



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA AND UN RESOLUTIONS CONCERNING ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

An Address by Mr. Fernand Leblanc, M.P., to the Eighth National Public Affairs Seminar of Hadassah-WIZO, Montreal, June 15, 1977.

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The subject of Canada's voting record on UN resolutions is, of course, as I fully appreciate, of lively concern to this audience. I am all the more pleased to be examining this subject with you today as there is always a danger that our votes on specific complex UN resolutions, often procedural in nature, will be misinterpreted — or rather overinterpreted — as meaning more than they really do. Let us be clear from the start that Canada's basic policy has not changed and will not change; those who add up the *minutiae* and cry "tilt" are mistaken.

Perhaps I should first outline Canada's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict — a policy that seeks, as you know, to consider the issues on their merits without automatically espousing the position of either party. As well, it is our policy to support the search for all available means to arrive at an early negotiated settlement that will put an end to 30 years of bloodshed, satisfy the legitimate concerns of all the parties and provide the surest guarantee for Israel's future security, which is a fundamental requirement. We recognize, of course, that Canada is not a prime mover in the Middle East. What we do or say may be helpful or unhelpful, but our influence is necessarily limited. We do not have the power to shape events.

Canadian policy towards the Middle East

For years the substance of our policy towards the Middle East has comprised two basic elements: upholding the right of existence of all states of the Middle East, including Israel, to a sovereign and independent existence, and the carrying-out of our peacekeeping role consistent with an objective and balanced approach towards the various issues arising out of the Middle East dispute. More recently, we have recognized, in addition, that the Palestinian people have legitimate aspirations, which require a political solution. Finally, the Government is determined to put new efforts into strengthening relations with all the states of the region, and to do so, wherever possible, independently of the vicissitudes of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

We are keenly aware that there are two sides to the Arab-Israeli dispute, and that it is Israel, on the one hand, and its Arab neighbours, on the other, whose concerns and vital interests must be satisfied. Hence our support for a peace settlement that will safeguard the sovereignty and independence of both Israel and its neighbours and will be seen by them to do so.

Canada's support for Israel is of long standing. It was manifest in our early recognition of the state of Israel, proclaimed after passage of the UN partition resolution in

1947. It was demonstrated again by Lester B. Pearson's concern in the early years of the fledgling state. It helps to explain our active participation in the drafting of Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967. It inspires us today to contribute to diplomatic efforts to encourage the parties to initiate early negotiations towards a settlement. We fully subscribe to President Carter's statement of March 16, 1977, at the Town Hall of Clinton, Massachusetts, when he said: "The first prerequisite of a lasting peace is the recognition of Israel by her neighbours; Israel's right to exist; Israel's right to exist permanently; Israel's right to exist in peace". Certainly a lasting peace can do no less, as it can do no less than to find a negotiated solution to the plight of the Arab Palestinian people, over one million of whom remain today in United Nations refugee camps. This dual concern lies at the heart of our policy, and we fully support President Carter's current efforts to address the principal issues of this conflict in a manner at once comprehensive, humane and realistic.

Security Council Resolution 242 remains the only framework for a Middle East peace conference agreed to by all the states immediately concerned: establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East; termination of the state of belligerency; sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area; secure and recognized boundaries; a just solution for the Palestinian refugees; non-acquisition of territory by war. We fully support Resolution 242 in all its parts, one of which is the call for a just settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem. For Canada, this means a just political as well as humanitarian solution, to be negotiated at future peace talks. While we fully support 242, we also recognize that there are other elements necessary to a settlement that are not fully defined in that resolution — the nature of the peace, what should constitute a just settlement to the refugee problem. There may also be a place in a settlement for factors that are not mentioned in Resolution 242 at all as long as they are consistent with its goals and principles and can be agreed to between the parties concerned.

Canada's approach towards the Arab-Israeli dispute is neither one-sided, as some believe, nor indifferent or detached. Our attitude fully recognizes the tragedy recognized by Israel's founder and first President, Chaim Weizman, who described the dispute as one between two peoples, each with right on its side. It is this humanitarian perspective of the great Jewish statesman, scientist and political philosopher in which, it seems to me, lie the seeds of a just and permanent peace for the region. For each side, it implies the imperative for compromise so that these two rights may be accommodated within a peace settlement that will stand the test of time and, incidentally, will provide Israel with security beyond that offered by mere geographical advantages in a climate of hostility.

Some critics have recently regretted the trend in Canada's voting record at the UN on resolutions concerning Israel and the Middle East. According to these views, Canada, from 1973 onwards, drifted away from voting in support of Israel in favour of joining the West European countries in abstaining on controversial resolutions concerning Israel and the Middle East. In so doing, it was argued, Canada was becoming part of a process that, whatever its guise and motive, is consciously aimed at the delegitimization of Israel and has already led to the erosion of Israel's inter-

national position. However, the same critics have recognized that Canada's votes were usually favourable to Israel. This conclusion was echoed recently before a Montreal audience by the Israeli Ambassador to Canada.

Let us now consider the record more closely. Canada's support of Israel at the UN has been consistent with the principles expressed in Resolution 242. We have done so not in a spirit of "Israel right or wrong" — an approach that would surely erode the moral basis of our action — but in a manner that takes into account three determining factors: the substance or content of each resolution; the context in which the resolution is put forward; and, finally, the effect we think the Canadian vote and explanation of vote might have, both on the situation in the region and on our relations with other countries.

My objective, therefore, today is to review the whys and wherefores of the Government's voting decisions on a few of the most substantive resolutions on the Middle East before the last United Nations General Assembly and the UNESCO General Conference.

On many of these issues we took positions that were in accord with Israel's point of view: we have voted against all resolutions we considered linked to the notion that Zionism is a form of racism. We have also voted against resolutions that singled out Israel for unjustified attack or condemned Israel on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations, or sought to substitute some basis for a settlement other than Security Council Resolution 242. There have been other resolutions on Middle East questions, moderate in tone and language and, we felt, constructive in substance, that we felt able to support. On others we have abstained, where we considered abstention would best reflect the Canadian attitude towards resolutions that contained acceptable elements as well as elements with which we did not agree. On all our votes, whether or not our position was the same as Israel's, we were, in our best judgment, reflecting a basic policy of support for Israel's long-term interests.

The overall voting score-sheet leads to the conclusion that Canada's votes at the UN have been, by and large, consistent with Israel's position — more so, in fact, than those of any other UN member except the United States. Throughout, the positions we have taken have been grounded in our opposition to any attempt to undermine, prejudice or by-pass Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

It is sometimes suggested that we pay too much attention to how others will vote — to whether or not we are "in good company", as UN jargon puts it. The record will show that this is not a decisive consideration; we have not been afraid to stand alone, or alone with the United States, on Israel's side when we consider that position to be right. It is certainly true that we do take into account the voting intentions of such other friends of Israel as Britain, the Netherlands, West Germany, the United States and other friendly countries whose support for the right of Israel to exist in peace and security has been as steadfast as our own. It is only common sense, it seems to me, to look at the opinion of our friends, when it appears as if they are taking a different position, so as to make quite sure that we really do think everyone is out of step except Israel, the U.S., one or two other countries and our-

selves on a particular issue. Indeed, as you are aware, there are times when we do not hesitate to vote entirely alone with Israel if we consider this justified.

Two resolutions last year attracted particular attention; first, the resolution (which we supported) deploring Israel's policy of establishing settlements in territories occupied in June 1967; and, secondly, the Egyptian resolution (which we also supported) calling for an early resumption of the Geneva Peace Conference.

In explaining our vote on the resolution concerning the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, we referred to a quite separate resolution that set out a timetable for Israeli withdrawal from the territories and a mechanism for turning the West Bank over to the FLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). We voted against that resolution on the grounds that it negated Resolution 242 and would be dictating the terms of a solution that must be settled by negotiations. So too, in our opinion, the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories amounted to an attempt to predetermine the eventual borders of Israel before negotiations had even begun. We believe that secure and recognized borders can only be secured by negotiations — not by one party staking out its claim ahead of time. Moreover, we were (and are) of the view that these settlements contravene both the Geneva Conventions applicable to territories occupied as a result of armed conflict and Resolution 242, which calls, *inter alia*, for withdrawal from those territories and reaffirms the principle of non-acquisition of territory by war. The settlements, if only because of the extensive infrastructure and financial and human investment that support them, constitute a presumption of permanency, going beyond the temporary security considerations that were initially advanced in their justification.

Another resolution on which our vote attracted some criticism was that sponsored by Egypt, together with a number of other Third World countries, during last December's General Assembly debate on the situation in the Middle East, which called for the early reconvening of the Geneva Peace Conference on the Middle East. We supported that resolution. Some critics thought we should not have done so because it implicitly authorized the Secretary-General to include the PLO in future consultations on the Middle East. We should certainly have preferred an explicit reference to 242 and, if we had drafted the resolution ourselves, there would have been one, if only because Security Council Resolution 338 of 1974 made it clear that the Geneva Conference should use 242 as the framework for negotiations. However, the call for a return to Geneva was one with which we could not possibly disagree. Canada too considers it of cardinal importance to get negotiations started — the sooner the better!

The implicit reference to consultations with the PLO also bothered us, as such references always do. We do not recognize the PLO and we do not see any constructive role for that organization in the negotiating process unless its spokesmen accept the right of Israel to exist and all the principles of Security Council Resolution 242. Had this resolution insisted that the PLO participate in the Geneva Conference as sole representative of the Palestinian people and without also insisting that they be committed to peace with Israel based on the principles of Resolution 242, we could not have supported it.

We do believe that the Palestinian people should be represented in any discussions affecting their future, such as a Geneva Conference. In present circumstances, the PLO does speak for a significant element among the Palestinian people. It is, in fact, the only organization now in being that claims to represent the Palestinian people as a whole. The chief obstacle to the inclusion of the PLO in the peace process is that they remain dedicated in their formal position to the elimination of Israel and reject Security Council Resolution 242. This hardly means that they should not be spoken to at all or that the Secretary-General was wrong to include the PLO in his consultations, or that we should vote against an otherwise satisfactory resolution because it envisaged that he would do so again. How else can we hope to get the PLO or some successor organization to change their policy but by involving them at least in some part of a consultative process? They will not disappear if we simply try to pretend they don't exist.

I should like, in closing, to mention also our vote against the resolution on the rights of the Palestinians. We regarded this resolution, which laid down a timetable for the implementation of so-called "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people", as seriously prejudging, and as an obvious attempt to influence unilaterally, the outcome of future Middle East negotiations. Consequently we opposed it. Thus, in this rather more typical instance, we not only took the same position as Israel but our reasons for doing so served to illustrate some important aspects of our policy.

Conclusion

May I now reiterate what is already so obvious and clearly demonstrated since the founding of the state of Israel: Among Canadians generally, as within the Government of Canada, Israel's right to an independent future is fully accepted and supported. There is a strong basis for this support. This is not to say that the Canadian perception of the tragic Arab-Israeli conflict is identical either with the Israeli perception or with the perception of Israel's Arab neighbours. Perhaps 20 years of Middle East peacekeeping responsibilities entitle us to certain views of our own on this subject. Those views have been and remain securely grounded in Resolution 242, to which Israel has also subscribed. We remain convinced that, with good will on all sides, the stage is set for peace with security and peace with justice and that Israel, which sets for all of us an example in democracy, dynamism and sacrifice, can achieve before the end of this decade what it has fought for so hard and so long and at such terrible cost.

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