

**What Canada has done
and should be doing
at the United Nations**

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**THE
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Revitalizing an Agenda for Peace

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The current outlook for global security is worrisome. While our common security depends on governments working together, how can we generate the sense of common cause and the momentum that is now required? With one step the UN might improve its capacity to prevent armed conflict and protect civilians.

After the Cold War, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented *An Agenda for Peace*, with a bold call for preventive action, including new peacekeeping and peacebuilding mechanisms. His report was prefaced with a caution that, "...the search for improved mechanisms and techniques will be of little significance unless this new spirit of commonality is propelled by the will to take the hard decisions demanded by this time of opportunity."

The idea of a permanent United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) stemmed largely from Canada's response to *An Agenda for Peace*, as well as the Secretary-General's request for a UN rapid reaction force. Rather than rely on slow, conditional standby peacekeeping arrangements for renting national personnel, a UNEPS would provide the UN with its own standing service to fulfill assigned tasks -- a rapid and reliable first responder to save time, lives and resources. Yet then, as now, governments were reluctant to take this step for a more effective UN.

Of course, peacekeeping didn't die and the demand didn't diminish. Currently there are over 117,000 peacekeepers (civilian as well as uniformed personnel) from 122 countries deployed to 17 UN operations worldwide, a nine-fold increase since 1999. Considerable progress is evident in the UN's foundation for peacekeeping with new contributors, improved command and control procedures, a global supply and support system, a cost-effective standing police capacity, as well as doctrine for integrated complex operations. The UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support have expanded into highly professional organizations. And, thanks largely to the pioneering work of Canada's Walter Dorn, the use of surveillance and

monitoring technology is improving situational awareness and safety in many operations. Gone are the days when ad hoc improvisation was necessary to 're-invent the wheel in the dark'.

Yet three long-standing problems remain. The UN has insufficient capacity for rapid deployment, prevention and protection.

Calls for rapid deployment have accompanied most recent operations, but there is seldom support from contributing states ready and willing to deploy rapidly. Further, in the current UN system, planning, mounting and deploying a new operation involves a long list of essential tasks that slow response times. UN documents acknowledge this process now requires from six to twelve months, which is far from rapid or adequate for pressing emergencies.

Protecting civilians at risk is another uphill struggle. A recent internal audit found that while UN mandates have increasingly prioritized protection of civilians, the national troops available are often unwilling to assume the risks entailed.

While no panacea, a permanent UN Emergency Peace Service would help. It is intended as a first responder, effectively a multifunctional 'UN 911', to address the critical gap in the first six months of complex emergencies. UNEPS was designed to help prevent armed conflict and genocide, protect civilians at extreme risk, ensure prompt start-up of demanding operations, and address human needs in areas where others either cannot or will not.

Of course, such an idea will inevitably raise concerns over the financial costs, the political will and whether it may be managed effectively.

Is it affordable? Better yet, a UNEPS would be cost-effective! The UN already suffers from insufficient funding, with all operations constrained by austerity and the mantra of 'do more with less'. Soon, the budget for peacekeeping will exceed what had been deemed the 'sacred ceiling' of \$8 billion. UNEPS would entail a start-up cost of approximately \$3 billion and annual recurring costs of another \$1 billion. This should be contrasted with annual global military spending, now nearing \$2 trillion. Worse, the Global Peace Index estimates that the annual cost of war has risen to \$9.8 trillion. It would be a great saving if the UN was able to deter armed conflict, or at least prevent it from escalating and spreading. A UNEPS would reduce the need for many new operations and reduce the requirement for later, larger, longer and costlier operations.

Could the UN manage a UNEPS or provide the support required? As noted, the UN's foundation for peace operations has improved, with DPKO and DFS already managing and supporting over 120,000 personnel in field missions around the world. A UNEPS would have a static operational headquarters and two mobile

missions HQs to help administer, organize and direct operations. Its logistic support could either be provided internally or by the new UN global support system.

Could the Security Council be trusted not to abuse a UNEPS? Security Council decisions are followed, analyzed and reported world-wide. As Security Council members would share in the investment required to develop a UNEPS and provide strategic direction, they should be even more inclined to show responsible leadership and ensure its success. For the Security Council, the "will" to do a job may often depend upon having an appropriate tool for the job, preferably one that is readily available, reliable and recognized as legitimate. At least when you have an appropriate tool, there are fewer excuses for failing to attempt a task.

At present, there is insufficient political will to support the development of a UNEPS. Nevertheless, over the years there have been seven occasions – after bad wars and genocide—when governments have attempted to generate support for vaguely similar proposals (a UN standing force). In the near future taking a few steps to revitalize *An Agenda for Peace* may not seem like such a hard decision.

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