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## “LEST WE FORGET....” THE CANADIAN ARMY AND UN PEACEKEEPING (AGAIN)

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The idea that Canada should, will or must ‘return’ to what is commonly called ‘peacekeeping’ in order to redeem its sins for engaging in warfighting in Afghanistan has been mooted both before and after the 2015 election campaign. Similarly, and not coincidentally, a group lobbying for increased Canadian involvement in Africa held a brainstorming conference in Calgary seeking to influence a future policy tilt towards that continent. A prominent pundit continues to promote a neutralist, non-interventionist policy established long ago during his halcyon days during the Cold War, this time precariously propped up by Procrustes. A university professor in Ottawa argues, using talking points seemingly provided by the Russian embassy, that NATO should be disbanded and that Canada should withdraw from it. Marty McFly steps out of the DeLorean. I am forced by circumstances to write yet another article to remind Canadians about the realities of peacekeeping history.

Those who champion a ‘return’ to ‘peacekeeping’ likely fall into one of two camps. The first consists of those with a world view that sees all global conflicts, international and domestic, as events that should be mediated by the United Nations with minimum force, like an RCMP officer using a Taser instead of a firearm. Some who harbour this view are also likely to accept at face value World Health Organization reports that red meat will give them cancer. The second camp is populated by the ignorant, who in turn can be divided into two sub-groups: the wilful and the uninformed. Toiling to pay their taxes, many of them lack the time to minutely examine the entrails of national security policy as spilled out by the high priests in Ottawa on the sacred rocks of the Global Affairs Canada building. They accordingly gravitate to a handful of self-satisfied, self-laudatory and self-referential Canadian media commentators who will interpret policy for them. Knowing full well that there are dedicated academics who will suss out and debate the details of the evolving realities of international events, they default to their trusted agents in the media instead. This simplistic commodity is best consumed on laptops over lattes at coffee shops because there simply isn’t enough time to read books anymore.

As to why these people are so uninformed, the fault probably lies somewhere within the education systems in this country. Detailed analysis is discarded in order to preserve self-esteem. Idealistic non-violence is taught without reference to the realities of human behaviour or global intercourse. Canadian history is distorted to prove how bad we were until we ‘invented’ peacekeeping, the one shining light in the horrifying colonial, genocidal darkness that was Canada.

This is what we will be returning to:

**1. A nostalgic perception of peacekeeping divorced from today's global realities.**

Canadian peacekeeping, in the UN sense of the term, was a product of the Cold War and was contextualized by that war. Interpositional peacekeeping of the kind developed and employed by General E.L.M. Burns in the Middle East of the 1950s and 1960s, during the UNTSO and UNEF missions, was part of a UN-mediated, state-based settlement between Egypt and Israel back dropped by a Soviet nuclear threat against the United Kingdom and France, two NATO members who had intervened in a regional dispute. UNEF II and UNDOF in the 1970s were deployed after a period of nuclear brinkmanship between the Soviet Union and the United States during a regional war between Egypt, Syria, and Israel. UN forces were deployed to the Congo in 1960 to mitigate a power vacuum being exploited by pro-Soviet elements. UN forces, in this case UNFICYP in Cyprus, were deployed to prevent escalating intercommunal violence from triggering hostilities between NATO members Greece and Turkey and to protect bases supporting the NATO deterrent.

As a representative of the anti-Communist bloc, not a neutral, Canada used the UN and its peacekeeping operations to pursue national interests related to the broader Cold War conflict. Our NATO and NORAD-committed forces far exceeded in number those committed to UN or other peacekeeping operations during the Cold War. No one disputes the fact that Canadian soldiers did phenomenal work, but that Cold War environment no longer exists and will not exist again. Nor will Cold War-era UN peacekeeping.

Indeed, the major UN peacekeeping operations that failed during the Cold War, including UNYOM in Yemen (1963–1964), are usually ignored by those who nostalgically seek a return to peacekeeping. The piecemeal mandate, the UN's inability to reign in Egyptian military forces or to prevent them from using chemical weapons, and the impossibility of controlling Saudi-supported irregular forces, not to mention the fact that UNYOM, by completely ignoring war in the Radfan, doomed itself to irrelevance when it came to generating peace in the region. It was not exactly Canada's finest hour when RCAF aircraft were used as cover by the Egyptian air force using their Soviet-supplied aircraft to napalm Yemeni villages.

**2. The false belief that Canada either makes war or does peacekeeping.**

Despite substantial evidence to the contrary, the dichotomous idea that Canada either fights war or 'does' peacekeeping persists throughout Canadian culture. Any 'shifts' into warfighting is disparaged; Canada is being "dragged into war" by a hyper-aggressive American ally. And when Canada 'returns' to peacekeeping, this state of affairs is praised to the skies. Historically, however, there is no such shift.

Canadian peacekeeping operations conducted during the Cold War, including UNFICYP, UNEF and ICCS, were initiated when Canadian-built CF-104 nuclear strike aircraft equipped with megaton-yield bombs were ready to turn targets in the Warsaw Pact area into radioactive rubble. The fact that Canada possessed an extensive nuclear capability during the Cold War and that this capability was justified by the enormous threat to Canadian values posed by the Soviet Union and its inhuman ideology is not taught in Canadian schools (indeed, the future existence of a monument to remind people of these facts is currently under attack by activists in Ottawa). UN peacekeeping divorced from its Cold War context is extensively taught in Canadian schools, and this pervasive and patently incorrect perspective has likely contributed to the 'either/or' view.

During Canada's long war in Afghanistan, Canadian Armed Forces personnel served with UNTSO and UNIFIL in the Middle East, UNMIS and UNAMID in the Sudan, and MINUSTAH in Haiti. Everybody forgets about the MFO in the Sinai, probably because UN acolytes consign it to oblivion since it was American and not UN-led. At least one Canadian officer was killed during these operations in Lebanon, and a Canadian vehicle was attacked during the MFO mission. The fact that the Canadian Army participated simultaneously in a variety of operations mounted by international organizations cannot be disputed. We fight war, we prepare to fight war and we engage in peace support operations at the same time. We have done so since the 1950s, over sixty years ago. Those who think otherwise should re-examine Canadian history and perhaps their own reasoning processes.

The question of whether Canada does *enough* peacekeeping is another matter. And no pundit has yet provided a metric to explain exactly what constitutes 'enough' or 'more'. Should we put more Canadian soldiers in harm's way on overseas UN operations so we can boost our peacekeeping numbers and tell the Canadian public and the UN that we are doing more? This course of action was supported by former Ottawa mandarin Paul Heinbecker in a CTV interview shortly before the October 2015 election. The media failed even to question the morality or utility of this approach during the discussions that followed.

The boast that Canada had "ready-aye-ready" contributed to all peacekeeping missions and that suddenly, under the Harper Government, we stopped peacekeeping is simply not true (UNOMIL in Liberia was a peacekeeping operation, while Trudeau senior, in the 1970s, was lukewarm to the idea of UN missions. Self-proclaimed 'peacemonger' and Ambassador to the UN George Ignatieff thought that UN peacekeeping was a busted flush following the events of 1967). And even if this were so, why is this relevant? We should be examining the impact of our involvement, not the number of soldiers we sent. The whole idea that Canada is not committing 'enough' peacekeepers somehow smacks of 1960's Vietnam-era McNamara-esque metrics, like body counts. This is 2015, after all.

Royal Canadian Dragoons Reconnaissance Squadron on UN Cyprus Patrol



### 3. Questionable mandates and confusion over Canadian interests

So now we are going to 'return' to peacekeeping. If the UN proponents want us to do so, they should be aware that their uniformed representatives may be used and abused by international organizations and the belligerents for their purposes. And these purposes will not necessarily coincide with Canadian values and interests.

Canada's lengthy involvement in the Balkans is probably, next to Somalia, the most instructive case study. Twenty years later, there is still no clear explanation for the Canadian Government's decision to involve itself in a multitude of missions in a collapsing country riven by vicious factionalism. The best explanation available is that Canada responded to requests from several international organizations to deploy military personnel simply because Canada, in 1991–1992, was supposedly the repository of peacekeeping expertise given her long involvement with Cyprus (UNFICYP starting in 1964) and her history of missions in the Middle East (since 1954 in UNTSO, 1956 with UNEF, 1973–1974 with UNEF II and UNDOF). So when the OSCE asked the European Community to form an observation mission in Slovenia and Croatia and one of the belligerents asked that a North American nation serve on the mission, Canada was asked to contribute and said yes, incidentally without appealing to Parliament and with no challenge from the opposition. When the Vance Plan was under discussion and forces were needed for the planned United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia, Canada said yes. Was there a public or even internal discussion on how these deployments were compatible with Canadian interests? Not that we, the Canadian people, are aware of.

When Bosnia collapsed into internecine fighting and the UNPROFOR rear office was threatened, Canadian forces were redeployed from Croatia to secure the Sarajevo airport and escort humanitarian aid convoys during what now amounted to a three-way civil war. Were significant public discussions held by the Government regarding Canadian interests or values at that time? About the same level of discussion as over deploying Canadian troops to the ECMM and UNPROFOR in Croatia. Apparently, the UN asks and Canada sends. And when the 700-man Canadian battalion in Bosnia was held hostage by all three belligerent forces, the Canadian people were barely aware of the dilemma facing their uniformed representatives. Why was that, exactly?

Neither was the Government of the day in a hurry to inform the Canadian people, and the Canadian media neglected to employ on the Balkan missions the incisive tools they later used in Afghanistan. Public debate might have exposed the folly of deploying an infantry battalion into the middle of a three-way civil war and asking it to play a neutral aid escort role. A public debate might have twigged people to the idea that the longer humanitarian aid is delivered during such a conflict with no functional peace process, the longer the war will continue and the more people will get killed. Humanitarian aid does not go only to neutral, starving civilians, assuming that civilians in a war like Bosnia's were even neutral in the first place.

Some of Canada's more questionable engagements on the African continent are of particular interest here. What was the reason, or at the very least the rationale, for deploying Canadian troops on Operation PRUDENCE to the Central African Republic in 1998–1999? The best explanation that can be extrapolated from the existing material was that Canada was propping up French neo-colonialism in that country. The infamous 1996 'Bungle in the Jungle' in Zaire, as far as one can tell, was either an attempt to stave off another Rwanda or, according to journalist David Pugliese, to gain a Nobel Peace Prize for Raymond Chretien. Was there really a strategic need to participate in the UNMEE Ethiopian-Eritrean mission in 2000 or was Canada merely demonstrating to the UN that it still had skin in the New York game? And then to what end? UNMEE was driven out of the region by 2008.

And Canada's disastrous involvement in Somalia appears to have been propelled by the so-called 'CNN Effect', a pre-internet concept whereby repeated sensational and emotional images shown on television by media outlets will galvanize public opinion and force the government to 'do something' (or, alternatively, the Government will anticipate that there will be public pressure to act and do so pre-emptively on the information available at the time, regardless of strategic interests).

As for Canada's repeated involvement in Haiti in the 1990s, the only extant discussion of that experience suggests that domestic politics and the 'Haitian vote' in Quebec during the 1995 referendum were the driving forces. If such is the case, or if these were significant factors in the decision to deploy, one might argue that there was a strategic rationale for the mission: keeping Canada together. Otherwise, if it were simply a case of responding to the CNN Effect or Canada's internationalist duty as expressed through the UN, there might have been some room for public discussion on the matter. And in Haiti, like in Kabul in 2003, it was not a matter of peacekeeping: it was a matter of taking sides and stabilizing a particular government. In Haiti, everybody wore blue helmets, but don't pretend it was peacekeeping.

The 1990s, a period when Canada lacked an effective strategic policy process and her interests were not clearly defined, should not serve as a guide for action in today's world. Nor should we instinctively respond to the whims of international organizations merely because some Canadians think they have something to prove. After Kosovo and Afghanistan, we have nothing to prove. If Canada is going to get involved in any future mission, we should all be clear on the nature of that mission and why exactly we are pursuing it. And that includes the anti-ISIS campaign.

### 4. The inability to protect human beings from mass murder

Those who champion a 'return' to peacekeeping have clearly failed to comprehend that this mentality led to inaction, indecision, and obfuscation while thousands of human beings were being slaughtered in ethnic conflicts in the 1990s. We already have the film "Shake Hands with the Devil," based on the book by Brent Beardsley and Romeo Dallaire. The film "Hotel Rwanda" (2004) is another less accurate depiction

of the events of 1993. Frontline's 2004 documentary "Ghosts of Rwanda" is as chilling as it is haunting. The Rwandan autopsy is open to all in the works written by Michael Barnett (*Eyewitness to a Genocide*), Philip Gourevitch (*We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families*), Jean Hatzfeld (*Machete Season*), Linda Melvern (*Conspiracy to Murder*), Colin Tatz (*With Intent to Destroy*), and Scott Peterson (*Me Against my Brother*). There is no excuse for not knowing and not learning from that horrifying experience.

The endemic indecisiveness of the United Nations in New York and Canada's slavish and legalistic complicity in the UN's failures during the Rwandan genocide is the real national shame, not what General Romeo Dallaire and his men did or did not do in Kigali. Some exponents have clearly failed to study this dark part of Canadian history in detail, otherwise they would not enthusiastically advocate a return to it. Why was General Maurice Baril promoted after that debacle...and then permitted to lead the 'Bungle in the Jungle' in 1996? How could Kofi Anan become Secretary General? Where were the Canadian voices of protest in both these situations?

Canada's engagement in the Balkans has obviously had no impact on people who want to return to more UN peacekeeping. Restrictive rules of engagement, the lack of a proper intelligence organization and a failure to grasp the strategic and political reality of the situation doomed Canadian efforts in Croatia. It was evident to those on the ground and in certain allied capitals that an American policy shift occurred in 1995, leading them to side with Croatia against the Serbs. Rather than withdraw the Canadian contingent in the face of an overwhelming military and moral force, Canadian and UN decision-makers woke up one morning to find that an entire Canadian infantry battalion had been overrun, disarmed and detained by Croatian forces. These included the same forces that had been repulsed in the Medak pocket by 2 PPCLI in 1993 while they were ethnically cleansing a Serb population to free up ground of future operational importance vis-à-vis the Krajinan Serb capital of Knin. As a result, the number of civilian casualties during Operation STORM was in the thousands. After almost a quarter of a century has passed, we still await a narrative by the Directorate of History and Heritage describing exactly what happened to Canadian troops serving the UN in Croatia, as well as in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. Canada had to wait only ten years for a history of the Second World War.

Those who advocate a return to peacekeeping have clearly forgotten that the 2005 policies drafted by the Martin Government expressly included the understanding that it might be necessary to kill for peace and that intervention to protect human life was acceptable regardless of the strictures laid down by international organizations. That 2005 document was written with a full understanding of what occurred in the 1990s, and its authors sought to move away from the dangerous thinking extant during that decade. And this took place while the Canadian Army was deployed in Afghanistan

in support of a legitimate government threatened with the totalitarian creed of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, entities who deployed terror attacks against civil society and the population in pursuit of their aims.

## 5. Concealing Casualties

One of the less honourable aspects of Canadian peacekeeping was the deliberate downplaying of certain incidents in which Canadian soldiers serving with the UN and other organizations were killed, after which the circumstances of their deaths were concealed or otherwise obfuscated. Overseas ramp ceremonies, CFB Trenton arrival ceremonies and public recognition on the Highway of Heroes became staples of casualty handling during the war in Afghanistan. This process was developed after the first four Canadian dead from a US airstrike during Op APOLLO in 2002 were commemorated by the City of Edmonton in an elaborate ceremony. The reasons behind such open and public expressions of collective grief stemmed directly from the poor handling of Canadian dead from UN peacekeeping missions.

Even before that, the 1974 downing of an unarmed Canadian Armed Forces Buffalo transport aircraft participating in UNEF II operations and the deaths of all nine Canadian personnel aboard had been concealed from public scrutiny. Indeed, the Trudeau Cabinet did not even discuss the incident, or if they did, they made no record of their deliberations. The UN deliberately portrayed the event as a "crash", not an attack, for their own purposes, which likely involved smoothing the waters so that the belligerents would accept the UNDOF force on the Golan Heights. The fragmented remains of the nine dead Canadians were collected in ammunition boxes from the crash site in Syria and then added to sand ballast in coffins. These coffins were returned at night with little fanfare to CFB Trenton. The details of the incident remain obscure even today, though it was subsequently revealed that Soviet surface-to-air missiles supplied to Syria had been used to bring down the aircraft.

In the Balkans, the deliberate killing of a Canadian soldier with a recoilless rifle was obfuscated into a death by random mortar fire. Canadian dead from the Balkans were returned quietly to Canada, usually to CFB Trenton, with little or no media coverage. It would be interesting to see some history written on the policy for the handling of overseas deaths of CF personnel during the Chretien Government years. And who influenced that policy.

## 6. The Professional Humiliation of the Canadian Army

The subject that no one wants to really discuss when they paper over the 1990s by calling it the 'Decade of Darkness' was the abject professional humiliation of the Canadian Army in the eyes of our allied peers, our opponents and our potential adversaries. Credibility is critical in any coalition environment, let alone vis-à-vis

one's potential adversaries (and we have them, despite what some might say). Professional competence and esteem are the most important aspects of credibility. By 1996, the institution had little or no credibility left.

The first stage in this process was the failure to deploy 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade to liberate Kuwait in 1991. By neglecting to make an effective contribution to the mission alongside our closest allies, the professional standing of the Army was diminished. This ranged from antagonistic personal behaviour among allied soldiers to a lack of inclusion in critical allied activities since the Canadian Army was not viewed as serious about warfighting. The second phase was the political decision to disband the Airborne Regiment rather than address systemic disciplinary issues in that unit. The wholesale removal of a rapid reaction capability in a world where one was sorely needed reduced Canadian global options. No other country disbanded its strategic quick reaction force on an emotional whim.

The third were the failures in Bosnia and Croatia during the UNPROFOR years. The overrunning of CANBAT 1 in Croatia and the neutralization of CANBAT 2 in Bosnia (not to mention the poorly-handed sexual abuse investigation of Canadian soldiers stationed at the Drin and Bakovici hospital complexes) drove home the fact that the Canadian Army was in serious trouble. The fact that a fifth-rate army was responsible in the first case and sixth-rate army in the other was not really covered by Canadian national media. Nor was there a serious effort to address the psychological fallout on those who had served in the former Yugoslavia. Nor were they ever feted. It took nearly a decade for 2 PPCLI to be recognized for the Medak Pocket. Once again, we await a Directorate of History and Heritage narrative to help us comprehend what exactly occurred to Canadian troops in the last days of UNPROFOR in 1995.

It took the planned 1996 operation to Zaire to really open people's eyes to the fact that this was an institution at its nadir. Canada's attempts to assemble and lead an international coalition to prevent what some saw as the next Rwanda laid bare our inability to collect and assess strategic intelligence, the lack of a Canadian strategic airlift capacity and rapid reaction force and our inability to convince potential partners that we were capable of leading such a mission. The dubious domestic and even personal political purposes of the Zaire operation as exposed by David Pugliese (which have not been refuted let alone seriously challenged) are generally ignored by Canadian cultural mavens who grace us with their patriotic and peacekeeping boosterism.

Peacekeeping proponents have yet to elucidate the long-term effects of Canada's engagement with UN peacekeeping. In theory, such an analysis should include demonstrable effects so we can learn lessons and adjust our policies. We are able to do this with respect to our involvement in the Second World War (Nazism, Fascism, and Japanese imperialism decisively defeated) and in the Cold War (Soviet-led Communism decisively defeated). Afghanistan is more ambiguous but measureable in some respects (Al Qaeda's strategic capabilities eliminated, its leadership's

appeal and strategic reach severely degraded if not destroyed, Pakistani proxies do not hold sway over Afghanistan following their failed assault in 2006–2009 and, after a decade and half of terrorism, they cannot build but only destroy).

But what about, say, UNTSO? It is still there, and four or five wars have been fought between the belligerents over its sixty year tenure. UNMOGIIP? Still there, and three wars have been fought by the belligerents over its nearly 60-year tenure. ICSC and ICCS in Indochina? A Vietnamese communist victory, the 're-education' of the non-Communist population and then.... the Cambodian killing fields. UNEF I: solved a Cold War nuclear crisis but was forced to withdraw after being held hostage by Egypt in 1967. ONUC in the Congo? Unabated violence throughout the 1960s and a couple of million killed in the 1990s-early 2000's. The UN did conduct successful post-Cold War disengagement missions in Latin America, and UNTAG was successful in Namibia. These were successful owing to a unique set of geopolitical circumstances, namely, the Soviets pulled their support from the Communist forces as the Cold War ended and their proxies were forced to the peace table.

The Balkans, as we all know, only calmed down with the mass introduction of NATO forces who were engaged in stabilization operations, not peacekeeping operations. The Kosovar Albanian genocide was only reversed with a NATO-led bombing campaign directed against the perpetrators coupled with a credible threat of ground invasion. Slobodan Milosevic was deposed through a covert action campaign. If the UN had been in the lead, Milosevic would still be in place and half a million Kosovars would be living in semi-permanent camps in Albania, Macedonia, and Italy. At this point in history, the Balkans remains comparatively calm. Somalia? The country devolved into a radical Islamist statelet which was subsequently invaded by Kenyan proxies. Rwanda is at peace not through the UN efforts but through an RPF military victory and French intervention to protect the genocidaires from the RPF.

Impartial interpositional peacekeeping was designed to freeze conflicts in place and forestall superpower involvement and possible escalation to the use of nuclear weapons. Stabilization operations in the 1990s dampened the flames of ethnic conflicts but were never able to fully eradicate embers temporarily starved of oxygen. Only a decisive blow delivered by one belligerent or another seemed to solve the problems of ethnic conflict: Croatian ethnic cleansing of the Krajinan Serbs, for example. Both experiences are products of their times. We cannot go back. Nostalgia, however misplaced, has no place in the future of Canada's national security policy. 'Peacekeeping' or whatever we call it or will call it, is, as I have written elsewhere, one arrow in the Canadian quiver. Given the world we live in, we cannot afford to make it the only arrow, no matter what emotional or nostalgia-based arguments that interested parties may deploy in a newly receptive political environment. 🇨🇦

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