



## Principles for a constructive and humane Canadian policy in the Middle East

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The following document outlines a high-level strategy for Canada in the Middle East for the coming months. Underlying this strategy is the conviction that Canada should apply basic principles of decency and humanity in its interactions with other countries. These principles include: 1) support for international law; 2) an equal legal standard for all; 3) a belief that violence doesn't lead to solutions; 4) humanitarian concern; 5) support for representative governance; and 6) a sense of urgency in responding to crises. There is also the underlying assumption in this document that Canada is a wealthy and privileged nation, and that Canada has a responsibility to contribute constructively (and financially) to humanitarian, political and diplomatic crises in the Middle East.

**Interacting responsibly with authoritarian regimes in the Middle East:** The past several years have seen Canada ink many new trade agreements with governments in the Middle East. While international commerce is necessary and healthy, Canada must ensure that it does not undermine moral imperatives under such agreements. For example, Canada must ensure that trade agreements ultimately benefit the general population of a country, and not just the ruling elite. Canada must also consider tying trade agreements to human rights targets when dealing with authoritative regimes. With any military contracts, Canada must ensure that military equipment sold will not become a tool for oppression. Canada already has established criteria by which to assess the appropriateness of its trade agreements, and it should be diligent in applying them.

**Reducing arms, and the arms trade to the Middle East:** At all levels, the Western arms policy in the Middle East has been disastrous for the region. Whether discussing small arms, or nuclear weapons, Canada must improve its record. First, Canada must support the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, must seek to make the Middle East a nuclear arms-free zone, and must bring an end to Israeli exceptionalism. Second, Canada must work with international partners to stem the sale of arms to the Middle East. Unless it is stopped, the influx of weapons into the region will only result in continued repression, sectarian violence, and civil strife.

**Opposing ISIS and other extremist militant groups in the Middle East:** There are many opinions on how to deal with groups like ISIS. Clearly, however, the West's approach of military invasions, bombing raids and drone attacks in the Middle East since 2003 has only made matters worse. Canada should be careful to act multilaterally with international partners, and should ensure that all actions align with international law, including the need for a UN mandate for any intervention. Ultimately, civil strife in the Middle East is the result of repressive governments, dire humanitarian need, and sectarian tension. Canada's long-term approach to extremist groups should address each of these underlying needs, eventually eliminating the conditions which lead to the rise of groups like ISIS.

**Contributing constructively to the resolution of the Syrian civil war:** Since 2011, there has been no easy path for Canada or the international community on how to approach the Syrian civil war. Nevertheless, Canada must continue to work for a resolution of the conflict, while respecting certain principles. First, Canada must respect international law in its interventions, and work multi-laterally with international partners. Given the failure of Western military interventions in the Middle East since 2003, it is difficult to see how more armed involvement will produce any long-term stability in Syria. Second, Canada must apply equal expectations of

all parties to the Syrian conflict, and not de facto take sides. While there is a tendency to “blame” certain parties for the conflict, the resolution of the conflict will inevitably involve many players. To be relevant to the resolution, Canada must seek to build trust relations with all players. There is no time to point fingers and exclude players: a solution is imperative.

**Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis:** Many Canadians have been encouraged by Canada’s commitment to settle tens of thousands of Syrian refugees over the coming years. Nevertheless, the need goes far beyond the mere settlement of refugees in Canada. Canada must respond with sustained support for the 4.6 million refugees current residing in Turkey, Lebanon and other countries. Working with international partners, Canada must ensure that Syrian refugees across the region have adequate food, shelter, security, health services, and education. Without this sustained support, the international community sows the seeds for another generation of instability.

**Responding to violence between Israel and Palestinian groups:** The past several years have seen frequent flare-ups of violence between Israel and Palestinian groups. The most recent of these conflicts occurred in the summer of 2014, and involved the deaths of 2130 Palestinians, and 60 Israelis. If such conflicts arise in the future, Canada must foremost push for a ceasefire to put an end to the death and destruction as quickly as possible. Canada’s response should also reflect the asymmetrical nature of the violence between Israel and the Palestinians: e.g. an attack which kills 100 Palestinians civilians is not equivalent to an attack which kills 3 Israelis. Canada’s response should also emphasize the need to protect all civilians, ensuring that civilians have access to food and medical aid at all times, and ensuring that neither party practices “collective punishment.” Finally, Canada’s response must incorporate basic legal principles for armed conflict, including the concepts of proportionality and necessity.

**Contributing constructively to a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians:** Officially, all Canadian parties support the two-state solution for Israel-Palestine. However, Canadians tire of parties which give lip-service to an idea, and don’t back up this idea with concrete action. Europe has been working pro-actively and independently regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, putting pressure on the parties to reach an agreement, and Canada should do likewise. Canada’s diplomatic positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict should also reflect an urgency, as Israel’s military occupation is in its 48th year, and Israel’s illegal “settlement” policies in the West Bank are on the verge of rendering the two-state solution obsolete. In tandem, Canada must push for solutions which respect international law, must restore its humanitarian support for Palestinian refugees via UNRWA, and should encourage progressive steps to Palestinian statehood.

**Maintaining a consistent opposition to Israel’s colonization of the West Bank:** Since 1967, every Israel government has supported the expansion of Israeli “settlements” (a.k.a. “colonies”) in the Palestinian West Bank. Now, experts estimate that there are at least 600,000 Israeli “settlers” in the West Bank, in addition to industrial zones and other land confiscation by Israel. This colonization violates Art. 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention, and is one of the chief impediments to the resumption of peace talks and a resolution to the conflict. Canada should consistently condemn every action which expands and entrenches this colonization.

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