



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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SYRIAN SITUATION

Statement by Mr. Wallace Nesbitt, Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Delegation, in the plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on October 30, 1957.

The Government and people of Canada have been watching with increasing concern the developments during the past few months in the Middle East and particularly the situation in and around Syria. Earlier this year we were encouraged to believe that we could look for an improvement in conditions in the area. We have been deeply gratified, as the Canadian Prime Minister indicated in the general debate, that the United Nations has had some measure of success as a calming influence in some parts of the Middle East. In these circumstances our concern about recent developments is given greater emphasis.

Like others in this Assembly Hall, the Canadian Delegation has followed with careful interest the course of the debate on the item submitted by the Government of Syria. In listening to the statements made by representatives of those states more directly concerned with the matter, we have been able to shape our opinions about what action, if any, the Assembly should take.

In the first place, we were not opposed to having the item raised in the Assembly. We shared the opinions of those delegations which have argued that the Assembly may discuss any questions related to the maintenance of international peace and security and we would not quarrel with the view that any member state, but particularly the smaller states, should be entitled to bring to the attention of the United Nations any cause of anxiety about its security and independence. Our assumption would be that the state concerned would be the best judge of where its best interest lay in a matter of this kind, but that in seeking assistance from the United Nations the interested government would act with responsibility and moderation. We have frequently expressed in this Assembly our belief that the United Nations will grow in strength and stature if we, as member governments, are prepared to heed the appeal of nations -- and this applies with perhaps greater force among the smaller nations--- who seek here to establish order in their relationships and on a basis of peace and justice.

Having said this, however, I would not wish my remarks to be interpreted as meaning that the Canadian Delegation believes that the complaint of Syria on this occasion is well-founded. It is evident that the Government of Syria views the situation along its borders with anxiety and concern, but for our part we are satisfied that the Government of Turkey has not behaved, and has no intention of behaving in any sense, in the irresponsible manner suggested in the explanatory memorandum submitted with the Syrian item, and in the statement of the distinguished Foreign Minister of Syria during this debate. In this connection I should like to endorse what the distinguished representative of the United States had to say on Friday about Turkey as a loyal member of the United Nations.

On several occasions during the course of this debate, the Assembly has heard the solemn assurances of the Government of Turkey about its intentions. We believe that these assurances are entitled to receive our respectful attention. The distinguished representative of Turkey has given some account of the anxiety which his government and his people have been experiencing because of recent developments in neighbouring countries. These comments from the representative of Turkey are surely relevant to our discussion here and particularly in view of the violent remarks which we have heard from the distinguished Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union.

Our intention at this time is not to engage in polemics or propaganda, but we cannot fail to note the lack of restraint which has characterized the statements of the Soviet Delegation during this debate. These have led us to question the motives and intentions of the Soviet Government in supporting the complaint of Syria. The Canadian approach to this item would be to deal with it calmly and constructively and we therefore deplore utterances here and statements elsewhere which, through their very lack of restraint, tend to aggravate not only the debate in this Assembly, but the situation in the area. However, in saying this, we are fully aware that unwarranted charges and accusations cannot be left unanswered, as the distinguished representative of the United States made clear in his intervention on October 25.

It was emphasized in the General Committee that the Syrian item involved a situation which all members of the United Nations should try to discuss in an atmosphere of calm and confidence. We regard this as good advice. We believe too that the Assembly would be wise to consider this matter carefully with a view to bringing about a reconciliation, rather than an intensification, of conflicting views. In other words, we should seek to allay any apprehension and anxiety which might prevail in the states immediately concerned. By doing this, we would help to allay those wider anxieties which naturally stem from deterioration of the situation in the Middle East. We have been happy to see that others share our preference for a constructive approach to the Syrian item.

In these circumstances we warmly welcome the generous initiative of His Majesty King Saud because clearly His Majesty's main interest has been to ease undesirable tensions between two neighbouring states. It would be our view that the distinguished ruler of a third Middle Eastern state could effectively lend good offices to a situation of this kind. It would be entirely consistent with the Charter of the United Nations if the Syrian complaint, which has brought into sharp focus serious charges and counter-charges, as between Syria and Turkey, were to be dealt with through regional processes. If we interpreted his remarks correctly, we understood the distinguished representative of Afghanistan to express the same view in his thoughtful and welcome statement of October 22. We have no doubt that this opinion is shared by many other delegations in this Assembly.

The Assembly should note with approval, we suggest, the repeated assurances and practical demonstration that the Government of Turkey has been fully prepared to accept the worthy offer of King Saud. It is surely incumbent on all member states to explore fully all channels of negotiation, mediation, conciliation or other peaceful means for resolving their differences. As we see it, the Government of Turkey has acted in accordance with its Charter obligations in the response to the initiative of His Majesty King Saud. We have been informed that this offer still stands. We hope we are right in assuming that the Government of Syria has not rejected it. The Canadian Delegation joins with others who have urged the Syrian authorities to weigh carefully the advantages of accepting the offer. Because of the uncertainties of the moment, we believe that the Assembly should be prepared to consider as well other means of dealing with the situation. In consultation with other delegations, and in the light of views expressed during this debate, we have reached some conclusions about a possible course of action.

If, for whatever reason, the parties are unable to agree to avail themselves of this regional process for settling the present matter, there are other means, as implied in the Charter. Several speakers in this debate have suggested that the Secretary-General, acting within the scope of the responsibilities given to him in the Charter, might be able to assist the parties to reconcile their differences and in this way to bring about an easing of tension, a situation of quiet. We have no hesitation in supporting that suggestion and in commending it to the Assembly and to the parties concerned.

In doing so, we have no wish to circumscribe the kind of action which the Secretary-General might take to achieve the aims I have mentioned. With the goodwill and co-operation of those most concerned and in the relaxed atmosphere which should prevail now that the situation has been fully aired in the Assembly, the Secretary-General should be able to make a helpful contribution.

I wish only to emphasize that the Canadian Government has complete confidence in the Secretary-General's diplomatic skill and patience. As we all know, he is no stranger to the political conditions which exist in the Middle East. We are sure that governments in the area share our appreciation of the Secretary-General's helpfulness during difficult negotiations. Accordingly, we believe that it would be wise not to tie the Secretary-General's hands in this matter but to allow him the opportunity, consistent with his responsibilities under the Charter, to explore the situation fully with the parties and with such others as may appear useful, all in order to bring about an easing of tension in the area.

It was for these reasons that the Canadian Delegation joined with others in co-sponsoring the draft resolution which has been introduced in the Assembly this morning. I need not describe the proposal because the document is self-explanatory and because it has been ably explained by the distinguished representative of Japan. I wish only to underline that our joint proposal is not in any sense a preferred alternative to, nor a move competitive with, the other efforts which have been made to deal with the present matter. On the contrary, and as I have indicated in this statement, we regard those efforts as highly commendable.

In these circumstances we urge that if those other efforts should prove unavailing, the "United Nations diplomacy of reconciliation", mentioned in the introduction of the Secretary-General's annual report, be permitted to take effect. What the Canadian Delegation has been looking for in this debate is an improvement in the actual situation, a means of making progress. We are confident that the approach which we and others have supported will serve those ends. We earnestly hope that this is the view of the great majority of delegations here.

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