Reassessing Peacekeeping

Sean M. Maloney, PhD

"Canadians don't fight wars. We're peacekeepers!" a women exclaimed indignantly in the coffee shop when the announcement was made to commit Canadian troops to Afghanistan. This all too common sentiment is, unfortunately, the cultural by-product of those who think Canada is a neutral, morally-superior nation unencumbered by national interests or worse: that Canada can somehow use the United Nations and Canada's participation in its peacekeeping activities as a counterweight to American cultural and economic dominance. Let us be blunt: Canadians have been decieved. We are not the world's peacekeeper and we never have been. If we do not recognize this fact, Canada will be unable to maintain the economy necessary for a high standard of living and will be unable to provide for the physical security of the Canadian people and their global interests.

We must understand what peacekeeping is, where it came from, and our role in it. The dominant image of Canadian peacekeeping is that of a soldier wearing a blue helmet patrolling a buffer zone between two belligerent forces. The Orwellian term 'peacekeeper' is used to describe this Canadian soldier. "In The Service of Peace" is inscribed on the memorial cairns where his dead comrades are commemorated. The UN is portrayed as a super-government whose only agenda is to bring peace to the world. Canada merely responds when the UN asks for peacekeepers because it is good and right.

The first time the public was presented with this image was between 1956 and 1967 when a UN mission to Egypt called the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) deployed in the wake of the Suez Crisis. Canadians were

continuously presented with similar images through the 1970s and well into the 1990s. Canadians wanted to believe that this made us different from other countries, (specifcially the Americans), embraced the image, and built monuments to it. The image drove us to put our soldiers at risk in parts of the globe that, in some cases, had absolutely no bearing on Canadian interests, without adequate logistics support, strategic lift, up to date weapons, and with politically-correct and therefore unrealistic rules of engagement and standards of behaviour. Peacekeeping was somehow deemed morally superior than war, something which only the nasty Americans did. Canada 'did' peacekeeping, and therefore her people could afford to be smug.

The reality, however, was very different. UN peacekeeping emerged during the Cold War and cannot be understood outside of this context. UN peacekeeping was only one of Canada's Cold War tools and was conceived as one part of a strategy to deny critical portions of the Third World to Soviet influence. The UN, created in 1945, was considered by Canadian leaders (including Pearson) to be unable to guarantee Canadian interests, which in turn prompted the creation of NATO in 1949. It is important to undertand that in its peak year (1964), there were no more than 2200 Canadians deployed on UN duty overseas compared with 12 000 air and ground troops serving in NATO capacities. Canada's NATO forces, equipped and prepared for mechanized and nuclear warfare, deterred Soviet agression and permitted peacekeeping efforts to suceed.

Indeed, 'peace-keeping' as it was called, involved the use of small groups of unarmed military observers in the Kashmir and Israel/Palestine in the late 1940s, long before UNEF arrived in Egypt in 1956. Canada's UN contribution rarely exceeded <u>twenty</u> people from 1948 to 1956. By 1960, the dominant image we are familiar with no longer existed. UN forces were used in the Congo in counterinsugency operations to prevent its takeover by Soviet puppets. In 1964, a UN force was deployed to Cyprus (UNFICYP) to reactively respond to "incommunal violence" so that the Sovet Union could

not exploit the conflict to disrupt and destroy the relationship between NATO members Greece and Turkey. None of these missions had a humanitarian component or objective: it was all part of the Cold War chess game and we played it well. American, British and French covert action was the 'bad cop', we were the 'good cop'.

Canada's image of UN peacekeeping, however, became fixated on UNEF and, after 1974, UNFICYP. UNEF and UNFICYP were "interpositionary peacekeeping", a thin blue line between the armed forces of two countries. These missions did not require heavily-armed forces or the ability to project power. It was benign. It was useful. But it was not the only expression of Canadian national security policy in the world and was never meant to be the basis for future policy: our NATO forces equipped and trained to fight were the foundation. The non-linear, more violent operations in the Congo and Cyprus prior to 1974 are rarely referred to. The real Canadian motives for involvement in UN peacekeeping during the Cold War are never discussed. The benign image is maintained. The fact that Canada would have had no credibility in UN circles if it had not been a NATO member and the fact that there would have been no Canadian forces available for UN duty without the NATO-driven Cold War build up has also been conveniently ignored.

Fast forward to the 1990s. The Cold War is over. The Gulf War is on. Canadian policymakers, caught up in the mistaken belief that the UN will come into its own as the prime mechanism for international discourse and adjudication, oppose the deployment of Canadian ground troops to fight Iraq on the grounds it will damage Canada's peacekeeping image. At the same time, Canada's NATO forces in Germany are disbanded. Similar arguments are made to support this decision. Canada's standing amongst her closest allies and trading partners is sacrificed to satisfy a non-existent image in pursuit of an unrealistic and Utopian goal which provides little economic or material benefit to Canadians.

1991-1995: The decade long Stabilization Campaign led by the Western powers unfolds. Pundits pontificate about ethnic cleansing, micro-states, failed states, and the revolution in military affairs. In quick sucession, Canadian soldiers are deployed to Croatia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, West Sahara, and so on. The Canadian public, raised on the image of UNEF interpositionary peacekeeping, is initially exultant over Brigadier-General Mackenzie's exploits to broker peace in Sarajevo, but is confused by the television images of Canadian soldiers held hostage in Bosnia and bewildered when confronted with the horrors of Rwanda. Canadian policymakers, not au fait with the motives and actions of their predecessors in the early part of the Cold War, respond reactively whenever UN bureaucrats in New York ask for more Canadians.

The 'peacekeeping' of the 1990s Stabilization Campaign was very different from the 'peace-keeping' of the Cold War 1950s. The confusion was driven by the image: in the early 1990s, Canadian soldiers were photographed and filmed wearing the same garb their fathers and uncles wore in the 1950s and some of their operations did involve interpositionary peacekeeping: Croatia, for example. Unlike the 1950s, however, humanitarian aid operations merged with peacekeeping. Bosnia and Somalia are two examples. The inability of the UN to understand that the use of force to deliver aid was incompatible with interpositionary peacekeeping led to confusion and disaster. Peacekeeping is a specific type of military activity using military forces. The term was then appropriated by those with other agendas and broadened to include a variety of activities: the deployment of multinational police units, mine-lifting, the insertion of UN arms control inspectors into Iraq, programmes to help women achieve sufferage, airdrops of food using military aircraft and other non-military missions.

In Canada, the appropriation of peacekeeping was conducted by those in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade pushing 'soft power' and 'human security', policies which are utopian in nature, disperse

scarce Canadian financial and military resources, put soldiers at risk for dubious pruposes, and do not significantly contribute to securing Canadian interests. At the same time, these individuals refused to accept the utility of military force and refused to pay for the modernization and expansion of the Canadian Armed Forces so that it could project Canadian power for Canadian interests.

The 'soft power' afficianados were hoist on their own petard, however. The collapse of UN operations in Croatia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia by 1995 demonstrated the folly of this undue emphasis in Canada and UN peacekeeping and it took the Kosovo crisis of 1999 to drive home the point, this time with CF-18 fighterbombers, Coyote armoured cars, and Leopard tanks. The lessons which emerged from the early 1990s were taken to heart, particularly by the Canadian Army and other allied armed forces. Peacekeeping was dead. What should these new types of operation be called? 'Peace Enforcement', favoured by some, was too Orwellian. 'Wider Peacekeeping,' was pondered but deemed suspect because it was rooted in the past. The American term 'Operations Other Than War' (OOTW) could not be pronounced.

Ultimately, the unofficial terms 'stability operations' or 'stabilization operations' emerged and have become doctrine. Fundamentally different from peacekeeping, stabilization operations are not based on policing a thin blue line and are based on the willingness and ability to use military force (tanks, special forces, attack helicopters, psychological operations) to coerce well-armed belligerents to comply with political agreements and to cooperate with humanitarian organizations. UN peacekeeping forces, outgunned by increasingly sophisticated belligerent forces, with poor command, control and leadership, a muddled mandate, and incapable of protecting themselves, could not keep the peace. Stablization operations rectify those failing and are either NATO-led (in the case of IFOR, SFOR, KFOR in the Balkans) or led by an ABCA (American-British-Canadian-Australian) member (in the case of

INTEFET in East Timor, the intial Haiti force in 1994, or the MNF in Zaire in 1996).

Stablization operations are closer to 1960's-style counterinsurgency than 1950's-style peacekeeping and constitute a new form of warfare in which the threat of force and its careful application can shape the environment and produce stability. What we do with that stability remains the main question. 1950s peacekeeping was designed to freeze a dangerous situation in place to forestall superpower escalation which might involve nuclear weapons use. Stabilization operations buy time for the implementation of a long term political solution by keeping the dogs of war at bay.

The bulk of Canadian military activity in the 1990s involved stabilization operations, not peacekeeping. Today, of the 4000 Canadian soldiers deployed overseas, only 230 wear blue berets. Indeed, the 'soft power' faction in DFAIT privately decries this state of affairs and is pressuring National Defence to increase 'light blue' instead of 'green' (or 'sand') citing our peacekeeping heritage. The fact that Canada has engaged with significant numbers in non-UN peace observation missions like the ICSC, ICCS, ECMM, KVM and MFO is also conveniently downplayed by these same individuals. For them, the only currency is 'light blue.'

There is no such thing as a Canadian peacekeeper. There is such a thing as a Canadian soldier. There are Canadian soldiers on peacekeeping duty. There are Canadian soldiers conducting stabilization and counterterrorism operations. They do so in the service of Canada, not the UN. Peacekeeping covers only one small band in the very broad spectrum of conflict. Canadian national security needs demand that we have an armed forces capable of handling much more than this since, despite the myths, peacekeeping troops alone cannot protect Canadian interests.