

Letter to the Editor published in the Globe and Mail, Thursday 1st March 2007

Michael Valpy's article "the myth of Canada as global peacekeeper" is at once intriguing and bewildering. It certainly contains nothing new and rehashes an argument cogently made over the years by our distinguished historian Jack Granatstein: that Canada no longer contributes troops to UN peacekeeping the way it used to do.

That is certainly true. But it does not mean that our country does not support peacekeeping or that we do not make significant contributions. To start, at the UN in New York, Canada plays a leading and major role in the UN Peacekeeping Committee that has been and still is highly respected. The fact that we have representation in nine UN missions means that our expertise is highly valued and is most often in the form of headquarters personnel who wield influence far beyond their mere numbers. Not to be forgotten is our representation in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai. Next, Canada's well-regarded Pearson Peacekeeping Centre's educational and training programs at home and abroad have educated thousands of military and civilian persons who now are influential in their countries' peacekeeping policies and practises. It is to be lamented that we do not now have high level military representation at UN Headquarters, but someday someone will recognize that mistake and rectify it. In the past, other countries have complained that Canada was over-represented at the UN, what with a general as Military Adviser to the Secretary-General and many officers in other areas. Those Member States demanded positions and they seem to now be enjoying their turn.

The article asks the question "what is Canada's military policy?" The answer is that it is the same it has always been: to do what the government tells it to do. It is wrong to suggest that we will never again contribute to peacekeeping in any form. We have no idea what the future will hold and our military must remain ready to peacekeep, to engage in general purpose combat, to fight fires and floods, to conduct search and rescue missions, to fly the flag in the Arctic and to use our experience and expertise in all of those areas to assist other countries to improve their military capability. Ann Livingston of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre strikes the right posture in the article when she says that Canada is "acting as responsibly as anyone does in the middle of significant change." By maintaining a well-rounded, well-educated, well-trained and well-equipped military force, we will continue to act responsibly and send forces to further Canadian interests and values where they are most needed.

Let us now resolve to stop this repetition of desire for the past and focus on the challenges and opportunities that now face us and that we will certainly face in the future.

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