

It is worth recalling that Canadians have been participating for many years in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East, and that UNTSO continues to exist and to perform a useful role on the ceasefire lines. Our previous experience in the Middle East in 1956, which was the first major United Nations venture in peace-keeping, is naturally very much in our minds at this time. Sadly, we seem to be back where we were 17 years ago. In fact, the request to Canada to participate in the 1973 UNEF is due in great part to the fact that we have special skills and experience, not only in peace-keeping generally but in peace-keeping in the Middle East, and in the role that is now assigned to our contingent....

The original request from the Secretary-General for Canadian participation on October 27 was in terms of Canada supplying the logistic component of the force. That role has been assigned to us precisely because of the effective way in which Canada discharged it from 1956 to 1967, and the skills that our troops demonstrated in doing their job. Two aspects of our previous experience are relevant to the new task assigned to Canada in the same area. First, the way in which UNEF had to terminate its peacekeeping function in 1967 and evacuate the Middle East gave rise to a great deal of discussion, both at the United Nations and in Canada. From that unhappy episode certain lessons have been drawn.

There is no point in participating in a peacekeeping operation unless our participation is acceptable to all, and especially to the sovereign state upon whose soil the force is to be deployed. I can assure the House that we did not accept this task until the Secretary-General had given us formal assurance that the presence of a Canadian contingent would be acceptable to all parties, and especially to Egypt, since UNEF will be deployed on Egyptian territory. In addition, I confirmed the Egyptian agreement personally with the Foreign Minister of Egypt when I met him a few days ago in Washington.

Part of the difficulty encountered with the original UNEF in 1956 was that it did not come under the authority of the Security Council and did not have the unqualified backing of the great powers. Nor was the mandate of the force so clearly set out and accepted by the parties concerned. The first UNEF in the Middle East was a brilliant improvisation that brought the international community back from the edge of disaster but could not ensure peace. This time the super-powers jointly proposed a peacekeeping force, and all members of the Security Council, except China, approved.