

*Toronto Star*, August 10, 2016

PEACEKEEPING

## HOW WE CAN KEEP THE PEACE

Canada's strategy will have to include the experience of the past, as well as the skills and forward-thinking of the present

THE STAR'S VIEW

Canada's military is very familiar with war, after a deadly decade in Afghanistan. But that doesn't mean it will be easy to answer Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's call to plunge back into the world's conflict zones as peacekeepers, in spite of Canada's once stellar reputation.

As Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan arrives in Africa on a fact-finding mission for prospective peacekeeping missions, a new chapter will be unfolding in the country's long involvement with keeping the peace.

Since the 1950s, when Prime Minister Lester Pearson famously won the Nobel Prize as an architect of international peacekeeping, things have changed dramatically for the men and women in blue helmets. Peacekeepers do not simply secure borders between once warring countries. In the 21st century they operate as multi-layered teams, and the scope of a peacekeeping mission includes civilians, police and volunteers.

They must not only maintain peace and security, while protecting vulnerable civilians, but be ready to facilitate a political process, assist in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, support elections, protect and promote human rights and help to restore the rule of law.

It's a tall order. And the military plays a leading role, although a defensive rather than offensive one. "Peacekeeping requires specialized training as it is a more complex and conceptually challenging task than war fighting," says peacekeeping authority Walter Dorn of the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. With the retirement of peacekeeping veterans, cuts to training for officers, and drastic reduction in the number of those sent on overseas missions over past decades – to less than 30 military personnel worldwide – there's an urgent need for a reboot, he says.

One way would be scaling up training to meet the new expectations. The new generation of peacekeepers needs to be adept at more than combat. That could require a new training facility to replace the now-defunct Pearson Peacekeeping Centre.

At the UN this September, Canada could make its mark by announcing its new peacekeeping strategy for expanding its deployment of military personnel, including a bigger role for women. It could also promote an idea whose time has been coming for

too long: the creation of a permanent UN rapid-reaction force to stop the spread of conflicts before they spiral out of control.

Tentatively named the United Nations Emergency Peace Service, this is the concept of Canadian peacekeeping expert Peter Langille. “If we had something like this in Darfur, it could have saved many lives,” he says. With some 16,000 dedicated personnel chosen by the UN, it would deploy a force for the crucial first six months of a conflict, giving time for a peacekeeping unit to arrive.

Although widely endorsed by experts, it hasn’t yet gained political commitment. But its estimated \$3 billion startup cost is far less than the trillions of dollars and millions of lives lost in wars, and it’s a project Canada could pioneer.

With the Trudeau government’s determination to be “back” on the international scene, Canada has much to contribute. It needs the experience of the past, but also the skills, and the forward-thinking of 2016.

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