpose and perspective reflected the totally unacceptable nature of Saddam Hussein's assault on the principles of peace and security. And it reflected the new spirit of cooperation which had given new life and new hope to the United Nations when tensions between East and West eased. Twenty-eight nations sent forces to the Gulf to enforce the sanctions.

The last five months of 1990 and the first weeks of 1991 witnessed the most intense diplomacy in modern history. At meetings of the United Nations, the Arab League, the European Community, and the Non-Aligned Movement and in literally hundreds of contacts between leaders from the world over -- north and south, east and west, Moslem and non-Moslem, Arab and non-Arab -- all avenues to peace were explored. I am satisfied that throughout these months Canada did all it could do diplomatically in the cause of peace. But all avenues led only to the dead-end of Saddam Hussein's intransigence. And so, on January 15th, after a final, 47-day pause for peace, coalition nations followed through with the use of force authorized by the United Nations.

Canada joined in that effort. We were determined to see the United Nations act as it said it would act if Saddam Hussein did not respond to the will of the world. We were determined to help secure the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait and to help restore peace and security to the region, as called for in U.N. Security Council resolution 678. So we asked Canadian men and women to serve their country again, this time in the Persian Gulf, accepting the great personal risks this entails. These courageous men and women deserve our full support and we owe it to them, to their families and to history to make our positions clear, to declare where we stand as representatives of the Canadian people.

In bringing this debate to a close, I want to restate the key issues. Mature and informed judgement of Canada's interests must be the basis of our decision. Wishful thinking that evil will go away if we want it to badly enough has no place in serious decision making.

The first interest we have at stake is simple morality. A terrible wrong is being perpetrated in Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. The world community has a moral obligation to step in and stop it. Canada shares in this obligation. And Canada cannot and will not leave others to defend its principles. We never have and we never will.

The second interest we have in this conflict is the construction and maintenance of a system of international peace and security that has the capacity to deter aggression and where necessary, to stop it. For decades, Canada has sought an effective system of international law and order based on the principle of collective security. With the exception of Korea, we have been stymied in that effort by ideological confrontation -- by the Cold War -- which paralysed the U.N. Security Council and which made collective security impossible. Collective security is not an alien objective. It is very much in the best of Canadian traditions.

As Geoffrey Pearson said recently in speaking of the urgent crisis in the context of Canadian traditions: "My father was not a pacifist. His policy was based above all on the U.N.'s importance to preserving peace. But once war broke out, he felt that U.N. member countries should use military intervention to oppose an aggressor." That is a Canadian article of faith, learned at the cost of countless lives -- many of them Canadian -- in two world wars and Korea.

But some Canadians, and some Members of this House, have asked why now, why here. Some argue that because the U.N. did not always suppress aggression in the past, it should not do so now. But when action was not taken in the past, when nations walked away from the U.N., the organization was undermined. Its security role atrophied. And conflict followed conflict. That is not an argument; that is history.

To say that because the U.N. did not work in the past, it should not be used in the present is to condemn it to perpetual irrelevance. If, on January 15th, the United Nations coalition had fragmented or had abdicated its responsibilities, I do not believe it inaccurate to say that the U.N. would have been discredited for decades to come, and quite possibly forever. If the U.N. had backed away, then why would any aggressor bother in the future with an international body that lacked the will and strength to follow through on its own decisions? Canada needs a U.N. that can both talk and act. It is a vital national interest. The best hope we have for a safer world is to give the U.N. the support it needs to work.

The most serious -- indeed troubling -- question for many Members in this debate has been as much about timing as about principle. Why could the world not wait and give sanctions and diplomacy more time? It is the view of this Government -- and the view of virtually every other U.N. coalition member -- that the risks and costs of waiting had become too great to tolerate. If sanctions alone had continued, the plunder of Kuwait would also have continued.

When this House debated this issue in September and again in November, Amnesty International had not yet documented the terrible reality of Iraqi brutality -- the unplugging of the incubators of Kuwaiti babies, the assaults on Kuwaiti women, the execution of young Kuwaiti men before the eyes of their parents and their brothers and sisters. We know now. We know as well that over half of Kuwait's population has fled in terror. What would have been left of Kuwait if the world had waited another six months, or 16 months or 60 months, or however long it would have taken sanctions to affect Iraq's military capacity, if they ever did?

We know now that Saddam Hussein used the pause for peace not for diplomacy but to lay plans for terrorism and to build his defences. He did not prepare for peace. He did not even explore the path to peace but instead prepared to launch missiles at innocent civilians in Israel and Saudi Arabia. Those criminal, terrorist attacks continue this afternoon. He used the time to mine Kuwait's oil wells and to build a pipeline to pollute the Persian Gulf. And he used the time to prepare formidable tank defences. He used the pause for peace to prepare for war. The world will measure the costs of waiting in coalition casualties. It is reasonable to conclude that with more time, he would have dug in deeper -- and the risk of casualty lists lengthening further would have increased.

Nor can we overlook the political risks of delay in a region that is a ticking time-bomb. A continuation of sanctions would have given Saddam Hussein time to sow discord and to trigger terrorism. Meanwhile, the developing world and Eastern Europe would have continued their economic tail-spins. One week ago today in my address to the House I said: "The argument is made by some that Canada should hold itself back now in order to play a peacekeeping role later. Were Saddam Hussein to succeed in his annexation of Kuwait, he would be in a position to threaten the entire Middle East, and he is in the process of threatening individual nations as we speak. With the time and the wealth he would gain and acquire, he would add further weapons of mass destruction of his arsenal, including, in all probability, nuclear weapons.

"In what position would this put his neighbours? After Iran and Kuwait, what would be his next target? Saudi Arabia? Jordan? Would we hold ourselves back again, waiting for the latest atrocities to end so that Canada might then be invited in as part of a peacekeeping force?

"Saddam Hussein has threatened to attack Israel with weapons of mass destruction. In the face of extraordinary provocation from Iraq, as evidenced by Foreign Minister Aziz's deplorably aggressive threat last week, Israel has demonstrated remarkable restraint. Should Saddam Hussein move against Israel, would we still hold ourselves back in the hope that we would be called in later to help keep what's left of the peace in what's left of the Middle East? This course is a prescription for neither wisdom nor responsibility and it is not a course that Canada should follow."

Those, Mr. Speaker, were my thoughts last week. Most leaders around the world shared the view I conveyed to the House. Just hours ago Saddam Hussein unleashed another unprovoked attack on innocent civilians in Israel. Men, women and children in Israel have become targets in the lethal shelling of that nation by scud missiles fired from Iraq. Among the reasons that this government stood firm last week when the critical hour came, and will continue that policy until victory is won, was that we had resolved never to remain silent and indifferent while Israel was threatened with death and destruction. History has shown both the folly and the immorality of that course, and I know that this Government and all Canadians will shun it for the appeasement it is. This war is about fundamental principle and about the kind of world we must create.

There is no evidence that sanctions were achieving their objective -- the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait. In fact, our experience with sanctions over the last five and a half months was far from encouraging. There is no doubt that the Iraqi economy was being affected. Imports and exports were heavily affected. Rationing had become more widespread. Prices for some goods had increased dramatically. Some factories were closed. But we also know that some foodstuffs and commodities were getting through the embargo. And that during the period when Saddam Hussein was reducing rations to his own people, he was increasing the rations for his army. Would the world have persevered with sanctions and would the coalition have held if Iraqi and Kuwaiti citizens starved while Iraqi forces sat tight in Kuwait?

This is a man who inflicted the ultimate sanction on his own people -- perhaps a half-million casualties in an eight-year war with Iran that he, himself, started. This is a man who used gas in war and who turned it on his own citizens. This is a man who took tens of thousands of people hostage. This is a man who is using rockets to attack civilian population centres, not military installations. This is a man who violates the Geneva convention abusing prisoners of war and threatening to use them as human shields to protect his weapons.

Since we last debated the Gulf crisis in November, we have all been able to make a better assessment of this man. Knowing what we know now, there cannot be many of us who still think that sanctions alone would have stopped him. It might have been possible to believe that when we first debated this crisis in September or even in November. But there cannot be many of us who are confident of that judgement now.

None of us in this House wants war. But sometimes it is necessary to fight for peace. And this is one of those times. I believe that as a nation we must bear our burden in doing by force what diplomacy and sanctions could not do. We must secure Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait as 12 U.N. Security Council Resolutions demand. And we must maintain solidarity with our coalition partners -- within the region and outside it -- many of whom are bearing a far larger burden than we are. What would the world think of us if we withdrew our forces when the going got tough and we retired to the sidelines? And, more important, what would we think of ourselves?

Canada will do its share. I can tell Canadians that we have the full capacity now to meet the obligations we have assumed and that all of our obligations can be met without the introduction of a policy of conscription. All Members of this House want to see this conflict end -- no one more than my colleagues and I. But some Members argue that we should have a pause in the conflict, now. In our view, such a pause would be counterproductive. Resolution 678 -- the resolution that Canada co-sponsored -- has already provided for a pause. The Government sees no point in pausing again.

The proper response to Saddam Hussein's intransigence and brutality is not to reward him with a respite from the war he started. It is in no one's interest to make it any easier for him to position more missiles to attack the cities of Israel and Saudi Arabia. And we are not going to take a chance at letting him regroup, rebuild his damaged infrastructure, and deepen his defences. The first order of business is to win the war. The second order of business is to win the peace.

Saddam Hussein has exploited the fissures and fractures of the most volatile region in the world. This is a region where weapons of mass destruction exist. This is a region that has made arms merchants rich. It is a region where many are poor and politics notoriously unstable.

The history of this region is that one war has simply set the stage for the next war. While the battles continue and Kuwait is being freed, while the United Nations resolutions are being implemented, Canadian diplomats have begun to consider what to do afterwards to bring peace and security to this turbulent region. The military victory we seek will be short and bitter, if we do not build just and durable peace. We will spare no effort in seeking solutions to those problems. Seeking solutions to those problems starts with the United Nations. If we succeed in maintaining our unity of purpose now, the problems of this region can be addressed by a U.N. that has stood the test of crisis. If we do not succeed in maintaining our unity of purpose, those problems will fester in the face of a discredited U.N.

Throughout this crisis, the government has taken a clear, consistent and constant position -- a position of principle. We have opposed aggression, we have supported the United Nations and we have been determined that Canada carry its share of the burden. There has been no equivocation and no shift of position. No one can be in doubt where the Government has stood from the very beginning.

Last November, in the second of three debates this House has had on the Gulf crisis, the Government outlined Canadian interests, stated our intention to support the will of the United Nations, and set out what action might be necessary if Saddam Hussein continued to defy the world. These issues were debated fully at that time. And since January 15th, we have debated whether or not to continue to support the United Nations and its resolutions. Since August 2nd, this House has debated Canadian policy towards the Gulf crisis for over 75 hours. The debate has been much more extensive than in the U.K., Australia, France, the United States and other democracies around the world.

When we first despatched our ships to the Gulf, there was an urgent need to deter further aggression. As time passed, as Saddam Hussein's determination to keep Kuwait became clearer, as doubts grew that sanctions alone would be enough to get him out, the world community realized that force would be necessary. In voting in this House on November 29, we were voting for U.N. Resolution 678, authorizing the use of force as of January 15, which was adopted in New York that same day. The U.S. Congress debated a similar motion, for the first time, in the second week of January, some six weeks later.

Parliament has had many opportunities to express itself on the principles, as it should. And the government has assumed responsibility for the decisions, as it must. We are confident that we have followed both the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. I call on all Members, including those Members who may have had different views before November 29th or before January 15th, to support the motion before us to reaffirm Canada's support for the U.N. No Canadian wanted this war. Every Canadian wanted peace.

The world gave Saddam Hussein a choice between war and peace and he chose war. Given his deliberate choice, Canada has followed a resolute and unswerving course: we have chosen to stand with the United Nations; and we have chosen to stand against aggression. We have chosen to stand up and be counted when freedom and world peace was under challenge.

On December 11, 1957, Lester Pearson spoke at the University of Aula in Oslo, in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize. He said: "...There can be no enduring and creative peace if people are unfree. The instinct for personal and national freedom cannot be destroyed, and the attempt to do so by totalitarian and despotic government will ultimately make not only for internal trouble but for international conflict."

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Let us decide together, today, to support the United Nations in its deeds as well as in its words. Let us help to free Kuwait. And let us work together to restore peace and security to that region, confident that, having done the right thing today, we can look forward to a more peaceful to-morrow.

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