THE MARITIME FACE OF PEACEKEEPING

by Lieutenant-Commander D.N. Griffiths

There are two common myths about the role of maritime forces in peacekeeping operations. The first is that peacekeeping is the exclusive business of soldiers; the second is that maritime peacekeeping roles are a recent innovation. Both are, at best, unhelpful and counterproductive.

The "Soldier-Centric" Model

According to no less an authority than Major-General Lewis Mackenzie:

Peacekeeping is primarily an Army responsibility, supported by the Navy and Air Force. The latter two services are charged with getting the Army personnel and equipment to and from the theatre of operations in an efficient and timely manner, and providing the type of support the Army needs while it is carrying out its assigned tasks. [1].

With the greatest respect, he is wrong.

Admittedly, in its first three and a half decades, peacekeeping followed a relatively predictable path, interposing lightly armed soldiers between consenting belligerents.

HMCS *Toronto*. "Over the past five years, Canadian ships have enforced UN sanction resolutions nin the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Adriatic and the Caribbean".

Canadian Forces Photo.

Today, that single choice has given way to a whole spectrum of what have become known as "peace support operations": preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace enforcement and peacebuilding, as well as traditional peacekeeping and the non-combat role of humanitarian operations[2]. Like contemporary warfare, modern peace support operations have become a very complicated and sophisticated business.

Warfare — whether fighting one's own, or preventing, containing, stopping, or cleaning up after someone else's — must involve all three environments as complementary partners, not one soloist with a supporting chorus. It cannot be neatly compartmentalized by environment. In Somalia after all, the soldiers were flown in by Air Force transports, to be met at the airport by Canadian sailors, who had flown ashore in their own ship's helicopter two days earlier in order to begin the humanitarian effort.

Nowadays, virtually all major and medium powers, including Canada, are investing enormous effort into their ability to conduct successful joint operations - in other words, forces from all environments achieving a common mission, under unified command and employing common doctrine and procedures. This joint approach is just as crucial to waging peace as it is to waging war. Some of the old army-oriented peacekeeping assumptions are obsolete and have outlived their usefulness.

A joint approach to peace support operations in no way minimizes the central and fundamental importance of the land component of the joint force. Replacing the "soldier-centric" peacekeeping model with a swing to the other extreme of naval chauvinism would be nonsensical. In peacekeeping, as in war, success is concluded ashore — on the front lines and in capital cities. Neither sea power nor air power are substitutes for the soldier, and they certainly cannot achieve success by themselves — Bosnia, for example, cannot be bombed into peace. Nonetheless, they are irreplaceable complements. Maritime forces have a considerably more challenging and important role to play in peace operations than being simply transporters and supporters of soldiers.

Maritime Peacekeeping - a New Role?

The second myth is that "maritime peacekeeping" is either a new idea, or an artificial invention to justify expensive naval capability in a post-Cold War world, or both. In describing Canadian maritime peace support doctrine and training, a previous Commander of Maritime Command said:
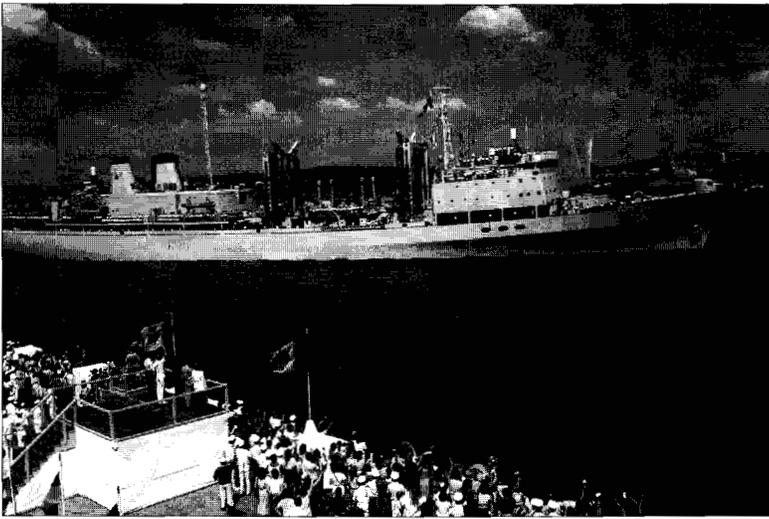
The public has not generally associated maritime forces with peacekeeping. In fact, many tasks described today as peacekeeping have been done by navies for many years. Contemporary maritime practice

Lieutenant-Commander David N. Griffiths *is Senior Staff Officer Doctrine at Maritime Command Headquarters in Halifax. He has served with the European Community Monitoring Mission in former Yugoslavia, and as INCSEA facilitator for the Middle East maritime confidence-building process.*

HMCS Protecteur departing Halifax harbour for operational tasks in the Persian Gulf.

Simply sailing a capable and credible warship or Task Group from home port toward a "hot spot" sends a strong diplomatic signal. Once on station, its closing the shore or withdrawing to the horizon can send signals of resolve or moderation, without the sovereignty implications or other complications which can arise from putting troops on the ground. Fighting ships have the capability to take peacemeakers into turbulent places, and even serve as secure and neutral venues for negotiations between belligerents. The Royal Navy's *HMS Avenger* did just that off Dubrovnik in 1992, when withdrawal of the last elements of the Yugoslav Army from Croatia was arranged. Because of their inherent flexibility and mobility, warships can shift quickly from maintaining stability through simple presence, to actively defending the maritime flank of the land forces and keeping open the sea lines of communications which sustain them.

Ocean-going warships may bring another invaluable resource to operations afloat and ashore - the maritime helicopter. Canada pioneered the concept of operating large helicopters from relatively small ships, and most of our ships carry them. The helicopter is an integral part of a ship-air team without which the surveillance and sea control capabilities of our ships could not be fully exploited. A large maritime helicopter is an invaluable and versatile asset, capable of a truly impressive range of peace support functions ranging from carrying cargo or inserting armed boarding parties, to dealing with hostile submarines which threaten the lines of communication. This is not a new idea: a naval helicopter from *HMCS Magnificent* was used at the outset of the first peacekeeping mission to Suez in 1956.

The most visible role of Canadian destroyers and frigates in the past few years however has been peace enforcement — policing embargoes against sanction-busters. Maritime patrol and interdiction are indispensable in maintaining an embargo against a coastal, archepelagic or riverine state. Efficient transport of truly large volumes of contraband can often best be done by water, and many coastlines lend themselves to smuggling. Over the past five years, Canadian ships have enforced UN sanction resolutions in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the

therefore draws on proven concepts, while evolving in new and challenging directions[3].

It is not only the public which labours under this misconception. As Commander Peter Haydon of Dalhousie University's Centre for Foreign Policy Studies has observed:

The tendency today, particularly among theorists, is to champion "naval peacekeeping" as the great new mission of naval forces. This misperception largely comes from not understanding the mechanics of how naval forces operate. The tasks being proposed as the key elements of a naval peacekeeping mission are, in fact, traditional naval tasks that have been undertaken by warships since the days of sail[4].

A good place to start understanding those mechanics and tasks, is to use Canadian maritime doctrine as a framework and to examine some real and hypothetical examples.

Maritime Peace Support Tasks

Among other things, Canadian maritime doctrine states that there are three ways in which maritime forces participate in peace support operations:

- the provision of one or more ships;
- the provision of contingents of naval personnel; and/or,
- the provision of skilled individuals[5].

Providing Destroyers and Frigates

The role of destroyers and frigates in peace support operations is probably the most misunderstood aspect of the "maritime peacekeeping" discussion. The sea control, surveillance and survivability for which they are designed, are capabilities well suited to the preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacebuilding missions which are highlighted in both the Government's recent foreign policy statement and in the earlier 1994 Defence White Paper[6]. Fighting ships are, and always have been, tools of foreign policy.

Many potentially volatile regions have littoral, archipelagic or riverine geography. Use of warships in the traditional peacekeeping role of interposition between belligerents is not beyond the realm of possibility. It was planned, though never executed, for the Formosa Straits in 1954/55. The present complex dispute over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea should serve as a warning example for the future.

Canadian naval personnel on duty with the UN force in Cambodia.

A *Sea King* helicopter operating off the coast of Somalia in support of the UN-endorsed coalition.

Adriatic and the Caribbean. To soldiers in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the multinational task force in the Adriatic may be out of sight and therefore out of mind. Nonetheless, without the unseen work of those "far distant ships", the overall peacekeeping strategy would be critically undermined. The work is not without its risks. The submarine, missile and sea mine threat is not to be dismissed lightly, especially if the situation should deteriorate. This kind of activity which must be done in the sea approaches and along the coasts of trouble spots if peace efforts are to succeed, is not the work of soldiers.

Providing Sealift and Logistics Support

Provision of ships can certainly include General Mackenzie's transport and support role. The Canadian Navy did that in 1956 to Suez and in 1964 to Cyprus. More recently, *HMCS Preserver* demonstrated the best of both roles in Somalia. She transported equipment to the theatre of operations and once there served as a logistics base, medical facility and R&R refuge for the troops ashore.

Sealift is certainly a valid naval role. Although chartered merchantmen successfully transport peacekeepers into permissive environments, it needs a warship prepared to go in harm's way to insert troops into a turbulent theatre, or to get them out again if the situation becomes untenable. Furthermore, most merchant ships depend on developed port facilities. Deploying a peacekeeping force may have to be done virtually as an unopposed amphibious operation if those facilities do not exist, or are unusable. In such cases, specialized naval ships become essential.

Logistic warships are much more than floating busses, trucks, hotels or supply depots. Their command, control and communication facilities can make them ideal interim headquarters for a joint force commander until secure and adequate facilities can be established ashore. The helicopters, flight decks and aviation maintenance facilities of naval support ships provide both helicopters and helicopter maintenance for the joint force. The workshops, technicians and cargo space are useful for peacebuilding and purely humanitarian missions too. Witness the disaster relief assistance provided to communities in Florida and the Bahamas by *HMCS Protecteur* after Hurricane Andrew[7].

Although our existing operational support ships were built for underway replenishment of Task Groups at sea, they have performed sterling service in a sealift role for which they were never designed. It is likely that their replacements will be more multi-role and designed for the full range of replenishment at sea, sealift, support to forces operating ashore and serving as a joint force headquarters. Such ships could perform roles "ranging from naval peacekeeping or environmental disaster relief to offshore surveillance and enforcement"[8] -- considerably more than simply "providing the kind of support the Army needs".

Providing Submarines

Submarines as peacekeepers sounds like a contradiction in terms, but a conventional submarine is the ideal platform for patrol and surveillance when the threat is high, when stealth is warranted, or when long and unsupported endurance on-station is required. In Canada, we have already gained useful experience in this kind of non-traditional submarine role by using our *Oberon*-class boats in fisheries patrol off the east coast of Canada. Complacent poachers scanned an empty horizon and confidently implicated themselves, while a nearby submarine was recording indisputable evidence of violation. Soldiers can't do that.

Providing Minor War Vessels

In addition to these "blue water" ships in peace support operations, smaller naval vessels also have a vital role closer to shore. Take two recent examples.

Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) Sinai was established in 1982 to monitor implementation of the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Egypt. It is a good example of a non-UN peacekeeping operation with a maritime aspect. Canada has filled staff positions ashore but is not involved in the naval side. MFO's maritime element is provided by Italy. This "Coastal Patrol Unit" consists of four lightly armed minesweepers, and is mandated to ensure freedom of navigation in the Straits of Tiran and lower Gulf of Aqaba. This little squadron remains under national command, is armed, and continues to fly the Italian naval flag. It is a purely naval function for which soldiers are neither trained nor equipped.

UN peacekeeping efforts in Central America required patrol of the coastal waters of the Gulf of Fonseca as part of the mandate. Like MFO Sinai, the vessels and crews were provided by a single nation, in this case Argentina. Unlike MFO however, the vessels were disarmed, painted white and flew the UN flag. Also unlike MFO, the role of the vessels was to carry multinational observer teams — including Canadians — who performed functions afloat similar in principle to those of UN Military Observers ashore, exploiting their nautical expertise to complement the effort ashore.

Providing Contingents

Providing ships, submarines and ship-based helicopters is one form of naval participation in peace support operations recognized by Canadian doctrine. The second is provision of contingents or teams of naval specialists. The obvious example is Cambodia, where the UN observer organization included a multinational 300 person naval component to perform the observer mission on the rivers, on the Tonle Sap lake and along the coast. Canada provided approximately 10 percent of the naval contingent. In this case, the vessels were not provided by the contributing peacekeepers, because the decision was made to repair and use indigenous vessels in order to regenerate Cambodia's capability to police and patrol its own waters. Cambodia is a classic case-study of naval resources complementing soldiers in a joint peacekeeping role, and certainly not restricted to transport and support.

Cambodia provides a good illustration of the kind of "force

multiplier" that the joint, rather than army-only, approach provides. Anyone who has participated in an observer mission knows the severe limitations on patrolling at night, when identification is unreliable and when landmines or undisciplined troops are a constant hazard. In Cambodia, where the waterways are highways, Naval Observers were able to move at night in relative safety (although their boats were not as well equipped as they could have been) monitoring round-the-clock activities on the water and along the shore -- something that military observers on foot or in vehicles could not have done safely or as effectively.

Specialist Contingents

Although Canada has not used them in peace support operations up to now, we have a significant capability for shallow-water mine countermeasures and explosive ordnance disposal in our Clearance Divers. We will have even more flexible capability to assure the safety of the approaches to harbours when we get the Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels now under construction. Sea mines and limpets are cheap, easily available and used. In Central America for example, 39 sea mines laid during the first three months of 1984 enjoyed a "damage ratio of one ship disabled for every two mines planted"[9]. Although not to the same extent, mines were also reportedly laid off the Croatian coast in 1991 and 92[10]. Having a sealift capability is not much use if the ships cannot get into a harbour without hitting a mine, or cannot use docks that are free of booby-traps or unexploded ordnance. Dealing with sea mines may be vital to future peace support operations, and is a highly specialized naval task.

If the maritime environment is dangerous to shipping — whether transporting the peacekeepers and their supplies, delivering humanitarian aid, or carrying the cargoes upon which the nation's economic life depends — there are other maritime experts who may be required. Before the sealift could begin into Haiti in 1994, the peacekeepers had to install a harbourmaster organization and restore navigation aids in Port-au-Prince harbour. Naval control of shipping, harbour defence and harbour control are not jobs for amateurs. Canadian NCS and harbour defence units are being structured with a capability to deploy and work on a regional basis for just this sort of operation. This could also be a future contribution by non-naval maritime organizations such as the Coast Guard. Managing sea traffic and ports in a chaotic or risky environment is not an Army function.

Providing Individuals

The third means of maritime participation in peace support operations is provision of people as individuals or small ad-hoc groups, as distinct from creating formed contingents. Two recent examples have involved Canadians.

In the Balkans, naval officers served as monitors with the European Community Monitoring Mission. In that case, the experience in diplomacy, management and staff work which the naval career can provide were of more relevance than extensive combat arms expertise. Even so, naval knowledge can also be useful to an organization charged with monitoring an area that includes a highly indented coastline with over 1000 off-lying islands, some with ethnic mixes, some with a history of being prison camps, and some with naval establishments[11].

A second example is peacebuilding within the Middle East Peace Process, where Canada is providing facilitators for development of maritime confidence building measures. Over the past year and a half, the parties have developed voluntary procedures for preventing incidents at sea (INCSEA), and a framework upon which to base a cooperative maritime search and rescue arrangement. Perhaps most important, this forum is bringing Middle East naval officers and maritime authorities into regular, personal contact, benefiting from what the preamble to the INCSEA text calls *"the spirit of mutual respect, common values and similar traditions shared by professional mariners"*. It is yet another specialized area in which soldiers are out of their depth.

Conclusions

The examples discussed suggest three practical conclusions. First of all, contemporary operations in support of peace have moved beyond simple peacekeeping into a complex spectrum of "peace support operations" which are not the exclusive preserve of soldiers. The challenges call for a joint approach, including specialized maritime skills and equipment.

Second, "maritime peacekeeping" is nothing new. Many tasks described today as "peace support" are well established "traditional" naval activities. Maritime forces and people, properly mandated and maintained, are well trained and practiced in the skills of peace.

Third, we cannot forecast future scenarios with confidence, or afford to ignore the presently improbable. Potential littoral, archipelagic or riverine theatres of operations are more prevalent than land-locked regions. The price of credible national capability to prevent, contain, stop or clean up after a conflict therefore includes effective, competent maritime forces. Naval capability can be cast aside easily, but not quickly or cheaply regenerated. Prudence commends to us the attributes required by the present mission of Maritime Command - "general purpose" and "combat capable"[12]. There are too many storm clouds glowering on the horizon to do otherwise. ☐

NOTES

1. Major-General Lewis Mackenzie, "Peacekeeping's Strategic Imperatives", in Alex Morrison (ed.) *The Changing Face of Peacekeeping*, Toronto: CISS, 1993.
2. These categories, defined in Bhoutros Bhoutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* (June 1992), have been adopted in Canadian joint and maritime doctrine.
3. Vice-Admiral Peter Cairns, "Maritime Training for Peacekeeping Operations", *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, No. 1/1994.
4. Commander Peter Haydon, "Naval Peacekeeping", *Datalink #35*, CISS, December 1992.
5. Cairns, op. cit.
6. *Canada in the World*, Government Sytatement on Foreign Policy, 1995, and the 1994 Defence White Paper.
7. This and other recent activities of Maritime Command are described in the Commander's *The Naval Vision*, Halifax: Maritime Command Headquarters, May 1994.
8. Ibid.
9. Captain James M. Martin and Bertrand P. Ramsay, "Sea Mines in Nicaragua", *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, September 1990.
10. Milan Vego, "War on the Yugoslav Coast", *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1992.
11. The Croatian island of Goli Otok was the "Yugoslav gulag" in the 1940s and 1950s. The island of Mamula in the mouth of the Bay of Kotor was a prison camp in both World Wars. The islands of Vis and Lastovo both have naval establishments. In the Second World War, Vis was headquarters of the allies and of Tito's National Liberation Front.
12. *The Naval Vision*, op. cit.