

Report: 8th Report, Standing Committee on External Affairs
and International Trade, House of Commons,
Parliament of Canada, Spring 1993,
chaired by Hon. Jon Bosley

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Full text

The Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade has
the honour to present its

EIGHTH REPORT

In accordance with its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), your
Committee has considered the subject of Canada's role in the United
Nations. Your Committee has communicated its findings and
recommendations to the Secretary of State for External Affairs in a
letter which is as follows:

CATCHING UP WITH HISTORY

An Open Letter from the Standing Committee on External Affairs and
International Trade to the Secretary of State for External Affairs:
Concerning *An Agenda for Peace* and the future of the United Nations

Dear Madam Minister,

As the first step in studying Canada and multilateralism in the 1990s,
the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and
International Trade has reviewed *An Agenda for Peace*, the comprehensive
report on the United Nations and international conflict prepared by the
Secretary General last year. We invited knowledgeable Canadians to
comment in writing on the document and some of them appear as witnesses
before the Committee. Some Members of the Committee also made a two day
visit to the United Nations in December to discuss the issues with
Canadian and United Nations officials and with representatives of other
countries.

The Committee is sending this letter to urge the Government to attach
the highest priority to evaluating, developing and acting upon the
essential ideas in *An Agenda for Peace*. We are deeply concerned that
this extraordinary attempt by the Secretary General to provide
leadership in reforming global institutions and policies is neither well
understood nor supported internationally. In particular, the effort has
not received the attention it deserves at the political level. Instead,
the international community has fallen into a pattern of decision-making
by crisis, which we are concerned could lead in time to disillusionment
with the ideal of international order and the United Nations itself.

Managing By Crisis

All of us are aware of the multiplication of conflicts around the world.
The Stockholm Peace Research Institute estimates that there were 34
civil wars being waged in 1992 and that the number could rise
substantially by the end of the decade. While Somalia and Bosnia

currently occupy the headlines, they could soon be replaced in the spotlight of world attention by some other country crisis. After all, how many in the international community thought seriously about those two countries much before one year ago?

There are many explanations for the increase in internal conflicts: they include the endemic violence of the 20th century, the poverty and inequalities within and among nations and the reawakening of sleeping conflicts following the end of the cold war. A senior United Nations official even suggested that democracy plays a part.

Many people have accepted a game - democracy - which, when it comes right down to it, they don't want to play. In many parts of the world, people think they cannot afford to lose and so when the results of democracy are unacceptable, they demand their own country or state where they are sure to win. (1)

Compounding the problems, there is a tragic mismatch between the kinds of conflict the world is encountering and the international machinery for dealing with them. The world has remained rooted in a system designed essentially to prevent inter-state conflict which is now less common than it used to be. As for internal conflict - which has now reached epidemic proportions - the international community is ill-equipped to respond and tends to react too late. We know all too well from Somalia and Bosnia that these tinder boxes often burst into flames long before the international fire fighters arrive on the scene. The result is terrible, protracted human suffering and enormous additional cost.

The hesitation of the international community to intervene in internal conflicts is explained in part by the sheer risks involved: countries fear wandering into the dark territory of local hatreds from which there is no easy exit. Traditional notions of sovereignty reinforce the sense of caution but, as more states prove susceptible to collapse or fracturing from within, the idea of the state as the foundation stone of international order begins to crumble. It is, however, an idea which the United Nations - itself made up of nation states - abandons with the greatest reluctance. And so the international community struggles with this hard choice: stay out of internal conflict and watch the suffering grow or go in and bear the unpredictable costs.

Crisis by crisis the world is struggling to catch up with its history. With each new conflict, the international community devises new forms of intervention, a fact which explains both the exhilaration and deep anxiety that now pervade the United Nations. There is exhilaration because the U.N. - the talk shop of the cold war when it came to security matters - suddenly finds itself at the centre of the action. There is also deep anxiety because many of the diplomatic and military innovations which appear daily are not based on any long-term strengthening of the United Nations system. They are inspired (and sometimes not so inspired) responses to the needs of the moment and there are growing doubts about their sustainability. As one observer put it, "the U.N. has metal fatigue. It's overloaded and overworked." (2)

In response to the enormous demands made upon it, the United Nations has cobbled together an approach that might be labelled "multi-bilateralism". It consists of United Nations authorization and

peacekeeping, while enforcement is left to the great powers, principally the United States. In this model, the U.N. issues the warrants and the United States makes the arrests. It is an arrangement dictated to some extent by the realities of global power but it is not a sustainable form of world order. In time, it will diminish the authority and legitimacy of the United Nations and, in all likelihood, exhaust the commitment of the United States. It is all too easy to grow weary of being the world's cop.

An Agenda for Peace is Praised to Death

Recognizing that the situation was untenable, in January the Security Council requested the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, to prepare proposals for managing the crisis of runaway history. His report, *An Agenda for Peace*, describes the growing conviction, among nations large and small, that an opportunity has been regained to achieve the great objectives of the U.N. Charter. At the same time, he warns plainly that success is far from certain.

While my report deals with ways to improve the Organization's capacity to pursue and preserve peace, it is crucial for all Member states to bear in mind that the search for improved mechanisms and techniques will be of little significance unless the new spirit of commonality is propelled by the will to take the hard decisions demanded by this time of opportunity. (3)

This letter is prompted by a concern that the Secretary General's warning is going unheeded. *An Agenda for Peace* is being praised to death: it is lauded for its vision but ignored or opposed for its specifics. Few of its recommendations are being translated into action. When we visited the United Nations in mid-December, we were informed that of the sixty odd recommendations in the report, only one or two would be adopted by the 1992 General Assembly. In a recent article, the Secretary General points to the uncertain fate of these ideas and acknowledges his disappointment at the reception many of them have received. (4) Should this continue, it is likely that the proposals and the opportunity to move towards a United Nations centred system of international security will be lost.

For these reasons, we think it essential that Canada lead in evaluating, developing and acting upon the essential proposals in *An Agenda for Peace*. By way of contributing to that process, the Committee hereby reports on its own hearings in which witnesses offered the Secretary General's proposals strong support and sharp, detailed criticism.

Peacekeeping and Beyond

Viewed in one way, *An Agenda for Peace* can be interpreted as no more than an attempt to develop traditional U.N. techniques for promoting peace and security. But, as Professor David Cox observed to the Committee, the proposals are significant because "they mark a shift away from the traditional UN premise of neutrality and the norms of consensus". (5) In advancing into this new territory, the Secretary General rubs the nation state the wrong way, which helps to explain the muted enthusiasm for the report among U.N. members.

Witnesses before the committee were in strong agreement that the U.N. must find ways to intervene earlier in conflicts so as to prevent tensions from flaring into civil war. They strongly supported the Secretary General's proposals for *preventive diplomacy* but insisted that the United Nations must improve its intelligence gathering and evaluation capabilities. In this connection, witnesses urged that far greater use be made of international and local non-governmental organizations.

As for *preventive deployment* - sending U.N. forces into regions before conflict occurs, with or without the consent of all the parties - witnesses supported the concept but questioned its practicality. Would the U.N. compromise its neutrality? Could it find itself in over its head? Would the Security Council authorize such operations? Shortly after these questions were asked, troops were deployed to Macedonia on just such a mission. The Committee endorses this bold action as being the kind of early response necessary to prevent the spread of conflict.

In moving on to *peacemaking and peace enforcement*, the report left behind many members of the international community. Few had difficulty with the non-military aspects of peacemaking - arbitration, mediation and so on - but the proposal for peace enforcement units is "a novel idea that involves some obvious difficulties." (6) In his testimony before the Committee, Professor Cox suggested that military peacemaking is only a halfway house between peacekeeping as we have traditionally understood it - resting on consensus and negotiation - and the enforcement provisions of the United Nations Charter. (7) William Barton suggested that the Secretary General's proposal "was an attempt to stake out the territory that the Americans are now proposing to occupy in Somalia." (8) Other witnesses, however, were very skittish about peace enforcement, seeing in it the shadow of Operation Desert Storm and insisting that Canada play no part in such operations.

Shortly after that advice was tendered, Canada signed up for the multinational enforcement operation in Somalia, led by the United States. The Government did so on the grounds that an international force of this kind, while not ideal, was preferable to the alternative of an exclusively American action. Still the Somali case highlights a moment of choice for the international community. It must either empower the United Nations to mount such operations - in some way similar to that recommended by the Secretary General - or rest content with the hired-gun approach to international peacemaking. While recognizing the difficulties, the Committee strongly prefers the former, for a simple reason: it places military power and political authority into the same international hands. We recognize that peace enforcement units should not be confused with a large U.N. standing army, an idea which the Secretary General has recognized as in appropriate and impractical. We were persuaded, however, that the United Nations must have its own rapid deployment capability - not just forces on standby - if it is to take timely and effective peace enforcement actions.

In discussing *peacekeeping*, the Secretary General returns to calmer waters, although he describes a range of activities unimaginable a decade ago. From the testimony, it is apparent that Canadians are comfortable with, even welcome, the new peacekeeping and see Canada as especially well-equipped to participate in these more complex operations. At the same time, witnesses were worried by the escalating dangers of

peacekeeping and the risk of overcommitting the Canadian armed forces. While remaining in the forefront of peacekeeping, it was suggested that Canada should not feel obliged to participate in every operation. Witnesses also argued that while military training remains the foundation for peacekeeping, Canadian peacekeepers need to work much more closely with international aid organizations. (9) Much of the concern expressed about peacekeeping revolved around the by now familiar shortcomings in the United Nations system. Witnesses recommended, among other things, that the command and control function of the U.N. should be strengthened and that better, more regular channels of communications should be established for the peacekeeping contributing countries like Canada.

The Secretary General's discussion of methods for managing conflict is rounded off with the concept of *post conflict peacebuilding*, an essential part of *An Agenda for Peace*. Here it is pointed out that "peacemaking and peacekeeping operations, to be truly successful, must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people." (10) Since it is obvious that conflict arises out of deeper political and economic failures, it can also be confidently predicted that without due attention to these matters, conflict will recur. Nonetheless, peacebuilding has tended to draw yawns from the international community, perhaps because it is fomidably complex, long-term and expensive, withess Cambodia. This comparative indifference to the political and economic underpinings of peace explains the urgent call by developing countries for *An Agenda for Development*. Echoing the same concern, Maureen O'Neil, the Director of the North-South Institute, argued that it made no sense for Canada to enthusiastically endorse *An Agenda for Peace* while shrinking the aid budget. (11)

Power and Money

At first glance, *An Agenda for Peace* appears to be about the development of new techniques for managing international conflict but it raises other more fundamental questions about power and money. At the centre of the current debate about international peace and security lie two deceptively simple questions: Who decides? Who pays?

The question of who decides points to *sovereignty*, the balance of power between the nation state and the international community. Here, the Secretary General treads carefully, bowing to reality (and his constituents) by observing that the "foundation stone" of international peace and security must remain the state. He goes on to say, however, that the time of "absolute and exclusive sovereignty" has passed and tht the task is to "find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world." (12)

In saying no more than this, *An Agenda for Peace* fails to convey the growing gap between the U.N. Charter and the new peacekeeping instruments. Likewise, it fails to alert the world to the fact that the very idea of international order, and not only the techniques for managing it, is undergoing rapid change. Witnesses before the Committee agreed there are certain minimum international standards to which states must adhere and that the right of intervention by the United Nations

should go beyond direct threats to international peace and security to include cases where states are treating their citizens badly or have lost the capacity to govern. Geoffrey Grenville-Wood argued that sovereignty should be seen as the servant of human rights and that the purpose of international intervention should be to restore sovereignty which serves the people. (13)

The issue of sovereignty opens up a deep fault line between North and South. As the response to *An Agenda for Peace* reveals, developing countries are sensitive to breaches in sovereignty which they see as facilitating intervention in their internal affairs. By contrast, developed countries are sensitive - just as sensitive - to giving up control over their international commitments and obligations. The difference is illustrated by reactions to the proposal for peace enforcement units: countries of the South worry about these units being used against them, without their consent, while countries of the North worry about their troops and money being commandeered for U.N. service, again without consent.

In discussing the gradual rebalancing of sovereignty - and all agreed it would be gradual - witnesses pointed to two requirements: the development of international standards for intervention and changes in power sharing within the United Nations. The former requirement responds to the charge that decisions to intervene are driven more by the politics of the great powers than by international consensus; the latter addresses the argument that even with standards in place, a few countries (namely the five permanent members of the Security Council) have far too much power to decide when standards will apply. There was general agreement that the membership of the Security Council should be reformed and that it would prove very difficult to do so. We note in passing that the Secretary General did not touch this subject in *An Agenda for Peace* because his mandate from the Security Council confined him to the existing Charter. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that the empowerment of the United Nations requires changes in the membership of the Council and in the balance between the Council and the General Assembly. Canada should play a leading role in seeking these changes, the further study of which will be a priority for the Committee.

If power is proving resistant to reform, money is proving even more so. The Secretary General observes that "a chasm has developed between the tasks entrusted to this organization and the financial means provided to it". (14) Picking up the same theme, U.N. officials repeatedly explained to us that the United Nations was broke. The Prime Minister has commented on the fact that the Secretary General is forced to travel the world like a mendicant, begging for funds.

The chronic failure of members to pay is commonly excused by unhappiness with the waste and inefficiency of the United Nations - both undeniable. General Lewis MacKenzie recently lobbed a shell at the peacekeeping operations division, charging that there is no command and control function in New York after the bureaucrats leave at five o'clock. (15) The other side of that story was put to us by Kofi Annan, Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations. He remarked that the United States, for one, "has trouble accepting our management and technology" but at the same time denies the U.N. the resources it needs (16). Whatever the truth, it is generally agreed that no previous Secretary General has moved as fast, or with as much determination, as

Boutros Ghali to reform the Secretariat. For his efforts, he has earned the title autocrat.

There are some hopeful signs in this generally precarious financial situation: the United States has promised to pay up its arrears and the 1992 General Assembly agreed to establish a special peacekeeping fund. We are persuaded, however, that the United Nations cannot continue to depend on the current assessment system for raising funds. Sooner or later it must have some kind of international levy - perhaps a tax on trade - to finance its operations. A seemingly large step of that kind reminds us of the Secretary General's warning.

It is crucial for all Member states to bear in mind that the search for improved mechanisms and techniques will be of little significance unless this new spirit of commonality is propelled by the will to take the hard decisions demanded by this time of opportunity. (17)

Canada and the Hard Decisions

There can be little doubt that from Somalia to Bosnia, the international community has been taking hard decisions but we wonder if they have been hard in the way intended by the Secretary General. The world responds more or less slowly, more or less adequately, to one crisis after another but thus far it has done little or nothing to improve its *capacity to respond*. It has done little to address the central argument of *An Agenda for Peace*, namely that it is necessary to change the system of international peace and security from one centred on the nation state towards one centred on the United Nations. To remind ourselves of how our minds still cling to the world of inter-state relations, note the intense in every jot and tittle of President Clinton's foreign policy-to-be-compared with the superficial interest shown in *An Agenda for Peace*. Once more, the world awaits the coming of the marines.

In these circumstances, we call upon the Government to provide international leadership in advancing *An Agenda for Peace*. We were encouraged by the recent seminar which the Minister convened, but much more needs to be done. As we see it, there are three hard decisions that Canada has to make in the 1990s if we are to respond to the challenge posed by the Secretary General: first, we must think things through; second, we must reorganize our resources for international security and development; and third, we must generate the political will necessary to make the first two hard decisions. We will touch on each of these points in turn.

1) Thinking Things Through

As a middle power, Canada has made a virtue of ad-hocery in its foreign policy and there are signs we are only too happy to carry on when it comes to *An Agenda for Peace*. In discussing the document with officials in Ottawa and New York, we discovered that they saw advantages in muddling through. As it was explained to us, countries will permit the United Nations to do things one crisis at a time that they would object to as a matter of policy. Apparently, it is better to keep your ideas under your hat.

The Committee thinks otherwise. This is a time, comparable to the period after World War II, when there is an urgent and pressing need to think things through. If the western alliance succeeded in accomplishing some of its most important goals other than the past 40 years, it was in no small part because it developed and stuck to a reasonably coherent policy, one which the vast majority of citizens in the democracies could understand. This did not mean reducing policy to rigid doctrine but it did force us to clarify means and ends. Similarly, we are compelled today to answer a few questions in as thorough and clearheaded a way as possible. What are the goals we mean to promote in the world? What is the structure of international organization most conducive to the achievement of those goals?

Canada's essential international goal in the future should be security on the one hand and development on the other - development understood as focusing on the elimination of poverty and embracing environmental sustainability and respect for human rights. While there is nothing new about the goals themselves, the relationship between them has been altered profoundly by the ending of the cold war. During most of the post war era, security policy concentrated on east-west relations and, in particular, on the military dimension of that relationship while international development focused on G-7 issues and the problem of poverty in the third world. This rather neat, if artificial, division of international labour has now dissolved and been replaced by a merging of security and development concerns. The bridge between the two is formed by peace, which is the point at which security and development meet and reinforce one another.

If the times demand the bringing together of development and security policy, they also point to the centrality of the United Nations. During much of the cold war, the U.N. was a kind of high-minded side-show so far as security matters were concerned, its role limited to peacekeeping (leaving aside the anomaly of Korea). Meanwhile the world headquarters for managing the cold war was NATO. No more. All of this has now passed into history. What now emerges as the key asset of the United Nations, apart from its global reach, is that it has the mandate to address the merged challenges of security and development. For these reasons, the empowering of the United Nations is fundamental to Canadian foreign policy and goes beyond the utility of the organization. The world needs a centre and some confidence that the centre is holding: the United Nations is the only credible candidate.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the empowering of the United Nations and the building of a U.N. centred system of international security and development should be a fundamental objective of Canadian foreign policy in the 1990s.

2) Reorganizing For Security and Development

The most profound consequence of the ending of the cold war is the merging of development and security concerns. This lesson has been learned conceptually but it is slow to penetrate bureaucratically. The United Nations has begun to relate its security and development functions but there has been little or no such movement in the individual member states: in most countries, the right hand of the military and the left hand of development assistance still knoweth not what the other is doing. We would argue that the U.N. cannot do it all.

Much of the rethinking and reorganization for peace must be carried out within the member states, and there is no better place to start than in Canada.

With the end of the cold war, the Canadian armed forces are a solution in search of a problem. Bernard Wood, the former President of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, has suggested that the problem may well be the proliferation of conflicts around the world.

For Canada, UN peacekeeping may represent primary as opposed to ancillary-defence challenges. It is time to recognize that UN peacekeeping is a global "growth industry" in which Canada is the world leader. It is a source of healthy national pride and extraordinarily strong public support for Canada's armed forces. (18)

Growth industry or not, the danger is that peacekeeping will come to be seen as just another bandaid that fails to help solve the underlying political, economic and social problems that give rise to conflict in the first place. For 27 years, Cyprus has stood as the symbol of peacekeeping as bandaid, which is not to disparage the fact that it stopped the flow of blood for all those years. The U.N. operation in Namibia, by contrast, organized peacekeeping in support of a much broader process of economic and social change.

To pursue the role of peacekeeper successfully, Canada needs to bring its defence policy - and armed forces - into a new, creative partnership with other elements of foreign policy, including trade, environmental and refugee policy, but especially the aid program. The possibilities are suggested by the performance of Canadian troops in Somalia. In addition to carrying out their military duties - or rather as a *means* of carrying them out - they are also rebuilding schools, roads and basic infrastructure in the Belet Huen region. Michelle Kelly, program director for the International Medical Corps, has remarked:

The Canadians are being very innovative and forward looking. They're taking a great risk. They don't want to sit on a few food trucks. I admire the way they've taken a great leap of faith. (19)

Joint ventures in support of security and development could not come at a better time for the Canadian aid program which is in desperate need of an infusion of purpose and vitality. At the moment it is dying the death of a thousand cuts. It has the sad, defensive air of an enterprise in decline, trying to fend off its enemies. It is time to renew the mission of Canadian aid by merging our international aid and defence budgets and seeking the best, most cost effective ways of contributing to lasting international peace. To this end, the Committee recommends the creation of a Council on International Development and Security to be chaired by the Prime Minister. The Council's initial mandate would be to reorganize Canada's defence and aid resources so as to contribute in the most cost-effective way to the promotion of international peace. We would urge that the Council be in place by 1995, the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

3) Mobilizing the Canadian Will

It is sometimes suggested that the obligation to address problems such as those raised in *An Agenda for Peace* is now excused by Canada's urgent need to look inwards and attend to our problems at home. This is both shortsighted and misguided. Increasingly, our problems at home are the same as our problems abroad, in kind if not in degree. As we struggle with economic restructuring, so does the rest of the world. As the rest of the world struggles with nationalism and the problems of modern democracy, so do we. The cliché applies: we do live in a Global Village and it won't do to ignore the people on the other side of the tracks. As to the notion that they have gained at our expense - another excuse for only looking after Number One - it is patently false. The 1992 *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programs reports that the gap between rich nations and poor has actually doubled over the past 30 years, and continues to grow. (20)

The decline in Canadian support for things international - and the decline is palpable - is explained more by loss of self-confidence among Canadians than by lack of caring. There is no more important task before us than to recover some of that confidence and no more important means of doing so than through the empowerment of the United Nations. People must see that the centre can hold and that they have a role to play in making it so.

By way of building the public and political constituency for the United Nations, the Committee recommends that Canada support the development of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (21) and that we offer to host the preparatory meeting of the Assembly in the Parliament Buildings as the centrepiece in our celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995. We would further recommend that the Government work closely with the national organizing committee for the 50th anniversary and encourage the active participation of non-governmental organizations in the planning and holding of the Assembly.

Conclusion

In closing this long letter the Committee wishes to commend the Government for being one of the few that has contributed energetically to keeping *An Agenda for Peace* alive. But alive is not good enough. Much more needs to be done. The proposals of the Secretary General should be the beginning of a vital international process of reform and renewal of the United Nations system. Canada should work hard to help make it so. The Committee intends to keep the empowerment of the UN high on its agenda and to hold additional hearings in the new session of Parliament. We would ask that the Minister respond in writing to this letter by early May.
