International Peace Operations and the Role of Domestic Support Will the Public Support Elective War?

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Introduction

My premise is that in the 21st Century, states that believe in the rule of law and in the UN Charter,

> whose peoples feel the most elementary sense of solidarity with those less fortunate than themselves,
>
> and who have endorsed the Responsibility to Protect doctrine,
>
> have a duty to contribute militarily, in armed combat if necessary, to the maintenance of peace and security.

The challenge for governments is to persuade their populations to support what in most cases will be regarded by their voters as elective wars,

> often accompanied by an extended and sometimes spectacular counter-insurgency conflict.

My thesis, derived from Canada's experience to the extent that that is relevant in Swedish circumstances,

> is that governments can meet that challenge,
>
> that the decision to intervene is consistent with the principles of the UN Charter and international law
>
> that military action will likely do more good than harm and have a reasonable prospect of success
>
> and provided that their populations are convinced that the stakes warrant the costs required,
> .

The key word is "convinced".

Elective warfare, even elective warfare meant to protect the innocent and to preserve international peace and security,

means that populations/voters retain a choice to decline and, even once involved, to withdraw.

To persuade people to endorse elective warfare

and the usually long and costly engagement that is necessary to succeed

demands a patience on the part of populations

and communications skills on the part of governments and their armed forces

that cannot be taken for granted.

Whether the peoples of the world, especially the economically advanced world, will prove willing to sacrifice their sons and daughters in elective wars,

was and is the major question mark hanging over the Responsibility to Protect,

the doctrine that all UN members, including Canada and Sweden endorsed at the 2005 UN Millennium Summit.

In Kandahar, Afghanistan the Canadian Government currently faces a major test of this thesis.

It is not yet clear that the Canadian Government will succeed in maintaining public support for the very dangerous Canadian mission in Kandahar.

This paper will canvas the issues involved, from a Canadian perspective, which I hope will have some salience in the Swedish context as well.

Canada and the Use of Force

First, a little Canadian history to put the discussion in context.

Unlike Sweden, Canada has never seen itself as a neutral country.

Canadians have never been especially war-like, but they have not been pacifist, either.

War has been a significant, in some cases transformative, element of Canadian history, dating, at least, from the battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1756.

That British victory over the French in Quebec two and a half centuries ago gave birth to the bicultural character of Canada.

And, ultimately, in making a success of a colony with English and French inhabitants, and aboriginals as well, the Canadian values of diversity and tolerance were born.

In the War of 1812, the British, including Canadians, sacked Washington and defeated the young American republic.

This victory bought Canada an exclusion from the Monroe Doctrine and shelter from American notions of Manifest Destiny, and gave our nascent country time to consolidate itself.

As part of the British Empire, Canadians fought in the First World War, effectively upon the decision of Her Majesty's government in London.

The Canadian Government's acquiescence in the decision to fight in Europe divided English and French in Canada, with the French leery of entanglement in European wars.

Nevertheless, it was in Northern France and Belgium in the battles of Vimy Ridge and Paschendale among others where Canada's armed forces found victory amid the enormous loss of life and, in doing so, forged a discreet and enduring Canadian identity.

In what was to make of the poppy an icon of patriotism, Canadian poet-soldier, Colonel John McCrae penned the poem “In Flanders Fields”

> (In Flanders fields the poppies blow
> Between the crosses row on row,
> That mark our place; and in the sky
> The larks, still bravely singing, fly
> Scarce heard amid the guns below.)

It was an ode to valour and to loss; the loss was staggering.

The Canadian population at the time was approximately the size of Sweden’s population today;

> 60,000 Canadians died in those fields.

Their deaths, and their victories, united Canadians at home in a new sense of nationhood that previously had been absent.

It, also, emboldened the still merely autonomous Canadian Government to ignore a British demand to return to Europe after the war ended to battle the Turks at Chanakale.

It was a figurative declaration of independence, a typically Canadian one, by the way—we just did not answer.

Formal independence followed shortly in the Treaty of Westminster.

In the Second World War, Canadians returned to Europe to fight the Axis powers; this time it was by their own Parliament’s decision to do so, not London’s.

> Although Canadians, for the most part, saw little viable alternative to fighting.

If we did not stop them “over there”, we would indeed, have to fight them “over here”.

In fact, Canadian commercial shipping was being sunk by German U-boats in the St. Lawrence River.

The threat was existential in most Canadians minds—it was them or us.

Following the war,

> with the losses of 100,000 citizens in the two global conflicts,
>
> with the advent of weapons of mass destruction,
>
> and living next door to the most powerful country on earth and between the two nuclear-armed superpowers,
>
> Canadians put their hopes in the rule of law, particularly the UN Charter.

Canada participated in the Korean War partly out of existential calculation,

> And partly in order to give substance to the idea of collective security codified in the UN Charter.

In 1956, Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson "invented" peacekeeping, with some help from his Swedish friends, not least Dag Hammarskjöld, which was a powerful expression of collective security.

Canada participated in virtually every UN peacekeeping mission until the early Nineties.

Canada participated in the Gulf war that expelled Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait—

> a war the UN had sanctioned to reverse an aggression that violated the UN Charter.

Canada did not participate in the Vietnam War because Canadians did not think it was justified on its "merits', or legally sound, or an existential threat.

And Canada did not participate in President Bush's Iraq War, for the same reasons as Vietnam.

We were not persuaded by the arguments for this war.

And we wanted to give weapons inspectors led by your estimable countryman, Hans Blix, time to do their jobs

The war was neither mandated by the UN Security Council nor supported by the great majority of the UN membership,

nor did have a humanitarian purpose,

although it was characterized in those terms when other arguments failed.

In summary, Canadians have generally accepted that the use of force is sometimes necessary in international affairs—

but the test of necessity for them has been the absence of a viable alternative.

That test has been augmented in modern times by the importance of upholding the UN Charter and the role of the UN Security Council.

And, following the catastrophes of Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia, by the responsibility to protect the innocent.

These purposes can and do conflict.

When, as in Kosovo, widespread slaughter loomed, and the Council was prevented from stopping it by the obstinacy of a single member, Russia,

Canadians were prepared to circumvent the veto, and the Council.

They were prepared to participate in an elective war, the first war for Human Security.

When the Americans responded to 9/11 by attacking Al Qaeda and its Taliban sponsors, Canada joined up.

We saw that war as justified self-defence, consistent with the Charter and customary international law, and ultimately sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

The point of this introductory exposition is to demonstrate that Canadians have not been averse to the use of military force abroad to achieve what they have regarded as justifiable ends,

What have been regarded by Canadians as justifiable ends have expanded over time from the absence of alternatives, to the preservation of collective security, to the prevention of wide-spread loss of life.

Nonetheless, as the Afghanistan conflict reveals, it is not clear for how long Canadians will support this particular elective war.

Afghanistan in 2008

It is clear that while the international attempt to help Afghanistan has not failed, it is in jeopardy.

The US, the dominant international partner, missed a golden opportunity to make a difference in ordinary Afghans' lives by allowing itself to be distracted by Iraq,

Other donors and troop contributors, Canada certainly and Sweden probably included,

> raised few effective objections to these policies,
>
> and committed far fewer funds themselves than needed,
>
> and disbursed even less, sometimes through contractors and subcontractors who creamed off large overheads.

Similarly, thanks to the persistence of the idea of a "light footprint", the international military forces allocated to Afghanistan were a third fewer in number than those assigned to Bosnia or even to Kosovo, a mere province of Serbia.

The Afghan Government, also, bears some of the responsibility for the situation the country is in.

The Afghan people want security from predators wherever they come from, inside or outside the country, but they are not confident of getting it.

The Afghan National Police and the Ministry of the Interior have been weakened by bad appointments, corruption and inadequate training, which drug gangs and the Taliban exploit.

The Afghan Government, partly because of the inadequacy of the international response, has allowed War Lords, who were relatively week in 2001, to regroup.

Economic leadership has been chequered.

But, even if governance were superb, the challenges would still be daunting.

> 75% of the adult population is illiterate; (Source: UNDP Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007)
>
> 4% have post-secondary education;
>
> 25% are employed
>
> and attitudes towards women are feudal, at best.

Despite the evident difficulties, all is not apparently lost.

If polling of the Afghans is to be trusted,

> and that is not a trivial question in such a pre-modern, conflicted, poor country,
>
> the world is not faced with mission impossible in Afghanistan.

According to an Environics poll of nearly 1600 people conducted face-to-face across the entire country in September, 51% of Afghans said the country was going in the right direction; 28% said it was not.

(In Kandahar, 43% said the country was going in the right direction and 43% said that it was not.)

Sixty percent of people said they were better off than they were in 2002 and only 14% said they were worse off.

Seventy-three percent, including 75% of the women interviewed, said that women are better off than they were five years earlier.

Seventy-three percent had a negative or very negative view of the Taliban and 54% saw Al Qaeda in negative terms.

Sixty percent regarded the presence of foreign countries in Afghanistan as positive and 43% wanted foreign troops to remain for "however long it takes to defeat the Taliban and to restore order".

Only 14% wanted foreign troops out right away.

So all appears not to be lost, yet.

But it is very clear that much more needs to be done by the international community if even minimal objectives are to be reached.

The war will not be won by military means alone, of course, but it will not be won by ignoring security imperatives and abandoning the South to the Taliban

Maintaining Public Support for War: The Problems Facing the Canadian Government

In 2001, the then Liberal Party government dispatched troops to Afganistan.

In 2005 the successor Liberal Party government sent troops into combat in Kandahar, the heartland of the Taliban resistance.

The current Conservative Government inherited the mission, but endorsed it strongly.

At the same time, the new government did not want to carry the responsibility alone, for continuing with a not popular war,

> and did not want to let the opposition parties play politics at the government's expense, every time things took a bad turn

With a major commitment coming due in February 2009, last fall, the Conservatives appointed a high level, non-partisan panel to advise it, and Parliament, on what to do about the mission,.

It is comprised of a former Liberal Party Deputy Prime Minister, a former Conservative Chief of Staff and a former head of the Canadian Public Service

It is an attempt to lift the issue above the partisan fray in a "minority" Parliament,

> that is, a Parliament in which no party has a majority
>
> and where there is no coalition, a highly vulnerable position for the government.

The government asked the panel whether to change the location of Canadian forces, or change the nature of their mission, or leave Afghanistan altogether, or continue

This week the high level panel recommended that Canadian forces stay in Afghanistan but with two major caveats—

1. that the Canadian forces be better equipped with medium lift helicopters to reduce the number of casualties they are suffering in traveling by road, and to extend their reach,
2. that ISAF allies agree to send a another battle group to help out.

<u>Maintaining Support for an Elective War in Difficult Circumstances</u>

Against this complex background, attracting and maintaining public support for the mission in Afghanistan is a major challenge for governments, especially the Canadian government,.

But I believe it can be done.

To make this point, I will draw on Canadian experience, some of it quite particular to Canada, but much of it more or less valid for many perhaps most governments.

Afghanistan is a war of choice for Canada, or so it is seen by many Canadians.

Canadians appear to be skeptical of the idea, advanced by some political and military leaders, that Canada faces an existential threat from Afghanistan.

Few Canadians seem to lose sleep worrying that Mullah Omer is coming to get them,

Or even Al Qaeda, either, although they are less sure about that, especially after an apparent home-grown terrorist plot was foiled in Toronto a couple of years ago.

At the same time, however, Canadians are clearly uncertain of the purposes of our country's role in Afghanistan and on the prospects for success.

In the first place, among many (but certainly not all) Canadians there is nostalgia for simple peace-keeping and a distaste for combat.

Since Pearson and the Nobel Prize, Canadians have prided themselves on peace-keeping, seeing in it a source of our particular self-identity, contrasting it favourably to the more war-like instincts of our neighbours.

We have built a prominent monument in Ottawa to Canadian peacekeepers and have put a picture of them on our currency.

This self-image has carried with it a romantic notion of peacekeeping, something that good Canadians led the world in, to the enduring gratitude of the international community.

However much truth there ever was in such a self-image, little of it remains.

We have changed and UN peacekeeping has changed, as well.

Canadian participation in UN missions has become quite exceptional.

We rank 58th in the world in terms of our contribution to UN-led missions.

Sweden ranks 63rd.

Even if the Afghanistan conflict is included, Canada is not among the top 10 troop contributing countries to international military missions.

Further, classic peacekeeping missions, themselves, have become few and far between, and for good reasons.

The nature of conflict has changed.

Among other things most conflicts are internal these days. ***HS Report

Moreover, a lesson drawn in the Brahimi report on reforming UN military operations post-Rwanda and Srebrenica was that the UN could no longer remain neutral between the victim and the perpetrator and retain any credibility.

If the UN did not want to be complicit in war crimes, it would sometimes have to take sides and that meant becoming a party to the conflict and to the combat.

UN mandates have become increasingly robust as conflicts have become more complex and bloody.

Canadians are not ignorant of these developments,

> but many still wish their armed forces were doing something a little less combative in Afghanistan,
>
> a sentiment endorsed by all the opposition parties, including the official opposition party, the Liberals.

Canadians are, understandably, especially disturbed at the extent of the loss of Canadian soldiers.

On behalf of Canada when I was Ambassador to the UN, I accepted 107 medals that had been awarded posthumously to Canadian military personnel who died over the course of nearly 60 years of UN military operations,

the most, regrettably, of any troop contributing country.

In Afghanistan, in just six years, we have already lost 78 soldiers and one diplomat, who coincidentally had been my deputy in Canada's UN mission in New York.

According to the Canadian Forces, themselves, the death rate in Afghanistan for Canadian soldiers has ranged from 1.3 to 1.6 per cent, compared to 0.3 to 0.6 per cent for our allies in Afghanistan, and 0.5 per cent for the U.S. forces in Iraq.

The Canadian death rate in Afghanistan is higher even than it was during most years of the Second World War, albeit on a much smaller base.

There is no doubt in my mind that if Canada had the draft, i.e., if our soldiers were being conscripted, support for the Canadian mission in Afghanistan would have dried up long ago.

But as our military are professional soldiers, who have volunteered knowing the risks involved, the Canadian population is willing to tolerate a higher degree of casualties than they would for citizen-soldiers.

At the same time, there is no doubt that Canada is bearing a disproportionate share of the burden and incurring a disproportionate share of the losses.

The losses are considerable, and Canadians do not understand why others do not help out more

and wonder whether we should continue in Afghanistan if they do not.

Further, many Canadians doubt that the war can be won, despite the findings of the Environics poll mentioned above.

A recent poll (by Angus Reid Global Monitor) found that 49% of Canadians are skeptical of the war and only 22% think it is succeeding.

Most allies' populations are even more skeptical.

A complicating factor is the confusion in the minds of some Canadians on the relationship of Afghanistan to Iraq and to the US-led "War on Terror".

Not every Canadian understands fully that Afghanistan is not Iraq, that the geopolitical circumstances of the two countries are very different.

To the unfamiliar eye the Iraqis and the Afghans all look alike, just as all westerners look alike to the Afghans.

Nor do many Canadians want to see their armed forces in combat in support of American foreign policy, at least current American foreign policy.

Many Canadians appear unsure what to make of the US "War on Terror", an article of faith among so many of our American neighbours, but Canadians long ago wrote off George Bush and his foreign policy.

Further, people are well aware that the Mujahideen expelled the Soviet Union and that Afghan tribes destroyed British military units a century ago.

They wonder whether "victory" in any meaningful sense of the word is even possible.

Polls taken in Canada within the last year have indicated that 45% of those interviewed supported completing the mission and 43% wanted to bring the troops home right away.

Communications and Maintaining Public Support for Military Missions Abroad

Obviously, these are very challenging circumstances.

To achieve and maintain public support for Canadian policy in Afghanistan, two things are critical.

- The policy has to be sound, with clear, realistic and worthwhile goals, workable strategies to achieve them and credible "metrics" of progress
- communications, domestically and strategically, have to be effective.

On the substance of the policy, Canadians will support the government if they believe that the policy being followed is necessary and workable and they understand the objectives

In the case of Afghanistan, for Canada and the rest of the international community the objectives include

- diminishing instability in a volatile region that comprises four actual nuclear-armed states and one potential one.
- denying safe havens to international terrorists, notably Al Qaeda
- demonstrating that the UN and NATO can successfully assist failed and failing states and protect populations
- solving the growing opium and illegal drugs problem
- promoting better governance, and
- attracting the cooperation, or at least, diminishing the meddling of Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan

In the case of Canada, and presumably Sweden, additional objectives include

- promoting Human Security, by
    - assisting the Afghans to stop the Taliban insurgency
    - alleviating poverty in one of the small handful of very poorest countries on earth (Afghanistan is not even ranked on the UNDP's Human Development Index)
    - promoting greater respect for basic human rights for all Afghans, including more access to education and health care for women and girls

These last objectives appear to resonate particularly strongly with Canadians.

Second, however sound the policy is, nevertheless, it will not sell itself.

The government has to "market" what it is doing purposefully.

Otherwise the images of returning body bags will fill TV screens and crowd out the government's message.

Part of the soundness of the policy approach depends on establishing bench marks of success, both military and political,

and credible reporting to the Canadian public about what is happening.

The first casualty of war is truth, or so it has been believed.

But in this modern age of web-based communications, governments cannot control the flow of information.

Propaganda is soon seen for what it is

Communications efforts need to be honest, frequent and open.

This means generally a pro-active communications strategy,

- with frequent on-the-record briefings by knowledgeable, responsible people,
- numerous press encounters by Cabinet level-officials,
- enlistment of the help of opinion shapers,
- trips to Afghanistan,
- recourse to cutting edge communications techniques, etc.

Because third parties are more credible than government spokespeople, in the Afghan case this means making much greater use of credible Afghanistan voices in Canada, especially visitors.

It, also, means making use of credible Canadian voices—in our case the high level non-partisan panel-- who are presumed to be not partisan.

All of this has to be done in full awareness of the strategic communications imperatives of sending signals of resolve when necessary and of compromise when advisable to the other side.

The Taliban, which many experts consider fierce but not a very formidable military force, knows that it wins by fighting – prevailing in battle if possible and losing if necessary.

Losing large numbers of recruits is strategically neither here nor there them.

It is the fact of battles that is the message to the Canadian and western publics.

The Taliban, thus, engages in strategic communications of its own with every suicide bombing, attack on "soft" civilian target and foreign military casualty.

This requires western governments to communicate unity and resolve back, a tricky proposition given the imperfect agreement that inevitably exists among western countries on Afghanistan about objectives.

Conclusion

If Canadians conclude

> that the effort cannot succeed
>
> or that the costs are going to be extravagantly disproportionate to the Canadian objectives,
>
> or that the Canadian Government is not leveling with them
>
> or that its allies are letting Canada do all the dirty work,
>
> or that it is trying too hard to please Washington, and echoing unconvincing American rhetoric from Iraq,

support will erode, even evaporate.

The consequences for NATO and for the UN would be serious.

But what would really be dramatic would be to the innocent in conflicts around the world who would not be protected

Judging by Canadian experience, populations will support elective wars, even in the face of bloody insurgency,

if they are convinced that the stakes warrant the effort required,

that the decision to intervene is consistent with the principles of the UN Charter and international law

and that military action will likely do more good than harm and have a reasonable prospect of success.

But ,in Canada, at least, the key word is “convinced”.

Thank You.