

THE DILEMMAS OF A COMMITTED PEACEKEEPER: CANADA AND THE RENEWAL OF PEACEKEEPING

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, Canadian military personnel have left Canada for foreign destinations on a number of occasions. Fortunately, with few exceptions, they left for peacekeeping rather than combat missions.

Over the years, Canadian peacekeepers have done their job so well that Canada's international reputation was greatly enhanced as a result. In most of the missions in which they participated, they were equipped only with jeeps, light weapons and the firm conviction that they were doing something worthwhile.

Today, however, Canadian peacekeepers increasingly require armoured vehicles, high calibre weapons, and additional training to do their work. Never before have so many Canadian soldiers from both the Regular and Reserve Forces been deployed around the world in peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping missions have multiplied rapidly in recent years and enjoy the international community's favour as never before. However, the end of the Cold War has brought major upheavals not only in the international situation, but also in expectations placed on peacekeeping operations. While acknowledging the importance of traditional peacekeeping operations, international public opinion also favours a more interventionist policy by the international community in regional and internal conflicts, if only to provide humanitarian assistance to victims.

As an ardent supporter of peacekeeping operations, it was natural for Canada to join the new wave of peacekeeping missions which have marked the international scene in recent months. As a result, in addition to engaging in traditional peacekeeping operations in which the belligerents have more or less agreed to end their fighting, Canadian troops are also involved in UN missions, as in the former Yugoslavia, where the combatants agree most of the time to let convoys of humanitarian assistance pass, but nevertheless continue their hostilities.

The risks facing Canadian peacekeepers in these new operations are on the rise, however. This new wave of peacekeeping missions also comes at a time when Canada's defence policy is being restructured as a result of the end of the Cold War. The fact that some Canadian military resources are in much greater demand than anyone could have imagined scarcely a year ago provides food for thought.

In light of this situation, the Committee undertook this study to examine the characteristics of recent peacekeeping operations, the ability of Canadian peacekeepers to carry out their duties, and the consequences of this activity beyond Canada's borders for Canadian military resources. Canada's participation in peacekeeping operations is such an important element of its commitment to the international community and the UN, that it is important to consider the implications of the new international situation and recent peacekeeping developments.