

Comments on the Conflict in the Middle East
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It appears that a majority of Canadians, including a large number of Liberals, are saying that Canada should maintain neutrality with respect to the current Middle East crisis.

Not this Liberal.

Canada **cannot be neutral** in this case. We must not be neutral when dealing with terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, or people like the president of Iran---not when they call for the eradication of Israel. My father, who landed on D-Day in 1944 and fought successfully against oppression in World War II, would (if he were still with us) remind us all that neutrality, sometimes, is simply not an option.

We in Canada must be much, much stronger in our condemnation of Hezbollah and Hamas. I have already said, clearly, that what both Hezbollah and Hamas did was wrong, clear breaches of international law. So too were their ongoing attacks on Israel, well before the most recent ones.

We must also support Israel in its right to defend itself, and indeed to take action to prevent further attacks.

However, although we can't be neutral, **we must be balanced**. There is a very big difference. As such, we can and should express our concern over the severity of Israel's response. Right after the crisis erupted, I wrote that the actions of Hezbollah and Hamas were wrong and that Israel had a clear right to take action, but that I did not view Israel's response as "measured". As my colleague Stéphane Dion has suggested, sometimes it's your friends with whom you have to be the most honest.

We, Canada, must support the right of peoples and states in the Middle East—Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese—to live in peace, free from attack or threat of attack. We must oppose those, like Iran, Hamas or Hezbollah, who seek the destruction of any people or state. But how best to encourage peaceful co-existence for all?

My concern is that the severity and scale of Israel's response will, ironically, make the ultimate goal of long-lasting peaceful co-existence in the Middle East less likely. It may even serve to escalate the conflict to even more devastating consequences. Why? Because it is punishing so many of the wrong people. Not only are civilian lives being lost; the destruction of so much key infrastructure in both Gaza and Lebanon will jeopardize the local economies and the wherewithal of the local populations even further. Forget for a moment the question of right or wrong, and look instead at the practical

results. This is not going to win over the public support that is so critical to long-lasting peace.

So what to do? First, I support the calls for an immediate cease fire---for the most important reason of humanity. Innocent people are being killed everyday and the lives of the survivors are being shattered. It must stop.

Second is the search for a solution. All involved must look beyond the immediate threat, attack and response cycle. But our cherished Canadian ideal of peace-keeping, although wonderful, simply isn't possible without a peace to keep. Those involved must want peace themselves, and right now, Hezbollah, Hamas, and many in Iran and Syria are clear---they do not.

Does that mean we give up? Of course not. Peace keeping may not be possible; peace promotion is critical. But it won't be imposed---the desire for peace must come from those involved.

The longer term solution will lie with the power of the moderate influences in the region.

There are moderates throughout the countries surrounding Israel who are not religious extremists; who are themselves concerned at the rise of religious extremism and the intolerance that it breeds; who do not support terrorist activity; and who wish to work toward peace in the Middle East. There are many Lebanese who want rid of Syria's influence in Lebanese affairs, who want to respect the borders, and who not only acknowledge Israel's right to exist but wish to coexist peacefully. In 2005 over a million Lebanese marched in the streets to protest the murder of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and, successfully, to demand an end to Syria's military presence in Lebanon. It is these same people who need to be persuaded to demand the disarmament of Hezbollah---but it is their hearts and minds that are required. It is these moderate influences that Israel, and the rest of the world, should be encouraging and supporting, not just by words but by actions---including helping with needed resources, and showing compromises which the more moderate factions can point to as negotiated successes. Imagine that the same money, time, effort and pain that have gone into the recent bombing and fighting were instead expended in preventative, democracy-building, peace-encouraging efforts.

A peace process leading to a peaceful solution will only be possible when the hearts and minds of the majority actually want peace.

Is it too late? Is this approach too idealistic? Too naïve? There is no question, recent events make it much harder---on both sides. But particularly with Iran and Syria's involvement, allowing ongoing escalation could mean disaster. Can Canada participate in this? Yes, but not with guns and tanks. We have a tradition in the area of relative objectivity and balance. Let's use that reputation to encourage, not force.

Ultimately we cannot lose hope that the voices of moderation, together with the necessary resources and the ability to compromise, can do better than what is happening now.