

## **Letter to the National Post, response to Israeli Ambassador Baker and Post columnist Jonathan Kay on the Lebanon war, May 2008, (carried in entirety in electronic version)**

Ambassador Baker has re-launched the diatribe against me in the National Post that he made in 2006. I responded then as follows.

*First, Israel has a clear right under international law to defend itself. That is fundamental. At the same time that defence must itself comport with international law, including international humanitarian law. Your readers might wish to consult Human Rights Watch reports on the subject ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)), particularly the letter of Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch (HRW) to the Jerusalem Post, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006. In his letter, Roth says that his organization “investigated some two dozen bombing incidents in Lebanon involving a third of the civilians who by then (July 30<sup>th</sup>) had been killed. In none of those cases was Hezbollah anywhere around at the time of the attack”. Those incidents include the attack that killed the Lebanese-Canadian family of seven vacationing in Lebanon, the attack at Qana that killed 28 civilians, and the attack on the UN post that killed a Canadian peacekeeper. HRW also documented Hezbollah war crimes, especially indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel. One side’s violations of international law do not relieve the other’s obligations under that law.*

*Second, as regards Canadian foreign policy [and immigration policy!], Mr. Baker is entitled to his preferences but fortunately for us the decisions are for Canadians to make. Successive Canadian Governments have opted for what they described as “fair-minded and principled” approaches to the Middle East, not “balanced” as Mr. Baker states, much less “neutral” as some allege. That has meant retaining the right to call them as we see them, from terrorist bombings to illegal settlements. Canadian Governments of all political stripes have supported Israel, not just Israel’s right to exist. At the same time, their judgment has been that simply aligning Canadian policy with Israeli policy would be inconsistent with our interests and, sometimes, our values and would, also, likely diminish our ability to play a constructive role, as for example we had done for years as “gavel” (chair) of the Refugee Working Group. Whether this posture enhances or diminishes our influence in the Middle East is in the eye of the beholder but the US has consistently shown its appreciation as have others, for Canada’s credibility and engagement...*

*Finally, conflating the Israeli-Palestinian issue with the attack on Iraq and the War on Terror, as the Bush Administration has done, and as Mr. Baker seems to advocate for Canada, is a failed policy that the American people have rejected and even American conservatives are abandoning. Further, in Canada’s diverse society, making wedge political issues out of sensitive foreign policy conflicts risks putting the public peace in jeopardy, which all of us, including Jews and Muslims, have reasons to avoid. That is not an argument for pacifism or neutrality; sometimes doing the right thing requires running risks and dangers. But it is a plea for principle and*

*independence. That hardly means that we are left to “cower on the sidelines”; Canadian sacrifice and heroism in two world wars, Korea, countless peacekeeping missions, the first Gulf war, the Bosnian and Kosovo conflicts and Afghanistan speak for themselves.*

*In the wake of Israel’s over-reaching response to Hezbollah’s criminal provocation, the latter’s stock has risen in the Middle East, the deterrence value of the IDF has diminished and Iran has been emboldened. Your readers will judge whether all that makes Israel better off.*

Mr. Kay’s deprecation of the UN notwithstanding, the Security Council remains the top international table for peace and security, which Japan, Germany, Italy, India and Brazil, among others, work hard to join. Canada has served on the Council every decade since the UN was created. Winning election has never required us to abandon Israel, but rather just to continue the fair-minded and principled stands we have always taken, based on our own reading of international law.

*Paul Heinbecker served as Canada’s Ambassador to the United Nations (2000-2003) and as chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (1989-92).*