



# Statements and Speeches

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## CANADIAN RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Statement by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Ottawa, February 17, 1983

...The first major interest I should like to comment on is peace and security. This has pre-occupied us in our view of the Middle East throughout the postwar period, at times to the virtual exclusion of other interests. As a western country we certainly have had a stake in that area's stability, as the Middle East is adjacent to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) area and is at the meeting point of three continents with the risk of super-power confrontation.

The Arab-Israeli dispute is not the only intractable and dangerous problem. The war between Iran and Iraq continues to threaten regional stability and the supply of oil through the strait of Hormuz. Despite the enormous costs of that war to the disputants, it is fortunate that the conflict has not spread throughout the Persian Gulf and beyond. Canada has supported international mediation efforts to end the war and, in order not to exacerbate the situation, has not supplied arms to either side. Other conflicts and threats of conflict persist in undermining regional security and in impeding development: e.g. the Western Sahara, and major differences among a number of individual countries.

In response to peace and security problems in the area, Canada has made a major UN peacekeeping contribution over the years, both in developing the peacekeeping system and in providing forces and observers. About 250 Canadians are serving with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO) which has observers in Israel and neighbouring Arab countries, including Lebanon.

### Trade

The importance and growth of trade over the past few years warrant emphasis. The area provided a market in 1981 for \$2 billion in goods, plus some hundreds of millions of dollars in services, up close to 50 per cent over the 1980 figures. Figures for 1982 when available should show continued growth. Many countries shared in this trade, but Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Libya and Israel should be especially mentioned. Some of our exports are particularly attractive as they comprise high-technology products or other manufactured goods and services. The Middle East and North Africa still represent one of the best potential markets and one that we must take advantage of. Trade can usefully be reinforced by co-operation in other fields, e.g. education, which helps form future decision-makers who know Canada;

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cultural exchanges including those which take advantage of our Francophonie character; technological exchanges; high-level political dialogue; and development programs.

**Energy, investments, development aid**

Energy is an area of obvious importance. Imports from the Middle East last year ran at about 64 000 barrels a day, 23 per cent of total imports. All these imports have been through the major oil companies; we do not have supply agreements or barter arrangements with individual countries. The countries of the Middle East are key players in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their influence over the international price of oil has implications for our own energy program and the international economic system. Canadian policy on nuclear proliferation has limited the extent of co-operation with countries in the Middle East and North Africa, as some countries have not signed the non-proliferation treaty and some are in conflict situations. The only country with which we so far have an agreement is Egypt and co-operation is in its first stages. Experts will be meeting in Cairo next week to discuss a range of questions, including the CANDU technology.

Investments from the surplus countries of the Gulf have been growing rapidly and involve several billion dollars. Some investments are purchases of federal and provincial bonds by the monetary authorities of the governments with financial surpluses of the region, but most are through private banking channels. It is Canadian policy to welcome investments of significant benefit and we have facilitated such investments.

Development aid is an important dimension of our relations with countries in the Middle East. Aid disbursements to countries in the region in 1981 totalled about \$46 million, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Canada has played an active role in the development effort in the Maghreb since the Sixties and has implemented a major aid program in Egypt since 1976. In recent years we have also provided a certain amount of development assistance to Sudan, and also, on a still more modest scale, to Lebanon, Jordan and North and South Yemen, as well as to two other Arab League members on the fringes of the area you are studying, Mauritania and Somalia. Certain projects in the occupied territories by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). A growing feature of aid activity is co-operation with various Arab development funds with which we are co-financing 35 projects throughout the developing world. We have also co-operated with Israel in a project in the Dominican Republic.

**Ethnic ties, immigration, education**

The interaction of people is a difficult-to-define but important field. Canadians individually and collectively are greatly aided in developing relations with the region by the linguistic duality and the cultural and religious diversity of our country. For example, we share membership in the international French-speaking community with three states of the area: Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon, and there are several others where French is much used. There are strong adherents in Canada of all three of the great

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religions which have their spiritual centres in the Middle East. The several Canadian ethnic communities with links to the Middle East and North Africa are intensely interested in the evolution of events in the region. We should be able to build on these varied ties with the area.

Immigration has been significant from some countries but has not been large in comparison to most other regions of the world. Tourism from Canada is extensive to the holy places and to archaeological sites and is growing to holiday locations in North Africa. An increasing number of Canadians are working and living in the Middle East and North Africa.

Education co-operation seems on the point of takeoff with several countries; we are anxious to do more in this field, working with provincial authorities and academic institutions. Cultural exchanges have traditionally not been extensive except with Israel and the Maghreb, but are now gathering some momentum elsewhere and Canadian scholars are doing useful research on various facets of the area, both here and in the field.

**Visits and  
co-operation**

Our interests are supported by a growing array of government tools. We now have ten embassies functioning in the region and are looking at the possibility of a physical presence in the lower Gulf to promote our economic and other interests. We have diplomatic relations with all countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In addition to increasing in number, the embassies have grown in size and now have a wide range of activities. Official visits to and from the region, including several by the Prime Minister, have been an increasingly important development in our relations with this area, where personal contacts are all-important as a basis for enduring links. ...I took the opportunity in 1976 to visit a number of countries in the region; I hope to return this year to signify my own commitment to broadening the base of our relationships.

Our relations in many cases have been buttressed by both specific and general agreements, providing in some cases for formal meetings of joint commissions. The subjects treated in these agreements and commissions range from trade through development to education and cultural matters. The countries of the region have also extended their interest in Canada. Eleven of them now have embassies in Ottawa; the rest cover Canada from New York or Washington. Also, the Arab League has had an information office here for some years. Provincial governments have been active in a variety of economic and other fields. The Canadian government has been happy to assist in these endeavours through our embassies in the area and through consultation and co-operation in Canada.

Although it would be foolish to deny the unstable record of the region — and the potential for further discord — we should not be deterred from pursuing our many interests in the Middle East. Excellent opportunities exist for Canada to establish

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closer ties and, working with the countries and peoples of both the Middle East and Maghreb, to achieve even greater mutual benefit. The government is committed to this objective and we are gratified that Canadians at large increasingly share the same view. We will look forward to the results of your enquiry with the deepest interest in the expectation that they will contribute significantly to the furtherance of Canada's long-range objectives and to the heightening of public awareness of the opportunities as well as the problems of the area.

**Arab-Israeli  
dispute**

I should like to turn to the Canadian view on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Peace in the Middle East can come only through negotiations and the Arabs and Israelis have to be encouraged to sit down together to work out their differences. Following a balanced and impartial policy towards the Israelis and the Arabs, including the Palestinians, we will do what we can to promote compromise and moderation but Canadian influence will obviously be limited as we are not a central player.

We support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. We strongly opposed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which we considered neither justified nor likely to achieve its stated objective. The Prime Minister deplored the invasion in writing to Prime Minister Begin. We continue to support Israel's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon. The withdrawal of Syrian and Palestine Liberation Organization forces is obviously equally important for the return of peace and stability to Lebanon. Negotiations to achieve the withdrawal of forces should be pursued vigorously and should not be delayed by attempts to achieve unrelated objectives. We deplored Israel's unjustified occupation of West Beirut. We were shocked and revolted by the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut.

Since the beginning of the invasion we have contributed \$3.05 million in humanitarian assistance for Lebanon. As requirements become clearer, we shall be considering what further contributions might be made to aid the Lebanese and the Palestinians in Lebanon.

**Peacekeeping**

We have had discussions with a number of countries about peacekeeping in Lebanon but Canada has not been asked to participate in the Multinational Force, MNF. It would be premature to speculate about what the Canadian government's reaction might be if invited to participate in either the Multinational Force or a changed United Nations Force in Lebanon.

On the conflict in general we support a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement based on Security Council Resolution 242, including the right of all countries to live within secure and recognized boundaries and the requirement for Israeli withdrawal from "territories occupied" in 1967. The final status of the occupied territories must be decided by negotiations. We oppose attempts to prejudge the outcome of negotiations through actions on the ground or one-sided resolutions in international fora. We support the security, well-being and rights of Israel as a

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legitimate, independent state in the Middle East. Because of our support for the principle of universality, we oppose any move to suspend or expel Israel from the United Nations or its specialized agencies. At the same time, we have expressed in the UN our opposition to certain Israeli policies.

**Occupied territories**

Canada has made it clear to Israel that we cannot accept the position that it has gained the right to retain permanent control over the occupied territories. We are deeply concerned over action which Israel has taken on the ground to extend its control: its annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights as well as its establishment of settlements in the occupied territories. We regard these actions as contrary to international law and extremely unhelpful to the peace process. The settlements have greatly increased in number, area and total population since the mid-70s when we began to criticize their establishment. We would like to see an end to settlements activity, not just a freeze. The repeated assertions by Israeli spokesmen that Israel will never withdraw from these territories, coupled with the announced determination to increase the number of Israeli settlements in them and to reject any suggestion about their removal in any peace arrangement, seriously undermine the possibility of successful negotiations leading to a permanent and secure peace. We have also criticized the strong measures taken by Israel in the occupied territories, including the closing of Palestinian universities, tough measures to put down demonstrations and the expulsion of some mayors and the dismissal of other mayors and municipal councils.

The world has come in recent years to acknowledge the identity of the Palestinians as a people. We recognize that for there to be a just peace, the legitimate rights of the Palestinians must be realized, including their right to play a full part in negotiations to determine their future and their right to a homeland within a clearly defined territory, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The nature of the homeland and its relationship with its neighbours should be decided by the parties to the dispute through negotiation.

We do not officially recognize the PLO. That is, we do not accept its claim to be the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", and we are giving no consideration to doing so. However, because of the PLO's obvious importance among Palestinians, we have had contacts with it on a range of topics in a number of places. We have tried to counsel the PLO to pursue a political course and to reject violence. We are following closely the meeting of the Palestine National Council, currently taking place in Algiers.

Canada has given strong support to international efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. Over the years, we have contributed \$70 million (US) to UNRWA.

**Camp David accord**

Canada has been one of the strongest supporters of the Camp David accord with its provisions for full autonomy and self-government in the occupied territories as the

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first step toward a comprehensive settlement. We hope Israel will find it possible to take a less uncompromising position on the future of the occupied territories as well as in its dealings with the inhabitants of those territories so that there will be some incentive for them and for Jordan to join the Camp David process. For their part, Arab governments and Palestinian leaders have to understand Israel's security concerns and be prepared to make clear their willingness to agree to genuine and lasting peace with Israel.

Canada has welcomed President Reagan's initiative and has indicated publicly that it is in accord with the main line of his proposals: they are an elaboration of Camp David and are consistent with it. We believe they merit the most careful consideration by all sides and that they offer opportunities for progress which should be vigorously pursued. President Reagan expressed the conviction that self-government by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan offered the best chance for a just and lasting peace. We have no problem with this option since it might indeed offer the best chance of peace but we would not rule out, as President Reagan has, other options open to the parties during negotiations, including the possibility of an independent Palestinian state.

**Fez summit**

We also welcome the fact that the Arab Summit in Fez put forward an agreed upon Arab view on a settlement without ruling out other approaches to the problem, such as the US initiative. In its reference to Security Council guarantees for peace for all states in the region, the Fez resolution seems to recognize the existence of Israel, at least implicitly. Although we would like to see this position made clearer, we think that what has been said is a positive development.

The way forward is very uncertain. The situation in the Middle East has changed dramatically as a consequence of Lebanon. Until there is an early withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, the prospects for movement in the peace process are not encouraging. There are other serious obstacles, moreover, which, if not removed, tend to foreclose the possibility of a peaceful solution to the Palestinian question. What is necessary above all in our view is that Israelis and Arabs should each make a genuine effort to appreciate the depth of the concerns and fears of the other. Only in such a spirit of mutual accommodation and understanding can a truly just and lasting peace be achieved. Canada will do what it can to further this process.

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