

The UN at 70: A return of Canada, the Peacekeeper

Contributing personnel and technology can improve Canada's standing with the U.S. and the international community, all the while helping to modernize peacekeeping operations

BY: A. WALTER DORN / OCTOBER 23, 2015

With Justin Trudeau as the next Prime Minister of Canada, the prospects for Canadian service to the United Nations just brightened. Canada can now offer the United Nations a tremendous birthday present as the world organization turns 70: a Canadian return to peacekeeping. Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada effectively withdrew from UN peacekeeping a decade ago, leaving the rest of the world to try to figure out how to foster peace and prevent conflict.

The world organization now deploys more soldiers on operations than any other organization, including NATO and the United States. The United Nations faces unprecedented demand for its military peacekeepers, now numbering **92,000**. Amazingly, Canada provides fewer than **30** of these. Not 3,000 or even 300 but 30. So while the United Nations surged to an all-time high in troops, Canada sank to an all-time low. That surprised the world, given that Canada proposed and commanded the first peacekeeping force, winning foreign minister Lester B. Pearson the Nobel Peace prize after ending the 1956 Suez Crisis with UN forces. Canada continued as the **top contributor** of personnel during the Cold War. Even in early 1990s, Canada remained the number one peacekeeper

with over 3,000 military personnel in UN operations. But **Canada** has virtually disappeared from the peacekeeping map.

So what can Canada offer now? For starters, it can provide Canadian Forces personnel at UN headquarters. In New York over 70 nations provide military officers to the UN's peacekeeping department but Canada presently offers none. Given Canada's current capacity and past leadership, at least a half-dozen Canadian Forces personnel could be sent to these UN-paid positions.

Furthermore, Canada can provide leaders in the field. Canadian generals commanded four UN missions in the 1990s but none since. The Congo mission provided several missed opportunities in the past decade for Canadian leadership and could be a means of service again. The Haiti mission would also greatly benefit from Canadian leadership. The Brazilians have commanded since the mission's inception in 2004 and would happily turn over the reins to Canada. The Canadian Forces' bilingual capability is especially useful in French-speaking countries like Haiti, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. Also the United Nations is keen on increasing the percentage of female peacekeepers and leaders, with the first **female** force commander in UN history (a Norwegian) being appointed last year to head the Cyprus mission. Canada can also provide top-notch female officers for such service.

Larger unit contributions, of battalion size, would be warmly welcomed but Canada has not deployed any new sizeable units since the Eritrea/Ethiopia mission at the turn of the century. In 2006, Canada **withdrew** its 200 logisticians from Golan Heights where they had helped separate Syrian and Israeli forces for over 30 years. At the time, the Afghanistan campaign made the Canadian Forces a single-mission military to the detriment of the larger world. Post-Afghanistan, several European nations are already contributing units to UN peacekeeping. For instance, The Netherlands and Sweden have sent advanced units to Mali, including special forces, intelligence units and Apache helicopters. If battalion-sized units (600-800 strong) are not possible, Canada could certainly provide smaller units with advanced capabilities.

The United Nations is often short of specialized units, for example, for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, engineering, and signals, areas in which Canada was *the* pioneering nation. Canada's **Coyote** reconnaissance vehicles served excellently in Ethiopia/Eritrea and they would be extremely useful in many current UN missions.

The United Nations is chronically short of military helicopters. So Canadian Griffons and Chinooks would make a real difference to provide observation and transportation of troops and supplies. To help deploy troops from around the world into mission areas, Canada's heavy lift C-17 would be greatly welcomed. The U.S. has provided strategic lift

into missions often in the past but it now seeks to share the burden.

Unlike NATO, the United Nations reimburses contributing countries for a significant part of their costs. So peacekeeping is much less of a drain on national resources, as well as operating in safer, more permissive environments, though still requiring combat-ready forces.

If Canada is to become once again the prolific peacekeeper, it will need to renew its training and education for UN operations. The military now carries out less than a quarter of the peacekeeping training activities it did a decade ago. The decline of peacekeeping training is epitomized by the **closure** of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in 2013, after the loss of federal funding. The Centre once excelled in training soldiers, police and civilians from Canada and around the world, including the United States.

The **U.S. government** is now placing renewed emphasis on peacekeeping. It seeks to become a leading “technology contributing country” to directly aid the world organization. By working with the United States to enhance UN peacekeeping technologically and otherwise, Canada could live up to a long-standing and proud tradition, gain respect and influence in both Washington and New York, and contribute to a more peaceful world. It can also help the United Nations make the next evolutionary step in peacekeeping: providing robust well-equipped and technologically enabled forces for the protection of civilians. Canada military personnel have served so well in peacekeeping in the past and can do so again.

When the United States and the United Nations call upon nations to make greater contributions, Canada has always had the means to respond. Now it might have the will as well.

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