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Peacekeeping, 1965: The Canadian Military's Viewpoint

David A. Lenarcic

Peacekeeping has become a growth industry over the last few years, both in terms of the proliferation of missions and the numerous academic analyses of them. However, the historical context in which contemporary developments are unfolding is often lost in the shuffle. This certainly seems to be true in Canada, where the past apparently holds little relevance for the present when it comes to peacekeeping.

The seminal changes that have accompanied the emergence of the "post-Cold War" era have led Canada to seriously re-evaluate the peacekeeping role of the armed forces. Since 1993, two Parliamentary committee studies on new-age peacekeeping, a defence policy White Paper, and a government report on a United Nations rapid reaction force have appeared.

Yet, one would be hard-pressed to find in media and even scholarly accounts of these events any reference to the fact that thirty years ago the Canadian government was engaged in a very similar process of re-examination. An explosive expansion of peacekeeping activities, coupled with dissatisfaction with the UN's ad-hoc approach and the inability of peacekeeping to lead to peacemaking, acted as a catalyst for the launching of reappraisals within the Departments of National Defence and External Affairs.

In particular, in 1964 the Canadian government used the occasion of hosting an international conference in Ottawa of military experts on the technical aspects of peacekeeping to produce a bevy of studies on the Canadian experience. However, these were intended for circulation to delegates from other countries and were thus somewhat sanitized. Papers designed for Canadian eyes only are consequently much more revealing. The one re-printed here falls into that category. It provides a frank assessment based on first-hand experience and therefore

presents a fascinating snapshot of the Canadian military's outlook on peacekeeping during its 1960s hey-day.

The author of the report, Brigadier N.G. Wilson-Smith, had recently commanded the Canadian contingent in Cyprus. He had just drafted an appraisal of UNFICYP in which he had recommended that an extensive study of peacekeeping and its military implications be conducted. Some of his own views on this score are evident in the report published here. Canadians today — well acquainted with the dangers of peacekeeping by half-measures in the former Yugoslavia — will for instance have no trouble relating to the discussion of "Arbitration" in paragraph 9.

The Brigadier's earlier report on Cyprus also contained one of the earliest expressions of what has become an oft-quoted statement and in some circles conventional wisdom. "In a situation where men must stand between highly armed, trigger-happy fighters, a soldier's training and a strict military discipline is needed", Wilson-Smith wrote. "In short — this is not [a] job for a soldier but only a soldier can do this job."

Much of the report reproduced below revolves around this notion and the related question of peacekeeping training.¹ This issue remains a source of debate today and so its long historical roots seem worth re-visiting. For example, the February 1993 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs looking into peacekeeping noted that "The Canadian Forces has [sic] been adamant that training as a soldier to use force is precisely the training needed to be a good peacekeeper. But mediation is not a soldierly skill; it is not warlike or militaristic. It is the opposite of those attributes. Especially with soldiers trained for war, it needs to be encouraged and stimulated: they need training in it." In its

June 1993 examination of peacekeeping, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs likewise emphasized that “basic military training should be supplemented by special peacekeeping training which would enhance not only the knowledge soldiers have of the particular characteristics of the theatre of operations, but also the skills they will need to carry the mission through [such as] training in conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation.” This sounds very much like the argument which one Department of External Affairs official made 30 years earlier on the question of military indoctrination for peacekeeping when he asserted that, “it may be just as important and perhaps even more important to give political and diplomatic training to personnel who may be engaged in United Nations field operations.”

Reading Brigadier Wilson-Smith’s report, one wonders what he would think of such recommendations or, indeed, of the recent establishment of the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Centre. Might he judge them superfluous? Or would he acknowledge that the radically changing face of peacekeeping today requires new approaches? Conversely, might those currently serving in Canada’s military nod in agreement at the Brigadier’s observations? Or would they perceive them as outdated?

Similar questions could be asked of Wilson-Smith’s provocative comments in paragraph 12 regarding the connection between peacekeeping and morale. Major-General Clive Milner of Canada, who, ironically enough, served as UN commander in Cyprus, offered a different opinion to the 1993 Senate Committee:

There is nothing like the completion of a six-month or one-year assignment to a United Nations mission by a Canadian officer or soldier to raise his morale, because he feels that he has done something for himself, for his unit, for his uniform, for his country and for the world at large. There is a tremendous feeling of satisfaction when that young man or young woman comes home and is able to say, “I helped keep the peace. I may have helped save lives. I helped people in distress, people who were much worse off than I am ...” As an individual it raises morale. Collectively as a unit it certainly does, and therefore it contributes to the well-being of the Canadian Forces at large.

Excerpts from a Department of National Defence document which summarized responses to Brigadier Wilson-Smith’s report are also included here. “In our opinion,” the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff had indicated in a memorandum requesting comments on it, “this paper has been well-developed and can be quite useful as a guide for the type of forces that could be used in future peacekeeping operations in which Canada may become involved.” The second document suggests a broad consensus within the higher levels of the Canadian military that Wilson-Smith’s observations were generally accurate. Paragraph 10 is particularly intriguing. What is the motivation behind the desire of the Brigadier’s colleagues to keep his attitude toward the training and morale aspects of peacekeeping from becoming public knowledge? Do they wish to disguise a certain lack of enthusiasm for the role on the part of the armed forces?

At a time when severe funding cut-backs have some advocating — as others did in the 1960s when the three services were unified — that the Canadian Armed Forces should specialize in peacekeeping, these historical documents provide much food for thought. At the very least, they suggest that old peacekeeping debates neither die nor fade away.

Notes

1. The Canadian Army Annual Training Directive for 1964/65 listed “to train designated individuals and units to carry out...limited warfare including peacekeeping operations and security-type operations” as one of the aims of training in Canada. Such units received two to six months of specialist training prior to deployment. One major peacekeeping exercise was conducted annually. In addition, a week long orientation course was held each year for officers selected for UN service. Briefing and debriefing of personnel on UN duty was also regularly carried out. Although the subject of peacekeeping was included to some extent in courses at Canadian military schools, there were no special training schools in Canada for peacekeeping. (“Peacekeeping Operations - Questionnaire: Visit of USN Officer - Capt. C.B. Landes, USN.” 15 April 1965. NAC RG 24 Accession 83-84/167 Box 7162, File 2.5080.3 Part 3.)

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CONFIDENTIAL

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June 1965

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

AIM

1. To outline the strength levels and types of troops required for peacekeeping operations.

GENERAL

2. There are three levels of peacekeeping operations:
 - a. Observation, which is examination without participation.
 - b. Mediation, which involves intervening with the purpose of reconciliation.
 - c. Arbitration, which requires the application of judgement to settle a dispute, with the judge in full control.

OBSERVATION

3. Observation requires officers with sufficient military experience to recognize what is a significant tactical event, and to identify clearly military weapons and effects. They must be of sufficient rank to provide this experience, and also to ensure themselves freedom of movement and access to the senior officers of both sides of the dispute. This normally requires that these officers be of the rank of major, though in some cases captains could be employed.
4. The numbers required are dependent on the scale of the conflict and the distances involved. Normally however, given good communications and good mobility, it is possible for a relatively small number of officers to cover a wide area of operations.

MEDIATION

5. Unlike observation, mediation requires active participation with both sides in the dispute. Mediators must listen to the claims of both sides and present them to the opposing sides, and then attempt to arrange agreement by negotiation. Before mediation can commence there must be an agreed cease-fire. Troops must be interposed to supervise the cease-fire and observe and assess responsibility if it is broken.
6. In an active controversy neither side can be expected to present the truth when making their claims. Mediation, therefore, requires independent information. This requires the interposed forces in the area of engagement, and further forces in depth, all with sufficient training and equipment that they can exercise close observation over both sides.
7. The task of interposing and observation can be done by well trained soldiers, with the mediation being done by officers. A mediation force therefore requires trained and disciplined soldiers, a command structure and an attendant staff and liaison, communications, and logistic support. Reconnaissance elements with suitable equipment are required for surveillance in depth. Weapon establishment can be restricted to those weapons necessary for self-defence and the defence of the unit should one or other, or both, of the warring parties turn on the peacekeeping force. Reserves

are not required for the operation, though some reserves would be required to rotate troops for rest and recreation.

8. It is difficult to arrive at a scale of strength required for mediation, as needs are dependent on topography, distances and strength of the opposing parties. For example, more men are required in built-up area than in open ground.

ARBITRATION

9. Arbitration requires more direct participation by the peacekeeping force. It is necessary to judge conflicts, and therefore, even better intelligence is required. There must also be sufficient troops and weapon strength available to convince the conflicting sides that the peacekeepers are in fact in control. Arbitration therefore requires the same strength as mediation, plus the addition of reserves equipped with heavier weapons and equipment. The reserves must be of sufficient strength and mobility so that a strong peacekeeping force can be assembled locally which would be stronger than either of the opposing sides. As a rough guide, these reserves must be equal to one-third of the troops employed in interposing duties, and their equipment must give them mobility, strength and an impressive appearance.

QUALITATIVE REQUIREMENTS

10. In all forms of peacekeeping the requirement therefore is for officers and men who thoroughly understand war. They must have the respect and confidence of both sides in a dispute, and they will earn this respect principally from their soldierly bearing, discipline, equipment and their reputation as fighting men. In an atmosphere of violence and fighting, the only thing which earns respect is soldierly qualities. A peacekeeping force moreover must also be capable of sustaining itself administratively, and of living hard if necessary; they must be able to fight in their own defence and so must be able to operate as a complete unit.
11. It is also clear, therefore, that the peacekeeping requirement can best be met by units fully trained for war. Training for war produces the knowledge, technical skills, command and staff procedures, reconnaissance and intelligence techniques, logistic support systems, and the disciplines needed for peacekeeping. In point of fact, actual peacekeeping duties use possibly only one-third of the accumulated knowledge and experience of trained soldiers, but the other two-thirds of war training is needed to produce the confident, self-contained, flexible and resourceful officers and men that the role requires. It follows that a unit well trained for war is also trained for peacekeeping.
12. The suggestion that is often advanced that we should organize and train specialist units for peacekeeping is therefore unsound. Training for peacekeeping would be taken directly from training for war. No subject can be found which could be put on a syllabus of training for peacekeeping that is not already covered in the present syllabus for training for war, apart possibly from a general orientation on UN peacekeeping or on the proposed theatre of operations. Pure peacekeeping training moreover, would suffer from the absence of the drive, urgency and sense of purpose that can be instilled into men who are being trained for war. Peacekeeping is really pretty dreary pallid stuff; it does not stir men or develop a unit spirit. Further, the amount of training needed for peacekeeping would not fully extend men and would include boring repetition.
13. Moreover, the peacekeeping role does not require a special organization different from normal unit establishments. If we established a special peacekeeping force from first principles, the result would be units, HQ, signals, etc, looking very much like those we now have.
14. The present system, therefore, is correct and indeed has proved itself. Units should train for war and be earmarked for peacekeeping. Peacekeeping as a subject might be studied at staff colleges and the National Defence College, but should not form part of a soldier's training. Exercises of a peacekeeping nature, or with a UN background, would be useful but only to provide variety and to orient thinking on the subject.

CONFIDENTIAL

6 August 1965

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

1. A number of interesting and related comments have been received as the result of Brig Wilson-Smith's paper which should be of general interest to those staffs concerned with peacekeeping operations....
3. Para 2 - The size and type of a force required for a peacekeeping mission is determined as much by the kind of situation into which it is to be inserted as by the kind of activity in which it is to be engaged. Therefore, it is doubtful that the three levels or categories of peacekeeping operations mentioned adequately describe past and future operations. For example, a major peacekeeping role may be supervision of a truce...or an agreement...and...such supervisory operations may or may not involve all of the three levels described in the paper.
4. Para 3 - In an atmosphere of violence the one characteristic which earns the respect of the opposing sides is the soldierly qualities displayed by the officers and men of the peacekeeping force. There are many other factors which have to be taken into account as well when selecting suitable personnel for those tasks, particularly the officers who will be in personal contact with representatives of the opposing sides. The following are but a few of which have to be considered:
 - a. Rank;
 - b. Medical category;
 - c. Personal characteristics;
 - d. Experience; and
 - e. In some locations, ethnic origin and religion....
8. Para 10 - The only stated logistic qualitative requirement is contained in this paragraph, i.e., "A peacekeeping force, moreover, must also be capable of sustaining itself administratively and of living hard if necessary." Experience to date has shown that, while certain special arrangements have had to be made to fit the logistic needs of particular forces:
 - a. There has been no real difficulty in planning the logistic support of Canadian forces to detailed for peacekeeping operations; and
 - b. No special training has been required by any of the logistic personnel detailed for duty with peacekeeping forces.
9. Para 11 - While it is true to say that fully trained regular soldiers make the best peacekeeping forces for countries such as Canada, which have a long tradition of democracy and of respect by the military for the civil power, it is doubtful that this is true of all countries and all traditions. The value of troops, fully trained for war, as peacekeeping forces is likely to depend on the orientation of military training within the society from which they are drawn, and therefore we should exercise caution about generalizing on our own experience in this regard.
10. Para 12 - penultimate sentence - It is suggested that the thought expressed here should never be publicly stated or implied. The importance of peacekeeping in our national policy should not be downgraded in any way by statements which, even inadvertently, suggest an impatience with the peacekeeping role of the Force.
11. There was complete support for the main conclusion of the paper, "It follows that a unit (Canadian) well trained for war is also trained for peacekeeping."

[signed]
F.W. Ball, Air Vice Marshal
Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff