



**THE
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**What Canada has done
and should be doing
at the United Nations**

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Unprepared for peace: A decade of decline in Canadian peacekeeping

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Peacekeeping has a place of pride in Canadian history and identity. Canadians know that Lester B. Pearson proposed the first peacekeeping force to move the world back from war in the 1956 Suez Crisis, winning him the Nobel peace prize. From then to the mid-1990s, Canada was the largest contributor of peacekeepers and the only country to have contributed to every UN mission during the Cold War. From Kashmir to the Congo, from Bosnia to Ethiopia, Canadian soldiers were at the forefront of world order, contributing to peace in war-torn lands. This is still recognized by the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal that they are entitled to wear. The National Peacekeeping Monument (called “Reconciliation”) in Ottawa is another testament to their contributions, as is the female figure on the ten-dollar bill who wears a blue beret under a banner that reads “Au Service de la Paix – In the Service of Peace.”

But what has become of that legacy? Is Canada the prolific peacekeeper it once was? Unfortunately, the answer is no. While Canada once contributed as many as 3,000 military personnel to peacekeeping, it currently provides only 34 – not enough to fill a school bus. While the United Nations currently (July 2014) deploys an all-time high of over 80,000 military personnel in the field, Canada has kept its numbers at

historical lows since 2006. Two months after the Conservative government came to power, Canada withdrew its 200 logisticians from the Golan Heights, even as the UN mission continued to serve as an important buffer between Israel and war-wrecked Syria. After 2001, instead of peacekeeping, Canada turned to war-fighting, spending billions on Afghanistan in an unsuccessful bid to defeat the Taliban. The Canadian Forces became a single-mission military with Afghanistan as the sole focus of attention. In that one decade, operating in one country, more Canadian soldiers died than in six decades of peacekeeping in more than 40 countries.

To make matters worse, over the past decade, the Canadian Forces (CF) permitted a major decline in training and education for peacekeeping – known as peace support operations (PSOs) in Canadian military parlance and doctrine. The government’s withdrawal of support to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre caused the demise of that unique facility and meant that Canadian soldiers could no longer train on multidimensional peace operations alongside civilians and foreign officers. More broadly, the CF provides only half the peacekeeping training activities that it did 10 years ago. Significantly, in training exercises and simulations, Canadian officers no

ABSTRACT

Canada’s international reputation as a prolific and proficient peacekeeper has been in decline for over a decade, owing to the country’s disengagement with peacekeeping operations. This loss of experience abroad is compounded by the loss of training at home, leaving Canada unprepared to re-engage with UN peacekeeping at the level it once did. As the peacekeepers of the 1990s retire, and as the courses and exercise that were developed to prepare officers for the unique challenges of peacekeeping are cut, Canada’s future foreign policy options are being undermined and narrowed. Given the international demands of the post-Afghanistan era, there are a number of things the Canadian Forces and government can do to reengage in peacekeeping.

longer take on roles of UN peacekeepers as they once did. At the joint command and staff program, the officers plan and exercise operations of an alliance, sometimes explicitly identified as NATO, but they are no longer given the opportunity to look from within a UN mission or review UN procedures and practices.

The 2006–11 combat mission in Kandahar, Afghanistan, unquestionably gave CF personnel valuable experience in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. While there are some similarities between COIN and international peace operations, there are also fundamental differences in the training, preparation and practice. Peacekeeping requires specialized training as it is a more complex and conceptually challenging task than war-fighting. War and COIN missions are enemy-centric, non-consensual and primarily involve offensive strategy, whereas peacekeeping is based on a trinity of principles: impartiality; consent of conflicting parties; and the defensive approach on the use of force, though robust peace enforcement action is sometimes required. A major change in mentality would thus be needed to properly prepare the post-Afghanistan CF for future peace operations. Special skills, separate from those learned in Afghanistan, are needed, including negotiation, conflict management and resolution, as well as an understanding of UN procedures and past peacekeeping missions.

Thus, a concerted effort is needed to revitalize the

peacekeeping skills of the Canadian Forces if it is to constructively help the United Nations in a conflict-ridden world. Since US-led coalitions on the ground are unlikely in coming years, the Canadian military does not have many alternatives to make its army useful in the field. Peacekeeping advances both Canada's national values and interests in enhancing a stable, peaceful, and rules-based order in world which is sorely lacking in these vital qualities. There is a constant need for well-trained and well-equipped peacekeepers. Canada's return to peacekeeping would be embraced by the United Nations and the international community. Such a development could help our country gain more influence and clout, including a future seat in the UN Security Council, and give Canadians something even more important: a sense of renewed pride in the nation's contribution to a better, more peaceful world.

Further writings on the subject by the author:

“Canadian Peacekeeping: Proud Tradition, Strong Future?” Canadian Foreign Policy, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp.7-32, available at <http://walterdorn.org/pub/32>.

“Canadian Peacekeeping: No Myth But Not What It Once Was”, SITREP, Vol. 67, No. 2, Royal Canadian Military Institute, 2007, available at

http://walterdorn.org/pdf/CanadianPeacekeeping-NoMyth_Dorn_SitRep_April2007.pdf.



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