

The world used to listen to Canada

BILL CARR, Lt. Gen (Ret) (feat. JACK GRANATSTEIN)

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Re: When Canada speaks, no one listens, Feb. 17.

While it was a long time ago, I was one of two Canadian Forces officers sent to the United Nations in New York to work with Dr. Ralph Bunche's assistant Brian Urquhart (Later Sir Brian) to put together the initial United Nations Emergency Force. (Bunch was the Under Secretary of the UN at the time.) The Canadian UN ambassador in New York was Sol Rae (Bob's dad) and the head of the Canadian team put together to help was the distinguished John Holmes who reported directly to Lester Pearson.

My impression still is that Canada was very much listened to at the General Assembly and in the Middle East. We were big enough to be heard, our amazing Second World War effort was well known, and we were not big enough to create suspicion that we might have political axes to grind internationally.

The furor over the Queen's Own Rifles was a tempest in a tea pot, and the antipathy to that unit's involvement was related to its royal name, not the uniform nor equipment its soldiers would use -which, coincidentally, was more or less identical to that used by the Egyptians, including the battle dress, inherited from the Second World War. I am surprised to read the contention in Dr. J.L. Granatstein's article, because the facts of the time do not support his thesis.

To cut a long story short, Lester Pearson presented the UNEF force design that we helped put together to the secretary general of the UN and it was accepted, with the modification that the Canadian unit would not be the Queen's Own Rifles. Gen. Burns had little to do with it and indeed appeared only once in New York. (He later became a UN employee as a full general with a uniform of his own design!) He had nothing to do with the later much larger operation in the Congo where Bunche was the secretary general's special representative and the commander was a Swedish General Von Horne. I was his UN Air Force Commander.

I do agree that today our influence in the world seems to have eroded greatly, especially during the last few years. But, perhaps there is reason to be more optimistic about the future than is suggested by Granatstein. And, perhaps too, our voice will once again be heard universally as that of an admired and caring world citizen