

Dear Sir:

I would like to contextualize my statements quoted in Sheldon Albert's article "6 months and out for our troops: Ottawa." As a Canadian and as a professor in War Studies, I am always concerned and take great interest when my government deploys military forces overseas. Many of my students, classmates, friends and relatives serve in the armed forces and within its bureaucracy. In several cases, they are the ones either planning or conducting operations in harm's way. I do not dissent with deploying 3 PPCLI to Afghanistan. Indeed, I know the battalion CO and at least one of his company commanders and they will do us proud. In addition to their safety, I am sensitized to the possibility that they may be constrained in their activities and force structure by the belief still present in certain quarters in Ottawa and within the intellectual elite that we don't 'do war', that the only type of military operation Canada conducts is 'peacekeeping,' and that every international deployment has to somehow be framed in reference to that now mythological ideal.

It is my belief that the Canadian people support the use of military force in the current crisis, as they have for every other major international crisis since 1914. It is also my belief that the Canadian people do not need to be treated like children by having the ugly face of war concealed from them, as was done on a number of occasions in the 1990s, out of fear by some that we will somehow demand our force's return or somehow not support their actions in extreme situations. There will always be a vocal minority who will wring their hands about such things and argue that force is not a Canadian 'value': I agree with Trudeau when he said, "There are a lot of bleeding hearts out there....Go on and bleed." We understand Afghanistan is a highly dangerous and uncertain environment. We do not need pallatives, we do not need people in Ottawa to minimize the risk for us. We support the government's decision to be involved and we support our people on the ground and back them in whatever they have to do.

When specific statements are made about duration and mission, there is always a danger that events on the ground will overwhelm the plan and that the plan will be criticized for being inflexible. For example, when we deployed the UNPROFOR battlegroup from Germany to Croatia in the spring of 1992, nobody anticipated that it would move to Sarajevo to secure an airport under fire and protect routes so that humanitarian assistance could be delivered. 'Mission Creep' became a pejorative term in the media, despite the fact that our people adapted and adapted well. The reality is that all situations of this type are in flux and that the missions of the force and most importantly its people must retain the flexibility they need without unwarranted criticism.

-Sean M. Maloney, PhD
War Studies Programme
Royal Military College of Canada