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CANADA AND PEACEKEEPING

When Canadians think of their country's activities abroad, peacekeeping is one of the first to come to mind. Canada has participated in an overwhelming majority of peacekeeping operations mandated by the United Nations Security Council. The Government has clearly stated that peacekeeping is a very important component of Canada's contribution to the multilateral system. It is not just a question of continuing a tradition for which Canadians have a deserved international reputation; it is a question of making a solid contribution to international peace and security.

WHAT IS PEACEKEEPING?

The United Nations experimented with various applications of military observers immediately after the end of the Second World War and deployed more substantive missions in Kashmir and Palestine in the late 1940s. However, the term *peacekeeping* did not enter the popular lexicon until 1956, when Lester B. Pearson, then Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, proposed the deployment to the Suez of international forces under the UN flag. For this visionary accomplishment, Mr. Pearson was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize.

In his 1992 report to the Security Council entitled *An Agenda for Peace*, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacekeeping as:

... the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well. Peacekeeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace.

Traditionally, peacekeepers were placed between hostile parties to supervise cease-fires and, on occasion, the withdrawal of forces. In recent years, however, the nature of conflict has changed and the willingness of the international community to respond to new security challenges has increased. The nature of peacekeeping has had to be adapted. Peacekeeping resources are now employed in a variety of circumstances, ranging from cease-fire supervision to the delivery of humanitarian aid, the monitoring of elections and the clearing of mines. In Cambodia (1991-93), the United Nations was charged with disarming warring factions, repatriating refugees, ensuring respect for human rights, supervising important ministries of the national government and organizing provisional elections. In Somalia (1992-93) and Bosnia (1992-), peacekeepers were deployed not to maintain a cease-fire, but rather to ensure the distribution of relief supplies and to stabilize the situation.

Thus an important civilian component has been added to peacekeeping's traditional military character, and the term itself has taken on a rather elastic meaning, involving a mixture of conflict prevention, consolidation or restoration of peace, and the political and social reconstruction of ruined societies.

"I do not exaggerate the significance of what has been done. It would be futile in a quarrel between, or in opposition to, big powers. But it may have prevented a brush fire becoming an all-consuming blaze... and it could do so again in similar circumstances in the future.

"We made at least a beginning then. If, on that foundation, we do not build something more permanent and stronger, we will once again have ignored realities, rejected opportunities and betrayed our trust."

Lester B. Pearson accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Oslo, December 11, 1957

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