

There's a new peace 'warrior' in town

Pearsonian peacekeeping may be gone, but a new report says it's time for Canada to get back in the thick of UN operations

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Canadian supporters of a strong and combat-capable military have grown to detest any mention of Canadian soldiers returning to United Nations operations. They remember the bad old days of the 1990s when the UN piled up failure after failure and Canadian troops wearing blue helmets were abused, shot at and even killed on these missions. But now a new report, by Jocelyn Coulon of the University of Montreal and Michel Liégeois of Belgium's Université catholique de Louvain, says Ottawa should reconsider in light of significant changes in UN missions over the past 10 years.

Their report, *Whatever Happened to Peacekeeping: The Future of a Tradition* (commissioned in 2008 by the Calgary-based Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute and released in Ottawa today), concludes that the era of "classic" UN peacekeeping initiated by Lester Pearson in 1956 is virtually over, but that there's a significant demand today for peace "warriors." These are troops who, under UN and other mandates, are far more heavily armed than the peacekeepers of the past. They take on more dangerous missions that can include combat, and adhere to much more robust rules of engagement.

Mr. Coulon and Mr. Liégeois point out that European countries such as France, Germany and Italy – which, like Canada, all but abandoned UN operations in the mid-1990s – are now serving with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon. The Europeans went in after ensuring they would have full command of their forces, as they would not have been able to do 10 years ago – one of many changes in the way the UN mounts peace operations.

From the creation of the UN Emergency Force during the Sinai/Suez crisis of 1956, Canada prided itself as a major supporter of UN peacekeeping. In those days, peacekeeping usually involved placing lightly armed forces between antagonists who wished to stop fighting but who didn't trust each other enough to police their own ceasefires.

The rationale behind that "classical" peacekeeping, as Mr. Coulon and Mr. Liégeois refer to it, was that the warring parties would not harm the strictly neutral UN forces that stood between them. The antagonists would then be encouraged by the international community to replace what Winston Churchill once referred to as "war-war" with "jaw-jaw."

Although the great majority of Canada's military trained to fight the Russians and their Eastern bloc satellites during the Cold War, peacekeeping was a useful activity for Canada to undertake, not simply to bulk up the country's international reputation, but also to serve the interests of the West, as historian Sean Maloney and others have described. So Canada served on almost all UN missions until the failures of the late 1990s.

Mr. Coulon and Mr. Liégeois make no excuses for the UN's failures. Nor do they consider NATO's assumption of military responsibility for operations in Kosovo or Afghanistan – the latter with a UN mandate – to be illegitimate. They also don't question the validity of Canada's intervention in Afghanistan. What they do say is that recent UN successes in places such as Chad, Burundi, the Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic and Cambodia have proved successful under reinvigorated UN leadership.

The UN is now combining thousands of heavily armed troops with peace-building and development workers and experts in the reform of civil government, the judiciary and police forces. Thus Canada should again give the UN a try when considering future missions.

Those who believe that Canada's military is an important tool of Canadian diplomacy and a key instrument of national policy should carefully consider Mr. Coulon and Mr. Liégeois's case. Canada is one of the very few non-Security Council countries with an effective expeditionary military capability. The quick deployment of Canadian troops to Haiti showed that, as does Canada's operation in Afghanistan. Canada has a military that can fight. It can also set its own terms for participation in UN missions that may well serve Canada's interests or those of close allies.

Canada should never again approach UN missions with anything like the automaticity of the past. But with the right mix of military, diplomatic and aid resources, Canada could do itself and the world a lot of good on strategic UN operations.

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