Keeping the Peace: The U.N., Canada and the Quest for International Security

International peacekeeping efforts are increasingly coming under public scrutiny and criticism. Yet, as Canada's peacekeeping history attests, perceived failures in the peacekeeping process result most often from a combination of the constraints placed on peacekeeping forces and the recalcitrance of the antagonists involved. Today, with the Cold War over, the U.N. is being asked to become an ever more visible actor on the world stage. Are new definitions of peacekeeping and collective security in order?

by Russell Field

July, 1993 marks a special moment in the annals of Canadian peacekeeping: the one-year anniversary of the airlift of humanitarian aid to Bosnia, the longest continuous airlift in human history. However, the anniversary is receiving surprisingly little media attention. Found instead are reports of the scandal in Somalia and of a Canadian soldier wounding two of his comrades while cleaning his weapon in Bosnia. In the former case, two Canadian soldiers have been charged with murder, and two others face charges of torture, in the death of a Somali civilian. The fallout from this incident has been such that the Prime Minister of Haiti has gone so far as to characterize Canadian peacekeepers as "a pack of Nazis...with swastikas on their arms."

'Incompetent neo-fascists' is hardly the image Canadians have cultivated during their 45 years as leaders in international peacekeeping. Canada's standing on the international stage (and especially her self-perception of her own stature) is based in large part upon the leading role taken in peacekeeping missions. British Brigadier General Michael Harbottle, former leader of Britain's U.N. detachment in Cyprus, was impressed that Canadians "take peace-keeping very seriously and have extremely strong ideas on how it should be carried out."

There are currently 4,382 Canadian peacekeepers serving in 14 different operations around the world. With Canada's full military complement standing at only 80,000, such involvement represents a rate of participation unprecedented and unmatched on the international scene. In fact, on the home-front, the Canadian military has been repeatedly charged with over-extending itself by involving its forces in many operations simultaneously.

A recent recruiting poster highlights Canada's unique commitment to peacekeeping. The photograph depicts a running, blue-helmeted soldier carrying to safety a young child (teddy bear in tow). The implicit reason to join the Canadian forces (and subliminally the raison d'être of the military itself) is not the defense of the nation, as is traditionally the case, but, rather, the preservation of international peace and the provision of humanitarian aid.

Peacekeeping, Not Peacemaking

Over the past 45 years, there have been few U.N. peacekeeping missions considered unqualified successes. In fact, many are viewed as unequivocal failures. Today, Somalia remains in upheaval; Bosnia appears forever shattered and antagonistic; and, despite successful U.N. overseeing of the May elections, Cambodia continues on, a country divided. The popular press took Canada's recent withdrawal from Cyprus as an opportunity to highlight the failure of peacekeeping efforts there.

Yet, insufficient distinction has been made between peacekeeping and peacemaking. As two well-known Canadian historians have remarked, "the chief object of peacekeeping is to keep two potential combatants separated while diplomatic efforts are mounted to resolve their conflict..." Peacekeeping is a military function, peacemaking, a diplomatic one. Nonetheless, peacekeepers are repeatedly expected to take on the role of peacemakers—a role that is often outside of their mandate and capabilities.

On top of the apparent failures of peacekeeping missions to make peace in troubled regions, much criticism of the whole peacekeeping process has stemmed from the deaths of U.N. troops and the involvement of peacekeepers in pitched battles and local skirmishes. Most recently, on June 5, 1993, 23 peacekeepers of Pakistani origin were killed in Somalia. Washington-led retaliation actions left five more U.N. troops and some 100 Somali militia dead. Mogadishu was bombed as blue helmeted soldiers led house to house searches for targeted warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid. Civilians were wounded and frightened and the local power balance was tilted towards Aidid's rivals. Questions arose immediately in response. Are the peacekeepers in fact keeping the peace? Is the cost in lives and dollars too high for the return in security? Should the very manner in which peacekeeping and peacemaking are carried out be re-thought?

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The Origins of U.N. Peacekeeping

When the drafters of the U.N. Charter in 1945 considered the organization's role in collective security they envisioned a large military force, kept at the ready, and capable of moving against an act of aggression anywhere in the world. This notion, however, had little practical application in a Cold War world. The veto power in the Security Council held by both East and West realistically precluded any multilateral cooperation against acts of aggression regardless of their origin. In addition, no member state was willing to finance a standing military.

As a collective security force quickly became an unattainable dream, the idea of U.N.-sanctioned peacekeeping missions was born. If the U.N. could not deter acts of aggression through the threat of its own force, at least it would be able to maintain a short-term peace while a more lasting solution was worked out.

Canadian historians are quick to point to the leading role played by Canada in the development of the peacekeeping concept. In 1950, External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson proposed that U.N. member states should earmark military units for peacekeeping service and that such military operations should be coordinated by the Secretary-General. Later that same year, the Cold War stalemate in the Security Council was circumvented when a resolution was passed that gave the General Assembly (rather than the more narrow Security Council) responsibility in matters of collective peace initiatives. The success of the U.N. emergency force in stabilizing the Suez Crisis in 1956—the first serious international crisis confronted by the U.N.—proved the validity of Pearson's formula. The age of U.N. peacekeeping had begun.

Why Canada? Canada's Peacekeeping History

Since 1947, Canada has participated in 32 different peacekeeping missions around the world [see map, page 10]. From the supervision of Korean elections in 1947 to providing humanitarian aid in Somalia in 1993, tens of thousands of Canadian military and diplomatic personnel have served the cause of peace, with 89 losing their life.

The reason most often cited publicly for Canada's significant role in international peacekeeping centres around her belief, as a nation, in peace and humanitarian aims. External Affairs Minister Paul Martin, in 1964, enunciated this 'higher

Canadian Armed Forces recruiting poster, 1993. [Canadian Armed Forces]

principle' while discussing Canada's involvement in a variety of peacekeeping operations:

> It is a long and expensive list and it is politically difficult at home because of the risks; and we get small thanks abroad for our work. We do it not for the glory but as our duty, since there are not many of us willing and able to move in quickly with an effective force.

Outside this abstract, perhaps somewhat altruistic, justification, there was a more pragmatic rationale. Geographically situated between the world's two greatest nuclear powers, peacekeeping represented not only Canada's contribution to collective security but also served in her own defence.

Moreover, the U.N. considered Canada an attractive participant in peacekeeping operations. Outside of the "great powers"—the five permanent members of the Security Council (France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China)—Canada could offer the greatest number of battle-tested troops and the most sophisticated military hardware. In addition, while a Western democracy with strong ties to the U.S., Canada had an international reputation for impartiality and few strategic interests in other parts of the world.

Attempting to understand Canada's contribution to international peacekeeping—and, in fact, peacekeeping itself—is difficult. Each mission is different in scope, intent and mandate. The U.N. has overseen elections in Cambodia, inspected biological and chemical weapons sites in Iraq, and monitored a cease-fire in Angola. However, two well-known Canadian peacekeeping missions—the U.N. force in Cyprus and the international deputation in Vietnam—speak to the variety of 'types' of peacekeeping and of the mandate and limitations of each mission. In Cyprus, Canada was actively involved in maintaining peace, while in Vietnam, Canada's role was that of overseer and supervisor.

Cyprus

> "If you forced these people back together again, you could have another Bosnia"
>
> - British resident in Cyprus (1993)

For nearly 30 years, the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) has attempted to preserve peace between the

Greek and Turkish populations on the small Mediterranean island. Since its inception in March of 1964, Canada has been a substantial contributor of personnel, equipment and financing to UNFICYP. What was originally viewed as a three-month peacekeeping mission became a regular tour of duty for Canadian military personnel. There have been incidents of serious hostilities as well as long periods of relative calm.

Tensions between Greek Cypriots and the Turkish ethnic minority (about twenty percent of the population) date back several centuries. Cyprus has been ruled by practically every principal Mediterranean power—from Assyria, to Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome and the Ottomans. At the start of the First World War, Britain annexed Cyprus because of its strategic importance in southern Europe. It was not until 1959, with colonial empires around the world crumbling, that Cyprus achieved its independence.

The treaty that created the independent state of Cyprus, however, also created the conditions for the re-emergence of age-old tensions on the island. Under the agreement, Britain, Turkey and Greece consented to respect the sovereignty of Cyprus. Complex constitutional checks and balances were installed to satisfy both ethnic groups—i.e. the President was to be a Greek Cypriot; the Vice President, a Turkish Cypriot. But all three powers were granted the right to intervene unilaterally if these conditions no longer existed.

In November of 1963, the president, Archbishop Makarios, attempted to amend the Cypriot constitution. Under his proposals the President and Vice President would lose their mutual veto powers, a majority from both ethnic communities in the House of Representatives would no longer be needed to enact laws, and the proportion of Turkish-Cypriots in the military would be reduced. As a result, in late 1963 and early 1964, there was an outbreak of civil violence between the two communities on the island and Turkey threatened military intervention.

In the hope of forestalling an open conflict between Greece and Turkey, Britain proposed a NATO peacekeeping force—as both nations were NATO members. This was strongly opposed by the Soviet Union, who openly supported Greece during the conflict. Makarios maintained that he would only agree to peacekeeping efforts if they were carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. The U.N. had failed to act when hostilities began in December 1963, but, with NATO efforts stymied, the U.N. reconsidered the issue. On March 4, 1964, the Security Council approved a temporary peacekeeping mission in Cyprus.

Secretary General U Thant asked Canada, Brazil, Ireland, Sweden and Finland to contribute personnel to the the mission. On March 11, Turkey again threatened to invade Cyprus unless U.N. peacekeepers arrived on the island. The next day, Prime Minister Lester Pearson confirmed Canada's participation and External Affairs Minister Paul Martin went about gathering additional support for the peacekeeping force.

Canada was the first nation to commit to UNFICYP and the first to arrive on the scene. This readiness to participate did not mean that Canada entered into the fray without serious reservations. Pearson told the House of Commons that Canada would only send troops to Cyprus if the duration of the mission was fix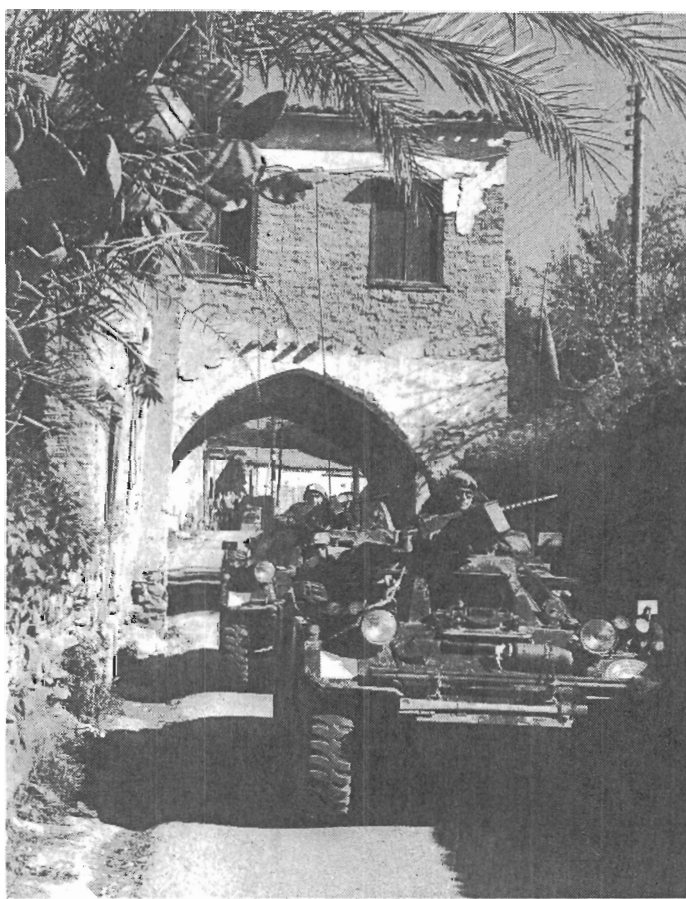ed in advance and a mediator was appointed to negotiate a peace between the two sides. In reality, however, the threat of a Turkish invasion meant that Canadian troops were committed to UNFICYP before Pearson had received adequate assurances on these matters.

By the end of April, 1964, the Canadian contingent in Cyprus numbered 1150 personnel in a U.N. force of 6500. Canada was assigned the task of demilitarizing the 'Green Line' (a buffer zone that extended through the capital of Nicosia and served to separate the city into distinct ethnic communities), and of protecting the route from Nicosia to Kyrenia (an important port city on the northern coast). The lack of authority granted the peacekeepers—force could only be used as a last resort— and the lack of respect shown them by the warring factions, made these tasks extremely difficult. Canadian troops were forced, in many ways, to be diplomats rather than soldiers.

CYPRUS: Tanks roll through Nicosia, patrolling the 'Green Line.' [Canadian Armed Forces]

From Poisoned "Poisson" to the Turkish Invasion

Although little had been done by the U.N. to effect a lasting peace, by the end of 1964, the situation in Cyprus had been stabilized. Life for the peacekeepers settled into a routine and, by 1969, the Canadian contingent was reduced to 480 personnel. Canadian forces rotated out every six months, and a tour of duty in Cyprus became standard practice for every Canadian soldier.

Minor disputes between Cypriots, as well as the alarmingly high rate of venereal disease among UNFICYP troops, represented the greatest problems facing the peacekeepers. Often the toughest decision facing Canadian troops was whether or

not to spend the day at "Nipple Beach," a topless stretch of sand on the southern coast. At one point, the most serious diplomatic dispute centred around a crate of rancid sardines disposed of by the Canadian contingent and marked 'poison'. A Greek-Cypriot militia unit found the crate, interpreted 'poison' as being French for 'fish,' and consumed the contents. The illnesses suffered were a source of some strain between the Canadian peacekeepers and the local Greek military.

This torpid pattern was shattered during the summer of 1974. On June 15th, the military junta in power in Greece supported a coup that overthrew the Makarios government and installed a president who supported the unification of Cyprus with Greece. On July 20th, Turkey responded. An invasion force of 40,000 ground and air troops invaded northern Cyprus. The UNFICYP commander was instructed to minimize casualties, offer humanitarian support to civilians, and maintain a U.N. presence in the situation. Neither side in the dispute was inhibited by the U.N. banner and Canadian forces came under heavy fire in their command headquarters at a hotel in Nicosia.

When the final cease-fire went into effect August 18th, the Turks controlled forty percent of the country. The 'Green Line' was extended to cover the entire 180 km width of the island and effectively divided it into two distinct ethnic enclaves. Mass migration and repatriation was required to reach this end. The line now separates the Greek and Turkish republics—the former claiming to govern the entire country and the latter considering itself a distinct state.

Since the cease-fire, life for the peacekeepers has returned to the routine of the 1964 to 1974 period. Open hostility still exists between the two ethnic groups, but the presence of the UNFICYP troops keeps it in check. Today, as former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark prepares to mediate a new round of U.N.-sponsored negotiations designed to unite Cyprus, a three-month mission has become a thirty-year commitment and little has happened to improve relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In June, 1993, the Canadian government—arguing that not enough had been done to ensure a lasting solution and in the belief that it had done its part in keeping the peace—withdrew its commitment to UNFICYP and Canadian troops left the island.

Vietnam

The goals of Canada's peacekeeping mission in Vietnam stand in marked contrast to U.N. efforts in Cyprus. Canada did not enter the situation to keep the peace actively, but rather to oversee the execution of a peace treaty. The mission was not carried out under the auspices of the United Nations, but under

VIETNAM: Supervising and observing.
[Canadian Armed Forces]

an independent supervisory commission. Canada was not expected to be an impartial observer to the peace, but rather to represent Western interests in the region.

When the 1954 Geneva peace conference was convened to discuss the end of the Korean War, the future of the French colonies in Indochina was also put forward for discussion. The French had regained control of these territories—which included present-day Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—after the defeat of the Japanese that had ended the Second World War. France had hoped to maintain control of the colonies but nationalists in all three nations, as well as an emerging communist movement in Vietnam, rose up to challenge French dominance. Combined with France's war weariness in the early-1950s, these conditions left France looking for a way to withdraw from Indochina.

Agreements reached at Geneva in 1954 created the conditions for this withdrawal. In the case of Vietnam, the country was divided into two sections (North and South) and the International Control Commissions (ICC) were created to oversee the peaceful transfer of power in the region. The mandate of the ICCs was to supervise the cease-fire agreement that had been reached in Geneva. Safe transport was to be provided for French troops and personnel leaving Indochina as well as for Vietnamese moving between the North (a 'communist' territory) and the South (a 'democratic' region). In addition, the ICCs were to monitor military arsenals and maintain them at 1954 levels. It was hoped that democratic elections for a unified Vietnamese government would take place by 1956.

The commissions were three-member bodies, with representatives of the West, the East, and a neutral third country. The parties to the Geneva agreements requested that Canada, Poland and India, respectively, take part in the ICCs. Canada was not present at these discussions and, in fact, the Department of External Affairs learned of this request through its publication in the media. There were three separate commissions established—one each for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The ICCs for Cambodia and Laos were relatively small peacekeeping operations. By far the most significant commission, because of its involvement in a full-scale conflict, was the Vietnam ICC.

A "Partisan Peacekeeper"

The ICCs were divided into teams of observers, with representatives from each of the three participating nations. The role of these observers was to investigate any reported violations of the Geneva agreements. Canada began its membership on the ICC intending to be as impartial as the situation would allow. It soon became evident, however, that the Poles were examining every situation from a partisan, Cold War perspective. To

counter-balance, Canada felt obliged to act as the spokesperson for Western interests in the region. A frustrated Department of External Affairs found that:

> ...an impartial approach on the part of Canadians combined with the partisan attitude of the Poles and the middle-of-the-road policy adopted by the Indians did not lead to just decisions. Since early 1955, there has been an increasing tendency in the Canadian Delegation to apply pressure against North Vietnam and to defend South Vietnam when it was considered [that] Commission action...was unduly harsh.

Canada's awkward position as a 'partisan peacekeeper' was exacerbated by the refusal of the United States to recognize the 1954 peace accords. The United States had moved to distance itself from the Geneva conference. The U.S.-backed Saigon government followed suit and refused to hold the 1956 elections—an act which prompted the North Vietnamese regime of Ho Chi Minh to do the same. It was the claim of both the South Vietnamese and the U.S. that the Viet Minh army—the northward repatriation of which the ICC was there to oversee—had left behind guerilla troops (the Viet Cong) in
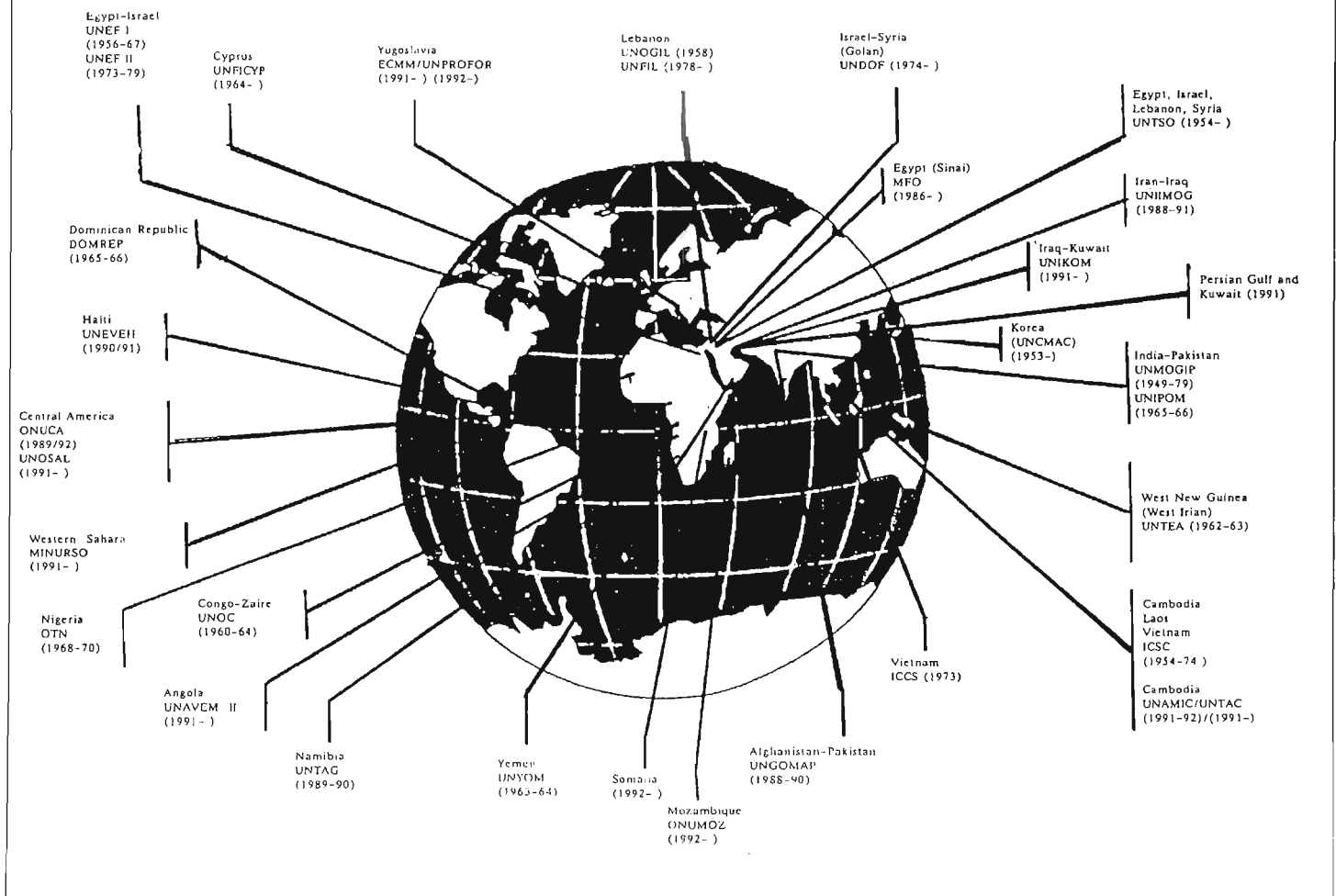
the South. It was this transgression of the Geneva accords, and the success of the guerilla action, that was used to justify the build up of arms and U.S. troops in South Vietnam in the early 1960s.

Canadians were part of the ICC in Vietnam from 1954 to 1972. During that entire period, no more than 170 Canadian personnel served in the region and the average contingent during the height of the Vietnam War reached only 66 observers. Despite this small commitment of manpower and resources, Canada's involvement in Vietnam and its effect on relations with the United States became a focal domestic issue during the 1960s. It was understood from the outset that Canada was to represent Western interests on the ICC. Yet, controversy arose over whether Canada should be playing the role of 'partisan peacekeeper' at all. If they were not impartial, could they be effective in keeping the peace?

In 1967 a CBC report on Vietnam claimed that two copies of all ICC intelligence reports were made—one for Ottawa and one for Washington. Prime Minister Pearson moved quickly to diffuse these allegations:

> Members of the Canadian delegation in Viet Nam are not engaged in clandestine or spying activities.

PEACEKEEPING: A CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD

Egypt-Israel
UNEF I
(1956-67)
UNEF II
(1973-79)

Cyprus
UNFICYP
(1964-)

Yugoslavia
ECMM/UNPROFOR
(1991-) (1992-)

Lebanon
UNOGIL (1958)
UNFIL (1978-)

Israel-Syria
(Golan)
UNDOF (1974-)

Egypt, Israel,
Lebanon, Syria
UNTSO (1954-)

Egypt (Sinai)
MFO
(1986-)

Iran-Iraq
UNIIMOG
(1988-91)

Dominican Republic
DOMREP
(1965-66)

Iraq-Kuwait
UNIKOM
(1991-)

Persian Gulf and
Kuwait (1991)

Haiti
UNEVEH
(1990/91)

Korea
(UNCMAC)
(1953-)

India-Pakistan
UNMOGIP
(1949-79)
UNIPOM
(1965-66)

Central America
ONUCA
(1989/92)
UNOSAL
(1991-)

West New Guinea
(West Irian)
UNTEA (1962-63)

Western Sahara
MINURSO
(1991-)

Congo-Zaire
UNOC
(1960-64)

Cambodia
Laos
Vietnam
ICSC
(1954-74)

Nigeria
OTN
(1968-70)

Vietnam
ICCS (1973)

Cambodia
UNAMIC/UNTAC
(1991-92)/(1991-)

Angola
UNAVEM II
(1991-)

Namibia
UNTAG
(1989-90)

Yemen
UNYOM
(1963-64)

Somalia
(1992-)

Afghanistan-Pakistan
UNGOMAP
(1988-90)

Mozambique
ONUMOZ
(1992-)

[Canadian Armed Forces]

BOSNIA: Tending to the wounded.
[Canadian Armed Forces]

> The Canadian delegation reports to the Canadian government and the Canadian government only; it is for the Canadian government to decide in the case of thesè reports...what use is to be made of them in the course of normal diplomatic exchanges with other countries.

In reality, Pearson did not deny the charges, he only deflected responsibility. The representatives on the ICC were doing nothing unethical. But, that was not to say that their reports did not wind up in the U.S. State Department anyhow.

The partisan nature of the supervisory force affected the ability of Canadian observers to carry out the work of the commission. The ICCs were dependent upon local governments for transportation from their permanent posts to the investigation sites. In North Vietnam, it was common for a jeep to be broken down or a bridge to be washed out when the ICC wanted to investigate an incident. In response, Canadians soon began to turn a blind eye to South Vietnamese violations, especially those concerning armaments.

In 1965, the seven ICC teams in North Vietnam were removed by the government, ostensibly because the North Vietnamese could not guarantee their security during American air raids. With a full-scale war in progress and neither side respecting the original peace accord, it soon became clear that the ICC was both ineffective and obsolete. In 1972, it was disbanded.

A Pale Blue Helmet

Peace*keeping* is almost by definition a process doomed to failure. Peace will not be *made*, no matter how hard an international force strives to *keep* it, while the antagonists refuse to come to terms with each other. Officially, peacekeeping forces have no authority to intervene when hostilities break out. Their presence in any region is conditional on the approval of the parties involved, and can be revoked at any time. U.N. peacekeepers are caught more and more often in the crossfire of a region's chaos. They become one of the combatants, another faction in a particular conflict—sometimes unwillingly, sometimes willingly given their interests in a particular region.

The distinction between peacekeeper and peacemaker

should be kept in mind when evaluating peacekeeping missions both past and present. So too should the mandate of the peacekeeping mission—partisan or impartial, passive or active. For nearly 30 years, U.N. peacekeepers maintained peace on Cyprus. It was the failure of diplomatic efforts to find a lasting solution to the problem—and the recalcitrance of the Cypriots—that prolonged the need for peacekeeping.

Faced with constraints on their actions, it is not surprising that the lives of peacekeepers are constantly in danger and that international peacekeeping efforts are now regularly characterized as ineffective. As a Canadian Forces Major, in Cyprus in 1974, has remarked:

> It is almost axiomatic that, if one is going to insist on flitting about a battlefield trusting in what security a pale blue helmet might provide, eventually, somewhere, somebody is going to get hurt.

Suggestions For Further Reading

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