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SOME ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING TASKINGS

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This paper has evolved from my long time interest in the non-traditional use of military forces and my own peacekeeping service in a United Nations force in Cyprus.^{1 2} There are a number of areas which I believe have ethical implications, one example being the difficulty of reaching a consensus when drafting terms of reference regarding the treatment of military and civilian peacekeepers in a mandate.³ Ethical questions also arise when one examines the wide differences found when one views cultural outlooks, religious considerations, and national and individual characteristics and interests. Finally, all involved have different methods to

¹ It could not have been written however, without the help of Lieutenant Colonel (ret'd) Alex Morrison, MSC, CD, who was for several years a special counsellor in the Canadian Mission to the United Nations in New York. Colonel Morrison was directly involved in many of the negotiations to set up several of the recent peacekeeping forces, in particular those in Iran-Iraq, Afghanistan, and Namibia.

² I would also like to thank Major Wayne Thornton, CD and Captain Doug Mair, CD, who between them, have served some fourteen United Nations tours in Cyprus, UNDOF & UNTSO, Iran-Iraq, and Afghanistan for their advice and comments on this paper.

³ For the purposes of this paper, I consider all members of a United Nations mission in any particular situation to be a part of the peacekeeping force. For example, in Cyprus, the force would include not only the members of the military but also all of the UN political personnel who are attached to UNFICYP.



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demonstrate their recognition for those who serve the cause of world peace in this way.

The process of sending troops into a troubled area under the auspices of the United Nations is a very complex one.⁴ It involves extensive negotiations by all levels of the United Nations bureaucracy, acceptances from the belligerent parties, and acceptances from the countries who will supply members of their armed forces to make up the Force. The process begins when the Security Council senses that some form of intervention may be possible, or may be requested. It then instructs the Secretary General and the Secretariat to begin preparations. Perhaps there will be some old plans on file, particularly if the area in question has been a trouble spot for a long time. If so, the planners will pull them out and begin up-dating them. Or they may have to begin from scratch, as has often been the case recently. Although there will probably be some military consultation, the work at this point will largely be conducted by civilian members of the Secretariat who draft the resolution for the Security Council.

As the Secretariat begins to see how a force might take shape, they informally consult with possible members, asking unofficially

⁴ This paper deals only with those situations which have generated official United Nations Peacekeeping Forces under United Nations appointed command. Both the action in Korea in the period from 1950-53 and the present action in the Persian Gulf region are specifically excluded from consideration in this paper.



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whether Nation "A" would be willing to supply say, 600 infantry troops, or 500 signals personnel, or 150 logisticians. During this period the Security Council is also active in informal consultations with the belligerent parties and others who have an interest, trying to come to some agreement as to how and when a Force might be created and how that Force is to be deployed when an agreement is reached. The process is carried out within very short time frames, and deadlines for responses often have been between 24 and 72 hours.

Once the Security Council is satisfied that a Force would be accepted by the parties to the dispute, and that appropriate troops are available to constitute such a force, a special session is called and a resolution put forward. Only after the resolution is passed will the Secretary General formally request from member countries the forces necessary to establish the new Force. The resolution will authorize the establishment of the force, select the commander, and make provision for necessary preliminary activities such as reconnaissance of the area and so forth. It may contain the Mandate, but often that comes later in another resolution.

The mandate contains four essentials; first, what the Force is to do, in short, a mission statement; second, how long it shall last, usually a six month term which is renewable as necessary; third, what political arrangements need to be made, involving both how the situation is going to be resolved and what special

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facilities may be required; and finally, what financial arrangements are required to support the Force.

One of the most important things which we, as Canadians, look for in the resolutions relates to how we treat our troops serving on this type of mission. Culturally, we believe that we should uphold the same general standards for our peacekeeping forces as we expect for our personnel in any operational situation. This means, for example, that food and facilities should be at certain minimal levels which may well be different from, and usually higher than, some other national standards. This can cause certain difficulties both within the Force and for the U.N. when perhaps the Canadians are seen to be treated differently from others. Sometimes these problems are worked out through transfer payments, at other times, on the ground, through nationally allotted funds.

Some problems also arise because of the differences between a professional, volunteer force and a conscript force. The Canadian Forces are a professional military and the troops which we send to our peacekeeping contingents are, for the most part, professional soldiers. Those members of Canadian reserve forces who have served in Canadian contingents to date have been totally integrated into regular force units and trained with them to regular force standards. Many of the countries supplying peacekeepers do so from reserve forces who may not

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attain their normal national military standard or they may be trained to substantially lower standards than regular military forces. This too, causes problems in a mixed nation force such as the peacekeeping forces are.

The second major area which raises ethical problems at the beginning is the fact that Canada does not believe in placing her troops unnecessarily at risk in the peacekeeping scenario. This can and does create a number of problems for the Canadian government at home. Some regard the military selection screening process as a violation to equality of treatment of our personnel in the Forces. Some examples of the kind of unnecessary risk to which I refer relate to selective membership in certain of the contingents. To be blunt, the protection of our own personnel mandates that what some might otherwise call discrimination be practised in the selection of members of some contingents. Merely wearing a Canadian flag or a U.N. Blue Beret will not guarantee one's safety in the midst of some of the conflict areas of the world. It would be tantamount to an unacceptable lack of care for our personnel for example, to assign a Jewish member of the Canadian Forces to a peacekeeping mission in Iran or Iraq. Such an assignment would be a deliberate and unnecessary risk for the member and might well compromise the usefulness of the contingent. A similar caveat exists in the use of the female members of our forces in certain areas of the world. Both the Iran and Iraq missions again come to mind, as well as Afghanistan. In the latter case, however, there was a positive situation for some of our



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female members. Afghan men do not allow female members of their families contact with men from outside the family. After the Soviet withdrawal many of the crop areas had been sown with mines of various sorts. The women and children of the mujahadin were the ones most likely to be injured by these as they are primarily responsible for caring for crops and flocks. Some female Canadian military engineers were formed into a team to teach Afghan women and children the proper way to remove mines and render them safe. That team did outstanding work with the women and children while a similar male team taught the men. Had we not had these trained women available to teach other women, the casualties among the local population as a result of the use of these mines would have been substantially higher in the aftermath of that war.

As peacekeeping operations are proposed and forces assembled, it is essential to be particularly aware of and sensitive to the national cultural and religious customs of both the belligerent and the fellow members of the force. It simply is not possible to export our North American cultural and societal mores to another country and expect their acceptance. Many Western countries are discovering this problem now with their forces serving in the Gulf Area. The Saudis, as is true with many conservative Arab States, do not permit the use or possession of beverage alcohol in their country. That has caused some difficulty for members of a culture in which beverage alcohol is a part of normal socializing. I am afraid that this type of cultural difference is sometimes not recognized by those who, in their own countries, would be

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particularly sensitive to the sign of a threat of domination of a minority by the dominant culture. I believe, however, it would be irresponsible ethically for Canada to refuse to offer her expertise and personnel to prevent further human suffering and war because of an insistence upon something which is accepted and insisted upon in our own society but which is not universally accepted in all societies.

Let us now move on to another area, one which might be called the microethical, which deals not with grand political discussions at the United Nations, but with the private soldier out at the sharp end. I have already mentioned unnecessary risk considered by the government in the discussions of the mandate and the political issues, but the young soldier is also concerned with unnecessary risk. He is often placed in an unfamiliar environment, between people who are angry at each other and who are probably better armed than he is, and he, low in the overall scheme, is expected to keep them from killing each other. What we expect from privates and corporals on a peacekeeping mission is an extremely difficult task. During my own experience in Cyprus I knew of privates finding themselves talking to very senior NCOs and officers of the opposing sides and trying to keep them apart or from changing a position which had been mandated by the truce. It is not a continuous thing, but it does happen, and the soldier on the OP is the one who has to make decisions, or call for help, or stop further moves from occurring. All of this can happen in a moment, for example, when a Greek farmer drives his tractor on the

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wrong side of a road, or a Turkish farmer decides to harvest a field that is too close to the line. In Nicosia, the line that separates the two sides is only a few feet wide in some places, and opposing soldiers with live rounds up the breach are looking at each other across the sandbags of their respective emplacements. This has been going on for longer than most of those soldiers have been alive, and for that matter, longer than most of the peacekeepers have as well.

With this kind of a situation, the soldier on peacekeeping duties needs to know that he is supported. To me this means that his officers and NCOs owe him even more individual concern than perhaps they might expect to give in a normal peacetime situation. Opportunities and facilities for communicating home, normal amenities where possible, reasonable opportunities for leave and facilities for recreation are all very important. Some of these things often have to be "fought for" with the civilian members of the UN bureaucracy, some of whom have demonstrated little use, understanding or respect for the military members for whom they have responsibility, even though they both are wearing the same United Nations insignia.

Senior members of the UN bureaucracy, like those of most governmental bureaucracies, understandably do not like to be presented with "ex post facto" solutions. But, unfortunately, they sometimes present members of the peacekeeping forces with just that type of situation. An example of this occurred in Afghanistan,

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when the first contingent of observers were given a daily sum for rations and quarters with no instructions or guidance as to how it was to be used. Three months later, a senior civilian mandarin in New York decided they had been given too much and unilaterally and retroactively cut their per diem allowance by almost one half, recouping the monies owed and already spent from the officers' future per diem payments. At the same time, UN civilian personnel in Islamabad, Pakistan (a part of the same mission) were paid almost twice the per diem given to military officers working with them. This resulted in the lowest ranking civilian secretary being able to reside in a North American standard hotel while his boss, the station chief (holding the rank of Colonel) could not afford to do so. An additional issue arose when the per diem was reduced for the civilian staff to the same level as that given to the military, because no recovery action was taken against civilians on the grounds that the money had already been spent on the better accommodations. This example probably resulted from there being no one in the UN headquarters who would act as a "Godfather" for the military peacekeepers on this mission. As a consequence they came under whatever section seemed to be handy at the time the force was established. Peacekeeping operations seem to have a low priority with the bureaucrats, most of whom are far more interested in the administration and funding of their own on-going programmes than they are in caring for an additional duty outside their own areas.

Another area which needs to be examined in the treatment of

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peacekeeping missions is the question of leave and compensatory time for military members of the Forces. The UN policy has not been updated for several decades, during which, military personnel have fallen far behind the civilian members who have had the advantage of collective bargaining and union pressure. Thus a civilian member of the Force would be entitled to twenty-five working days of leave per annum which equates to five calendar weeks while a military member serving along side of him would only be entitled to only eighteen calendar days in the same period.

There are also problems concerning the granting of compensatory time off. Military members of some mission are granted compensatory time in lieu of weekends which most civilians do not work. It is not uncommon for mission members to work for 24 days straight in order to accumulate their compensatory time and be able to take it out of area. But this time is treated quite differently than leave time. It is presently impossible to take it outside the mission area without a 50% cut in per diem. Many mission areas are zones of hostility and uncondusive to either rest or relaxation. Personnel assigned to Beirut are an example of this. Much of the accommodation in these areas is secured by members going together, pooling their per diem and making a long term contract. This must be paid for whether the individual is in or out of the mission area. The result is that the member in Beirut, for example, if leaving the area for a safe zone such as Tel Aviv or Damascus, must pay for two sets of accommodations on half the per diem, or remain in an area which is ill-suited for

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either rest or "recharging one's batteries."

What seems to be desperately needed is a "Military Cell" for the UN headquarters that would have several functions. It would be responsible for maintaining continuous planning for possible peacekeeping operations in various trouble areas. At the present such plans are drawn up on an "ad hoc" basis only when a mandate is being considered. The operations section of such a cell could also provide a small cadre of people for an initial response team to assist in setting up the force on the ground.

The cell would also have attached to it a comptrollers section responsible for providing supervision of expenditures undertaken by peacekeeping forces. In connection with the planning cell, the comptroller's section would be responsible for knowing such things as costs of housing, food, and other necessities in areas where peacekeeping forces might be established. One would hope that such a cell would be manned by military personnel familiar with the kinds of situations which arise in the field and able to make provision for meeting such situations.

The final section of such a cell should be one concerned with personnel and logistics. Its function would be to ensure that all members of a mission were treated with some degree of equity by the United Nations, whether they were wearing a uniform or civilian clothes. Just as military forces serving various nations need to have those who are committed to ensuring their well-being, military

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forces doing the work of the United Nations need someone who will do the same for them.

All of these suggestions have been impossible here-to-fore because of the opposition of some of the major powers in the UN. However, the situation has changed radically over the past year and perhaps the time has come for those nations who have been most active in setting up and operating the peacekeeping forces to now suggest something of a more permanent nature for the control of such operations.

Another area which causes some difficulty in peacekeeping forces is the lack of common military values. No two countries are the same when it comes to questions of values, and all of the peacekeeping forces are multi-national in makeup. Some national contingents have been known to take equipment home with them which had been issued to the contingent for their use during the operation. This, of course, means that the next unit is faced with a shortage of equipment that it expected to have. The situation is well known in the UN but is considered too politically embarrassing to talk about. Nevertheless the fact that it does happen makes it difficult for those who must continue the work without an essential piece of equipment.

Something similar happens in the treatment of the personnel themselves by their own countries. Some peacekeepers are allowed very substantial leeway in regard to customs upon return from an

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assignment. Others, like Canada, are extremely strict about what may be brought back. Such differences can result in morale problems particularly when they seem to be so strongly emphasized at times.

All these questions of national values can provide a great levelling experience to members of UN Forces. Other countries' values, while different from our own, are as important to them as our values are to us. It is important, therefore, to teach our personnel to accord these different values respect. Only in this way will we be able to work together as a team.

There is one final ethical area which I would like to raise in relation to peacekeeping, the recognition of sacrifice. Those who have served in the various United Nations peacekeeping forces are recognized by the Secretary General with the award of a medal for each tour. Multiple tours are recognized by the addition of a numeral to the ribbon of the medal. Needless to say, in Cyprus, for example, there are many who have served a number of tours, as that particular mission has lasted continuously since April 1964.

But over and above service in the peacekeeping forces are those who have suffered injury or death in the cause of peace. The roll of honour for Canada alone contains seventy seven names, while those who have suffered serious wounds and survived are many more. If these injuries or deaths had been suffered during a war, many nations would have made some special

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recognition of them. These wounds and deaths, however, were suffered in the cause of peace, trying to prevent a further outbreak of hostilities, and they were suffered not on behalf of one country, but in the name of the United Nations, almost literally the whole world. For this reason, I believe that the United Nations should institute a special medal to be awarded in two classes, one for wounds, and one for those who die for the cause of peace. I would further suggest that some appropriate place be set aside in the UN headquarters building as a memorial to those who have given their lives in the service of peace in United Nations Forces. Perhaps when the world, and particularly the leaders of the world, begin to see in graphic terms what their failures cost, in human lives and suffering, they will have the kind of incentive to work to prevent any further wars.