

Canadian Study on a United Nations' Rapid-Reaction Capability

The United Nations experimented with ways to use military observers immediately after the Second World War and deployed more substantive missions in Kashmir and Palestine in the late 1940s. However, "peacekeeping" did not become a well-known word until 1956, when Lester B. Pearson, then Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, proposed sending international forces to the Suez under the UN flag. For this accomplishment, Mr. Pearson was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize.

Ever since, support for, and participation in, UN peacekeeping operations has played a prominent role in Canadian foreign and defence policy. It is therefore appropriate that in 1995, the UN's 50th anniversary year, the Canadian government should take on the task of finding ways of improving the use of UN peacekeepers to help resolve conflicts.

The result of that work, a study entitled *Towards a Rapid-Reaction Capability for the United Nations*, was presented to the UN's 50th General Assembly in September 1995 by Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet. The study's recommendations are being reviewed by a group of UN members seeking ways to carry them out. Canada and the Netherlands are chairing the group.

Even though this is a time of fiscal crisis for the UN, there are high expectations that it will play a pivotal role in the emerging global security system. While there have been many improvements in how the UN undertakes peace operations, there have also been deficiencies in the many missions undertaken in the past five or more years.

Operations have increased in size, scope and number since the end of the Cold War, and the UN has not always been allocated the resources to carry out missions effectively. As a result, it has not been able to mobilize its peace operations quickly and respond effectively to crises.

Rwanda was a notable example. The critical lesson of the Rwandan experience is that modest but timely measures can make the difference between containing a situation or letting it spiral out of control.

The Canadian study's objective was to recommend changes, at all levels of the UN system, that would help it respond rapidly to crises. The report covers all aspects of peace operations, including financial issues, logistics, training, equipment and creating a UN headquarters for a rapid-reaction group.

To win wide support for the report, Canada consulted with other governments, particularly those who contribute the most troops; non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental institutions.