



Statements and Speeches

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CANADA'S RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE

Statement by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Annual Conference of the Canada-Israel Committee, Ottawa, March 16, 1983

I am happy for the opportunity this annual conference gives me to resume the contacts with the Canada-Israel Committee that I used to enjoy when I was Minister for External Affairs between 1974 and 1976. Today I want to talk about the Canada-Israel relationship and the Arab-Israeli dispute. I do not intend to cover all the aspects of these very broad subjects since I have just recently put a full statement on the record of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs on February 17 and I returned to the subject yesterday before the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence. I want simply to highlight some of the issues involved.

Our interest in Israel is a special one. There is a closeness with Israel that goes back many years. We supported the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and established our diplomatic mission there in 1954. As a reflection of our interest in Israel, our embassy is now about the sixth largest diplomatic mission in the country.

Over the years, Canada has developed a solid relationship with Israel and a friendship that is based on understanding and frankness. I am sure these have given us greater insight into the aspirations and preoccupations of Israelis as well as helping Israelis, in turn, to understand how Canadians view Israel. The Canada-Israel Committee's contribution to the dialogue is very much valued.

The official visit I made to Israel in 1976 brought home to me the vitality of Israeli democracy and the enthusiasm that is typical of Israelis. These are not things that are easily forgotten. Nor is the sense of history with which Israelis live their daily lives. I found memorable the ancient history captured in the holy city of Jerusalem. Then there was the more recent history of the Holocaust which is recorded at Yad Vashem so that none may forget the horrors that man has perpetrated against his fellow man. Finally, there was the daily history being written in the constant confrontation between Arabs and Israelis.

Development of bilateral relations

How have our relations with Israel developed over the past seven years since I was last in this portfolio? I see that the basic friendliness between us has remained unchanged and that the fundamental commitment by Canada and Canadians has stood the test of time. There is continuing contact and dialogue at all levels.

There are, of course, differences between us, including some very important ones over various Israeli actions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as both Foreign Minister Shamir and I made clear to each other during our meeting at the United Nations last fall. At that time, we discussed our opposing views relating to the conflict — the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the occupation of West Beirut, the Reagan initiative and the Fez Summit. We also dealt with the stepped-up Israeli settlement campaign and I expressed our view that it was contrary to international law and extremely unhelpful to the peace process. Such differences do not undermine our support for Israel's very existence, as some have suggested, nor do I think they undermine the basic rapport between us.

There has always been an active interchange between our people. The number has doubled since 1977 and has reached some 40 000 to 50 000 visitors annually in each direction. Many of these are drawn primarily by family ties but a great number are involved in business and professional exchanges. It is good to see that a growing number of parliamentarians is visiting back and forth. In our Parliament, a Canada-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group has been created and a corresponding Israel-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group has been established in the Israeli Knesset.

On the official level, we have broadened our already extensive relations. There is now a framework of agreements and understandings that was not yet in place when I visited Israel. These cover trade, agriculture, industrial research, health, cultural relations and film-making. We even developed a tripartite aid project together. When I met with the late Yigal Allon, who was Foreign Minister at the time of my visit, we spoke of establishing a joint committee on trade which I favoured. We now have two such bodies — a Joint Economic Committee and a Joint Agricultural Committee. Both met last year, one in Israel and the other here.

**New institute
to promote co-
operative R & D**

I am pleased to announce today on behalf of my colleague, the Honourable Edward Lumley, Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, that funds have been approved to help in setting up, together with Israel, an institute to promote co-operative industrial research and development in Canada and Israel. This initiative was greatly assisted by the good work of the Honourable Herb Gray who, as Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce at the time, signed the Letter of Understanding on this project while on an official visit to Israel in January 1982.

There have been periodic trade missions between our countries in an effort to improve our trading links. Ministerial visits are also a regular feature of our interchanges and we look forward to receiving the Israeli Minister of Industry and Trade, Mr. Gideon Patt.

As I have already told the Senate Committee, I hope and intend to visit some countries in the Middle East, including Israel, later this year. I want to make this visit because there have been great changes in the region since I was there last. These have

to be seen at firsthand if one is to understand properly the responses of the countries concerned to events touching them.

**Diplomatic
support**

I see my return visit to Israel as a reaffirmation of Canada's fundamental commitment to Israel. We have consistently supported its existence as an independent and secure state in the area. This is a basic element in our Middle East policy and is not subject to change. Because of our commitment, we have at times gone very far in extending our diplomatic support to Israel. Where, for example, the existence of Israel and its legitimacy have been challenged in international fora, we have taken a strong position against such efforts to undermine Israel.

In recent months, three attempts have been made to strip Israel of its rights of membership in UN bodies – at the International Atomic Energy Agency General Conference, the International Telecommunications Union Plenipotentiary Conference and the United Nations General Assembly. We not only opposed these attempts energetically because of our support for the principle of universality of membership, but in some instances we took a lead in order to defend that principle. At the IAEA Conference last September, for instance, Canada and other like-minded states were successful in obtaining a blocking third to defeat a resolution to expel Israel from the Agency because of its earlier attack on Iraqi nuclear facilities. Unfortunately, in the dying moments of the conference, an incorrect procedural ruling on a late vote by one delegation which broke a 40/40 tie, led to the rejection of the Israeli credentials for that specific conference. Canada, along with 16 other states, walked out of the meeting in protest.

One further point worth making about the hundreds of resolutions in the UN system: Canada has not drafted these resolutions and has no control over their contents. As a result, we do not see them as a satisfactory way of expressing Canadian policy although in our voting we take account of the basic thrust and balance of each resolution.

I recall that, in 1976, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin remarked that, to outsiders the Arab-Israeli conflict looks much simpler and much more solvable than, unfortunately it is in reality. If Canadians ever thought that (and I do not think they have, given our long experience in Middle East peacekeeping operations), events since then have certainly shown how difficult the road to a peaceful settlement is. Issues that we were discussing in 1976 have not been resolved and are still among the questions which will have to be dealt with in moving towards peace. In Israel, I had long talks on the central position of Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis of a peaceful settlement and the need for Israel's Arab neighbours to accept the existence of Israel. I also discussed the requirement that Israel withdraw from territories occupied in 1967, the obstacle to a peaceful solution created by the establishment of settlements in the occupied territories, and the need for a solution to the Palestinian problem that recognizes the rights of the Palestinians.

In my statement to the Senate Committee I reaffirmed our views on these various ongoing issues which are well-known to you. I have made these views known not only in the parliamentary context but also during my talks with Foreign Minister Shamir at the United Nations.

Since my talks in Israel seven years ago, new elements have entered the Middle East equation, including the Camp David agreements and President Reagan's initiative which we see as consistent with Camp David and meriting support. The Israel-Egypt peace treaty which emerged from the Camp David agreements is one of the few positive elements in the complex Arab-Israeli picture and shows that peace can be achieved between Arab and Israeli when high statesmanship is in evidence. It also shows how unpredictable the road to peace can be. Although we discussed the possibility of such an agreement at the time, neither Prime Minister Rabin nor I imagined that such a treaty could be just around the corner.

In the year since your last annual conference, momentous events involving Israel have occurred which have left their mark not only on Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours and the occupied territories but on Israel itself.

The promises of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty have yet to be fully realized.

**Palestine and
Canada's position
re PLO**

Although even more important than before, the Palestinian problem remains unresolved, despite the fact that it is recognized by all, including Israel, that the Palestinians have legitimate rights and just requirements (to use the language of Camp David) and there are various proposals on the table, such as the Reagan initiative, that could provide a basis for negotiations. For our part, we continue to support the right of the Palestinian people 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. We do not rule out any options open to the parties in negotiations.

Regrettably, the recent meeting of the Palestine National Council in Algiers did not give its leadership a clear mandate to negotiate, although it may have left the door sufficiently open so that, with encouragement from others, there can be some movement in the peace process.

The place of the PLO in negotiations continues to create controversy. As we have made clear, 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. We question how the PLO could usefully participate in such negotiations so long as it fails to accept Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries. Because of its importance, however, we have maintained contacts with it at the level of officials. We believe that such contacts are valuable and that they should be maintained.

Despite the many worrying signs I have described, I detect that there is a hesitant

willingness to begin talks, and the potential for peace therefore exists. However, the momentum could be lost if the parties do not show greater flexibility. We may therefore be at a crossroads.

Canada has been urged to play a more active role in the Middle East in an effort to provide the stimulus required in present circumstances. Some see our continued acceptability to the parties involved as an opening for us to try to exert influence. We, of course, speak out to the parties in private and through public statements. However, we do not have any illusions about the influence we can exert over the Arabs or Israelis.

Lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be imposed. It can come only through negotiations. One of the main problems is to get the negotiations going between the Arabs and Israelis. The key to breaking the present impasse on this point is to find how to encourage the parties to take the steps needed to bring them face to face.

Unfortunately, the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict appears to be one of missed opportunities and continued violence, followed by renewed efforts at peacemaking. New potential openings in the peace process have occurred in recent months but the window for progress is very narrow and if opportunities are not grasped by the parties quickly, the deadly cycle may simply repeat itself yet another time. While there may be some who would be comfortable with a perpetuation of this state of affairs, I think the vast majority of people directly concerned must want an honourable and peaceful end to the conflict, if only one can be found that protects their vital interests.

Sinai withdrawal
optimistic step
toward peace

In closing, I wish to recall and at the same time pay tribute to perhaps the historically most significant achievement in the Middle East in the past year — the final withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai and the peaceful restoration of that territory to Egyptian sovereignty in accordance with the peace treaty made possible by Camp David.

This event provides evidence of Israel's eagerness to act for peace when an Arab country indicates a willingness to negotiate. As that act showed, a settlement in the Middle East between Israelis and Arabs is possible once the will is there on both sides, and once there is a beginning of sympathetic understanding by each side of the aspirations and the fears of the other.

It is this fact that we should bear constantly in mind when events seem to suggest that there is an unbridgeable gap between present adversaries. It provides the hope on which we should all be trying to build.

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