

Soldiers of Peace

When the United Nations sent 6 000 peacekeeping troops, including almost 1 200 Canadians, to the Sinai peninsula in 1956, a new era in international diplomacy was born. More than three decades later, Canada's leading role in the design and implementation of multilateral peacekeeping activities is still a great source of national pride.

Today, Canada participates actively in UN peacekeeping forces in Cyprus and the Middle East, and in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) established outside UN auspices to monitor implementation of the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. And when Central American leaders reached agreement on a regional plan for peace and reconciliation, Canada immediately offered the services of a professional design team to support the development of appropriate peacekeeping mechanisms. In many ways, this activity can be traced back to the day in 1956 when Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson, who later became Canada's prime minister, rose in the United Nations General Assembly to propose one of the most creative diplomatic advances of the post-war era.

Moving Back from the Brink

Modern peacekeeping grew out of a recognition that new methods would be required to deal with regional conflicts in the nuclear age.

When the United Nations was formed after the Second World War, it was anticipated that the world body would use a judicious blend of negotiations, non-military sanctions and military action to keep the peace. But as then UN Secretary-General U Thant observed in 1963, "there has been a gradual change in thinking on questions of international security. The idea that . . . war can be used by or on behalf of the United Nations to counter aggression and secure the peace seems now to be rather impractical."

In November 1956, the UN faced a potentially cataclysmic problem. A military conflict was raging in the Suez Canal zone, and there were fears that the situation could escalate. At Pearson's urging, the General Assembly established a peacekeeping force, the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I), under the command of another Canadian, Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. Burns. UNEF I would serve as an effective buffer between Israeli and Egyptian troops until May 1967.

Pearson believed the Suez crisis could help build a broad, international consensus in support of a negotiated political solution for the region. "What is the use of passing a resolution which brings about a ceasefire and a withdrawal?" he asked the Assembly. "What are we withdrawing to — the same state of affairs? . . . If we do not take advantage of this crisis to do something about a political settlement, we will regret it. The time has now

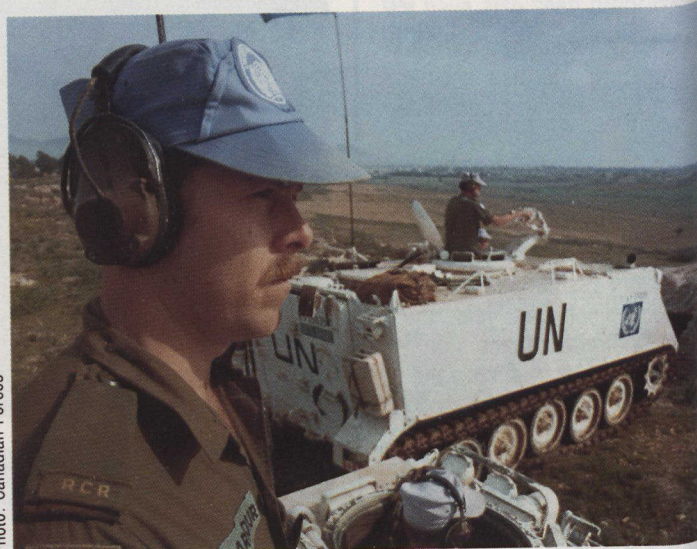


Photo: Canadian Forces

Keeping the peace.

come for the UN not only to bring about a ceasefire, but to move in and police the ceasefire and make arrangements for a political settlement." Pearson earned the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership in the Suez debate.

A Positive Approach

Since the 1950s, Canada has participated in every peacekeeping operation the United Nations has organized, and in multilateral discussions aimed at improving the effectiveness of modern peacekeeping. Canadian troops have also been involved in four control commissions or observer forces established outside the UN umbrella. With its enthusiasm for the process, and its strong advocacy of more equitable funding arrangements for peacekeeping forces, Canada has demonstrated its commitment to promoting international security.

Major Canadian peacekeeping initiatives have included:

- provision of up to 7 000 troops as part of a UN force established to control and limit the conflict in the Korean War theatre;
- continuous participation of up to 1 126 personnel in the UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), established in 1964 to prevent a recurrence of hostilities between the island's Greek and Turkish communities;
- assignment of 421 troops, including signal specialists and a small air contingent, to support a UN peacekeeping force in Congo (now Zaire) between 1960 and 1963;
- provision of 361 personnel to UN control commissions in Southeast Asia, 194 to UN forces in Lebanon, 112 to an observer mission along the India-Pakistan border, and small contingents to peacekeeping operations in Korea, West New Guinea, Yemen and Nigeria;