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Views and Opinions

# Why Keep the Myth Alive?

by Sean M. Maloney

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It is with some regret that I re-enter the arena, but the continuing debate over Canada and peacekeeping compels me to do so. I have, since 1998, endeavored to demonstrate in my writings that Canadian peacekeeping history has been misused by some to justify skewed and dangerous policies, that closer examination of the historical record would undermine those positions and reinforce another, more mature Canadian *Weltanschauung*, or philosophy of life. My key work in this area, *Canada and UN Peacekeeping: Cold War by Other Means 1945-1970*, was published in 2002, but was, in fact, written between 1998 and 2000 during the Kosovo campaign, the campaign which should have put the nail in the coffin of the 'soft power' aficionados, the UN supremacists, and their academic supporters. Work I conducted for NATO in 2000 contributed to a re-examination of the terminology that had been used (or misused) to describe Canadian military operations in the early 1990s, a period when we moved from armed humanitarian intervention to stabilization operations, distinct from interpositional peacekeeping, the Orwellian "peace enforcement" terminology. I examined the problems of Canadian values-based versus interest-based national security policy in two *Policy Option* articles published in 2001-02, but which were written before the 9/11 attacks. The Cold War concept of peacekeeping as a basis for Canadian policy was facetiously declared dead by me in a subsequent *Policy Options* piece two years ago in September 2005, in favour of an expanded spectrum of operations that included counterinsurgency.

It was with some satisfaction that I saw these ideas appropriated by the authors of the Autumn 2005 *International Policy Statement*; by bestselling journalists like Andrew Cohen in *While Canada Slept* (2004); and by bestselling historian Jack Granatstein in *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* (2004) and *Whose War is It?* (2006). I am honoured to have my work filtered through these prisms for wider public consumption, since they are capable of this and I am not. We are seeing a new maturity in Canada's international policy outlook.

However, with the publication of Walter Dorn's article "Peacekeeping: Then, Now and Always" in 2006, Eric Wagner's "The Peaceable Kingdom? The National Myth of Canadian Peacekeeping and the

Cold War" in 2007, and John Melady's *Pearson's Prize* (2007), we seem to be back where we started. Two of these ignore the existing refutation of the peacekeeping myth, while the other seeks, apparently, to re-engineer the primary source-based argument from *Canada and UN Peacekeeping* with secondary sources and even borrowings from my writings in order to attack Dorn. To what end?

Let me clarify the components of the debate with an analogy.

In one corner, with the light blue and white trunks, is the UN Supremacist. He is motivated by a belief that the UN has and should be the arbiter over how much military force should be used, and by whom, against whom. All nations should bow to the might of the UN bureaucracy, the Security Council, or, if necessary the General Assembly. He has a Canadian flag sewn on his trunks and his underwear is made up of maple leaves, so his Canadian fans in the crowd, many of who wear pin stripes, will champion him. His brain has been damaged from too many shots to the head lately from little bullies like Serbia and Iraq, and, when he was younger, from big bullies like the Soviet Union. Consequently, his vision is impaired. He *thinks* his opponent is wearing a top hat, beard, and trunks spangled with the stars and alternating bars of the United States.

In the other corner is the man in the red and white trunks, Canada: the *real* Canada. The one who, as a young man, beat the Kaiser's Germany, who pummeled the Third Reich, and who stood alongside others shoulder to shoulder for 25 years to contain the street fighter in the red jacket with the shiv who was trying to interfere with the game and to intimidate the audience. Though he was forcibly retired by his owner and manager back in 1970 because he wasn't a box office draw, and because the street fighter scared his handlers, the man in red and white is finally back, tanned, and fit. This boxer once saw his current UN opponent as a tag-team fighter against the back ally hoods, fight fixers and gangsters, but has become dismayed with the myopia of late, especially when the UN Supremacist refused a fight with the guy in the black turban and constantly quoted rules and regulations to excuse himself from the ring.

Many in the audience cheer for the man in the light blue trunks out of sheer nostalgia. After all, he has been in the ring for awhile, and he is a known quantity, but his agent and manager have hyped his boxing record. Even if he loses, his champions will cry that they were robbed and will blame the referee. Even those who cheer for Canada feel a pang of sympathy for Canada's opponent and wish the hype was not there, but see a boxer past his prime, who should have retired before a potentially humiliating bout.

The man in the light blue trunks always uses the same move: he fades back and dances around the ring hoping to exhaust his opponent, dependent upon the cheers of his supporters in the crowd. The man in red and white has been told for years that his only move is to fade back and dance around the ring, but now his atrophied skills – right hooks and left jabs – have returned. The man in the black turban carefully watching the fight preparing for his match would, of course, prefer to fight an amputee boxer, but better the man in light blue than the man in red and white. Consequently, he joins the pin-striped crowd in cheering on the man in light blue.

Those engaging in the current Canadian peacekeeping mythology debate are like sports writers describing a bout that took place several years ago while they are watching the current fight. Indeed, some of those writers would prefer to see the man in light blue as the referee between the man in the black turban and the man in the star-spangled trunks. Some would like to see the man in white and red change his trunks for light blue. Others would prefer to have the venue moved from its present locations for a replay of Ali and Forman's "Rumble in the Jungle" and pretend the contender in the black turban does not exist.

The Canadian Peacekeeping Myth is activated by those who have specific agendas. Fundamentally, the underlying premise, which is sometimes concealed and sometimes not, is anti-American, and this plays to a long-established undercurrent in Canadian society, the media, and particularly, in academia. These myth activators or invokers take several forms. The first is the Trudeau-era obsession to distance Canada from the United States by re-engineering our national history and by being deliberately contrarian with unrealistic "Third Option" policies. There is the Chrétien variant, behaving in an openly antagonistic and insulting fashion for cheap domestic political points. Second

is the belief by some that the United States is the primary threat to world peace because nothing, apparently, is able to "contain" the so-called "hyperpower." Third are the Africanists who are desperately trying to re-orient Canadian international policy to deal solely with Africa and its discontents. They are an extension of the first form. The fourth form are the UN Supremacists, who firmly believe that the UN should be the *only* expression of Canadian international policy, that Canada should not have a policy independent of what the UN decrees, and should have reduced, little, or no connection with the United States. They are related to the second form. It is important to understand that many people who accept these beliefs generally did not recognize the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and, in general, do not recognize the threat posed by radical Islam today. They continue to hide in their self-created universe of moral equivalency.

It is also important to recognize that there is a UN peacekeeping industry that emerged in the 1990s, and it is still chugging away, despite its irrelevancy. Its primary funding body is, not surprisingly, the UN. Many analysts made a lot of money studying and propounding on UN peacekeeping during that time. They continue to do so today. However, their motives should be examined alongside their written products.

It is not surprising that Canada's engagement in Afghanistan has triggered a re-emergence of a once-dead debate. Afghanistan is important because is it everything those who believe in and pursue the peacekeeping myth hate. It is not a UN mission; it was American-led and is now NATO-led; it involves stabilization and counterinsurgency, and not peacekeeping; it has a defined enemy; and Canada is not neutral in this engagement. In other words, the continuing existence of a Canadian counterinsurgency commitment to Afghanistan completely refutes those who promulgate the peacekeeping myth. It is a complete affront to their image of Canada on the world stage, and they keep falling back on their imagined past to feel better and to decry the "new" policy.

Thus far, those propounding the Canadian Peacekeeping Myth have yet to convincingly refute several arguments that have been in circulation for at least the past five years:

1. Canada fights wars; she does not just do peacekeeping.
2. Canadian international policy since the 1940s has historically rested upon close relations between Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (the ABCA nations), and upon its participation in NATO and NORAD. The UN has been an adjunct to those activities, not the lead.
3. Canadian involvement in Cold War-era UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations has demonstrably had a relationship to Cold War strategy and geopolitics. These missions were not undertaken for purely altruistic reasons, nor should they have been. Canada was never neutral.
4. The vast majority of Canadian military operations during the Cold War were geared to deterring a war with the Soviet Union, and to fighting that war if deterrence failed. Nuclear weapons, including Canada's nuclear capability, played a significant role in this system. Canada was never neutral.
5. Lester B. Pearson did not "invent" UN peacekeeping. Others, including non-Canadians, went before him. The UN did not beguile these men, including Pearson, and they were fairly skeptical about its efficacy.
6. The types of post-Cold War military operations that Canada and her allies engaged in were, in the main, not UN peacekeeping missions. They were mostly armed humanitarian interventions and stabilization missions, and even open warfare. After 1995, most of these missions had to be led by NATO, or by ABCA nations.
7. The limitations of the UN as an institution were collectively demonstrated by the UN mission in Afghanistan in 1993; UNOSOM I and II in Somalia in 1993-94; UNAMIR in Rwanda during 1994; UNPROFOR I in Croatia in 1995; UNPROFOR II in 1995; and the Oil for Food scandal in

Iraq. The UN has not been able to recover its reputation as an institution in the past decade. There is little or no point in committing Canada to UN operations until or that deficiency is rectified, should that ever occur.

The Canadian Peacekeeping Myth debate is sterile, and it lacks utility. It is a *cul-de-sac* at this particular point in time. We have far more pressing problems that demand the application of good analytical skill and commentary, specifically our operations in Afghanistan; the problem of Pakistan as a potential failed state; the *Al Qaeda* movement and how it affects Canada internally and externally; the potential dangers posed by a resurgent Russia; the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons to sub-national groups; the confrontation of an aggressive Iran; and the future direction of American policy and how that will affect Canada. Looking at these problems strictly through the light-blue and white lens is not a useful exercise. Canada has interests that need protecting, and, in my opinion, the UN is not the tool we need to use to protect those interests.

**CMJ**

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DND AR2007-A029-0020 by Sergeant Craig Fiander, JTF-AFG-R3

Soldiers of the First Battalion, Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Régiment keep a watchful eye during a meeting at the Arghandab District's Afghanistan National Police Headquarters.

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