

“Once More Unto the Balkans Breach, Dear Friends!”

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It is gratifying to see Canada once again deploying effective and significant military forces to assist in stabilizing the Balkans. The decision to send a squadron of Canada’s state of the art Coyote reconnaissance vehicles and the seasoned armoured soldiers of the Royal Canadian Dragoons to serve with NATO’s Operation ESSENTIAL HARVEST force should be universally applauded. The steady deterioration of the situation in Macedonia and its potential effects on Canadian interests in the region clearly warrants such a deployment.

Canada has now been involved in military operations in the former Yugoslav republics since 1991 and, as the events of the past year demonstrate, the work we started is not yet finished. This stabilization campaign, unprecedented in Canadian history in terms of scale of effort and particularly in its unique nature, has entered a new phase. Canada initially became involved in 1991 with early peace observation efforts through the European Community Monitor Mission, and then with the UNPROFOR deployments to Croatia and Bosnia in 1992. The nature of the situation at the time was such that the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the subsequent liberation of the captive peoples of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the other states was by no means a long term *fait accompli*. The hard line coup attempt in Moscow during August 1991, a number of Russian nuclear alerts, and ongoing problems in the Baltic states were but some indicators that the peace was more precarious than generally believed. A Yugoslav spark could have generated widespread instability and presented serious security and economic problems for NATO members Italy, Greece,

and Turkey with subsequent effects on other NATO allies. A whiff of the First World War was in the air....

It was not in Canada's interests to sit back and not be involved. Additional impetus was provided by the political blunder generated by the near-unilateral withdrawal by the Mulroney Government of Canadian forces from Germany, the minimalist participation in the Gulf War and the subsequent decrease in Canadian influence in NATO and with some EC members. With the initial deployments to Croatia and Bosnia, Canada's strategic tradition, Forward Security, was once again in operation as it had been in the First, Second, and Cold Wars in the 20th Century.

The subsequent evolution of the UN and EC missions (supported by NATO forces in the air and at sea, all with the participation of significant Canadian combat forces) into the NATO-led IFOR and SFOR missions was the next phase when the mostly ad hoc stabilization efforts became more systematic in their approach to maintaining the peace rather than containing the violence. When the situation in Kosovo spun out of control Canada was in the lead in sending peace observation personnel with the Kosovo Verification Mission, CF-18 fighter-bombers, and a salient ground contingent which included Coyote vehicles, Griffon helicopters, and a combat-ready armoured-infantry battlegroup equipped with tanks and anti-tank missile vehicles.

Unlike the earlier phases, the reasons for Canadian participation in the Kosovo phase of the stabilization campaign were slightly different. By the late 1990s, Eastern Europe was no longer threatened with instability to the degree it had years earlier. After the failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Zaire however, the West's credibility was on the line and there was still potential for instability in Albania and Macedonia generated by the Kosovo crisis to affect Italy and Greece, not to mention the possible destabilizing effects on newly-stabilized Bosnia and Croatia. The ongoing success of KFOR, in some measure due to the initial Canadian contribution to it from 1999 to 2000, cannot be allowed to succumb to instability in Macedonia.

Canada has developed specific expertise in Balkans stability operations. Europe is an area which is economically, culturally, and historically linked to Canada by extremely strong bonds which have no equivalent connection to any other continent or area with the exception of North America. This latest commitment of Canadian forces hopefully demonstrates that the previous ill-advised foreign policy of deploying small and virtually unprotected contingents to UN operations in areas of the world that hold little or no Canadian strategic interests is now defunct. The Balkans is one place where Canada has made and can continue to make a difference.

We who observe and report on Canadian national security policy efforts wish Major Cotton and his Dragoons well in their mission.