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NOTES FOR A STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR W. H. BARTON,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
DURING THE EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
ON AFGHANISTAN,
NEW YORK, JANUARY 7, 1980

Mr. President,

I should like to thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate. I should like also to extend good wishes to you on assuming the office of the President for the month of January. The Council is fortunate to have you guiding its affairs in these difficult times.

It is a matter of deep regret to Canada that we enter a new year, and a new decade under the sombre shadows of crisis, one of which has necessitated the convocation of this urgent meeting.

Let no one try to minimize the gravity of the situation that has resulted in this debate. More than fifty nations, by requesting that the Security Council be called into session, have manifested their profound concern over the violation we have been witnessing in Afghanistan of one of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. The Soviet invasion of an independent nation is a gross violation of international law, and equally serious in this day and age, a clear reversal of the process of decolonization begun more than a quarter century ago. Respect for the principles and obligations of international law is a cornerstone of the United Nations and all members are committed to it. There cannot be one law for the Soviet Union, and one for the rest of the world. Canada has had no option therefore but to associate itself with all those -- and there are very many of them -- who have condemned the Soviet action in Afghanistan as a blatant use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of a smaller neighbouring state.

We are being asked to believe that Afghanistan was threatened by outside aggression, and that the military might of a great power -- the Soviet Union -- was necessary to rescue Afghanistan from its plight. Surely no one believes it -- and it disappoints my government to think either that the Soviet leaders have talked themselves into believing it, or are seriously asking others to believe such a contention. The view of the Canadian Government is that, before the Soviet invasion and indeed now, the situation in Afghanistan has been one of civil war rooted in the resistance of a substantial part of the Afghan population which has been increasingly alienated by the policies of a régime which had come to power by undemocratic means. All evidence suggests that the Soviet Union is deeply implicated in the coup d'état of December 1979, and indeed one of the reasons for the Soviet military intervention was to place in power a wholly subservient régime. As we have seen, it is easy enough to parachute an alien régime into a country, call it revolutionary and then call all anti-government activity anti-revolutionary. Given what has happened in Afghanistan, intervention would be an inadequate word to describe what the Soviet Union has done, it has quite literally moved in. In such circumstances, the Canadian Government has already announced that it will not accord recognition to the régime which has assumed power in Afghanistan with the aid of Soviet arms. But the consequences of this military action reach beyond the fate of the Afghan people to threaten the very fabric of the international community.

Half a century ago, it was a Soviet foreign minister who wisely warned the world that peace was indivisible. To our sorrow, we have learned that his warning was well founded. Has the world changed? Indeed, it has become much smaller to the extent that it is even less possible today than before for any responsible nation to act according to one set of standards in one situation and a different set of standards when that seems expedient.

The building of confidence is a continuous process: it permits no interruptions. And détente is indivisible: it cannot be made to flourish in one area of the globe while it is being flouted in another.

It is with profound regret that we must acknowledge that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has contributed to an erosion of a sense of international confidence and to calling into question the whole concept of détente which depends on confidence for its effective pursuit.

As long as present circumstances exist, the Canadian Government cannot but be deeply concerned about the way in which the international climate is being affected.

Our concerns exist on a number of levels.

In the first place, the Soviet invasion has had a deeply corrosive effect on the interests of the entire international community. Prospects for the early implementation of important measures of arms limitation which all members of the United Nations were eagerly awaiting have dimmed. The invasion has also cast in doubt the Soviet commitment to manifestations of détente as a meaningful policy rather than a high sounding word.

Secondly, the Soviet invasion has exacerbated an already complex and difficult regional security situation, and apart from doing a grave disservice to the interests of world peace, this surely constitutes a major threat to the nations and the people of the region. Tensions have mounted, uncertainties have multiplied and the potential for further instability has increased. Above all, the path of economic development will be interrupted and the human consequences of this are hard to measure. It is not so difficult however to forecast the tragedy that is being played out and undoubtedly will continue in terms of the refugee outflow. Again, as in Vietnam and Kampuchea, it is a story of lives lost, families separated and hardship endured. We can only ask: in whose interests?

Finally, and all things considered, the whole system of relations between the Soviet Union and other nations will inevitably be strained and diminished.

The Canadian Government will be keeping the situation in Afghanistan and its consequences for the international community under close review. As a first response to the present situation, we urge that this council condemn the Soviet Union's role in Afghanistan and demand the withdrawal of all Soviet forces now in Afghanistan so that the people of that country can determine their own future without the interference of any foreign power. The achievement of this objective, we believe, is in the supreme interest of all concerned with our world's peace and security and with the observance of generally accepted norms of civilized international conduct.