

UNEF: The Origins and Realities of Canadian Peacekeeping

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When the Trudeau government was elected in October 2015, it did not take long for government officials and political observers to announce that “Canada is back.” Launching a high-profile bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, the prime minister announced: “we need to focus on what brings us together, not what divides us. For Canada that means re-engaging in global affairs through institutions like the UN. It doesn’t serve our interests – or the world’s to pretend we’re not deeply affected by what happens beyond our borders.”¹ Peacekeeping was one of the ways in which Canada was to re-engage with the world, revitalizing the myth that peacekeeping is where Canada finds success on the world stage. But the reality behind the myth certainly questions the idea of “success.”²

Canada’s Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan – an experienced and decorated peacekeeper in his own right – led a much publicized fact-finding mission to Africa in August 2016 to decide on the de-

1. Canada, “Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Address to the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” available at <http://pm.gc.ca/>.

2. See Canada, “Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter,” available at <http://pm.gc.ca/>.

ployment of Canadian peacekeepers: yet it took almost two years before portions of a substantive peacekeeping deployment plan – Canada’s support for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was announced.³ Even Canada’s hosting of the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference produced few substantive policy commitments. In part, the delay can be chalked up to uncertainty regarding Canadian-American relations and the extent of Canada’s operational commitments to NATO and other existing military obligations. Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Sajjan also clearly stated that Canada would not “fast track” any peacekeeping deployment, but rather would do it “responsibly and thoughtfully” to make “sure that we get it right so that we can have the maximum contribution on the ground.”⁴ More importantly, however, there was a sense of reticence on the part of some policymakers and members of the public due to the seemingly “new” realization that peacekeeping is dangerous and success is often elusive. The response to the Mali announcement highlighted this: much of the initial criticism focused on the fact that the mission that Canada announced was actually quite dangerous, as if Canada should only have chosen the safest option for its troops, rather than where the need was the strongest or where Canadian intervention could be most effective. This realization that peacekeeping is indeed a dangerous undertaking, however, is hardly a recent development. The Canadian Armed Force’s (CAF) first major UN deployment with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in 1956 demonstrated that peacekeeping operations were difficult and dangerous undertakings and subsequent missions did nothing to dispel that truth. To make sufficiently informed decisions about future peacekeeping deployments, one must push beyond the myth that has enveloped Canadian peacekeeping to arrive at an historically accurate vantage point from which modern-day military operations can be more

3. Department of National Defence, Royal Canadian Air Force, “RCAF to deploy Air Task Force to UN Mission in Mali,” available at <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/>.

4. Bruce Campion-Smith, “Canada won’t be rushed into military peace mission, Trudeau says,” *Toronto Star* (25 March 2017), available at <https://www.thestar.com/>.

soundly judged. It is in the details of Canada's first major peacekeeping mission with UNEF – the details of its inception, mandate, and withdrawal; the details of its financing; and the details of life on the ground – that the value of history can be found and lessons may be gleaned for Canada's future forays into peace support operations.⁵

The myth of Canadian peacekeeping was a Cold War construct which promoted the idea that Canada was a natural peacekeeper, altruistically focused on the cause of world peace.⁶ Some of this has been explored by Walter Dorn in the previous chapter. It should be noted that the myth is not a complete fabrication, and altruism and Canada's national self-interest need not be construed as mutually exclusive. Yet Lester Pearson's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Suez Crisis were entirely in Canada's self-interest, in keeping with his famous saying that "foreign policy is, after all, merely domestic policy with its hat on."⁷ Finding a way to extricate the British from the Suez debacle helped to bridge the gaping chasm between Canada's two closest allies, the United Kingdom and the United States, and maintained relationships within NATO, the UN, and the Commonwealth, all cornerstones of Canadian foreign policy. Interjecting a peacekeeping force between Egypt and Israel helped reduce tensions in the Middle East and prevented a regional conflict escalating to a nuclear showdown between the two Superpowers. All of these were worst case scenarios for Canada, but finding a peaceful resolution pro-

5. In Chapter 4 Michael Holm expands on the American situation regarding UN peacekeeping – public support and governmental reluctance – a situation not unlike Canadian involvement with the Mali mission.

6. For a glimpse into some of the debate behind the myth see: J.L. Granatstein, "Canada and Peacekeeping: Image and Reality," *Canadian Forum* (August 1974): 14–19; Lane Anker, "Peacekeeping and Public Opinion," *Canadian Military Journal* 6.2 (Summer 2005): 23–32; Sean Maloney, "From Myth to Reality Check: From Peacekeeping to Stabilization," *Policy Options* (September 2005): 40–46; Walter Dorn, "Peacekeeping Then, Now and Always," *Canadian Military Journal* 6.4 (Winter 2005–2006): 105–106; Eric Wagner, "The Peaceable Kingdom? The National Myth of Canadian Peacekeeping and the Cold War," *Canadian Military Journal* 7.4 (Winter 2006–2007): 45–54; Michael K. Carroll, "Peacekeeping: Canada's past, but not its present and future?" *International Journal* 71.1 (2016): 167–176.

7. L. B. Pearson, "Canada's Role as a Middle Power," in *Canada's Role as a Middle Power*, ed. J. King Gordon (Toronto: CIIA, 1968), 195.

vided benefit for the entire world.

Propelled by Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his role in creating UNEF and bringing about an end to the Suez Crisis, the myth has subsequently taken on a life of its own and peacekeeping, according to one journalist, "is in our genetic code as a nation."⁸ While there are elements of truth in the myth, it has ultimately led to unrealistic expectations about what Canada, and the blue berets, can accomplish on the world stage. Re-examining UNEF from a perspective that is more realistic and not coloured by a desire to highlight or glory in Canada's contribution, allows policymakers to create a more accurate definition of peacekeeping "success" that includes efforts towards peacemaking and also allows for a public understanding of the real risks and dangers that the Canadian Forces and civilian personnel undertake each time Canada supports a mission.

It is often forgotten that Canada was, initially, a very reluctant peacekeeper. Canada was not a part of the first official UN observer mission in the Middle East in 1948 – the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) – and the following year when the UN sought support for an observer force to keep the peace between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, Canada's Cabinet, in the words of one minister, was "allergic" to the idea.⁹ Yet Cabinet ultimately held little sway over the conduct of foreign affairs and the new Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent, had confidence in his Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester Pearson. Both Pearson and St. Laurent realized that boots on the ground would provide Canada with a measure of international credibility and four CAF officers were duly deployed to the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). Five additional soldiers – including General E.L.M. Burns as the force commander – were assigned to UNTSO in 1954. These are hardly the numbers upon which myths and

8. Carol Off, *The Lion, the Fox & the Eagle: A Story of General and Justice in Yugoslavia and Rwanda*, Toronto, Random House, 2000, 2.

9. "Canada and Peacekeeping Operations," Report no. 4, Directorate of History, Canadian Forces Headquarters, 22 October 1965; DHH, Cabinet Conclusions, 13 January 1949, LAC, RG 2, vol. 2643.

legends are built. The cost of seconding nine officers to UN duty was negligible, yet there was little enthusiasm for peacekeeping among Canadian military officials. The idea of unarmed observers walking along a demarcation line with a pair of binoculars and writing reports held little appeal to soldiers who had come of age storming Juno beach and fighting in the epic battles of the Second World War. Approximately 200 military personnel and diplomats from External Affairs were assigned to the International Control Commissions in Indochina in 1954 and, while this was not a UN mission, it was nonetheless viewed by officials in National Defence headquarters as a drain on limited resources that should more appropriately be directed towards Europe and NATO. It was not until after the deployment of UNEF in 1956, and the international recognition that came along with it, that Canada, and its military, became enamoured with peacekeeping.¹⁰

Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956 shocked the world, but appeared, on the surface, to have little direct effect on Canada. "This is primarily a European matter," the Minister of National Defence commented a week after the fact. "It is not a matter which particularly concerns Canada. We have no

10. While public opinion in Canada has been supportive of peacekeeping operations since the creation of UNEF the academic literature has, as of yet, been unable to pinpoint an exact date as to when public expectations became a prime motivator compelling Canadian governments to act in the service of peace. Public opinion was in favour of contributing to the Congo mission in 1960, but as Kevin Spooner deftly demonstrates in his work its influence was not decisive. Likewise, the Liberal government had pressing foreign policy concerns that went hand in hand with their decision to contribute to UNFICYP in 1964. Nonetheless, by this point in time peacekeeping had become a major plank of the 1964 White Paper on Defence and was, on some level, embraced by successive governments throughout the rest of the 20th century. Military policy makers always prioritized their Cold War alliance responsibilities, but embraced peacekeeping once they realized that public support for UN peacekeeping could be harnessed for justifying increased military spending. See, among others, Kevin A. Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping 1960-64* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), Sean M. Maloney, *Canada and UN Peacekeeping : Cold War by Other Means, 1945-1970* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), Norman Hillmer, "Peacekeeping: Canada's Inevitable Role," in *War in the Twentieth Century: Reflections at Century's End*, ed. Michael A. Hennessy and B.J.C. McKercher (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

oil there. We don't use the Canal for shipping."¹¹ Yet the economic and psychological importance of the Suez Canal to Great Britain, and the impact that could have upon Canada, did not escape Pearson's notice. Nor did the growing divide in rhetoric espoused by leaders in United Kingdom and the United States. From the Canadian perspective Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal opened a Pandora's box – unleashing competing and potentially divisive interests in Canadian foreign policy.

The lid finally came off with Israel's invasion of Egypt on 29 October 1956. Four days later the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of all troops in the Suez region. Canada was one of six notable abstentions in the vote, with Pearson reasoning that while the goal was worthy, the resolution was inadequate in dealing with the essence of the crisis. "The resolution does provide for a cease-fire and I admit that that is of first important and urgency," Pearson explained to the General Assembly. "But it does not provide for any steps to be taken by the United Nations for a peace settlement, without which a cease-fire would be only of temporary value at best."¹² Yet the "Canadian resolution" which laid the groundwork for UNEF, that was passed 24 hours later, had little more bite.

To achieve widespread appeal, the Canadian-sponsored resolution shrewdly avoided going into detail and simply placed responsibility for the creation of a peacekeeping force in the hands of the Secretary-General. Calling for a peacekeeping force to "secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities,"¹³ the resolution provided a general idea of the conflict resolution mechanism but provided no clear vision of how to resolve the underlying problems in the Middle East. The result, according to one observer, "was a set of general principles which pleased nobody one hundred per cent but which everyone could, without too much reluctance,

11. Quoted in Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 November 1956, Fourth (Special) Session, Twenty-Second Parliament, Official Report, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1956, p. 13.

12. United Nations, General Assembly Official Records (GOAR), 562nd Plenary Meeting, ES-I, 1 November 1956.

13. United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution 998 (ES-I), 3 November 1956.

accept.”¹⁴ The resolution passed by a vote of 57 to 0, with 19 abstentions.

The speed at which UNEF was subsequently organized was nothing short of amazing. Within 48 hours of the initial resolution being passed, the Secretary-General was able to cobble together his initial report, and in little more than a week later troops were on the ground with a mandate for peace. Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Finland, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia all contributed troops to this pioneering peacekeeping mission and offers from a dozen other nations had to be turned down. According to Under-Secretary General Ralph Bunche, UNEF was “the most popular army in history, an army which everyone fights to get into.”¹⁵ Whether consciously or not, it was with UNEF that the shape of UN peacekeeping really came into being. A 6,000 strong, lightly armed, 10 nation force, UNEF was, in the words of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, designed to be “para-military in nature,” though “not a force with military objectives.”¹⁶

Yet despite the initial level of success in creating the force, Hammarskjöld freely admitted that “In order to gain the necessary time, I accepted a certain lack of clarity.”¹⁷ The Secretary-General was forced to concede the supremacy of Egyptian sovereignty over the UN mission, a decision that Pearson recognized, somewhat prophetically,¹⁸ the UN might later come to regret. Yet it was a political trade-off without which the force never would have come into being. Even when UNEF’s mandate was amended to include the patrolling of the Israeli-Egyptian border in February 1957, and the threat of conflict was no longer an imminent concern, no attempt was made to direct the UN to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Almost a decade before Egypt played the sovereignty card and insisted

14. Quoted in Peter Calvocoressi, *Suez: Ten Years After*, ed. Anthony Moncrieff (New York, Pantheon Books, 1967), 133.

15. Quoted in Brian Urquhart, Ralph Bunche (New York, W.W. Norton, 1993), 270.

16. United Nations General Assembly, A/3302, 6 November 1956, available at https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ls/Urquhart_A-3302_e.pdf

17. United Nations General Assembly, A/3302, 6 November 1956, available at https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ls/Urquhart_A-3302_e.pdf

18. Comments by the Honourable Lester B. Pearson to Questions put to him by Mr. Yousuf Karsh, September 1958, LAC, MG26 N2, Vol. 89.

upon UNEF's withdrawal, Pearson lamented that "the intervention of the United Nations was incomplete and only...partially successful." In Pearson's opinion the UN "failed to take advantage of the atmosphere of crisis and anxiety by tackling the problems, especially those of relations between Israel and her Arab neighbours, which brought about the crisis in the first place."¹⁹ General Burns, the most visible Canadian after Pearson to be involved with the conflict, also indicated that he would not wish to remain as the force commander, nor did he think that Canadian troops should be maintained with UNEF, unless a permanent solution to the problem was actively being sought.²⁰ Nonetheless, so long as UNEF was able to facilitate a peaceful status quo in the Middle East, there was little impetus for diplomats to delve into the centuries-old debate surrounding the Arab-Israeli crisis, and nothing in the mandate of the peacekeeping mission required movement towards such a goal.

Peacekeeping, as it developed, was a far cry from what Pearson had originally envisaged. The presence of peacekeepers along the Israeli-Egyptian border was never intended to be of an indeterminate duration, nor was support for UNEF intended to be dependent on the dictates of individual UN member nations. Pearson regretted not insisting on a stronger mandate to deal with the underlying issues at UNEF's inception, though recognized that at the time it may have severely delayed or even scuttled the peacekeeping effort altogether. Time was of the essence, lest a regional conflict escalate to a global, and nuclear, scale. A decade later, when Egypt demanded the removal of UNEF's troops in 1967, the UN Secretary-General felt compelled to accede to the request and Pearson was forced to wistfully watch the drama unfold as war again broke out in the Middle East. A careful look at UNEF should dissuade UN officials from compromising on a mission's mandate and creating a situation in which the nations in conflict, rather than the UN itself, are the arbitrators of its presence.

Laudable as UNEF's creation was, member states felt little compunc-

19. Comments by the Honourable Lester B. Pearson to Questions put to him by Mr. Yousuf Karsh, September 1958, LAC, MG26 N2, Vol. 89.

20. Cairo to External, 24 December 1956, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 25, Vol. 6109, file 50372-40 [pt. 11.2].

tion to pay the costs associated with peacekeeping which left the UN teetering on the verge of bankruptcy throughout much of the 1960s. It was originally envisioned that the majority of peacekeeping costs would be borne by the UN, with contributing nations only picking up the tab for their individual troops' equipment and salaries.²¹ Budgeted at \$25 million for its first year – almost half the regular UN budget – the Secretary-General deemed it necessary to fund UNEF outside of the regular budget to ensure the peacekeeping force had access to the funds in a timely manner. However, not including UNEF in the regular UN budget made the force's costs seem extraordinary to some members.

In December 1956, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 1089 by a vote of 62 to 8 with 7 abstentions, establishing that the costs of UNEF should be apportioned among the UN member states using the regular assessment scale.²² While the negotiations surrounding the resolution had been difficult and complex, given the fact that members of the General Assembly had originally approved the creation of UNEF and had also approved a mechanism for its financing, it was perhaps not entirely unreasonable for the Secretary-General to expect that UN members would remit payments in a timely manner. Few, however, were truly willing to follow through financially in support of such an expensive collective policy.

Ultimately, the problem of paying for UNEF was political, not financial. Canadian diplomats around the globe championed the UN's cause and preached the concept of collective financial responsibility, yet few nations heard the call. Throughout the 1960s the UN General Assembly only provided *ad hoc* financial support for peacekeeping operations to enable troops to be kept in the field. To appease the increasingly cost-conscious General Assembly, peacekeeping missions were consistently scaled-back in scope by the UN, while some were cancelled outright. UNEF felt the pinch as its budget was slashed from \$25 million to \$15 million. And

21. United Nations General Assembly, A/3302, 6 November 1956, available at https://legal.un.org/avl/pdf/ls/Urquhart_A-3302_e.pdf.

22. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1089 (XI), 21 December 1956, available at <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/eed216406b50b-f6485256ce10072f637/c73b0379bdc6d7f3852560df006939d0>.

yet, with the withdrawal of UNEF in 1967 – ten and half years into its mission – a permanent solution to the UN's financial predicament still had yet to be found.

Lacking the resolute support of all members of the Security Council, there was little that Canada – or the United Nations as an organization – could do to force recalcitrant states to support peacekeeping operations that they did not perceive to be in their national interest. As a result, peacekeeping in the 1950s and early 1960s was often of a reactionary, extemporized nature. With debts approaching \$60 million in 1959, the UN comptroller warned that the organization's fiscal situation was becoming dire.²³ Yet Dag Hammarskjöld was in no ways worried. "To my mind," the Secretary-General mused, "it is absolutely excluded that members would, for what really is a small amount of money, consider wrecking a most important political operation."²⁴ Peacekeeping arrears at the end of 2016, however, amounted to a considerably larger sum than "a small amount of money": \$1.8 billion. Yet Secretary-General António Guterres attests that "the overall financial situation of the Organization is generally sound."²⁵ Perhaps Hammarskjöld was right to be unconcerned with the financial aspects of peacekeeping. If missions are in the interest of the permanent members of the Security Council, there is always a way to find financial support. Yet without a sound and predictable financial basis that is beyond the realm of politics, for those nations in need around the globe which are beyond the direct interests of the major powers, there are very clear limits as to what the UN, and peacekeeping, can achieve.

As the creation of UNEF helped restore peace in the Middle East and diplomats across the globe turned their attention towards how to pay for it, few people actually gave much thought to the difficulties facing the troops on the ground. As the first major UN deployment, UNEF and its Canadian commander, General E. L. M. Burns, were required to write the book on modern multinational peacekeeping operations. Faced with

23. Permis NY to External, 3 June 1959, LAC, RG 19, series F2, vol. 4286, file 8204-11-2 (2).

24. Permis NY to External, 14 August 1959, LAC, RG 19, series F2, vol. 4286, file 8204-11-2 (2).

25. UN doc. A/71/440/Add.1, 8 May 2017.

limited resources, conflicting cultures, and backed only by moral authority, the odds were not in UNEF's favour. Each of the contributing nations came to the task with varying levels of professionalism and preparedness, and for Burns organizing these disparate contingents was a challenge hampered by language barriers, sovereignty issues, and of course financial constraints. Burns also had to walk a fine line so that his judgement could be trusted and respected by both Arabs and Israelis alike.²⁶ This was no easy task.

Military planners in Ottawa had originally intended to supply an infantry battalion for peacekeeping duty in the Middle East in 1956. But given the fact that Canadian soldiers were loyal to the same Queen, spoke the same language, and wore similar uniforms to the British troops – troops that were still occupying parts of Egypt – President Nasser was, somewhat understandably, unwilling to allow a battalion of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada to deploy on Egyptian soil. Yet given Pearson's instrumental role in bringing UNEF into being, Nasser's refusal to allow Canadian troops to participate – and his ability to dictate to the UN which nations could or could not participate in the mission – was considered a slap in the face and the cause of considerable domestic embarrassment. A compromise of sorts was achieved when General Burns came to the conclusion that Canada was one of the few nations capable of providing vital logistics, signals, and transport elements for the mission.²⁷ Nasser again demurred to the idea of including Canadian soldiers in UNEF, but relented upon hearing that Burns would then be obliged to resign as the force commander.²⁸

Even though Canada did not supply infantry troops, they provided personnel for nearly everything else from dentists to pay clerks to supply officers to engineers. Canadian doctors, medics, chaplains, and postal workers were even included in UNEF's makeup. To provide Canada some

26. Blair Fraser, "How Tommy Burns Tries to Keep the Peace," *Maclean's* (19 January 1957): 19.

27. Burns to Pearson, 19 November 1956, DHH, 410.019 (D3)

28. Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, vol. 2, eds. John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis (University of Toronto Press, 1973), 263.

front-line exposure, and to downplay criticisms of Pearson's "typewriter army," a reconnaissance element was added to the Canadian contingent in February 1957.²⁹ With the permanent members of the Security Council excluded from service, Canada was one of the few nations with a well-trained and professional military capable of supplying specialized support troops. While this contribution may not have been deemed as desirable as a front-line infantry battalion, it was nonetheless vital to the success of the mission, and many considered it the core of the peacekeeping force.

Yet providing troops for UNEF was a challenge for the Canadian military. The original plan to send a self-contained infantry battalion such as the Queen's Own Rifles would have been relatively straight-forward. Plans were well entrenched as Canada had earmarked a stand-by battalion for UN duty since the end of the Korean War. Providing troops in a piecemeal fashion, however, was a task for which the military was less prepared. And in the case of the proposed reconnaissance squadron, the CAF were initially opposed to the idea as there were no mobile armoured units readily available, and if a squadron was pieced together for UN duty it would create difficulties for scheduled training exercises for the entire Armoured Corps.³⁰ The same argument held true for other administrative and logistics troops assigned to UNEF.

The Canadian military also found themselves on unfamiliar ground with UNEF and had no idea what to expect. As the commanding officer of the first group deploying for Egypt briefed his troops: "I have no idea what you are going to be faced with. Do what you have to."³¹ And they

29. Editorial, *Globe and Mail* (20 November 1956), 6; Cabinet Conclusions, 31 January 1957, LAC, RG2, vol. 1892.

30. Chief of the General Staff to the Minister, 21 December 1956, DHH, Raymond Papers 73/1223, series 1, file 450; Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 18 December 1956, in Greg Donaghy, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 22, 1956-1957, Part I, DFAIT, 2001, document 203; Memorandum for the Minister of National Defence, 14 January 1957, DHH, 112.1.003 (D11), vol. 1.

31. Interview with Col. (Ret'd) Arthur J. Byford, 8 February 2002, interview conducted by David W. Edgecombe, Canadian War Museum (CWM), George Metcalf Archival Collection (GMAC), Canadian War Museum Oral History Project (CWMOHP), 31D2 Byford.

did. While the Canadians had operated as part of larger forces in the First and Second World Wars, they had never directed headquarters and support staff activities. It was not until they arrived in theatre, however, that the Canadians were informed that they would be running the show. Nonetheless they relied on their training and set out to do their jobs the same as they would have in Canada, Germany, or any other locale. Canadians became known for their flexibility and ability to improvise as situations dictated. These skills continue to serve Canadian soldiers well around the globe and it is in their specialized capacities that Canada still has much to offer.

The expulsion of UNEF from Egypt in 1967 sounded a wake-up call for peacekeeping operations in general, and for the Canadians in particular, who had become very comfortable with their “helpful fixer” image. It also highlighted the deficiency of having a peacekeeping mission at the whim of its host. Though widely publicized in Canada at the time, this public humiliation has conveniently been forgotten and omitted from subsequent nostalgia regarding Canada’s golden era of peacekeeping.

The reasons for Canada’s, and UNEF’s, withdrawal are generally regarded as a failure of peacekeeping, and are swept aside as an anomaly. But it is important to note that it was not a failure of peacekeeping in particular, but one of diplomacy in general. The peacekeepers did their job well and, so long as they were deployed, conflict between Egypt and Israel was contained so that it did not boil over into open conflict. Canada’s Minister of National Defence, Paul Hellyer, made this point crystal clear in a speech before the House of Commons in June 1967: “The fault is not with the peace keeping force – not at all – it is with the failure to come to grips with the social, economic and political problems that made the peace keeping force necessary in the first place.”³²

UNEF managed to keep the peace along the Egyptian-Israeli border for over a decade, but it did so at a price: \$214 million spent, and 106 dead peacekeepers.³³ Of the 10,000 Canadians who served with UNEF,

32. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 22 June 1967, Second Session, Twenty-Seventh Parliament, vol. 112, no. 33.

33. United Nations, *The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peace-Keeping*, 3rd ed. (New York, Department of Public Information, 1996), 693.

32 died in the service of peace. And to what end? War broke out in the Middle East less than two weeks after the request for UNEF's withdrawal.

For Canada, the initial achievement in defusing the Suez Crisis, and Lester Pearson's subsequent Nobel Prize, equalled "success." This was the genesis of Canadian support of, and justification for, participation in future UN peacekeeping initiatives. Yet when considering the ability to create a lasting peace rather than merely to keep a peace – peacekeeping as imagined by the UN is ineffectual on its own. The UNEF, and other long-term missions in Cyprus or India and Pakistan, were all able to measure a degree of success in maintaining peace between hostile forces. However, all too often peacemaking did not go hand-in-hand with – or even follow – peacekeeping.

Broad questions of UNEF's success, or failure, miss its true value which is in the details. So, what can we learn from its history that applies to today and Canada's efforts to re-engage in peacekeeping? First of all, the details of UNEF's inception, or rather the lack of specific governing detail, made it difficult to mandate parallel peacemaking efforts while the peacekeepers kept things quiet on the ground – which ultimately led to a return to conflict. As it was, Canada's first peacekeeping effort taught a lesson that continues today to be a challenge and is, perhaps, the source of the current government's hesitancy to meaningfully re-engage: The parties in conflict need to ceaselessly strive for peace, and the UN needs to have structures in place to aid with these efforts.

Secondly, the details of UNEF's financing show the lack of accountability when it came to paying for peace, and subsequent budget cuts meant the force often subsisted hand-to-mouth. If peacekeeping is always seen as the "extra-curricular" activity of the UN rather than part of its core mandate, then its importance – and the need to pay for it – will always be questioned. This is particularly the case now as nations are slowly turning their gazes inwards. Financial participation being optional also highlights the "extra" in the extra-curricular. If peacekeeping is not part of the mandatory collective but rather remains at the behest of Security Council members that too have their own political agenda, then

the United Nations will never be able to fulfill its primary mandate “to maintain international peace and security.”³⁴

Finally, the details of life on the ground during Canada’s first peacekeeping effort demonstrate that peacekeeping is inherently difficult, and it always has been. Despite these difficulties, Canada and the UN rose to the challenge, and UNEF was able to make a valuable though temporary contribution to peace and stability throughout the Middle East, and throughout the world. Canada’s contribution came by stepping up where others could not, where the CAF had the capacity or expertise to share. Precision peacekeeping so to speak, adding value where others cannot, and being particular and specific with the roles occupied is perhaps Canada’s best contribution.

It is on these realities that the origins of Canada’s peacekeeping legacy should rest, and the realities against which future operations should be judged and measured rather than behind the hazy, rose-coloured glasses of Canada’s mythical success at peacekeeping.

34. United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, Chapter I, Article 1.1, available at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>.