

# FROM MYTH TO REALITY CHECK; FROM PEACEKEEPING TO STABILIZATION



Sean M. Maloney

Canadians cling to the mythology, born of the 1956 Suez Crisis, that we are a nation of peacekeepers, interposing between belligerent forces bent on war. Similarly, for decades Canada participated in the Cyprus UN force interposed between Greeks and Turks, not just to keep the peace, but as Sean Maloney writes, “to prevent the situation from escalating into a war that would destroy NATO.” Peacekeeping was actually part of the Cold War strategy of containing the global ambitions of Soviet communism. But the decline and fall of the Soviet empire from 1989 to 1991 “left local power brokers to their devices.” Subsequently, “UN forces brought in to monitor separation agreements found themselves caught between heavily armed warring factions.” Bosnia and Somalia were post-Cold War conflicts; Rwanda was sheer genocide. Afghanistan is a post-conflict exercise in nation-building. Peacekeeping, as Canadians understand it, no longer exists. Today’s stabilization forces undertake much more dangerous roles.

Les Canadiens s’accrochent à ce mythe né de la crise du canal de Suez de 1956 qu’ils forment une nation de gardiens de la paix s’interposant partout entre forces belligérantes. Ainsi le Canada a-t-il longtemps participé aux forces onusiennes dépêchées à Chypre pour maintenir la paix entre Grecs et Turcs, mais aussi pour « empêcher l’escalade du conflit en une guerre qui aurait détruit l’OTAN », observe Sean Maloney. Or le maintien de la paix s’inscrivait dans la stratégie de la guerre froide visant à réfréner les ambitions mondiales du communisme soviétique. Mais de 1989 à 1991, le déclin puis la chute de l’empire soviétique « ont éperonné les petits potentats régionaux », de sorte que « les forces onusiennes chargées de surveiller l’application des accords de séparation se sont retrouvées coincées entre factions rivales surarmées ». Conflits d’après-guerre froide en Bosnie et en Somalie, génocide avéré au Rwanda et, à l’heure actuelle, exercice de reconstruction en Afghanistan : les forces de stabilisation remplissent aujourd’hui des missions bien plus périlleuses que le maintien de la paix. Lequel n’existe plus tel que les Canadiens le conçoivent.

“Adapt or perish!”  
Brigadier Maurice Tugwell

**I**n the summer of 1992, a Canadian soldier wearing a blue helmet and equipped with a sniper’s rifle engaged and killed armed belligerents intent on interfering with UN forces who were securing the Sarajevo International Airport. The soldiers’ battalion had recently forced its way from Croatia to Sarajevo by threatening to assault, using armoured vehicles and TOW missiles, defended roadblocks placed in its path by various factions in the three-way civil war. The Canadian battalion in Sarajevo was provided with access to the aerial striking power of an American aircraft carrier cruising the Adriatic Sea, if required.

In the spring of 1993, the Canadian Airborne Regiment, an aggressive light infantry unit structured and trained to parachute into enemy rear areas, deployed to Somalia with elements of an armoured regiment to coerce local forces in order to facilitate the delivery of food in that starving country. Dubbed “The Clan that Never Sleeps” by the locals, the Airborne Regiment, conducting airmobile operations with Twin Huey and Sea King helicopters, established a heavily armed presence in Belet Huen north of Mogadishu, disarming local forces and protecting relief efforts.

Despite the fact that Canadian government officials and media of the 1990s called the operations in Bosnia and Somalia “peacekeeping missions,” they were something very different from Cold War-era peacekeeping. The UN Protection Force II

(UNPROFOR II) in Bosnia and the United Task Force (UNITAF) in Somalia were something new, something for which there was, at the time, no agreed-upon lexicon in the Canadian Forces, the Department of National Defence, or any of the other national security policy bodies in the Canadian government. At best, UNPROFOR II and UNITAF were akin to “armed humanitarian interventions.” But they were not UN peacekeeping missions. They were the prototypes for what the new 2005 Canadian inter-

on it, it was a “peacekeeper.” If it handed out teddy bears to starving children, it was conducting “peacekeeping.” How, people asked, could UN “peacekeepers” in Rwanda not stop the carefully organized rampage against the Tutsi? How, the people asked, could peacekeepers be handcuffed to Bosnian ammunition dumps and used as human shields? How, they wondered, could the peacekeepers not bring peace? What the people didn’t understand, and nobody was willing or able

and the finer points of NATO strategy to stave off Communist totalitarianism. The Canadian War Museum may use Pearson’s Nobel Peace Prize in their display as a shortcut so that more complex questions are not raised. Anti-military elements in the Department of Foreign Affairs and CIDA readily cling to the myths. The reality is very different. And, given the fact that 2006 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Suez Crisis, it is worth explaining what the real origins of Canadian UN peacekeeping are and how we have moved away from those times into far more dangerous operations.

There are inherent dangers in an unhealthy adherence to mythology. Mythology distorts. Mythology pigeonholes. Mythology produces blinders, it limits action. In the 1990s, the mythology of Canadian peacekeeping produced unrealistic expectations that, when they could not be met, merely produced obfuscation and disillusionment.

national policy statement (“A Role of Pride and Influence in the World”) calls “Stabilization Operations.”

Why, exactly, are these distinctions important? Are not all Canadian military personnel “peacekeepers”? Has UN peacekeeping not been the stock in trade for Canadian soldiers since Lester B. Pearson invented peacekeeping in 1956 during the Suez Crisis? Isn’t our national identity based on the fact that we do peacekeeping while others fight wars? Are we not morally superior because Canada engages in peacekeeping? Will we lose that moral superiority if we engage in operations other than peacekeeping?

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Images on television readily distorted the complexities of military operations in the 1990s. If it wore a blue helmet and drove around in a white vehicle with black UN markings

to tell them, was that UN peacekeeping as it emerged during the Cold War was obsolete, ineffective, and inoperative in the post-Cold War era. It was as “done” as the Soviet empire, except nobody had stuck a fork in it until Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda.

Those who propagate the mythology of Canadian UN peacekeeping focus exclusively on the year 1956. Ostensibly, a neutral, impartial Canada decided to lead the international community in stopping imperialist aggression undertaken by Britain and France against helpless Egypt, a situation which threatened to bring the world to near-nuclear war when the Soviets prepared to intervene. Mild-mannered Canadian diplomat Mike Pearson saved the day with a speech in the UN General Assembly proposing that a UN force be interposed between the belligerents. Thus UN peacekeeping was born and Canada/the Liberal Party had the key role in its creation.

This fairy story may make a nice Heritage Minute and it may be easier to impose on Canadian students than explaining to them the dangerous nature of the Cold War, Canada’s deep involvement with nuclear weapons

After the Second World War when the UN was in the process of maturing as an institution, some of its

more utopian proponents suggested that there be a large multinational UN army to police the world and maintain the peace. In 1947, these wild ideas had to be confronted by the bureaucracies of UN member states. The UN Army concepts were passed for comment to Lieutenant General Charles Foulkes, who was then the Canadian Chief of the General Staff. Foulkes had his staff examine the proposals. These anonymous men concluded that the Cold War would prevent any such undertaking, but that a small UN force using the reputation of the institution could be employed discreetly in dispute resolution to prevent wider conflict. Two years later, a UN mission called the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was established by the agreement of the two belligerent parties when war threatened over the Kashmir issue. UNMOGIP, a multinational military force, patrolled a buffer zone and reported on the state of affairs to the UN. UNMOGIP was led for a time by a Canadian, Brigadier H. H. Angle, who tragically died in a plane crash in 1950. In 1948, a similar military observer group called the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization (UNTSO) was established in Israel/Palestine.



United Nations photo, Montreal Gazette archives

**Mr. Peacekeeping: Canadian General E.L.M. "Tommy" Burns on an air inspection of the Sinai Peninsula in January 1957. Note the UN emblem adorning his cap. Though Lester Pearson won his Nobel Peace Prize for the UN peacekeeping initiative, General Burns was in the peacekeeping business for the UN even before that.**

By 1954, another Canadian general, Major-General E.L.M. "Tommy" Burns, took command of that force. In his 1966 memoir, he noted that unarmed UN military observers could only report and not seriously influence events because they lacked the ability and mandate to use force. In November 1955, after UNTSO was continuously pushed around by the belligerent forces, Burns suggested that an armed UN force replace UNTSO, which he referred to as "a policeman without a truncheon." In 1956, UNTSO was supplemented with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), a drama in which Mike Pearson played a significant supporting role in the

diplomatic effort. Burns took command of UNEF, built the organization up and continued to lead it until 1960. In effect, three Canadian generals and their staffs not only conceptualized UN peacekeeping missions in volatile environments teeming with ethnic tensions and violence. To deliberately ignore or minimize their crucial role in the development of peacekeeping in favour of diplomats operating in the comfortable surroundings of New York and Geneva does them and Canadians a disservice.

And what exactly was the purpose of those early peacekeeping missions? UN peacekeeping was used during the

Cold War to freeze a conflict between two countries in place. This was so the conflict in question would not escalate and produce superpower involvement. Superpower involvement could have nasty ramifications, like nuclear war. Indeed, and it is clear from declassified Canadian policy documents of the day, UN peacekeeping during the Cold War was used to fill power vacuums in the decolonizing Third World to stave off Soviet and Chinese influence. UN peacekeeping was a Cold War tool. Incidentally, the bulk of Canada's Cold War commitments were in Western Europe, in the North Atlantic, and in North America. These deterrent forces, some of them equipped with nuclear

weapons, were the mainstay of Canadian defence. UN peacekeeping was an adjunct to Canada's NATO geopolitical strategy. The mythology would have us believe otherwise. Canada was not neutral during the Cold War, Canada was not impartial during the Cold War, and Canadian UN peacekeeping was a supplement to other more important activities. Period. Despite the rearguard assertions of some aficionados, Mike Pearson played an important diplomatic role during the Suez Crisis, but he did not invent UN peacekeeping.

There were some anomalies, however. UNMOGIP, UNTSO and UNEF were what are called interpositional peacekeeping: they were interposed physically between belligerent national forces and reported developments to the UN in New York so that diplomatic pressure could be brought to bear on the belligerent countries if the situation started to escalate. In the early 1960s, however, multinational UN forces were deployed to the Congo and Cyprus in somewhat different roles. In the Congo from 1960 to 1964, the UN force called ONUC propped up the fledgling Congolese government that was under attack from elements inside and from the outside by Communist-inspired forces seeking to secure the resources of the Congo. In Cyprus from 1964 to 1974, the UN force (UNFICYP) operated in an area role, fire-brigading from ethnic hotspot to ethnic hotspot to prevent the breakout of what we would 30 years later call ethnic cleansing. Neither mission was interpositional between recognized governments. The strategic purpose of both missions, however, was to prevent Soviet meddling in NATO's sphere of influence by having an ostensibly neutral proxy force on the ground to fill the power vacuum. Operationally, these missions involved the imposition of an armed force, more haphazard than not, to stabilize the regions.

Confusingly, because the personnel wore blue helmets and operated under the auspices of the UN, both ONUC and UNFICYP were also called "peacekeeping" (with the hyphen).

The Cold War role of UN peacekeeping in Canadian strategy was secret, so it is not surprising that the details remained unknown until the 1990s after the Cold War was over. Back in the 1970s, however, the new generation of Canadian leaders chose to disregard the Cold War realities they were immersed in and use UN peace-

Cyprus was the new Canadian paradigm: a multinational UN force was interposed in 1974 between Greeks and Turks to prevent the situation from escalating into a war that would destroy NATO. From 1974 to 1993, Cyprus was the dominant vision of Canadian UN peacekeeping. For nearly twenty years, journalists would journey to that island, walk the Green Line, and report that all was well. UN peacekeeping worked.

keeping as a plank in the new Canadian nationalism. Despite the fact that Pierre Trudeau was not a peacekeeping fan, Canada committed to four new missions in the 1970s. These generally were similar to the early missions: the UN force was deployed between two warring countries who agreed to the presence of the force. The deployments were related to Cold War crisis management: freeze the situation in place, hope for a better day, and hope the situation did not escalate. And that cemented the peacekeeping model in the public mind.

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The myth gestated during the 1980s, despite the fact that there had

been non-UN peacekeeping missions before and since: the International Control and Supervision Commission (ICSC) in the former French Indochina, the European Community Monitor Mission, and the US-led Multinational Force and Observers, all of which had Canadian contributions, were but three. People came to believe, however, that peacekeeping was somehow an exclusively UN preserve.

Peacekeeping as a Canadian Cold War policy tool, however, was on the wane into the 1980s. At the end of that

decade, with the collapse of the global Communist system on the horizon, there was renewed hope among UN aficionados that the UN and UN peacekeeping would be invigorated and, perhaps, would come into their own in the original utopian view as world policeman. From 1989 to 1992, it looked very much like it might. Canada was asked to participate in several new UN missions: four in Africa, three in Central America, and in Afghanistan. In general, all of these missions involved the deployment of small numbers of military observers for limited periods who were in these places to monitor the disengagement of Cold War proxy forces in the Third World. This collection of short-term missions was a variant of earlier peacekeeping missions and the scattering of Canadian troops, even in small numbers, made it look like Canada (and the UN) was everywhere.

The global withdrawal from Communist empire, however, left local power brokers to their own devices. These individuals capitalized on the potential for violence between

ethnic groups and actively stimulated ethnic warfare in bids for power. The first to go was the Balkans, followed by the Horn of Africa, and Cambodia. UN forces brought in to monitor separation agreements found themselves caught between heavily armed warring factions who reported to no internationally recognized authority.

At the same time, changes in information and media technology brought these situations into Western living rooms with minute-by-minute coverage. The ability of interest groups to manipulate and mobilize public opinion had a dramatic effect on demands for international intervention, particularly the humanitarian variety.

UNPROFOR II in Bosnia and the collection of UN or UN-authorized

missions in Somalia (UNOSOM, UNOSOM II, and the non-UN, American-led UNITAF) were armed forces designed to coerce local belligerents to permit aid delivery. They were unable to do so effectively in both locations. Why?

In many cases, the UN forces were outgunned and hampered by restrictive rules of engagement. The Cold War peacekeeping mentality, that is, freeze the situation in place, didn't work, nor did the use of military force as a blunt instrument against what amounted to dispersed, heavily armed local microgovernments. Diplomacy could not work: there was no state to deal with, no larger government entity that could be convinced or coerced to moderate the activities of the local

entities. In addition, strategic objectives and alternatives were not thought through, particularly in Somalia. Once the forces were deployed and were in the process of coercing the factions, what next? Was the UN supposed to make the country a protectorate? Was it supposed to hold elections and turn the country over to the winners? Or was the UN supposed to withdraw its forces once public opinion was distracted with some other tragedy? In many cases, the UN forces came under fire and either stood in place and took casualties, or departed, taking casualties on the way out. The lessons were: traditional peacekeeping didn't work in these environments and there was no overarching understandable strategic



Sgt. Frank Hudec, Canadian Forces

**A Canadian light armoured vehicle (LAV) provides cover for a foot patrol in the Afghan capital, Kabul. Canada is part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), recently increased from 8,000 to 12,000 strong, from 36 nations, serving under NATO, not UN, command.**

context for the missions as there had been during the Cold War. The rules had changed. The problems in Bosnia and Somalia were bad enough, but then there was Rwanda. A UN disengagement monitoring force, established between a government and a rebel group, was swept up into an ethnic war that in days escalated to genocide. The UNAMIR mission was not equipped or mandated to stop genocide. The unwillingness by the international community to reinforce UNAMIR or send in an intervention force, particularly after the debacle in Somalia, meant that the follow-on UNAMIR II mission was merely there to clean up the bodies. Unlike Bosnia and Somalia, Rwanda had no Cold War context: there was no power vacuum. This was a straight out ethnic fight, in a non-strategic area, with UN forces caught in the middle.

By 1995, therefore, UN peacekeeping was as dead as the victims in Rwanda or Srebrenica. These new missions, mistakenly labeled “peacekeeping,” were lumped into the mass grave of history. The replacement for UN peacekeeping was, however, born out of the ashes of Bosnia. A NATO-led force called the Implementation Force (IFOR) moved in to take over from the exhausted and overrun UNPROFOR. IFOR was, using the terminology of the day, “robust.” It had firepower, and was willing to use it. It had mass. It was equipped to coerce armed factions. It was logistically supportable. IFOR brought reconstruction coordination with it as well, and its successor organization, Stabilization Force (SFOR) developed a long-term strategy to disarm, rebuild and reintegrate Bosnia. IFOR and SFOR imposed peace and brought about stability.

Over the latter half of the 1990s, other stabilization missions would follow. All were led by ABCA countries.

All employed coercive force. East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Papua New Guinea were some of these, but the penultimate stabilization mission was Kosovo. It was the Kosovo crisis that really set the new paradigm.

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The dominant thinking prior to the 1990s was that there was “war” and there was “peace.” There was “warfighting” and there was “peacekeeping.” This neatly fit with the bi-polar Cold War zeitgeist as much as it neatly fit Canadian mythology designed to differentiate Canada from the United States: The United States (war), Canada (peacekeeping). In the old paradigm, diplomacy fails, war is fought, diplomats talk, peace is achieved, and peacekeepers arrive to monitor it. During the experiences of the early 1990s, the paradigm changed to: country collapses into factional fighting, the peacekeepers arrive and deliver aid in the middle of the fighting, and everybody turns on the peacekeepers.

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In Kosovo, there was no simplistic delineation between “war” and “peacekeeping.” Ethnic warfare produced a situation where a repeat of Rwanda was possible and this was deemed unacceptable by the international community. Indeed, there were four phases to the Kosovo crisis. In the first phase, coercive diplomacy permitted the deployment of several international monitoring forces to determine what was occurring in Kosovo. The primary agency, called the Kosovo Verification Mission, was led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). When the Milosevic regime toyed with the personnel conducting these missions and interfered with their ability to verify the situation, the international missions were withdrawn and an air campaign led by NATO was launched in 1999. At the same time, NATO combat forces mobilized, deployed to Albanian and Macedonia, and prepared to move into Kosovo. The coercive nature of these actions eventually prompted the withdrawal of Serbian military forces from Kosovo. The mechanized tank- and helicopter gunship-equipped NATO combat force, renamed Kosovo Force (KFOR), moved into the province to prevent ethnic conflict between the civilian communities (*à la* IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia), to deter military intervention by Serbia, and to form the basis of a strategy

whereby Kosovo would become an international community protectorate until a solution could be found. Light infantry, intelligence and civil-military relations specialists quickly followed to assist in this effort. In time, the basis for governmental institution-building arrived, supplied mostly by the OSCE and the UN.

There is no more “peacekeeping,” *per se*, though there was a minor exception when Ethiopia and Eritrea requested a classic interpositionary

force in 1999-2000. Conflicts today have a pre-conflict phase where diplomacy is attempted and facts sought, followed by a combat phase, followed by a stabilization phase, and then a nation-building phase. There is tremendous overlap between these phases and no set time line. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have generally followed this pattern,

Simplistic notions whereby the American-led “warfighters” leave and the UN-led “peacekeepers” take over do not hold. In Afghanistan, the Canadian media rushed to call the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) “peacekeepers” to differentiate the mission from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). ISAF, however, is not UN and it is not peacekeeping. ISAF is designed to support the central government, much in the same way ONUC was designed to support the Congolese central government from 1960 to 1964. ISAF is not impartial. It conducts stabilization and combat operations, as does the American-led OEF.

though in the case of Afghanistan the pre-conflict phase was rather short and the Iraq pre-conflict phase rather long.

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These “full-spectrum operations” are a more accurate way to explain how military force is employed today. Stabilization missions lie somewhere in-between peacekeeping in the traditional sense, and outright counterinsurgency. Stabilization operations are probably more like counterinsurgency than peacekeeping. Unlike peacekeeping, stabiliza-

tion operations operate in an environment where there is a long-term plan for reconstruction and reintegration. They are not there to freeze conflicts in place. So far, the most successful stabilization mission is SFOR in Bosnia. It took 14 years to get to the point where SFOR could be withdrawn in the fall of 2004. The lesson to take from the SFOR experience is that there are no short-term solu-

tions. Contrast this to UNFICYP in Cyprus. Established in 1964, UNFICYP still exists, but there has been no movement, no solution. The situation is still frozen in place. Why is it a more complex, more violent situation like Bosnia can be brought to some form of positive resolution and a comparatively minor situation like Cyprus cannot?

Are stabilization operations more dangerous than Cold War-era interpositional peacekeeping? The record would suggest that Cold War-era peacekeeping was a hazardous undertaking: Canadian soldiers were killed by mine strikes, vehicle accidents, beatings, outright assassination or casual shooting by belligerent forces.

In Vietnam, a Canadian ICCS observer may have had his helicopter targeted and shot down because he learned too much about North Vietnamese plans, for example. A Canadian soldier was deliberately shot and killed by a Turkish sniper in Cyprus in 1974. The greatest loss of life during Cold War peacekeeping operations occurred in 1974 when a Soviet-supplied (and possibly commanded) Syrian air defence missile battery shot down an unarmed Canadian Forces

Buffalo transport aircraft killing nine Canadian soldiers and airmen. Canadian soldiers, who survived attacks, by politically-motivated mobs in the Congo had their lives shortened by their injuries and died young.

On the whole, though, Canadian forces engaging in stabilization operations face a far more lethal environment in terms of belligerent armament but are in a position to take pre-emptive action and respond to threats with lethal force, unlike those serving on UN operations in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand stabilization operations are less passive than peacekeeping, which increases exposure to risk by enemy action as well as transportation accidents. The suicide attack by al Qaeda against Canadian soldiers in

Kabul, for example, has no Cold War-era comparison, so we may be into an “apples and oranges” situation when trying to compare relative risk.

Canadians, hopefully, understand that today’s operations require the use of lethal force and are no longer beguiled by the passive nature of “peacekeeping.” Indeed, the new policy documents recognize this shift in attitude. Though there are some aficionados who are nostalgic for the salad days of UN peacekeeping and wish to bask in past glories, the rest of us have moved on and do not wish to be handicapped by mythology. The acceptance of stabilization operations as accepted Canadian policy is indicative of a more mature Canadian approach to the lethal world that we live in, and not some utopian UN fantasyland. It is gratifying to see that the Canadian government finally thinks so, too.

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