Senate Presentation

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The notion that Canada is somehow different from other states which use military power to gain political ends began to take root in this country in the early 1960s. It is probably connected to the efforts of a group of anti-nuclear activists (which then included myself) to dissuade Canada from fulfilling its commitments to both NATO and the United States to accept nuclear weapons for North American defence and for use as part of the NATO alliance. Because it was in the same time period that the Canadian media, political leaders and some academics began to extol Canada as a peace-loving, peacekeeping nation, especially alongside our super power neighbor which used its military to defend, or pursue, what it saw as its national interests. In Canada this notion was also connected to the idea that Canada, in fact, did not engage in the dirty business of pursuing national interests at all.

I hardly need point out today that much, if not all, of the UN peacekeeping we did in the period 1957 to the mid-1990s was, first, a small part of our overall national defence objectives and second, done to serve the interests of NATO, and not because we were placing our military at the service of human kind.

The vast bulk of Canada's defence spending during the Cold War went to land, air and sea forces which were to serve under NATO command to deter the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies from either actually attacking western Europe or, just as important, politically dominating central and western Europe through the potential use by the Communists of their numerically overwhelming military power. Virtually all Canadian

participation in UN peacekeeping missions was aimed at (1) representing NATO interests in places such as the Middle East or Cyprus – the Soviets almost always chose Poland as their representatives –and (2) solving NATO problems such as the split between the UK and France and the United States during the Suez crisis of 1956 or keeping NATO allies Greece and Turkey from going to war over Cyprus. These realities have been well covered by Dr. Sean Maloney in his book Canada and UN Peacekeeping: Cold War by Other Means.

Why then did Canadians fall in love with "peacekeeping"? First, because making peace is a lot nicer than making war. Second, because successive Canadian governments of both major parties saw it as in their interest to keep the peacekeeping idea alive. Third, because in the endless pursuit of enlarging small differences, which Canadians have exercised vis-à-vis the United States since Canada's founding, Americans did war – ugly, deadly and destructive – while we did peace. The fact that most Canadian defence efforts were aimed at waging war against the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies was lost on most Canadians. Besides, what did the Canadian army do in Europe, or the Navy in the Atlantic or the air force in the skies over North America? They exercised and exercised and exercised some more. Pretty boring stuff compared with keeping Israelis and Egyptians apart, or Greeks and Turks.

The end of the Cold War marked a dramatic shift in international diplomacy. There was no longer any need to keep the clients of NATO and the Warsaw Pact from each other's throats. But UN peacekeeping went on as before, with little change and failed miserably in Rwanda, East Timor and for Canada most notably in the Balkan civil war of 1992-1995.

Canada went into the Balkans, eventually with two full battlegroups – something we cannot do today – with the best of intentions but without clearly understanding the human geography in the region. We went initially to police a ceasefire between Croatia and Bosnia, both breakaway states from former Yugoslavia. We did not seem to understand the deep hatred that separated many – not all, but many – of the three chief players in what soon after became a three way civil war between Croatians, Bosnians and Serbs. Nor did we understand when we went in that all three sides distrusted the UN and charged UNPROFOR (the official UN mission there) with siding with the other guys. Canadians there were shot at with rifle, tank, mortar and artillery fire. Canadians were killed by snipers, IEDs and ambushes. Canadians fought a 36 hour battle with Croatian forces at the Medak pocket. Canadians witnessed the most appalling war crimes committed by all three sides against each other. Many Canadians came back to Canada badly scarred psychologically from the experience, others were physically broken up. We paid little attention to them – or to the bodies that came back – because they weren't warriors, they were "peacekeepers".

That era saw the death of the Chapter 6 peacekeeping that Lester Pearson helped create with UNEF I, which won him the Nobel Peace Prize. But because the government of the day did not want to shatter the image Canadians had of peacekeeping, Canadians did not realize what was happening. They were so enamoured with peacekeeping that even at the height of the war in Afghanistan – our third largest war – many still thought Canadian troops were in Kandahar to keep the peace. To the credit of the Martin government which sent Canadians to Kandahar, no one tried to pull the wool over Canadian eyes. The then Minister of National Defence

Bill Graham and the Chief of the Defence Staff Rick Hillier toured the country before the deployment to tell Canadians that Afghanistan was going to be a different kind of mission, just as Minister Dion and Minister Sajjan are doing now with regard to the coming mission in Africa, but many Canadians did not listen and many are not listening now. The current government, to its credit, is not talking about "peacekeeping"; they talk about "peace operations." Good for them. But we could just as easily call our presence in Korea from 1951 to 1953 as a "peace operation" rather than a war. In fact, Washington and Ottawa called Korea a "police action". But there were no police along the Jamestown Line from the late fall of 1951 to the ceasefire of July 1953. They were all combat soldiers.

Let me be clear; I do not support a mission to Africa because any mission to just about any of Africa's trouble spots – Mali, the Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan – to name a few, is a mission to join one of a number of incredibly complex wars – wars way more complex than the one we fought in Afghanistan - and none of which show any chance of a peaceful resolution any time soon. We will be entering a mess wherever we go, with no resolution in sight, and in pursuit of no perceived national interest. Of course we all hate to see the killing, raping, and other atrocities which are taking place there. And we seem to bear a national guilt about the fate of Rwanda. But we choose to support a very small military and an even smaller army – some would say for very good reasons – and we do not have the resources to save very much of the world. Our military resources should preserved to be used in alliance with NATO and the United States (in the defence of North America) or should be used to make a difference to Washington by helping the United States in places such as the Caribbean basin.

I am also opposed to splitting our small military to send them to as many spots in the world as we can in order to create the impression that we wield far more military power than we in fact do. We now have from 300 to 400 troops in the Middle East, we are sending some 400 to Latvia and now 600 to Africa. That is about 1400 of the at most 2500 that we can deploy abroad at any given time and even then we would be sorely stretched. It was the Martin government which proposed that Canadian interests were better served by one or two “large” deployments – preferably one – than many small ones. In my view they were correct. In my view, we are hurting our own national interests by turning back to the choice of many small deployments instead of one larger and more significant one. Sending 600 troops to join the 14,000 or so now in Mali, for example, is sheer tokenism.

There are many other issues I could cover, but there’s no time to do so. So I will rest here and I’ll be happy to take your questions.