

# War: 101

## Is it War or is it Peacekeeping? Debunking the Myth

The recent killing of diplomat Glyn Berry and a rash of attacks against our soldiers in Afghanistan, have raised the profile of Canada's mission in that country and stimulated an overdue debate regarding our role there. As in all-too-many debates, there have been some outright errors of fact offered as justification for a particular point of view regarding the Afghan mission.

A respected reporter with the *Toronto Star*, for instance, recently opined that our current mission in Afghanistan is "the first ground-fighting war this country has fought since Korea more than half a century ago." Wrong – see below. On the same day, the leader of the NDP said that we must protect our "good-guy" reputation around the word and concentrate on peacekeeping.

Assuming that Canada does not have the authority to change the 1956 definition of peacekeeping, as developed by the United Nations with Canada's input, it's perhaps timely to remind Canadians, and particularly the media and politicians, of what constitutes a peacekeeping mission.

First and foremost, *a peacekeeping force has to be invited to the conflict by the belligerents.* (I'm not making this up!) In fact the belligerents can, and have, refused to accept soldiers from particular countries as part of the peacekeeping force if they feel they would be biased for or against one or more of the belligerents. As an example, the Bosnian Serbs refused to accept the presence of U.S. army units in the early days of UNPROFOR.

Second, *the force must be impartial and treat all sides in the conflict equally.* This characteristic was essential during the

Cold War when peacekeeping missions were used to keep countries from resuming their war with each other. Unfortunately, it became problematic in the post-Cold War period when the majority of peacekeeping missions found themselves brokering and attempting to maintain cease fires between warring factions in the context of a civil war. In Bosnia for example, the Bosnian government was engaged in a conflict with breakaway Serb and Croat factions supported in varying degrees by their mother countries. UN impartiality quickly became part of the problem; however, for three years the UN insisted that the principle be applied.

Third and finally, *the peacekeeping force will only use deadly force (killing the bad guys) in their own self defence.*

Considering the above non-negotiable peacekeeping principles, how do we define our service in Afghanistan?

Hot on the heels of 9/11, NATO nations, including Canada, invoked *Article Five* of the NATO Charter which states that an attack against one is an attack against all. The US, in self-defence, deployed a combat force to Afghanistan to take down the Taliban government and root out members of Bin Laden's al Qaeda

and their infrastructure. The war on terror was joined. Canada deployed a battle group based on 3 PPCLI from Edmonton to serve with the US-led force. For six months Canada provided one third of the combat power operating out of Kandahar, tracking down and killing the bad guys. The Canadian battle group was not invited into Afghanistan, it was not impartial, and it used deadly force to eliminate the enemy. Nevertheless, many still erroneously referred to it as "peacekeeping." It was war.

After a short hiatus at home, and concurrent with a U.S. request that we join them in Iraq, Canadian troops redeployed to Kabul as part of an international stabilization force, the aim of which was to enhance the tenuous security position of President Hamid Karzai and his government. The force was invited by one side (not both), it was not impartial, and the use of deadly force was authorized under special circumstances. The term, "stabilization operations" emerged as one of the favourite terms to describe the Kabul role. It was not peacekeeping.

In mid-2005, Canada agreed to leave Kabul and deploy a 250-strong Provincial Reconstruction Team to the area close to Kandahar. That team is now in position, and deployed under the security umbrella of the United States. The U.S. will shortly reduce their forces in Afghanistan and in February NATO will take command of the security mission in Southern Afghanistan. Canada will command one of the international brigades (approximately 4,000 troops) and will provide a 1200 strong battle group based on 1PPCLI from Edmonton as part of that brigade. The NATO force has been invited in by the Karzi government, it is clearly taking sides and is not impartial and it will be routinely using deadly force. Its war.

For all intents and purposes, peacekeeping, as it was created during the Cold War, does not and cannot apply to civil wars and insurgencies which dominate the international scene today. Our "good-guy" reputation will only be enhanced by living up to our international responsibilities which includes accepting risky missions in the war on terror rather than pontificating from some self-declared moral high ground while other nation's do the heavy lifting. **FL**

*Major-General Lewis MacKenzie retired from the CF in 1993 after 36 years of service.*

**Apr 2006 – Afghanistan – Pte Darrel Barker, Cpl Paul Ractnski, Pte Jeff Leitch and Pte Joe Rustenburg, all part of 2 Section C-Company, 1PPCLI Edmonton, stand guard outside of a cave that is being searched for weapons.**

PHOTO: CPL ROBIN MUGRIDGE

