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United Nations Headquarters, New York City

AFTER AFGHANISTAN: CANADA'S RETURN TO UN PEACEKEEPING

by Michael Byers



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The Honourable Lester B. Pearson as Prime Minister of Canada

Introduction

"We need action not only to end the fighting but to make the peace."

– Lester B. Pearson

Spoke by Lester B. Pearson in 1956, these words grace the side of the peacekeeping monument in Ottawa. They also provide an insight into the true nature of this difficult and often dangerous task.

Pearson knew a great deal about war. He served in both the army and air force during the First World War.¹ During the Second World War, he served as a diplomat in both London and Washington. During the Korean War, he served as Minister of External Affairs. When Pearson spoke about making the peace, he was drawing a distinction from two other types of missions: the defence of one's country from outside attack, and forward-leaning interventions aimed at defeating opponents overseas.

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Defending the country from outside attack is the fundamental role of the Canadian Forces (CF), and they must be well trained and equipped for that purpose. Some overseas missions will also be necessary: during the Cold War, the principal duty of Canadian soldiers was not to make the peace, but to guard against the Soviet threat. From sailors in the North Atlantic, to fighter pilots on patrol over West Germany, to technicians at DEW-line stations across the North, they protected both Canada and our NATO allies.

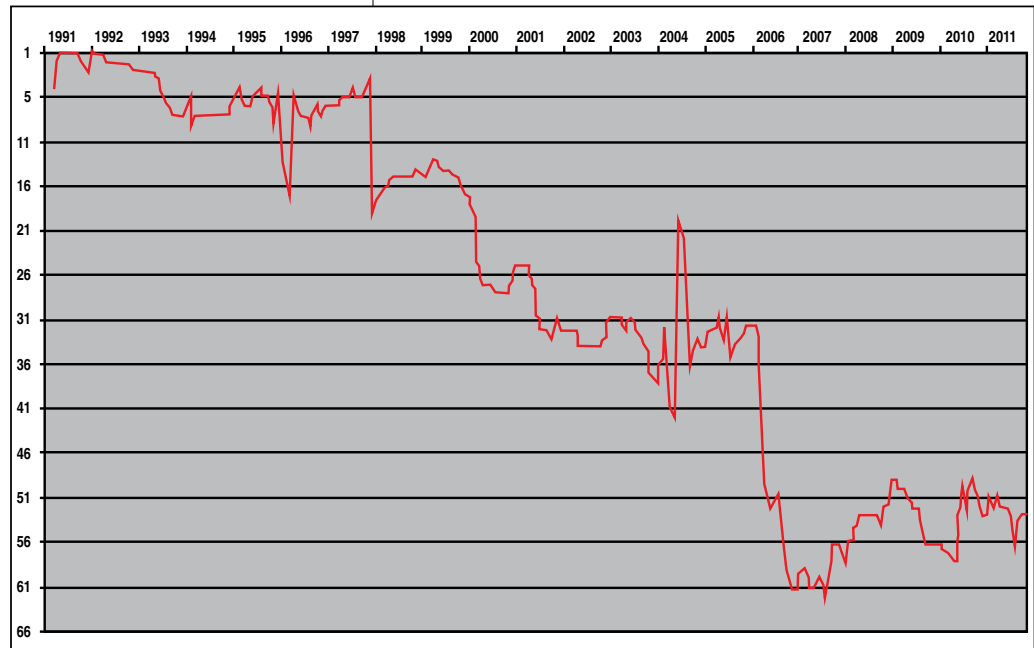
Other overseas missions will take place in circumstances where there is no real military threat to Canada. Most recently, Canadian soldiers served bravely in a forward-leaning ‘counterinsurgency’ mission in Afghanistan. A mission that from a security perspective was optional, since al-Qaeda had relocated elsewhere by 2005 and the Taliban posed no significant threat to Canadians in Canada. As Canadian historians David Bercuson and Jack Granatstein opined in 2011: “Canada did have one core reason ... to be in Kandahar from beginning to end. Ottawa wanted to take on a dangerous and heroic mission in a difficult struggle in order to achieve influence in determining the course of that struggle. That was so that Canada would no longer be seen in Washington and Brussels as a free rider... ”²

Peacekeeping is also optional, insofar as it does not address direct threats to this country. It is something that Canada traditionally did, not only to curry favour with the United States, but to promote our long-term interests in international peace and security.

For almost four decades between 1956 and 1992, Canada was often the single largest contributor of UN peacekeepers. Its involvement then began to slip, and today, Canada occupies 57th place with only 11 military personnel and 116 police officers participating in UN peacekeeping missions.³ Logistical and personnel constraints in Kandahar were only partly responsible for this downward trend, which began well before 2005.⁴

Instead, the retreat from peacekeeping has been a political decision, as was demonstrated in 2010 when the United Nations wanted to place Canadian Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie in command of its 20,500-soldier force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It

was initially reported that the Canadian Forces were “... angling to take command of the UN’s largest peacekeeping mission,”⁵ and the required deployment of just one general and a couple of dozen Canadian troops “... would be small enough not to make any impact on resources.”⁶ But then the politicians stepped in, and, before long, Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Catherine Loubier was explaining: “We’re fully engaged in Afghanistan until 2011, and that’s what we’re concentrating on for now.”⁷ Canada did keep nine soldiers in that UN peacekeeping force, and nearly two years later, the head of that contingent was reporting some progress – while calling for continued Canadian involvement in the Congo.⁸



Canada's rank among contributors to UN peacekeeping

Walter Dorn

This article accepts that the Canadian Forces play several essential roles. My argument is simply that peacekeeping should represent a larger proportion of our discretionary missions than it does today. To that end, I question some of the arguments made in favour of Canada’s disengagement from peacekeeping by examining them within an updated context, since much has changed during the past decade, including in the way in which the UN approaches peacekeeping. A strong case for reengagement can now be made – and that creates the need for a reappraisal.

Peacekeeping actually works

For more than a decade, Jack Granatstein and others argued that peacekeeping is passé, and counter-insurgencies are the new reality.⁹ They often pointed to the failed UN missions in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, where peacekeepers were forced to stand by – due to ‘toothless’ mandates and inadequate equipment or numbers of personnel – while thousands of innocent civilians were abused and killed. They often overlooked the core reason for those failures of the early-1990s, namely, a lack of political will, not on the part of the UN as an organiza-

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tion, but on the part of its member states. For example – and as Granatstein has himself identified – the UN ‘came up short’ in Rwanda, due to a lack of political will on the part of the members of the Security Council, especially France and the United States.¹⁰

date, UNIFIL was equipped with tanks, artillery, and surface-to-air missiles. In addition, UNIFIL’s commanding officer is ‘double-hatted’ to also serve as the UN head of mission, eliminating any potential confusion between the military and political leadership. UNIFIL is currently composed of soldiers from 36 countries, including major contingents from Italy, France, and Spain, with maritime support provided by Germany and Denmark. Significantly, a number of the main contributing nations are NATO members – although Canada, with its ideally-suited bilingual English-French military, is conspicuously absent. Since 2006, UNIFIL has successfully prevented a return to all-out hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.



Canadian Forces members serving in Lebanon as part of UNIFIL, 2008

There have been many other successful UN peacekeeping missions. For example, from 1992-1993, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) stabilized and administered an entire country, ran an election, and managed a transition to a power-sharing government with strong public support, while sidelining the notorious Khmer Rouge. The UN Peacekeeping Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) from 1992 to 1994, and the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from 1999 to 2002, had similar mandates and successful outcomes. The UN Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) from 1991 to 1995 successfully demobilized the FMLN guerilla organization, as well as military and police units implicated in serious human rights abuses, and also trained a new national police force. The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) from 2005 to 2011 led to the end of the civil war, a referendum, and the relatively peaceful secession of South Sudan.

There was also a learning process underway, as the end of the Cold War enabled the UN to take on more robust and complex peace operations.¹¹ As a result of that process, UN peacekeeping has evolved significantly since the early-1990s, as evidenced by changes made to the operation in Lebanon.¹² The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was initially formed in 1978. In the summer of 2006, after two months of intense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, the Security Council increased the number of troops in UNIFIL from around 2000 to a new authorized level of 15,000 personnel. It also provided an expanded and much more robust mandate, one that authorized UNIFIL to take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems necessary within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations (AO) is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind, to resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties under the mandate of the Security Council, and to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers, and, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.¹³

Consistent with this robust ‘take all necessary action’ man-



Thousands fleeing fighting in Kadugli, Sudan, seek refuge in an area secured by UNMIS, 09 June 2011.

DND photo 1S2008-1291

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Several independent analyses confirm that modern peacekeeping works, more often than not. From 2003 to 2005, the RAND Corporation compared eight state-rebuilding missions conducted by the United States, and eight by the UN in terms of inputs, such as personnel, funding, and time, and the achievement of the goals of peace, economic growth, and democratization. The study showed that seven of the UN missions succeeded, whereas only four of the American missions triumphed. It also identified several limitations to UN missions, including that they need at least some degree of consent and compliance from the parties to the conflict, and should not exceed 20,000 troops. However, it then concluded:

Assuming adequate consensus among Security Council members on the purpose for any intervention, the United Nations provides the most suitable institutional framework for most nation-building missions, one with a comparatively low cost structure, a comparatively high success rate, and the greatest degree of international legitimacy.¹⁴

The point with respect to low cost bears emphasis: UN peacekeeping accounts for less than one percent of global military spending.¹⁵ In 2012-2013, the UN will spend a total of \$7 billion on its 15 missions involving more than 80,000 soldiers.¹⁶ In 2010-2011, Canada alone spent an equivalent amount on its Afghanistan mission, with roughly 2500 soldiers deployed there.¹⁷

The RAND Corporation's research has been verified by Professor Virginia Page Fortna of Columbia University, who, in 2008, published a book-length investigation into whether peacekeeping works.¹⁸ She determined: "... peacekeepers make an enormous difference to the prospects for peace, not only while they are present, but even after they depart."¹⁹

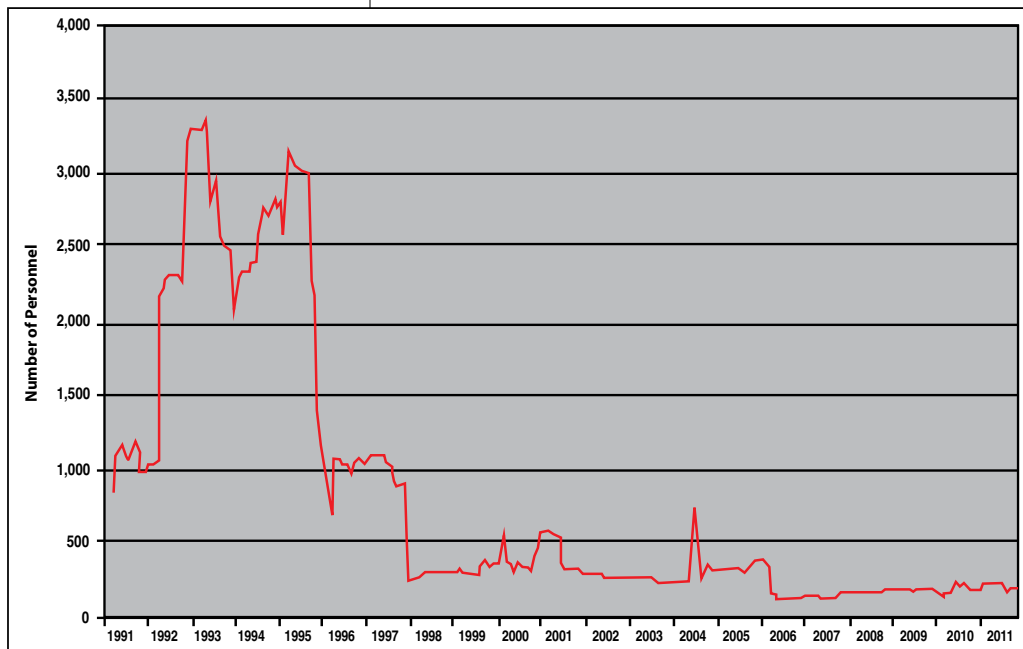
Some critics of peacekeeping argue that most conflicts in the post-Cold War era are civil wars requiring more robust forms of intervention than the UN is able to provide, and that this explains the move to NATO in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. However, the Human Security Report reveals a marked decline in political violence worldwide since the end of the Cold War, including decreases of more than 70 percent in both international conflicts and 'high-intensity' civil conflicts.²⁰ It examines the various possible reasons for this decline, and concludes:

[T]he key factor was the liberation of the UN from the paralyzing rivalries of Cold War politics. This change permitted the organization to spearhead an upsurge of international efforts to end wars via mediated settlements and seek to prevent those that had ended from restarting again. As international initiatives soared - often fivefold or more - conflict numbers shrank. Indeed, high-intensity conflicts declined by some 80 percent between 1991 and 2008.²¹

UN Peacekeeping at all-time high

Today, there is no shortage of peacekeeping missions where Canadian soldiers could make a valuable contribution. Back in 2006, the Under-Secretary-General of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations acknowledged Canada's competing demands in Afghanistan, while expressing a desire to see more Canadian 'blue helmets' in the future, because UN peacekeeping operations depend upon universality, and the demand has not diminished.²² Indeed, in the last two years, the UN has deployed more peacekeepers than at any time in the organization's history, with more troops in conflict zones than any actor in the world, other than the US Department of Defense. As mentioned earlier, there are currently more than 80,000 blue-helmeted soldiers from 115 countries deployed in 15 separate peacekeeping operations, from Kosovo, to Lebanon, to the Congo.²³

"Several independent analyses confirm that modern peacekeeping works, more often than not."



Military and Police Personnel on UN Peacekeeping Missions

Walter Dorn

Unlike the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, most Canadians have not heard of these missions - in part because they are successful, and therefore, considered less newsworthy than failures. The member states of the UN, however, are clearly aware of the successes, for they continue to establish and fund more missions.

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General Stanley McChrystal speaks to the media in Washington, D.C., 10 May 2010.

seeking to expand and train the Afghan army and police, which is a daunting task. The attrition rate of the Afghan army is 24 percent; in other words, nearly one-quarter of Afghan soldiers leave the army each year.²⁹ Undoubtedly, some of those leaving the Afghan army will reappear as better-trained insurgents. In addition, 86 percent of the soldiers are "... illiterate, and drug use is still an endemic problem."³⁰ Adding to the challenge, the Taliban are systematically targeting recruits and trainers, including by the tactic of infiltrating the ranks of the recruits and then turning their guns on their classmates and instructors.³¹ In 2012, NATO significantly reduced the number of joint operations between Afghan and Western forces because of the frequency of these "green-on-blue" attacks.³²

Complicating matters further, corruption is so pervasive that Afghanistan is tied with Myanmar for third-most-corrupt country (just behind North Korea and Somalia) in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index – a widely respected measure of domestic public sector corruption.³³ According to Transparency International: "Widespread corruption in Afghanistan continues to seriously undermine state-building and threatens to destroy the trust of the Afghan people in their government and their institutions while fueling insecurity."³⁴

To conclude this section, it is worth repeating an uncomfortable but important point. In 2005, the counter-insurgency mission in Kandahar was portrayed as a desirable step away from UN peacekeeping for Canada and the Canadian Forces. Today, the mission has fallen significantly short of its objectives, leaving Afghanistan more dangerous than it was before. With the counter-insurgency alternative having experienced a hard death, it is time to re-consider Canada's relationship to peacekeeping – and return to a much more active UN role.

Canadians in general remain strongly supportive of peacekeeping. In an October 2010 poll conducted by Nanos Research for the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, 52 percent of Canadians rated UN peacekeeping as an important role for Canada's armed forces, with 25 percent giving it a '10 out of 10' on a scale of importance.²⁴ In comparison, only 21 percent of Canadians rated overseas combat missions as an important role for the military.

Lessons from Afghanistan

Canada joined the US-led counter-insurgency in southern Afghanistan in 2005, eventually deploying more than 2500 troops to Kandahar Province. The mission was definitely not peacekeeping, since it lacked impartiality and went beyond the minimum use of force.²⁵ Put forward by opponents of peacekeeping as a better fit for the Canadian Forces, the Afghan mission can hardly be described as a success. Indeed, in this author's opinion, the security situation in Afghanistan is significantly worse today than it was in 2005.

As US commander General Stanley McChrystal stated in 2009: "Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating."²⁶ According to the United Nations, 2010 was the bloodiest year since 2001 for Afghan civilians.²⁷ The number of NATO casualties has also climbed, from 131 in 2005, to 521 in 2009, to 711 in 2010 – before leveling off at 566 in 2011.²⁸

In an effort to exit the counter-insurgency, Canada and the US are now



Opening of the 67th General Debate of the UN General Assembly, 25 September 2012.

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A niche for Canada

Most UN peacekeeping missions today have more robust mandates, more soldiers, and better equipment than the missions of the early-1990s. But they tend to lack well-trained soldiers from the developed world: a weakness that can be ascribed, in part, to Canada's disengagement from peacekeeping. A relatively small number of well-trained, highly disciplined Canadian soldiers could act as force-multipliers in UN missions, by providing leadership and mentoring, and by serving as role models for less-well-trained developing country troops. Canada still trains developing country soldiers through the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Centre, but this is no substitute for a presence in the field.

Contrary to the line of argumentation that took us into the counter-insurgency in Kandahar, if Canada wants to 'punch above its weight' militarily, UN peacekeeping missions are a good place to start.

Moreover, when Canada acts on behalf of the international community, it bolsters its reputation, thus generating what Joseph Nye of Harvard University calls "soft power" – the ability to *persuade* rather than to *coerce*.³⁵ Soft power is the principal currency of diplomacy for middle-power states. Canada's history, our international reputation for independence and objectivity, our highly trained, experienced, diplomatically skilled soldiers – all these attributes enable us to 'punch above our weight,' especially when we are not punching in the exact same place and time as the United States.

Sadly, our soft power has declined considerably in the past decade. In September 2010, for the first time in its history, Canada lost one of its regular bids for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. According to many international observers, our abandonment of UN peacekeeping was a contributing factor in the defeat.³⁶ As a result of losing that seat – to Portugal, no less – Canada has been absent from the top table for key decision-making on Libya, Syria, Iran, and North Korea, in what has been an important period of time for international peace and security.

Conclusion

As Jack Granatstein acknowledges, even the UN peacekeeping operation in Cyprus (which is often stereotyped as nothing more than traffic policing) was sometimes quite dangerous: "The Canadian Airborne Regiment fought a major



U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaks during a news conference in Islamabad, Pakistan, 04 December 2008.

Reuters RTR228TL by Mian Kursheed

"In an effort to exit the counter-insurgency, Canada and the US are now seeking to expand and train the Afghan army and police, which is a daunting task."

battle against invading Turkish troops in 1974 and sustained - and inflicted - casualties in this fight with a NATO ally at the Nicosia airport."³⁷ Those who argue against, and sometimes belittle, a Canadian role in UN peacekeeping do a disservice to the thousands of Canadian veterans who served in these missions, and particularly the 114 who were killed. Peacekeeping requires diplomacy, discipline, and often courage. Peacekeepers must be able to negotiate when possible, and to fight when necessary. Achieving that balance and acquiring those skills are difficult and valuable tasks.

Some critics even propagate the myth that peacekeeping is for 'wimps,' a myth that found its ultimate expression in US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's October 2000 comment: "We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten."³⁸ Rice was a member of the US administration that failed to develop a peacekeeping plan for post-intervention Iraq, with unfortunate consequences for Iraqi civilians, US and allied military personnel, and ultimately, the global position and reputation of the United States.

Canada did not make the mistake of joining the war in Iraq. We should also avoid Rice's mistake of denigrating, and disassociating ourselves from the essential and often successful contributions made by UN peacekeeping. Canada served honourably in many UN missions; we should do so again.

Author's Note: The two graphs in this essay were provided by Walter Dorn, Associate Professor, Canadian Forces College. I am also grateful for assistance from Stewart Webb, Research Associate at the Salt Spring Forum.



NOTES

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