



## **A Backgrounder to *Whatever Happened to Peacekeeping? The Future of a Tradition***

### **The New “Peacekeeping”**

After a period of reflection and reform following the failure of certain missions during the 1990s, peace operations have been transformed over the past decade. They have gone through such great change that most experts now use the term “peace operations,” an expression that covers all of the practices leading to peace, conflict prevention, and consolidation of peace, as well as the maintenance and imposition of peace. They have also become essential instruments for managing or resolving conflicts. Today’s peace operations include:

- 40 missions on five continents to maintain, impose or consolidate peace;
- 200,000 peacekeepers (soldiers and military observers, police and civilian specialists);
- 6 international and regional organizations (UN, EU, NATO, the African Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Economic Community of Central African States) and two coalitions are currently involved in missions;
- Billions of dollars are being put towards the reconstruction of fragile states and offering a new beginning for the populations of 23 countries, mainly in Africa;
- A track record of success that is recognized by most researchers and research centres, such as the RAND Corporation and the Human Security Report.

If modern peace operations have become popular with decision makers as a tool for managing or resolving conflicts, it is because their refinement over the years has produced results. Today, the mandates for peace operations permit:

- The establishment of confidence between the parties and support of the political process;
- The arrest and trials of war criminals in international tribunals;
- The creation or reinforcement of State structures and the supervision of elections;
- Disarmament and mine clearing;
- The reintegration of child soldiers and militias;
- The protection of civilians, particularly women and children;
- The reform of the security sector;
- The rehabilitation of infrastructure, hospitals, schools, etc.; and
- The creation of thousands of local jobs;

The success of peace operations is now even acknowledged by a growing number of Western countries that abandoned them in the 1980s. There are many indications of this renewed confidence:

- In 2006, seven European countries reinforced the Lebanon mission (FINUL);
- In September 2009, during an unprecedented meeting, President Barack Obama addressed the countries that contribute troops to the UN and promised a sustained commitment from the United States;
- In February 2010, the Defence Green Paper in the UK emphasized that “the UN’s unique role in the international architecture, building peace, security and governance is more important than ever.”

### **The Return of Canada**

In a few months, Canada will begin the withdrawal of its military contingent in Afghanistan after a decade of deployment there. During these years, Canadian government authorities have preferred to commit Canada to military interventions that take place outside of the UN structure and, in the particular case of Afghanistan, in an anti-insurgency role. This choice is perfectly legitimate; however, Canadians and their elites should also recall that Pearson left a legacy that has undergone an astonishing transformation and has great vitality. The entire world now relies on peace operations – whether the original or newer versions – as a preferred instrument for managing or resolving conflicts.

Canada, with this great tradition and the exceptional and courageous experience of its soldiers in Afghanistan, is now in a position to re-engage in peace operations. For this purpose, it can rely upon:

- The massive support of Canadians who are still very attached to peacekeeping;
- Experienced and well-equipped Canadian soldiers who are ready and able to meet the challenges of peace operations;
- A reinforced and effective UN planning and decision-making structure;
- International and regional organizations that are ready to support the UN or assume its role;
- European, American, Australian and New Zealander allies already active in building coalitions or committing themselves to the work of international organizations.

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