

Statement

95/24

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
IMPROVING THE UN'S RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY

MONTEBELLO, Quebec
April 8, 1995



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Dr. Polanyi, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I wish to thank you for accepting, with such promptness and enthusiasm, our invitation to participate in this international conference on the rapid-reaction capability of the United Nations.

This conference, and your participation in it, are of crucial importance to the Canadian government. In holding it, we hope to hear your ideas and your advice on what you think is the best way of approaching an fundamental issue: the United Nations' [UN] rapid-reaction capability.

Our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, our Minister of National Defence, the Honourable David Collenette, and I are anxiously awaiting the results of your work. I have heard about the workshops you have held since your arrival here, and am sure that the coming ones will be every bit as productive.

The idea of a Canadian study on rapid intervention arose last year out of the terrible tragedy in Rwanda. I have seen nothing since that time that could make me doubt the necessity of such a study. On the contrary. Outbreaks of ethnic, religious and nationalistic antagonism are the root causes of much conflict throughout the world. Although they may be internal conflicts, they can in many cases become real threats to international peace and security. Regardless of its nature or scope, we cannot disregard the human and humanitarian dimension of war.

The situations in Rwanda, Burundi and Haiti tell us that preventive diplomacy, rapid reaction and peace building must be considered as part of the same strategy. They do not work in isolation.

It is clear that much work needs to be done in the field of preventive diplomacy. This is one of the main proposals I made to the General Assembly in New York last September. We must work to attack the root causes of conflict before they explode. Indeed, defining a clear mandate for peacekeeping forces involves understanding the nature of conflict. The UN could do a better job if it could respond more coherently to early warning signs by effectively deploying the instruments at its disposal.

A rapid-reaction capability must also exist as a part of a series of processes within the UN and regional organizations. As I said earlier, it will fail if it exists in isolation. There must, above all, be a capacity to re-build societies in a post-conflict phase if rapid-reaction is going to work. And there must be clear links between what a rapid-reaction capability can do in the short run, and what other parts of the UN system must do as they take over from a rapid-reaction group in response to crisis.

At the outset of this study, we decided to focus primarily on the operational side of this issue. We have not, of course, divorced ourselves from the wider political context. We are well-aware of the crucial need to mobilize the political will in order to respond to crises. Indeed, I understand participants have been spending some time here identifying key political questions the United Nations is faced with when responding to crises, and I encourage you to continue this work.

Having said that, Canada's study has been based on the view that our best immediate contribution to this debate is mainly an operational one, focussing on providing the UN with new instruments as part of a wider process of conflict management.

Since my speech to the UN General Assembly last September, a lot of work has been done, in Canada and in a number of other countries as well, notably in the Netherlands and Denmark. This meeting today is critical to refining recommendations that I can put to the UN at the General Assembly next September. My colleague, the Minister of National Defence, mentioned yesterday a few ideas currently in play. Allow me to mention a number of others upon which we are currently focussing.

One of our concerns is providing the Security Council with timely military advice. We, and others, emphasize the importance of meaningful consultations with troop contributors. But we need to think of mechanisms for troop contributors to provide their views to the Security Council, particularly on the military side, as planning proceeds and as mandates are being negotiated.

On the "strategic level" of the UN system, we also need more coherent crisis management structures. Normal peacekeeping operations move at the same relative pace as planning, which, as we all know, can be slow. But crisis situations demand a different approach. The key, in our view, is advance planning and quick execution. Staff must be continuously acquiring information and developing contingency plans. All of this must be done in advance of crisis. Countries that have the capacity to help in this area must be brought in at an early stage. This is why I am attracted to the idea of an operational rapid-reaction headquarters that can put together these different requirements. I understand it has been in discussion here, and I look forward to hearing more about it.

We also need to do more work with regional organizations, at all three levels of actions I mentioned - preventive diplomacy, rapid reaction and peace building. The United Kingdom and France have launched initiatives in Africa. The Organization of African States [OAS] has stepped up its efforts in the field of conflict management. Canada also feels that it is now time for La Francophonie to play a preventive diplomacy function. Burundi is the first test that comes to mind, of course. In this regard, at

an extraordinary Francophonie ministerial meeting in Paris last week, we agreed to send a mission of good offices to Burundi. In keeping with our desire to see closer co-operation between multilateral and regional organizations, this ministerial delegation will coincide with one from the Organization of African Unity. The actions of both missions will complement each other.

We should also be exploring opportunities for regional peacekeeping training centres, regional stocks of equipment and possibly operational headquarters at a regional level. We intend to work with Latin American countries to see how a start can be made on these issues in Latin America, possibly through the OAS. The newly-created ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] Regional Forum could also be a valid interlocutor in these matters, as far as the Asia-Pacific Region is concerned.

A UN standing force remains a key goal for many of us. But it is not an "all or nothing" proposition. It is feasible, in my view, to develop what Major-General Dallaire calls a "Vanguard Concept." In that idea, standby arrangements play a key role. In the UN system, we need a better appreciation of the role that standby arrangements could play in making the UN more effective. Therefore, I will soon be proposing to the UN a meeting of countries that have established standby arrangements, or that are on the verge of doing so. We could explore the way ahead on standards, training, on joint exercises and the development of the Vanguard Group concept, and we could think on how to link this concept, over time, to the longer term goal of a permanent UN emergency force.

Another key point is the need for coherence in the UN's overall approach to crisis. This means workable arrangements among the humanitarian organizations, the non-governmental community and the UN, towards common objectives. There are innovations that can help achieve the unity of effort that is fundamental to effective action. We need a strong civil component in every peacekeeping mission, with a focal point for humanitarian coordination. The key to this is people. Canada is prepared to make available, for short-term assignments to the UN, trained personnel with linguistic and regional expertise, if missions need to be strengthened on the non-military side.

As we look ahead, we need to be thinking about keeping up the momentum. The International Conference on the Extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in New York next week, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting that I will be hosting in Vancouver next month, are both excellent opportunities to continue a meaningful dialogue on these issues with a number of key players. I also look forward to discussions with my NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] colleagues at our next

meeting in late May, and to my meetings in the context of the G-7 summit in June.

It may also be useful to call a meeting of like-minded Ministers before we table our report at the 50th General Assembly in September. All of these efforts are aimed at maintaining the initiatives at the political level.

A rapid-reaction capability is not the answer to every problem of instability and conflict. But it is one important instrument. In this, the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, we should aim high. We must give the UN the tools it requires to do its job well into the next century.

I thank you for coming to Montebello this weekend.