

PEACEKEEPING THEN, NOW AND ALWAYS

by Doctor A. Walter Dorn

In the thought-provoking article “Peacekeeping and Public Opinion” (*Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 2005), Lane Anker postulates that there exists a “disconnect” or “gap” in Canadian public opinion regarding peacekeeping. Anker points out that polls consistently show strong public support for peacekeeping in general, but weak (and decreasing) support for a Canadian Forces (CF) presence in Afghanistan. Anker accuses the public of having an anachronistic view of the evolving practice of peacekeeping. While I agree that peacekeeping has evolved, I believe there is no disconnect or anachronism in public opinion, and that the public’s views on Afghanistan operations are quite understandable.

The simple truth is that not all of the CF activities in Afghanistan have been peacekeeping. As part of the US-led “war against terrorism,” our soldiers have hunted down former government (Taliban) and al Qaeda forces, turned over “detainees” to US forces for transport to Guantanamo Bay, and generally supported the US forces after the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Canadian society is right to question these activities and certainly correct in not calling them peacekeeping.

Some of the CF activities *have* been peacekeeping: support for elections, contributing to a secure environment in Kabul, and various forms of nation building. Had the Canadian polls focused on these International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) activities in Afghanistan, I believe more positive results would have been obtained. The polls would have shown the traditional consistent support for a CF role. Anker makes the same mistake as some pollsters by lumping together all CF operations in Afghanistan. These different types of operations need to be distinguished to obtain a clear picture and better understanding of public opinion.

This is not to say that the public does not accept the use of force by peacekeepers, including those in Afghanistan. Of course, these soldiers can and must use force when required to do so – otherwise, why support the deployment of combat-trained personnel in the first place? The Canadian public has often seen peacekeepers operate in dangerous environments¹ where a soldier’s weapons may need to be used. But even the most robust forms of peacekeeping should not deviate

from the basic peacekeeping principles: legitimacy, consent, impartiality and the minimum use of force.² The public understands that the use of force in peacekeeping may go beyond self-defence if armed action is necessary to respond to clearly apparent threats to the peace and the protected population, but Canadians also appreciate that arms should be used only as a last resort with the minimum force necessary to achieve the objective, and without significant collateral damage. Going beyond this is a recipe for disaster in a peacekeeping mission and for sinking public opinion at home. If tougher operations are envisioned, then the term “enforcement” (as envisioned in the UN Charter) should be used, after applying the highest standards of the “just war” principles and only after a thorough public debate.

Equating peacekeeping to the “three-block war” is similarly confusing and inappropriately linked in the article. Mixing mandates by combining warfighting with peacekeeping and humanitarian action removes mission clarity, and reduces international support. It also confuses the Canadian public, the population in the mission area, and even the soldiers themselves. It could allow peacekeeping to be used as a cover for more nefarious activities, such as covert operations. Such operations (targeted assassinations, for example) require special national and international (UN) consideration and a different mandate.³ Peacekeeping is not war by other means. Peacekeeping does not exist to fulfil narrow-minded national interests, but to help the afflicted population in war-torn areas create the conditions for a sustainable peace and a normal lifestyle. In the long run, that is in everybody’s interest.

If the Canadian government wants to align itself with the Canadian public, it should be tasking the CF to do more for the United Nations. The world organization desperately needs more Canadian soldiers in its 17 missions around the world, for instance, in Haiti, the Congo and Sierra Leone. Our current position as 33rd contributor is a disgrace to our peacekeeping tradition. To ignore the UN’s calls for help is to do a disservice to the world organization at a time when the demand for UN peacekeeping is surging and the operations are finally becoming more robust. We also need to support, much more boldly and strongly, the Standby High Readiness

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Brigade (SHIRBRIG) for UN peacekeeping, a body we helped create in 2000, for rapid deployment. But the narrow focus on Afghanistan is sapping energy from other areas.

In conclusion, there is no “conceptual gap” on the part of the public regarding peacekeeping and the missions in Afghanistan. Also the term peacekeeping will not disappear from our lexicon, though some additional terms are welcome.⁴ The concept of *peacekeeping* is too deeply ingrained in the public consciousness and too valuable to dismiss. Canada should do much more to live up to its image as a peacekeeping nation, as its citizens expect. Furthermore, whoever seeks to assume the Pearsonian mantle of

peacekeeping would be mistaken to avoid the bedrock principles upon which it was built. A legitimate UN mandate, consent for deployment, impartiality and the minimum use of force are time-honoured standards that engender public support. The public needs to know when these conditions are exceeded to allow for proper consideration. In the end, the public is smarter than we think.

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NOTES

1. The entire history of peacekeeping – not only recent history as Anker suggests – has been filled with tough missions in areas of civil war and internal unrest as well as international conflict: for example, the UN missions in Palestine (1948-), Kashmir (1949-), the Congo (1960-64), and Lebanon (1978-). The UN Forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP), a mission cobbled together by Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin Sr. in 1964, operated in a very dangerous and fractious environment until the late 1960s. After the Turkish invasion in 1974, when the island was partitioned in two, the conditions for peacekeepers were almost vacation-like, giving many Canadian soldiers and citizens the false impression that peacekeeping was extraordinarily easy and safe. But in the early 1990s, especially, the Canadian public witnessed up close on nightly television how dangerous peacekeeping can be. The experiences of General Romeo Dallaire in Rwanda, particularly, have sensitized the public to the need for robust forces and for the ability to move from a peacekeeping to a peace enforcement operation, if conditions necessitate.
2. The “Universal Principles of Peacekeeping,” as listed in the Peace Support Operations Field Book (Kingston, Ontario: Peace Support Training Centre, Version 2, 2002) include: legitimacy, consent, impartiality and minimum use of force. *Legitimacy* means that the force arises out of international law, namely the UN Charter, and a mandate from the UN Security Council. It means that the operation is an expression of the will of the international community, not just of a partial interest. *Consent* means that the host government agrees to the initial deployment of the peacekeeping force. If the government does not approve a force, then it constitutes an invading force, not a peacekeeping mission. *Impartiality* means the peacekeepers do not take sides, but all parties are held to a rules-based system of law. This avoids a dangerous ‘black and white’ view of a conflict in which the force favours friends and fights enemies. The *minimum use of force* provision is broader than personal self-defence. It allows peacekeepers to defend persons entrusted to their care, and to resist attempts
3. by force to prevent the mission from discharging its duties. Even then, peacekeepers would apply force only when absolutely necessary, after all other methods have been tried. Should it become necessary, however, to attack a party outright, then a separate enforcement mandate and mission is required.
3. It is true that in some dangerous theatres in the world today, peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations may be occurring simultaneously. But the distinction between these two activities should be made clear. Peace enforcement requires a much closer public and international scrutiny than peacekeeping. In any case, both types of missions need to be authorized by the United Nations.
4. The term “peace support operations” (PSO) is currently used by NATO to encompass peacekeeping plus peacemaking (negotiations for a peace agreement), humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and peace enforcement. In Canadian doctrine, peace enforcement has been taken out of this set of PSO types and made a category of its own.