

by Steven Staples

A report commissioned by
The Council of Canadians
October 2006

MARCHING ORDERS

How Canada abandoned peacekeeping - and why the UN needs us now more than ever





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Table of Contents

Peacekeeping by the numbers.....	1
From peacekeeping to war-fighting: Perception is reality.....	3
Transforming the military.....	4
The Calgary School.....	7
Enemies of peace, allies of war.....	8
Defending U.S. interests.....	11
Funding new priorities.....	12
UN peacekeeping on the rise.....	13
Beyond the Pearson model.....	15
Promoting peace in the face of terrorism.....	17
Adapting to global demand.....	18
Partnering with the U.S.....	20
Broken promises.....	21
Conservatives carrying the Liberals' torch.....	24
Canadians divided.....	26
Conclusion: Peacekeeping needs Canada.....	27
About the author.....	28
Endnotes.....	28

Peacekeeping by the numbers

Number of Canadian military personnel on UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 1991: **1,149**

Number of Canadian military personnel on UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 2006: **56**

Number of military personnel (all nationalities) on UN peacekeeping missions as of August 31, 1991: **10,801**

Number of military personnel (all nationalities) on UN peacekeeping missions as of August 31, 2006: **66,786**

Number of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 1991: **11**

Number of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide as of August 31, 2006: **16**

Cost of all current Canadian UN peacekeeping missions (2006-07): **\$6.2 million**

Cost of Canadian mission in Afghanistan (2006-07): **\$1.4 billion**

Cost of Canadian mission in Afghanistan to date (2001 to 2006-07): **\$5 billion**

Increase in military spending announced in 2005 by previous Liberal government: **\$12.8 billion over 5 years**

Increase in military spending announced in 2006 by current Conservative government: **\$5.3 billion on top of promised Liberal increases over 5 years**

Number of Canadian soldiers who have died on UN peacekeeping missions since 1990: **19**

Number of Canadian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan since 2001: **42**

Percentage of Canadians who consider peacekeeping “a defining characteristic of Canada”: **69%** (October 25, 2005, Centre for Research and Information on Canada)

Percentage of Canadians who oppose sending troops to Afghanistan: **53%** (October 2006, The Strategic Counsel)

Percentage of Canadians who opposed extending the mission in Afghanistan by 2 years: **54%** (June 2006, Decima Research)

Percentage of Canadians who believe “Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan are dying for a cause we cannot win”: **59%** (October 2006, Decima Research)



From peacekeeping to war-fighting: Perception is reality

From Washington to Ottawa to Afghanistan, the refrain is the same: “Canada is a nation at war; peacekeeping is over.” Almost daily, generals, politicians and experts tell the Canadian public that the world is a dangerous place, and that our role on the world stage should be a military one. Increasingly, they say that UN peacekeeping is an outdated vocation for today’s Canadian Forces.

Is this true? Is the world more dangerous today than at any other recent time? Must Canada give up its cherished role as a peacekeeper and instead climb on board the U.S.-led “War on Terror”?

The perpetual beating of war drums in the Canadian political discussion could be mistaken for a military mission itself, or a “PSYOPS,” the military term for a psychological warfare mission – like dropping leaflets from airplanes to try to convince the enemy to surrender. The goal of this media-focused campaign would be to persuade the Canadian public to give up the notion of Canada as a peacekeeper, and accept new war-fighting missions under U.S. leadership.

It is no accident that Canada’s blunt-talking Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, delivers Canada-needs-to-get-tough lines to journalists in perfect, sound-bite rapid succession. The quotable general has been well trained to be a most effective advocate for building up the military to better fight terrorist “scumbags” around the world.

“We get public speaking training, how to present a lecture or treat a subject. We learn from past experiences,” he revealed to *Profit* magazine recently. “When I was in Afghanistan, we had people from the BBC come in to help us create the right perceptions, because perception is reality.”¹

General Hillier is on the front lines of a defence lobby intent on perpetuating the notion that the military is a war-fighting force and that peacekeeping is nothing but a quaint anachronism. Once the public accepts this perception, the vision of a new Canadian military will become a reality. Fuelled by billions of new dollars, thousands of new recruits, and state-of-the-art weapons, it would be ready to fight wars around the world – all in the service of the “War on Terror.”

Fanning out behind General Hillier is a legion of retired military brass, academic hawks and industry lobbyists who are organized into a public relations machine comprising a range of think tanks and university departments, frequently well funded by the Department of National Defence itself.²

General Hillier is on the front lines of a defence lobby intent on perpetuating the notion that the military is a war-fighting force and that peacekeeping is nothing but a quaint anachronism.

The war that Canada is currently fighting in Afghanistan is aimed not only at killing insurgents, but also at challenging the idea that our military's primary role should be that of peacekeeper.

General Hillier shares this vision of a new war-fighting Canadian military. Chosen to lead the Canadian Forces by Paul Martin's Liberals in January 2005, he has said that his goal is to transform the military into a force that has the funding, capability and political support to fight wars abroad alongside allies such as the United States.

"We're into a new era where instability and terrorists and militia forces are threats," he said last summer. "Global instability could cause some of these things to come home to roost in Canada, and I want the population to really understand that we are asking these young men and women to die."³

The war that Canada is currently fighting in Afghanistan is aimed not only at killing insurgents, but also at challenging the idea that our military's primary role should be that of peacekeeper.

While the defence of Canada has always been the primary purpose of the Canadian military, Canada faces so few military threats that the armed forces have been available for international peacekeeping missions.

General Hillier is using the dangerous mission in Kandahar – a mission that he personally sought out for Canada – to convince Canadians that we need a more powerful military to defend our country. Those who think as he does argue that the defence of our country relies on our ability to fight wars in other countries (the away game) before those threats can reach continental North America (the home game).

Following this line of thought, the defence of Canada requires co-operation with the U.S.-led war on terrorism, which is based on the idea that the best way to defend the American homeland is to invade someone else's homeland.

Transforming the military

The mission in Afghanistan has spanned three prime ministers: Liberals Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, and Conservative Stephen Harper. Chrétien accepted Canada's role in the original invasion and authorized the 2003 NATO mission in Kabul. Paul Martin's government shifted Canada's presence from Kabul to the southern and much more dangerous province of Kandahar until February 2007. Stephen Harper, after narrowly winning a non-binding vote in Parliament in May 2006, extended Canada's mission by two years, to February 2009.

Along with the mission to Afghanistan, the Liberal governments under both Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Prime Minister Paul Martin authorized and funded a new military "transformation", aimed at making Canada's military more suitable for the U.S. War on Terror. In fact, Paul Martin hand-picked General Hillier precisely to bring about these changes.

In announcing General Hillier's appointment as Chief of Defence Staff on January 14, 2005, the government trumpeted Hillier's experience, most notably his former role in commanding U.S. troops as an exchange officer with the U.S. Army, stating "Lt-Gen Hillier's leadership and experience will be invaluable as we move forward in this process to transform the Canadian Forces to meet the security challenges Canada faces. He has extensive experience serving in Canada, Europe, and the United States."⁴

The Liberal government provided General Hillier with the authority to reshape the military, and wrote him a virtual blank cheque for the largest military spending increase in a generation in the 2005 budget: \$12.8 billion over five years – an increase that will eventually take Canadian defence spending higher than any level since the Second World War.⁵

According to interviews conducted by the *Toronto Star*, the decision to ramp up Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan was made at a meeting on March 21, 2005, a few weeks after General Hillier's appointment. Prime Minister Paul Martin, his senior ministers and staff members were present to discuss the upcoming deployment of a 250-member Provincial Reconstruction Team to Kandahar – a mix of mostly military personnel along with development workers and diplomats who would carry out local reconstruction and training programs.

General Hillier arrived at the meeting with something much bigger in mind. He wanted to send a 1,000-strong battle group to Kandahar. The mission would change Canada's role at the time from conducting NATO peace support roles in the north, to a combat, counter-insurgency role in the south. Such a large combat role for Canada would impress the Americans, who had been suffering heavy losses, and wanted to rotate out 4,000 troops from Afghanistan for duty in Iraq.

Hillier had to convince the Martin government to take on the dangerous mission. According to the *Star*,

A number of people in the process were uncomfortable with the fact that to go south to Kandahar, Canada was going to have to step outside of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and once again sign up with the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

ISAF was truly multilateral, led by an international organization. Its mandate was to assist the Afghan government By contrast, Operation Enduring Freedom was an American-led, counter-terrorism mission, aimed at rooting out and killing the Taliban.⁶

There was concern about the cost in lives as well. Those fears would turn out to be well founded, since 28 soldiers died within six months of redeploying to Kandahar, in contrast to the eight deaths suffered in the entire preceding four years.

But General Hillier won the room by appealing to the Martin government's desire to be a global player, especially where it could assist the U.S. War on Terror.

Scott Reid, Martin's communications director, told the *Toronto Star* that it was the U.S. factor that won the day: "There was a fairly strong trail of orthodoxy [in the Foreign Affairs department] that was based on an evaluation of strategic interests in terms of our relationship with the United States. A lot of times policy was put to us based on, 'this matters to the White House.' And things that matter to the White House can't be taken lightly, because these guys take it personally So, we really have to evaluate the importance of making a decision that runs counter to the White House."⁷

The Liberal government provided General Hillier with the authority to reshape the military, and wrote him a virtual blank cheque for the largest military spending increase in a generation.

But what was really driving Hillier? And why was Martin so eager to push forward what the U.S. military has called a “transformation agenda”?

A few weeks before the March 2005 meeting, Martin had announced that Canada would not participate in the U.S. ballistic missile defence system. The Bush administration was still stinging from this decision, as well as Canada’s earlier stance against participating in the Iraq war.

An official who attended the meeting told the *Toronto Star* that “There was what you might call inevitability about the [Afghanistan] decision No one would ever call Hillier ‘arrogant,’ but some say another prevailing view emerged in the room: that if you couldn’t embrace the new and more dangerous world order you were just ‘naïve.’”⁸

Concern about the mission and the blurring of the line between NATO’s peace support role and the U.S.’s counter-insurgency role was a concern not just in Ottawa, but also at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the *Globe and Mail* in March 2006, “We’ll keep the [NATO] mission distinct from [the U.S.’s] Enduring Freedom. I do, we do, and the allies do consider this a NATO mission.”⁹

NATO members knew that the mission in the south would be dangerous and bloody. The alliance refused to take over command of the south until troops from Britain and the Netherlands had joined the Canadians. In those two countries, a debate raged about the role of British and Dutch forces, and whether victory was even possible. In the end, both countries decided to send troops to the south, but only after a thorough debate and vote in the Dutch Parliament. NATO took command of the south on August 1, 2006.

In interviews with the *Globe and Mail*, NATO officials were bemused by Canadian General Hillier’s seeming eagerness to take on the Kandahar mission. The *Globe* reported:

NATO officials pointed out that it was the Canadian military, under the leadership of General Rick Hillier, that insisted on sending troops to this most dangerous corner of Afghanistan.

Some NATO officials believe Gen. Hillier was attempting to overcome Canada’s weak military image in his decision to leave safer parts of Afghanistan to other members of the 30-nation coalition.¹⁰

General Hillier made some comments soon after taking on the role of Chief of Defence Staff that foreshadow the “get tough” attitude in his style of leadership and his perceptions of the military and the degree of threat faced by Canada.

In the wake of the London bombings by homegrown terrorists in July 2005, General Hillier declared the upcoming Afghan mission was needed because Canada had to “take a stand,” telling the *Globe and Mail*, “These are detestable murderers and scumbags We’re not going to let these radical murderers and killers rob from others and certainly we’re not going to let them rob from Canada.”¹¹

The *Globe and Mail* went on to observe that “[Hillier] stressed the new face of the Canadian Forces, which he said are now focused on the first job at hand: protecting Canadian interests at home and abroad. ‘We’re not the public service of Canada; we’re not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to kill people.’”

That Canada was under no immediate, let alone long-term threat from the Taliban in Afghanistan seems not to have figured into the general’s reasoning.

That Canada was under no immediate, let alone long-term threat from the Taliban in Afghanistan seems not to have figured into the general’s reasoning.

The Calgary School

David Bercuson, who heads the DND-funded Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary, has been supportive of General Hillier and his new approach to war-fighting.

Bercuson is wrongly presented as a middle-of-the-road commentator by media outlets. In reality he speaks for the hawks of the Canadian defence lobby. From his academic post at the University of Calgary, he disseminates his views, which are widely held to be almost identical to those of the current Conservative government. Just as the neo-conservatives at the University of Chicago, or “Chicago School,” have had a major influence on Republican Party policies, “the Calgary School” lends credence to the Conservative Party’s agenda.

In a recent column that is typical of his views, published in *Legion Magazine*, Bercuson berated Canadians for their increasing reluctance, as shown by several opinion polls, to support the military’s mission in Afghanistan. In an article titled “Canada’s Changing Role in Afghanistan,” Bercuson lets his cannons loose on the Liberals and the public in the wake of the January death by a suicide bomber of Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry:

It took the dramatic suicide bombing of Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry near Kandahar on Sunday, Jan.15, for many Canadians to finally awake to the death of Canadian peacekeeping

Canadians are not there to do peacekeeping, they do not wear blue United Nations helmets, they are not present to give two warring factions a chance to make peace

They are there to kill “bad guys” before the bad guys can kill them. And although the Liberal government tried to explain this to Canadians in the spring and summer of 2005, hardly anyone listened

The ISAF mission in Kabul was sold to Canadians as another form of peacekeeping, though the soldiers who went there knew full well that it was not

Canadians are now in the process of waking up to what soldiers do. Soldiers fight wars and prepare to fight wars – big wars, small wars, asymmetric wars, wars against terror, wars against tyranny. Soldier is not a synonym for peacekeeper. For all the long history of this country Canadians have gone into

harm's way for reasons of both national pride and national interests. They are doing it once again and the sooner the veil of national naïveté drops from Canadians' collective consciousness, the better. Once they know what the stakes are, and where Canadian pride and interests lie, Canadians will be far less inclined to cut and run.¹²

Today, the full cost of Canada's nearly five-year-long fight against the "scumbags and terrorists" is greater than \$5 billion, and rising. The human cost in lives is incalculable, but at the time of this writing, the death toll stands at 42 soldiers and one diplomat.

Canada's contribution to the U.S.-led War on Terror is being trumpeted loudly in Washington, D.C. Michael Wilson, Canada's new Ambassador to the United States (and former finance minister to prime minister Brian Mulroney), has been boasting of our military's role to American audiences this year: "Canada is an active contributor and partner in the war on terror, particularly with our activities in Afghanistan," he told the D.C.-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.¹³

Not dissuaded by Canadian polls showing dropping support, he added, "in the words of our Prime Minister, [Canada] does not cut and run."

To ensure the message of Canada's military role was known by Washington decision makers, the Canadian Embassy spent thousands of dollars to hang banners in the Washington subway system, especially at the stations nearest the Pentagon. The banners showed a photo of Canadian soldiers, and read, "Canadian Troops in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Boots on the Ground. U.S.-Canada Relations – Security Is Our Business."

Enemies of peace, allies of war

The Embassy's slogan on those billboards is particularly revealing, because the government has never promoted to a Canadian audience a connection between the war effort in Afghanistan and a desire to build stronger ties with the U.S. However, this is exactly the message that the Canadian government wants American power elites to hear.

Traditionally, the government has encouraged the idea of Canada as a global peacekeeper. The image is used on currency and stamps, and is featured in a peacekeeping monument that was erected in Ottawa in 1992. The federal government recently designated August 9 as national Peacekeeping Day. Many Canadians see the military's involvement in peacekeeping as a source of national pride.

In fact, the accepted wisdom in Canada for many years was that without its image as a peacekeeper, the Canadian military would not have been able to bolster public support in the post-Cold War era. This seemed especially true in the wake of the terrible 1993 Somalia scandal (when soldiers tortured and killed Shidane Arone, a Somali boy).

In March 2001, the Department of National Defence convened a meeting with 65 defence experts to discuss the military's peacekeeping image and its effect on the Forces. A report on the meeting revealed the state of the debate:

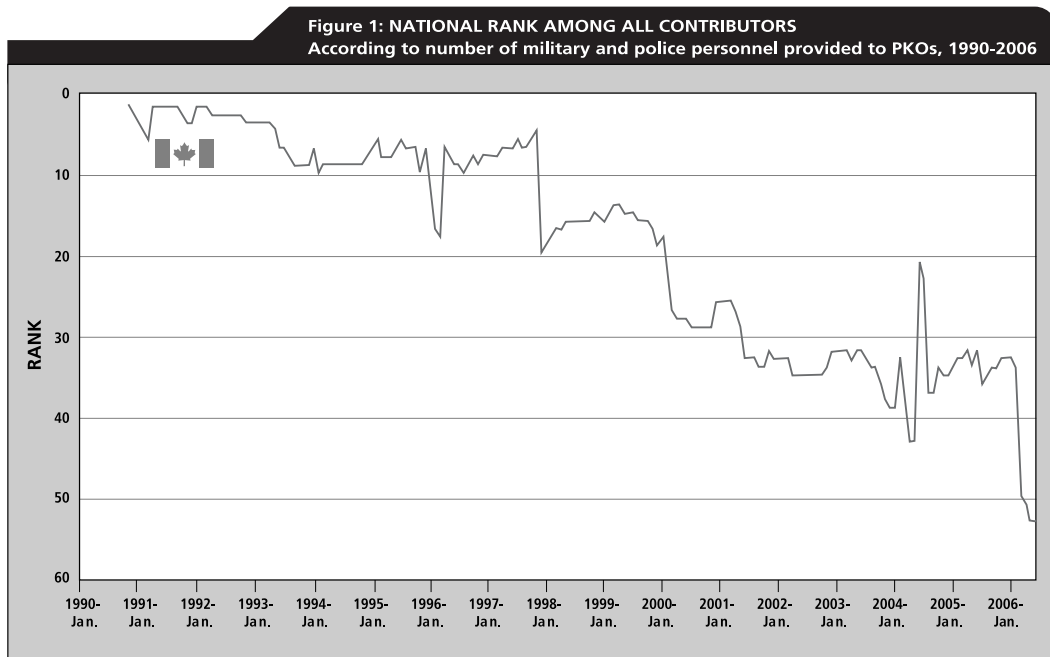
One participant raised the concern that the Canadian military is losing its character and war-fighting capability by becoming too involved in PSO [Peace Support Operations], and cautioned that the Canadian myth of the CF [Canadian Forces] as peacekeepers and not war-fighters has to be broken in order to salvage the primary purpose of the CF Yet another participant remarked that including phrases such as “war-fighting” in public communications results in reduced support from the public for such operations, even if the label is more accurate.¹⁴

The Canadian military has completely changed course, virtually abandoning UN peacekeeping in the process.

Just a few years after this meeting was held, the Canadian military has completely changed course, virtually abandoning UN peacekeeping in the process. In 1992-93, participation in UN missions accounted for more than nine of every ten dollars spent on international operations. By 2004-05, the United Nations had been nearly abandoned, accounting for a mere 30 cents of every 10 dollars of Canada’s spending on military missions abroad.¹⁵

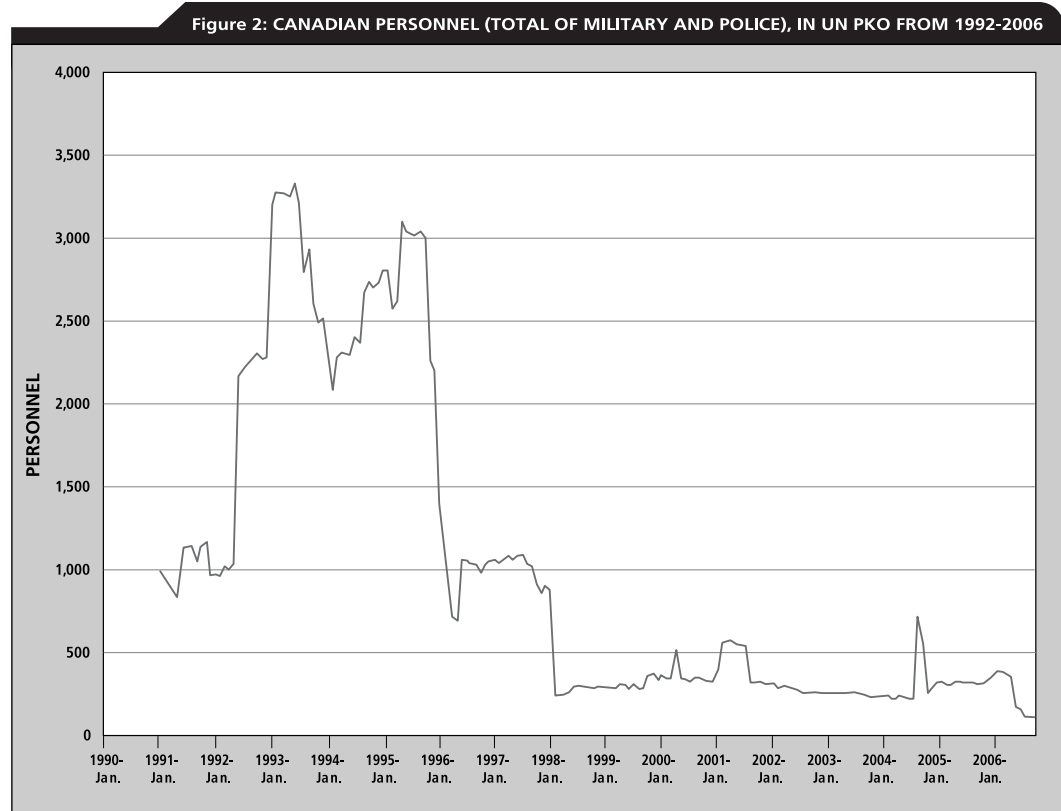
Before the mid-1990s, Canada was consistently among the top-10 contributors of UN troops. In 2005, Canada had dropped to 35th out of the 96 countries then contributing.

Today, Canada’s total contribution of troops to UN peacekeeping missions could fit on a single school bus: 56 soldiers, out of 66,786 international troops serving in UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. Canada now ranks a dismal 52nd out of the 97 contributing countries worldwide, on par with the tiny state of Mali.¹⁶



Source: Prof. Walter Dorn, Canadian Forces College

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Source: Prof. Walter Dorn, Canadian Forces College

It is ironic that while the 1990s and the current post-Cold War period has marked a renaissance for the UN and its peacekeeping operations, Canada has been moving away from the UN, gradually contributing fewer troops to the UN, and engaging in missions that take up the slack behind the United States.

But it didn't start this way. Despite some popular books with titles such as *While Canada Slept* that accuse Canada of slipping into international irrelevancy during the 1990s, Canada's participation on the world stage was very relevant indeed.

According to Professor Joel Sokolsky, Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College:

In the first decade of the post-Cold War era, Ottawa dispatched forces to most of the hot spots in the newly turbulent world order, beginning with the first Gulf war and continuing on to, among others, Bosnia, Haiti, East Timor and Kosovo . . . The Canadian Forces did so for a number of reasons: first, as a major industrial country Canada's fundamental wellbeing is inseparable from the West; second, it is a strong supporter of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]; third, and above all, Canada is an ally of the United States.

To be sure, this was also an era of the former foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy's "human security agenda." This approach to international rela-

tions placed an emphasis on the individual rather than the state; it drew criticism from the U.S. and within Canada. Nevertheless, Ottawa pressed ahead with what critics charged was nothing more than “pulpit diplomacy,” or moral posturing for the sake of antagonizing Washington and projecting an independent image abroad. [But] . . . Canada took the initiative of championing the Landmines treaty and the Rome statute that established the International Criminal Court.¹⁷

Sokolsky points out that many within Canada’s defence lobby are misrepresenting Canada’s track record. During the 1990s Canada played a major role on diplomatic and military fronts internationally, as the seminal achievement of the International Criminal Court over the opposition of the U.S. so clearly attests.

However, by the end of the decade, Canada was seriously slipping into the U.S. military orbit, and contributions of troops to the UN were on the decline.

Defending U.S. interests

The political fallout from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks only served to cement trends that were already under way within Canada’s Department of National Defence.

DND’s strategic analysts, perhaps watching the oft-repeated footage of the towers collapsing and the Pentagon on fire, quickly drafted an epilogue to their *Strategic Assessment 2001*.¹⁸ The predictions made by those analysts were chilling, not just in what they foresaw, but also in their accuracy.

The authors predicted that transnational terrorism would likely be regarded as the primary threat to international security, observing that the balance between the notion of “human security” and traditional concepts of security would shift in the direction of defending national territory and populations, and away from championing human rights and eradicating poverty.

They said that calls for military, diplomatic and other support from Washington would be regarded as a test of loyalty. The analysts boldly suggested that the international system would be reordered into “allies” and “enemies” in the fight against terror: “Countries that try to adopt a neutral stance will find themselves under pressure to take sides States will be regarded as allies not on the basis of verbal statements of support but in terms of a demonstrable, tangible commitment to fight terrorism,” they wrote.

The report predicted that the reordering of the international security agenda would likely lead to calls to bolster national defences and change force structures to provide military capabilities suited to the war against terrorism. The authors also suggested that human rights and civil liberties would be circumscribed in order to provide enhanced security.

In the United States, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld used the post-9/11 period to put in place wide-ranging plans to “transform” what he felt was a defence structure mired in Cold War thinking into a modernized fighting force that used fewer troops and high technology to defend U.S. global interests.

U.S. forces are immersed in a brutal civil war that has claimed the lives of thousands of U.S. troops, in the worst quagmire since Vietnam.

Along with Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld created the U.S. Department of Force Transformation, which was entrusted with the task of promoting a new approach to the development and application of military power. In 2003, the department's first director, the late Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski (ret.), described his, Rumsfeld's and Wolfowitz's vision of the new role the Pentagon would play:

We see the emergence of a new globalization, with new rule sets. There is chafing between the old rule sets and the new, which is bound to happen in any period of transition. . . .

If you are fighting globalization, if you reject the rules, if you reject connectivity, you are probably going to be of interest to the United States Department of Defense. On the other hand, if you are a participating member of globalization, we have the opportunity to make common cause against those nefarious activities, those unfortunate things that tend to flow from the gap.¹⁹

At the root of Rumsfeld's vision for military transformation is the use of new, exotic weaponry and a reduced emphasis on soldiers. This is the approach the Bush administration took with the invasion of Iraq, where Rumsfeld ignored his own military leadership and invaded with a small force backed by the latest high-tech weaponry. This policy was successful in quickly conquering Iraq, but the lack of sufficient troop numbers, according to Pentagon experts, left a security vacuum that has proven to be disastrous for the over-confident and under-prepared military. Now U.S. forces are immersed in a brutal civil war that has claimed the lives of thousands of U.S. troops, in the worst quagmire since Vietnam.

Funding new priorities

In Canada, the 2001 federal budget was pushed through Parliament only a few months after the September 11, 2001 attacks, injecting \$7.7 billion of new funding into national security agencies, including the Department of National Defence. The government's stated goal was "to improve Canada's ability to detect, prevent and respond to threats at home, and to fund Canada's participation in the international military campaign against terrorism."²⁰

Achieving this, it would require transforming the Canadian Forces into a lighter, swifter and more lethal force, achieving greater "interoperability" with U.S. military forces.

In no time at all, U.S. military priorities, no matter how misunderstood, were being imported into Canada. General Rick Hillier's predecessor, General Ray Henault, described his goals in the Chief of Defence Staff's 2001-2002 annual report:

Another key driver that is shaping future thinking is the rapid pace of technological change and the resulting revolution in military affairs

Collectively, these developments pose significant challenges for Canada and other NATO/coalition allies in terms of their ability to maintain interoperability, particularly with the United States. The U.S. is the world leader in the development of new military technologies, concepts, and doctrine, and spends more

on military research and development than the rest of NATO combined. Keeping pace and maintaining interoperability with the U.S. where necessary is therefore going to be a major challenge for the CF.²¹

The following year's annual CDS report was titled *A Time for Transformation*, and General Henault reported that "we must continue to build on our defence relationship with the U.S. as part of both countries' efforts to strengthen continental security following September 11th. The U.S. is Canada's most important ally and defence partner."

General Henault went on to cite Canada-U.S. free trade as the impetus for greater security co-operation, saying that "both countries' economies rely on our free trade relationship. And while neither country wants to restrict trade, security considerations are increasingly driving concern for American decision makers following September 11th. In this environment, it is in Canada's national interest to work collaboratively with the U.S. to strengthen continental security."²²

The UN is involved in more peacekeeping operations today than ever before, and even defence think tanks have found that they are effective – more effective than U.S.-led combat missions.

UN peacekeeping on the rise

Did Canada make the right decision when it abandoned its United Nations peacekeeping commitments in favour of U.S. or NATO-led interventions?

In March, this report's author debated the University of Calgary's David Bercuson on CBC Radio's *The Current* about the validity of UN peace operations. Bercuson said,

As far as UN-led operations, Steven [Staples], there just aren't any left in the world today and you ought to really know that. These old Blue Helmet operations which our army stopped doing back in the early 90s, no one is doing them any more. And the reason they're not doing them is because they're not effective.²³

In fact, the opposite is true. The UN is involved in more peacekeeping operations today than ever before, and even defence think tanks have found that they are effective – more effective than U.S.-led combat missions.

The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations provides monthly reports on UN peacekeeping missions. The report from August 2006 documents 66,786 military personnel wearing blue helmets in 18 UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), comprising 64,038 troops and 2,748 military observers.²⁴

If peacekeeping is dead – as Bercuson asserts – what are these 66,786 soldiers doing?

According to the United Nations, 97 countries are contributing uniformed personnel to the peacekeeping mentioned above. But a handful of countries are providing the majority of boots on the ground: Bangladesh (10,156), Pakistan (9,820), India (9,279), Jordan (3,811) and Nepal (3,524) together account for 57 per cent of the more than 63,000 blue helmet troops.²⁵

The truth is, the UN is running out of peacekeepers and simply can't keep up with the demand.

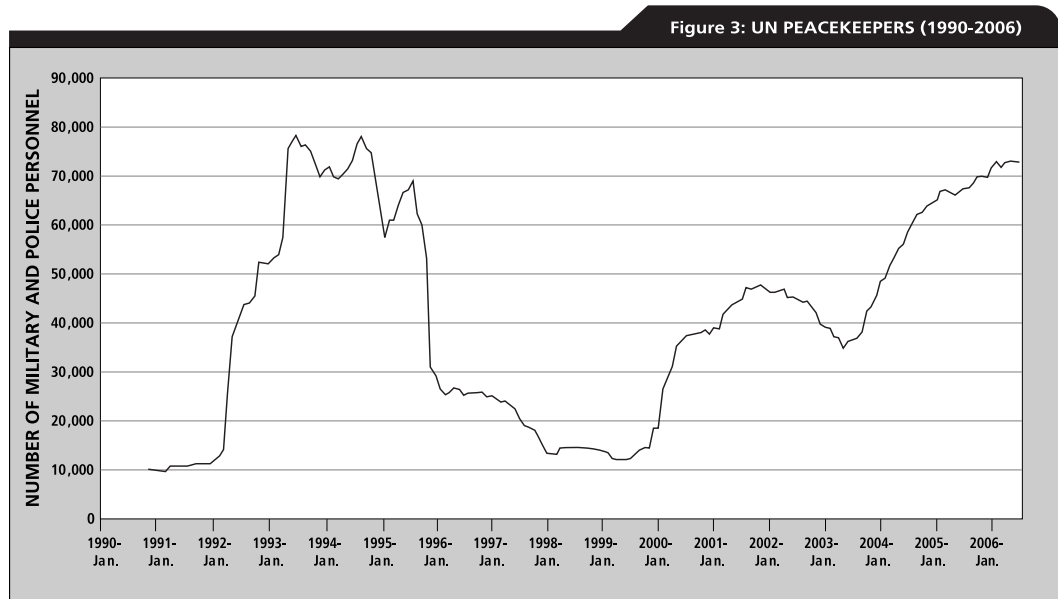
This level of activity is unmatched in the UN's history. Of the 61 UN peacekeeping operations launched since 1948, one-quarter are under way today (18), and half of those have been launched since 2001 – mostly in Africa.

The truth is, the UN is running out of peacekeepers and simply can't keep up with the demand.

The *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* is published by New York University, and its editor, Bruce Jones, warns that a crisis is inevitable if more countries don't contribute troops. "This year marks half a century since the United Nations launched its first large-scale peace operation – a deployment of troops to the Sinai desert during the Suez crisis. But 2006 also could mark a tipping point for the organization's overstretched peacekeeping forces," he wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* in March.²⁶

Jones argues that the international community is pushing the United Nations to take on a new strategic role without providing it with adequate resources, troops and materiel. And despite the frequent criticisms of the UN over the last decade, its operations are larger than the foreign military deployments of any country other than the United States.

From 1999 to 2005, the number of UN peacekeepers rocketed from 12,700 to 60,300, with mandates to deploy a record 90,000 Blue Helmets, according to the report.



Source: Prof. Walter Dorn, Canadian Forces College

And according to Jones, the need for troops will only grow in the future, raising the total number to well over 120,000 – especially since the UN recently authorized a 20,000-strong peacekeeping mission to relieve overstretched African Union troops in Darfur.

The United States supports this mission, and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told an emergency meeting on Darfur recently, “If the notion of the responsibility to protect the weakest and most powerless among us is ever to be more than an empty promise, then we must take action to save lives.”²⁷

If the new Darfur intervention goes forward, it will push the UN way beyond its previous peacekeeping peak in the early 1990s, when more than 80,000 troops served in more than a dozen international missions, including major operations in Cambodia, Bosnia and Somalia.

Beyond the Pearson model

Despite the far-reaching impact of the UN’s peacekeeping program, many people harbour misconceptions about modern peacekeeping. Opponents of peacekeeping frequently qualify their remarks by referring to the “Pearson model,” named for former Canadian prime minister Lester Pearson, harking back to the missions where lightly armed international troops patrolled a buffer zone between previously warring parties while a ceasefire agreement could be turned into a permanent peace agreement.

In fact, peacekeeping has evolved significantly over the years, and the term is now used to describe a range of interventions, spanning from the prevention of civil wars to the promotion of nation-building, all being conducted under the auspices of the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Modern multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations may be authorized under Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The most important distinguishing feature of these operations is that they are put in place to implement a peace process, but, as the UN points out, they are not a substitute for a peace process. The military is only one component of a comprehensive political, diplomatic, humanitarian, and economic effort. The objectives of these missions include supporting civilian and non-governmental organizations in the provision of humanitarian aid, the organization and protection of elections, the supervision of government functions, the disarmament and demobilization of large number of parties, the repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees, the protection of safe areas, restoration of national government and institutions, and other missions.

Peacekeeping has evolved greatly since the early days of “Pearsonian” peacekeeping. Today, most peacekeeping missions contain “enforcement” elements because they are authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows for the use of force where necessary to implement the UN mandate. These “robust” missions stand in stark contrast to the more traditional form of lightly armed peacekeepers, which were authorized under Chapter VI of the UN Charter.

Still, it is important to note that UN forces consult with the parties involved, before intervening. The UN, on the one hand, does not want to become a party to the conflict but, on the other, needs to have the capacity to respond effectively to renegade forces on the ground and to protect civilians in imminent danger.

Peacekeeping has evolved significantly over the years, and the term is now used to describe a range of peace-building interventions being conducted under the auspices of the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations supports the notion that peacekeeping has had to adapt to changing circumstances:

Under-resourced, under-sized peacekeeping operations with inadequate rules of engagement proved to be ill suited for contemporary post-conflict situations, in which armed factions often remained active in the period following civil wars. In addition to targeting and abusing civilians, these groups have also attacked UN peacekeepers. Aware of the dangers of deploying peacekeepers in situations where there is no real peace to keep, the Security Council now provides, when it deems necessary, UN peacekeeping operations with more “robust” mandates

These mandates allow and in fact require peacekeepers to “use all necessary means” to protect civilians, prevent violence against UN staff and personnel and deter armed elements from ignoring peace agreements. Currently, UN missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Kosovo, Burundi, Haiti and Côte d’Ivoire operate under Chapter VII mandates

The Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed, however, that this new approach should not be interpreted as a means of turning the UN into a war-fighting machine, and that the use of force should always be seen as a last resort.²⁸

As Bruce Jones points out, UN peacekeeping has successfully evolved over the years, managing to help mediate armed conflict, even in the midst of more complex and violent circumstances:

This boom in UN peacekeeping, although obscured by the war on terrorism, is saving lives and allowing people emerging from war to choose their political futures. In 2005, the United Nations oversaw or assisted elections and referendums in various countries, affecting the lives of more than 100 million people, and it has proved adept at stabilizing small trouble spots such as Timor and Sierra Leone.²⁹

The United Nations’ current mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a good example of its new, robust approach to peacekeeping. The country, formerly known as Zaire, has been gripped by war since 1990. According to Project Ploughshares’ *Armed Conflicts Report* for 2005, estimated deaths in this current phase of fighting amount to 350,000 as a direct result of armed conflict, but malnutrition and disease brought on by the war has claimed another 3.4 million people.³⁰

The war is fuelled by ethnic violence and competition for natural resources such as diamonds and gold. Neighbouring states have also sent troops into the DRC, and arms have flowed from Europe, Asia and the United States. The United Nations established MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1999 to help enforce a peace agreement. By 2003 foreign troops had left, but stubborn fighting continues within and between rebel groups.

Today, there are more than 16,600 international troops in the DRC, the lion's share provided by India (4,349), Pakistan (3,560), Bangladesh (1,351), Uruguay (1,324), South Africa (1,183) and Nepal (1,052). These developing countries are providing the backbone of a peacekeeping mission with an annual cost of more than \$1 billion per year – one of the largest UN peacekeeping operation ever in terms of troops and dollars. A 1,000-strong European Union force, led by its main contributor, Germany, augments the UN force.

This year, the UN authorized several large-scale military operations, which included the use of attack helicopters, against certain rebel groups in the DRC. Nearly 100 peacekeepers have been killed since 1999, but the mission has allowed the DRC to hold its first free elections in 40 years. It is hoped that this will help bring to an end one of Africa's bloodiest conflicts.

Promoting peace in the face of terrorism

UN peacekeeping, then, has proven to be adaptable and in demand. Has it been effective?

The experts say that the UN has been very successful since the end of the Cold War in bringing about more widespread peace in the world, despite the fears of international terrorism brought on by the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. This was a central finding in the 2005 *Human Security Report*, published by the Human Security Centre at University of British Columbia and led by Andrew Mack, former director of the strategic planning unit in the Executive Office of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.³¹

The report proclaims that global conflict has been in decline since the end of the Cold War in 1989. Taking a long view of history, the authors note that between 1816 and 2002, there were 199 international wars (including wars of colonial conquest and liberation) and 251 civil wars. By the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s wars between states accounted for one-fifth to three-quarters of all wars waged. But in the 1980s and early 1990s, international wars declined rapidly, and since the late 1990s there have been almost none at all.

Although civil wars increased in the second half of the last century (from 2 in 1946 to 25 in 1991), after 1992 the number of civil wars also declined quickly – much faster than the rate at which the number grew in the preceding decades. In fact, in just 10 years following 1992, the number of civil wars fell by 80 per cent, according to the 2005 *Human Security Report*.

“The most persuasive explanation for the decline in civil [and international] conflict is found in the far-reaching political changes wrought by the end of the Cold War [in 1989],” Mack writes. Breaking down this analysis even further, Mack finds that as the end of the Cold War removed ideological drivers to both civil and international wars, the U.S. and the former Soviet Union stopped supporting their client states in proxy wars. According to Mack, this “liberated the UN, allowing it for the first time to play an effective global security role – and indeed to do far more than its founders had originally envisaged.”

Adapting to global demand

The idea of an inept, inert and wasteful United Nations is utterly debunked by the findings of the 2005 *Human Security Report*. As noted, the 1990s saw a dramatic upsurge in demand for UN activities, and despite some tragedies such as that in Rwanda (where donor countries refused to contribute troops to prevent the genocide), the United Nations has quickly adapted to unpredictable demands.

The following accomplishments have gone practically unreported in the last 15 years:

1) A dramatic increase in preventive diplomacy and peacemaking activities

UN preventive diplomacy missions (those that seek to prevent wars from breaking out in the first place) increased from one in 1990 to six in 2002.

UN peacemaking activities (those that seek to stop ongoing conflicts) also increased nearly fourfold – from 4 in 1990 to 15 in 2002. The increase in preventive diplomacy helped prevent a number of latent conflicts from crossing the threshold into warfare, while the rise in peacemaking activities has been associated with a major increase in negotiated peace settlements. Approximately half of all the peace settlements negotiated between 1946 and 2003 have been signed since the end of the Cold War. The average number of conflicts terminated per year in the 1990s was more than twice the average of all previous decades from 1946 onwards.

2) An increase in international support for UN peacemaking

The number of “Friends of the Secretary-General,” “Contact Groups” and other mechanisms created by governments to support UN peacemaking activities and peace operations in countries in – or emerging from – conflict increased from 4 in 1990 to more than 28 in 2003, a sevenfold increase.

3) An increase in post-conflict peace operations

There has been a major increase in complex peace operations, not just UN missions but those of regional organizations as well. These have involved an ever-growing range of peace-building activities that are designed in part to prevent the recurrence of conflict. Since 40 per cent of post-conflict countries relapse into political violence within five years, any policy initiatives that can minimize this risk will in turn reduce the risk of future wars.

The number of UN peacekeeping operations more than doubled between 1988 and 2004 – from 7 to 16. The peace operations of the post-Cold War era are not merely larger and more numerous than Cold War peacekeeping missions, they are also far more ambitious. Whereas the Cold War missions typically involved little more than monitoring ceasefires, many of today’s operations are more akin to nation building.

4) A much greater willingness to use force

The Security Council has been increasingly willing to authorize the use of force to deter “spoilers” from undermining peace agreements and in so doing to restart old conflicts. UN peace operations are now routinely mandated to use force to protect the peace, not just their own personnel.³²

It’s not just the *Human Security Report* that found success in UN peacekeeping operations. Even the Rand Corporation, a U.S.-based private think tank, has high praise for the United Nations. “The United Nations provides the best suitable institutional framework for all but the largest and most demanding of nation-building missions, due to the UN’s comparatively low-cost structure, high success rate, and high degree of international legitimacy,” found a report released in February 2005.³³ The same report stated:

Among those studied, two-thirds of UN nation-building operations can be counted as successful at this time, compared with half of such U.S. operations

Within its limits, UN peacekeeping is a highly efficient means of placing post-conflict societies on the path to enduring peace and democratic government, and the most efficient form of international intervention so far documented

UN nation-building efforts tend to be smaller, shorter, and cheaper and, at least among those studied, more often successful than the American efforts³⁴

Despite derision from the defence lobby, the United Nations is widely recognized as playing a vital role in mitigating global conflict and promoting peace. And while the UN’s behind-the-scenes work may have gone largely unnoticed for years, it was hard to miss the important role that the UN played in the debate leading up to the invasion of Iraq.

No longer a body that was inconsequential to international politics, the UN became the central focal point for the debate in 2003. As many commentators have stated, it was remarkable that an international debate took place over the very legitimacy of war, in the case of the U.S. proposal to invade Iraq. The United Nations was the centre point of the debate – not NATO, or any other international body for that matter.

Ramesh Thakur and Andrew Mack wrote in March 2003, only three days after the terrible “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad began, “A funny thing happened on the road to Baghdad. The people of the world defected from the U.S. and converted to the UN. Instead of being a pro forma test of UN relevance, the agenda shifted to become a litmus test of U.S. legitimacy The UN has been front and centre in the debate, the focus of hopes, fears and the media’s most pressing attention.”³⁵

Thakur and Mack wrote in the *Japan Times* that “a globalized public opinion mobilized in opposition to the war before it even began The UN as a global forum provided a platform for voicing domestic dissent within the U.S. For the first time ever in human history, the international community united to wage peace before a war started.”

Deep structural and even cultural changes within the military are taking root, locking in the new posture that has been brought about in recent years, especially in regard to our military ties with the United States.

Achieving the level of interoperability — or integration — with the United States that is desired by the military leadership requires billions of dollars not just for more troops, but also for expensive, high-tech and frequently U.S.-built weaponry.

Partnering with the U.S.

Despite the strong international consensus on the utility and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping, views within the Canadian Forces remain divided between “the pragmatists” and “the hawks.” The pragmatists see the value of peacekeeping in maintaining confidence in CF missions abroad and support for the military budget. In contrast, the hawks feel that the public peacekeeping image prevents the military from winning large increases to military spending, purchasing new equipment that might appear aggressive in nature, and taking on more “robust” combat missions abroad. It could be said that there are still some “doves” in the Canadian Forces who see the value in UN peacekeeping, but they have been virtually silenced.

In the wake of September 11, 2001, the hawks have clearly won the debate within the defence lobby. They are leading the charge in challenging Canada’s peacekeeping role and are working hard to convince the public to embrace a new war-fighting role for the military, especially alongside U.S. armed forces.

Meanwhile, deep structural and even cultural changes within the military are taking root, locking in the new posture that has been brought about in recent years, especially in regard to our military ties with the United States.

According to the Royal Military College of Canada’s Joel Sokolsky and Carleton University doctoral candidate Philippe Lagassé, the Canada-U.S. security relationship has evolved in the last five years at a pace unseen since the early Cold War:

In spite of Ottawa’s decision to eschew a role in the Iraq war and the U.S. ballistic missile defence system, Canada has played an active part in the war on terror. Since the fall of 2001, Ottawa has launched several counter-terrorism initiatives at home, joined the Americans in dislodging the Taliban in Afghanistan, and worked with Washington to improve security on the continent and at the Canada-U.S. border.

As the authors point out, despite Canada’s decision not to participate in the Iraq war or the U.S. ballistic missile defence program, Canada has played a significant role in the U.S.-led War on Terror:

Canada’s contribution to the global campaign against transnational terrorism is focused on Afghanistan. In late 2001, Canadian frigates joined American [aircraft] carrier battle groups in hunting and capturing Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in the Arabian Sea. Since that time, over 20 Canadian ships have deployed to the Arabian Sea to join or lead battle groups and conduct maritime interdictions, force-support and force-projection operations. This naval contribution is one of the largest from a NATO member

In late 2005, under the auspices of U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom, the Canadian military deployed a provincial reconstruction team to the Kandahar region, and Canadian special operations forces are helping the U.S. military hunt and kill Taliban and Al Qaeda near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. A

CF brigade headquarters and an army task force also deployed to the region in 2006. These deployments indicate the Canadian government grasps the link between overseas commitments and maintaining good bilateral relations [with the United States].

All told, Canada's overseas contribution to the global war on terrorism is far from insignificant. Indeed, the Canadian presence in Afghanistan reflects Ottawa's view that a part in the war on terror's "away game" is worth as much to Washington as any contributions to the "home game" – even though the home game may be of greater import to the bilateral security relationship.³⁶

Broken promises

In that meeting room in Ottawa back in March 2005, where former prime minister Paul Martin and his senior defence and foreign policy leaders determined the nature of Canada's intervention in Afghanistan, Martin asked the military leaders for a promise.

Eugene Lang, chief of staff to Defence Minister Bill Graham, and John McCallum, who was in the room at the time, told the CBC that Martin was concerned about the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Darfur, Sudan, as well as the peace process in Haiti.³⁷ Martin wanted to maintain the flexibility to send significant numbers of troops to those regions, even if he agreed to send more than 2,000 troops to Kandahar, as the military wanted. According to Lang, the reply from the military was, "yes," Canada would be able to send troops in support of a UN mission to those, or any other countries.

But today, the military and the Conservative government say the mission to Afghanistan has tapped out the military and there are no troops left for other missions. The deal has been broken.

Is this a case of "can't do it," or "won't do it?" The government says its military is overstretched, but documents released to the New Democratic Party through Access to Information requests confirm that the military predicted it would have enough troops for a second mission.³⁸ This seems reasonable since, after all, in 2003 Canada maintained 2,000 troops in Kabul, Afghanistan, while 1,300 troops were still deployed in Bosnia.

Now, Paul Martin is crying foul. "Rick Hillier told me he would," Martin says. "That was what we agreed on."³⁹

The Conservatives are largely implementing plans that were laid out by the Martin Liberals before them. The only difference is that they are pushing the Canadian Forces into the arms of the U.S.-led War on Terror with more enthusiasm.

Several years after its implementation, the so-called "transformation agenda" within the Canadian military has proven to be incredibly expensive. Achieving the level of interoperability – or integration – with the United States that is desired by the military leadership requires billions of dollars not just for more troops, but also for expensive, high-tech and frequently U.S.-built weaponry.

The 2005 Federal Budget announced another \$12.8 billion in military spending over five years, an increase of 35 per cent.

In April 2003, Liberal then-defence minister John McCallum appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. Bloc Québécois MP Claude Bachand criticized DND's plans, commenting that, "to my mind, interoperability [with the U.S. military] is a costly proposition in so far as sovereignty is concerned and also from a materials standpoint."⁴⁰

McCallum replied, "As far as costs are concerned, I recall my British counterpart saying the very same thing, even though his budget is much larger than mine. He stated that there were major problems associated with interoperability because the US spends twice as much as all other NATO countries combined. Keeping pace with the US represents an enormous challenge."

But 2005 was the turning point. In January, Paul Martin appointed Rick Hillier as the new Chief of Defence Staff, over other candidates who were next in line for the job. Hillier brought with him experience in Afghanistan, but most importantly experience working as an embedded officer in the U.S. military: he served as the first Canadian Deputy Commanding General of III Corps, U.S. Army in Fort Hood, Texas. Hillier was committed to bringing into Canada U.S. military concepts and priorities.

In February, the Martin government was experiencing a political crisis over missile defence. Faced with growing public opposition, a divided caucus and a minority government, Paul Martin refused to participate in the United States' missile shield. However, the decision was made to provide a "significant" increase to Canadian military spending – the lifeblood of the "transformation agenda" – in part to offset potential U.S. anger over the BMD decision.⁴¹

Also in January, the 2005 Federal Budget announced another \$12.8 billion in military spending over five years, an increase of 35 per cent. The government described it as the largest increase in 20 years, while the Conference of Defence Associations, a defence lobby group, declared the increase "staggering."⁴²

By March, General Hillier had convinced Martin's government that the best way to impress the Bush administration would be to take on the dangerous redeployment of Canadian Forces, including a battle group for counter-insurgency operations, in Kandahar province for one year, ending February 2007.

Later that year, the Martin government produced a long-awaited International Policy Statement. Foreign policy experts noted that the new statement, intended to guide Canada's role in the world, barely mentioned United Nations peacekeeping.

The statement devotes a whole section to the military's "transformation agenda," noting, "the military will acquire new technologies and equipment in order to operate effectively in today's challenging security environment alongside our allies and other government and non-governmental agencies. The government has provided significant new resources that will, among other things, improve the Canadian Forces' deployability, their surveillance and weapons systems, and their ability to lead and sustain operations."⁴³

The statement calls on the Forces to adopt a "three-block war" concept that blurs the distinction between combat, police and humanitarian operations by soldiers. Based on a Pentagon

strategy, which has yet to be proven successful in either Afghanistan or Iraq, the term describes three distinct operations occurring within a three-block urban environment, presumably in the context of forces operating within a “failed or failing state.”

These sweeping changes in approach are disquieting. But what is most troubling is this quotation from the statement: “transformation, however, is not just about technology and equipment modernization. It will require a fundamental change to the culture of our military to ensure a fully integrated and unified approach to [military] operations.”⁴⁴

It is precisely this issue of the changing culture in the Canadian Forces that is alarming, even to some people working within the military. Professor Walter Dorn, a civilian instructor with the Canadian Forces College, laments Canada’s abandonment of peacekeeping. In the *Globe and Mail* earlier this year, he wrote:

In doctrine, the Canadian Forces leadership is replacing the time-honoured concepts of peacekeeping and peace-support operations with the “three block war,” a term coined by a former U.S. Marine Corps commandant. It advocates combining peacekeeping and humanitarian activities with war-fighting, all in the same mission – an impossible task. An enemy-centered mentality is creeping inexorably into the Canadian military psyche. The previous notions of negotiated consent, impartiality and minimum use of force (formerly criteria for Canadian participation in peacekeeping) are being replaced by the more aggressive goal of “a high intensity fight” against the “armies of failing states,” to use the words from a recent [Canadian] army poster.⁴⁵

Dorn, in raising the alarm over the changing military culture, is undercutting the enthusiasm over the “transformation agenda” within the Canadian Forces – an agenda that is moving away from UN peacekeeping toward more combat-oriented, “enemy-centric” fighting – often under U.S. command. “Operationally, the Canadian Forces have decided on an almost exclusive focus on Afghanistan, in a partnership with the United States, whose priority is offensive operations,” observed Dorn.

Reaction within the Canadian Forces to Dorn has been strong, as was expected. Professor James Finan and Major Michael Boire, both of the Royal Military College of Canada, launched their own academic counter-offensive:

Walter Dorn remains convinced that there is no life after or outside of the United Nations Given the events of 9/11, even the die-hard Canadian liberal left has moved on to a more reasoned and responsible position regarding Canada’s place in the world. Dorn has not. He is trapped well within the mystique of the blue beret, a mythological throwback to simpler times.⁴⁶

Taking up a position on Dorn’s flank is Dr. Lawrence McDonough, also from the Royal Military College of Canada:

It is interesting that Professor Walter Dorn does not appear to appreciate the difference between national interests and national vanity . . . the peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and other United Nations mandates that Canada has un-

In terms of military spending, the Conservatives endorsed the whopping increases brought in by the Liberals, and topped them up by \$5.3 billion over five years.

dertaken in the past represent worthwhile charitable acts but should not be confused with national interests. The desire for recognition of these charitable acts is nothing more than vanity.⁴⁷

Dorn quite expected this kind of response from his military colleagues. In a recent article, he offers this observation:

Ironically, Canadian soldiers' feelings toward peacekeeping are not generally as positive as those held by the Canadian public, though soldiers receive considerable appreciation and praise for their service.

Canadian soldiers on UN peacekeeping missions, despite the initial excitement of the deployment, soon find themselves in long periods of boring patrols and observation, interrupted by occasional bursts of violence and possibly tragedy. They may feel that UN Rules of Engagement are too weak, possibly endangering their own lives

This sense of impotence and anger at the UN for not properly equipping and guiding them, has left some soldiers bitter and others with a general sense of disaffection and cynical of the UN. Many military personnel fear that a single-minded focus on peacekeeping will turn them into a "constabulary force," doing police-like work and rendering them incapable of high-intensity combat. It would replace the "warrior ethic" with a softer, gentler attitude that would make them less than full soldiers.⁴⁸

Moreover, as we have seen, these concerns apply to the outstanding military perception of peacekeeping, which has been replaced by the modern, multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation. In places such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, no Canadian soldier would ever describe the situation as unchallenging. As Walter Dorn's research shows, it's tragically ironic that Canada's contributions are at a historic low, just as the UN's need is reaching a historic high.

Conservatives carrying the Liberals' torch

Canadians are paying close attention to the military's new, expanded mission in Afghanistan. In a recent poll, 60 per cent of respondents said they felt well informed about the mission.⁴⁹ However, as some have suggested, being well informed does not mean greater support for the combat role Canada has undertaken, nor does it mean Canadians are supportive of the "transformation agenda" being driven by Canadian government policy and spending.

Since their election in January 2006, Stephen Harper's Conservatives have carried out the plans and policies laid out by their Liberal predecessors. While there may be some differences in their use of language and in how the government characterizes its motives, essentially Canada's defence and foreign policies have followed the same trajectory, despite the change in leadership.

In terms of military spending, the Conservatives endorsed the whopping increases brought in by the Liberals, and topped them up by \$5.3 billion over five years. Instead of promoting notions of international obligations, such as “the responsibility to protect,” the Conservative Party prefers to describe its defence policies as putting “Canada first” by focusing on “national interests.”

Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s first speech to the United Nations in September 2006 displayed the single focus of the government. His comments focused entirely on Afghanistan and the military mission there, to the exclusion of all other international issues that concern Canada. He could have mentioned other pressing matters such as human rights, the environment, global poverty or disarmament.

But if Canadians really want to see how their government sees the world, they need look no further than the boilerplate speeches that Ambassador Michael Wilson has been delivering to our U.S. allies about Canada’s commitment to the War on Terror. Here are just a few of Ambassador Wilson’s recent comments:

- “No country is more important to Canada and its people than the United States of America.”⁵⁰
- “I’m proud to say that Prime Minister Harper immediately reached out to President Bush after being elected with a minority government and made it a well-known priority of his government to repair the Canadian-American relationship.”⁵¹
- “In the Speech from the Throne . . . the Government signalled its determination to join with our friends and allies to advance common values and interests, ‘starting with Canada’s relationship with the United States, *our best friend and largest trading partner*.’”⁵² (emphasis is from original)
- “Prime Minister Harper has taken [steps] to re-orient Canadian foreign policy.”⁵³
- “[In the] Speech from the Throne . . . the Government not only committed to putting more police on the street and improving border security, but to a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars.”⁵⁴
- “Canada buys almost one billion dollars in military goods from American firms each year Our significant defence trade contributes not only to economic growth and jobs on both sides of the border . . . but to the interoperability of our forces in the field, and to obtaining the best value for money for our taxpayers.”⁵⁵

Canadians divided

Although a general consensus on the value of the Afghanistan war may exist among decision makers within the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the departments of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, Canadians aren't so convinced. In fact, Canadians are becoming more critical of the shift in Canada's military role, in part because of the rising number of casualties that this new policy has created.

In March 2006, at the outset of Canada's new, more dangerous and combat-oriented role in Kandahar, the Strategic Counsel found that there was 55 per cent support for Canada's mission. But the survey also found that about 70 per cent of people believed that the main purpose of the intervention in Afghanistan was related more to peacekeeping than combat. Only 26 per cent thought that its primary role was combat.

Seven months and 40 deaths later, a clear majority of Canadians now consider the mission in Afghanistan to be a lost cause. Fifty-nine per cent told Decima that Canadian soldiers "are dying for a cause we cannot win," according to the poll released on October 1, 2006. In the same poll, 76 per cent of respondents said U.S. policy had made the world more dangerous, and 68 per cent predicted that the U.S. would eventually abandon the Iraq war without success.⁵⁶

Ironically, while Canada continues to embrace U.S. war-fighting, these same policies are becoming political liabilities for the floundering Bush administration. A recent CNN report skewered U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for his miscalculations in Iraq. Frank Sesno interviewed Major General John Riggs, who was drummed out of the military and into retirement after contradicting Rumsfeld's "transformation agenda." General Riggs told CNN what he would say to Secretary Rumsfeld given the opportunity:

Mr. Rumsfeld, I respect your opinion as far as this force, but you're not God. You don't have all the knowledge, and to bet on a single entity, especially in light of what's unfolding in Afghanistan and Iraq, you know, I think this transformation agenda is off base – seriously off base.⁵⁷

General Riggs is demanding Rumsfeld's resignation, and a widening circle of other retired U.S. generals have joined his call.

Conclusion: Peacekeeping needs Canada

Canadians are deeply sceptical of the U.S.-led War on Terror. Many would likely be alarmed if they understood how closely our political leadership has integrated Canada's military policy with that of the U.S., devoting billions of dollars to pursuing in Afghanistan the same strategy that has failed the United States so miserably in Iraq.

But it will take a committed, well-informed and well-organized public to pull Canada's foreign and defence policies out of the U.S. War on Terror's fire. The hawks in Canada have tried to use the fear of terrorism to convince Canadians to throw in their lot with the Bush administration and move away from the United Nations and Canada's traditional peacekeeping role. Yet everywhere the evidence exists that UN missions have evolved, that they are more successful and less costly than U.S.-led missions. What's more, peacekeeping needs Canada.

Canada should immediately answer the call from the United Nations to provide more support to UN missions. It should set itself the goal of once more being among the top-10 global contributors of military personnel to UN operations within five years. This would only require the rededication of the current number of troops deployed in Afghanistan (2,300) to UN missions.

Canadians want their government and their military engaged in resolving international conflicts – not creating or exacerbating them. Regrettably, this view is not reflected in the declining numbers of Canadian peacekeepers deployed over the past 15 years. Nor is it borne out by the growing insurgency in southern Afghanistan or by the increasing numbers of dead and wounded Canadian soldiers and Afghan civilians. Nor by the increased dollars committed to combat missions by both the Martin and Harper governments. Nor by the escalating rhetoric of war employed by the current Conservative government.

At every turn, federal government policy is failing Canadians' true desires and expectations and is becoming less and less distinguishable from that of the Bush administration's War on Terror. Yes, Afghanistan must be rescued from the current cycle of violence. But Canada is complicit in this violence and should have never taken up its current "counter-insurgency" war-fighting role in Kandahar. Instead, we should refocus our role in the country on diplomatic measures to win "the hearts and minds" of the Afghan people, extend the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and ensure that aid dollars can reach those who need it most.

Now is the time for Canada to change course. It's time to return to an independent path that's in keeping both with Canadian public opinion and our historic internationalist values. It is a poor ally that won't tell its "best friend" where the priorities of its people – and those of the world – truly lie. Canada needs to keep the peace.

About the author

Steven Staples is founder of Ceasefire.ca, former Director of Security Programs for the Polaris Institute, and author of *Missile Defence: Round One* (Lorimer, 2006).

Endnotes

- ¹ Kara Kuryllowicz, “Top of my game,” *Profit*, October 2006, p. 34.
- ² The Security and Defence Forum (SDF) is a program of the Department of National Defence that is mandated to “develop a domestic competence and national interest in defence issues of current and future relevance to Canadian security.” The SDF program funds more than a dozen Canadian university Centres of Expertise in security, defence and/or defence management studies. See <http://www.forces.gc.ca/admpol/content.asp?id={2B255CA2-0A84-4BAB-BCE0-25EF4ECDBA79}>
- ³ “Soldiers, not Peacekeepers,” p. 55.
- ⁴ Department of National Defence, “Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier appointed new Chief of the Defence Staff,” January 14, 2005 (http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1572).
- ⁵ Steven Staples and Bill Robinson, *It's Never Enough: Canada's alarming rise in military spending*, Polaris Institute, October 25, 2005, p. 3.
- ⁶ Bill Schiller, “The Road to Kandahar,” *Toronto Star*, September 9, 2006, p. F1.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Doug Saunders, “NATO chief defends Afghan mission,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 3, 2006.
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