Why have there been no more ‘Affairs’ like Somalia, Rwanda and Srebrenica?

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Why have there been no more ‘Affairs’ like Somalia, Rwanda and Srebrenica? In his dissertation, Dr. Klep concentrates on peace operations and their aftermath as fairly domestic matters in Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands. These three peace operations also fit, however, into an international development at the end of the Cold War. Classic, ‘blue’ peacekeeping was largely replaced by more robust ‘green’ international interventions that are not only more dangerous, but during which much more is expected of the peacekeeping forces. New ‘affairs’ surrounding peace operations have not occurred. The UN and national governments are less inclined to begin such missions (namely Daurfur). Presumably the armed forces of several countries have drawn lessons from the peace operations that went off the rails. Also the public is less shocked by accusations of misconduct under difficult circumstances.

In the epilogue to his study, Dr. Klep observes that in recent years there have not been any new national peacekeeping crises as occurred after the events in Somalia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica; as he puts it, ‘new affairs of a similar length and seriousness have not occurred’ (269).[1] It is worth thinking about why this has been the case. Klep, for his part, is cautious about reaching any general conclusions concerning the extent to which this can be attributed to the Canadian, Belgian and Netherlands governments and militaries having

1 Christ Klep, *Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica. De nasleep van drie ontspoorde vredesmissies* (Amsterdam 2008).

conducted themselves in a more 'responsible' fashion since the peacekeeping disasters that befell them and the local citizenry in those three places (274-275).

In trying to address tentatively this question of why there have been no more such crises, it makes sense first to deal with the extent to which the three affairs themselves really can be considered similar, beyond just being three peacekeeping disasters. At first glance, the differences seem just as great as that similarity. What went wrong in all three was not quite the same. The Somalia crisis centered about the death in 1993 of two young citizens at the hands of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, one of whom was tortured to death. In Rwanda ten Belgian peacekeeping paratroopers were murdered by locals in 1994, whereupon the Belgian government withdrew the rest of its national contingent to the UN peacekeeping force and Hutus turned to murdering Tutsis in genocidal numbers, and in Srebrenica the Netherlands peacekeeping battalion, Dutch-III was unable to prevent in 1995 the murder of eight thousand Muslim men by Bosnian-Serb troops in a UN enclave.

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Somalische insluipers vormden een hardnekkig probleem voor het *Canadian Airborne Regiment*. De kampen – met hun vele honderden meters aan hekwerk en prikkeldraad – waren erg lastig te bewaken. Bron: *Esprit de Corps Magazine*.

Undoubtedly, these three fiascos are similar in that they all lead to *domestic* political dramas in the three troop-sending countries with similar characteristics. All three entailed 'dramatic and morally freighted events that placed political and military systems under heavy pressure' in Ottawa, Brussels and The Hague. They also consisted of 'a series of bigger and smaller crises, attempts at *damage control* and inquiries'. Finally, in all three cases, the aftermath was 'lengthy and left many with the feeling of not having been satisfied' (12). Comparing how the three affairs played out as domestic political crises is largely what this engrossing and well-written book is about.

Internationally, these three operations also fit into a pattern; this would probably have merited inclusion in this book. Right after the end of the Cold War peacekeeping operations were rapidly multiplying. The numbers are quite striking. Between 1988 and 1993 the UN Security Council established no fewer than 14 new peacekeeping operations, as many as had been created in the previous forty years. With the deadlock at the UN broken it seemed like a golden age of international peacekeeping might have been dawning. This was an especially exciting prospect to many Canadians, who had taken pride in their country's contributions and had even begun to derive a part of the national identity and international image from them. One just has to look the peacekeeping monument that was built in downtown Ottawa in 1992 or the bereted peacekeeper that appears today on the back of a Canadian ten-dollar bill.

But at the same time, the nature of peacekeeping was changing, too. More and more the operations were responses not to interstate conflict, but to internal conflicts in what later came to be called 'failed or failing states' – like Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The most challenging peacekeeping operation the UN had undertaken until the 1990s, namely in the Congo in 1961-1963 was as a result of internal conflict. But for a long time it was an exception. Operations in failed or failing states were far more ambitious, difficult, and dangerous. In classical peacekeeping situations, disciplined national armed forces of the former belligerents, usually sovereign states (Egyptians and Israelis, Indians and Pakistanis, etc.) generally could be expected to respect both the truce that had been negotiated and the peacekeeping forces sent to monitor compliance with it. For that reason, 'trucekeeping' sometimes has been suggested as a better term than 'peacekeeping' in these classical situations. Moreover, these national armed forces usually could be separated, returned to their national territories and enjoined to remain within certain demarcation lines and national boundaries.

Within failed or failing states the situation is quite different. The peacekeepers are often faced with unclear boundaries between belligerents, irregular forces outside central control, or some local participants in the conflict who have not agreed to abide by the negotiated truce. Under such

circumstances, the truce may readily break down, resulting in new rounds of violence. The line between peacekeeping and low-intensity combat becomes very thin. These were the kinds challenging conditions that the Canadians, Belgians and Dutch dealt with in Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. The Canadians grew frustrated with rag-tag, but persistent thievery in a chaotic local environment. The Belgian paras were killed by a frenzied mob of soldiers; the Dutch yielded to Bosnian-Serb separatist forces.

This is not for a moment to suggest that the murder of the young Somali by the Canadians was justified by the circumstances, nor is it to take any stand at all on the decisions reached on the ground in Rwanda by Belgian and UN officials, on whether the Belgian government should have withdrawn its forces from Rwanda after the death of its troops, or on whether Dutchbat should have put up a fight. It is, however, to suggest that all three sets of events were precipitated by the changing nature of international peacekeeping in the very early post-Cold War period. The Americans, it can be added, also learned a very bitter lesson about international intervention for humanitarian purposes during this period, losing dozens of soldiers to attack in Somalia.

At least in the Canadian case, there was a noticeable lag during the early 1990s in adjusting to the messier, more violent forms of international peacekeeping – or 'peace enforcement' as it was coming to be called. This partially explains why the events in Somalia wound up on the Canadian national political agenda; the public was deeply shocked by what had occurred. Klep alludes to this at the beginning of chapter 1 of his book, that deals with Somalia. While the Canadian military placed the blame on a 'few bad apples', there were not supposed to be any: peacekeepers were the pride of the nation. Canadians had not only grown used to the serene image of the peacekeeper – the blue-bereted soldier calmly scanning the distance with binoculars to make sure the truce was being observed – but many had also come to think that might even be something inherently Canadian about peacekeeping. Maybe it had to do with the national temperament, or having to deal with different languages and ethnic groups at home. Many Canadian also believed (as many still do today) that classical peacekeeping was the 'specialty' of the Canadian armed forces. In reality, though Canada won its once cherished peacekeeping reputation during the Cold War with strikingly little effort. Peacekeeping was little more than a sideline to – if not at times an outright distraction from, the Canadian military's principal combat-related tasks. There was little special peacekeeping training. No special peacekeeping units or formations were ever established. At National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, each new peacekeeping responsibility was handled as just another overseas contingency operation. These operations were mounted infrequently and were rarely dangerous for the participants. Few Canadian military personnel were involved. For example, during the 1980s, the number of Canadian military personnel on peacekeeping assignments averaged 1,643,

and the government planned on never having to deploy more than 2000. Nonetheless, except to the very earliest post-World War II peace operation missions, Canada always dispatched highly trained, professional troops. A good soldier is a good peacekeeper was the Canadian military's watchword. So if Canadians were not *inherently* good at peacekeeping, they nonetheless undoubtedly were very good at it because of the quality of the military peacekeepers they sent.

In other words, the military's crimes and misdeeds in Somalia seemed to threaten the myth of Canada as the international peacekeeper *par excellence.* The Canadian government felt obliged to demonstrate that the military had been purified so that it could regain its status; the most symbolically visible step Ottawa took was the dissolution of the Canadian Airborne Regiment.

I can only speculate if a similar, perhaps less intense dynamic was at work in the Netherlands as the government and public reacted to the reports from Srebrenica. Perhaps there were Dutch citizens who were asking themselves if their soldiers in Bosnia had conducted themselves as the army of a *gidsland* should. Finally – and let me stress that this is nothing more than an attempt to again speculate briefly, extrapolating from the Canadian experience – the Belgian fiasco seems more complicated. While the Belgians undoubtedly took pride in altruistic, humanitarian nature of not only their peacekeeping but other aspects of their involvement in Rwanda, they cannot have been completely shocked when their military engagement in their own former colonial backyard went terribly wrong.

It is too bad that I am left speculating on this point. It would have been of value for Klep to address at least in some detail in his book the relationship between peacekeeping and the Dutch and Belgian national self-conceptions, as well as the impact of that relationship on the unfolding of the peacekeeping crises in those two countries, having – quite correctly – raised the national identity issue at the start of his coverage of Canada.

The Balkans and the ongoing lag in thinking about peacekeeping

The lag in thinking about how international peacekeeping had changed, that is, fully coming to grips with how fundamentally difficult peacekeeping was in failed and failing states, would continue to afflict the Canadian government even after Somalia. In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, hundreds of thousands of Hutus fled into Zaire, where they were vulnerable to attacks by Zairian Tutsis and Zairian rebel forces under Laurent Kabila. The Canadian government decided to try to prod the international community into action. No doubt this was motivated in large part by sincere worries about the Hutus and the conviction that this time they should not be abandoned by the international community. But it was also an opportunity for Canada to reestablish its peacekeeping *bona fides*, at home and abroad in the wake of the

recent mess in Somalia. Ottawa went so far as to offer to lead an UN-sponsored peacekeeping force in Zaire-Rwanda, an offer that the UN Security Council took up in a November 1996 resolution. Where Belgium had failed, perhaps Canada would succeed.

But it was another mess. Canadian forces were sent to Rwanda-Zaire, to take up their leadership roles. But they were soon withdrawn. Ottawa had completely miscalculated the difficulty of intervention and Canadian politicians had overestimated its own military's capacity to lead a difficult mission. An internal defence department review concluded that the Canadian military suffered from 'systemic inability' to organize swiftly for the overseas emergency deployment of personnel and equipment. The incident is still being taught about and studied at Canadian military educational institutions, where it is known as 'the bungle in the jungle'. The UN operation itself was canceled. Fortunately, the feared recurrence of genocide did not happen as the Hutus were able to flee. And so the events were little noted publicly in Canada.

It was in the Balkans that Canada was forced fully to come to grips with how international peacekeeping had become international peace enforcement, although the lag in thinking did not disappear at first. Canadian forces first entered the region as peacekeepers in 1992. There were soon charges being made that the Canadian government sought to shield the public from knowing how violent the Yugoslav commitments had become, how many Canadian soldiers had been wounded in them and, in particular, how during a 1993 firefight in the Medak pocket, Croatia the Canadian army had engaged in its first real firefight since the Korean War forty years earlier. There were bitter accusations that Ottawa was withholding military decorations so that it would not have to admit that its forces had been in combat. Soon, there were over 4000 Canadian military personnel in the former Yugoslavia, a level that approached the number of Canadian soldiers stationed in Germany towards the end of the Cold War. Word eventually got out in Canada about the intensity and danger of the operations, and it became further clear to Canadians how far there forces were from old-styled blue-bereted days once NATO, under U.S. leadership, took over responsibility for the conduct of most of the Balkan operations. If there were any doubts remaining in Canada about how tough intervention in a failed state could be, and in particular how tough the situation was that Canada was helping to deal with in the former Yugoslavia, these had to come to an end when NATO went to open conflict with Serbia in the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. Canadian aircraft played a major role in the bombing.

The Balkan experience also prompted both the Canadians and the Dutch to come to grips with how to tackle the complexities of peace enforcement operations in failed and failing states. The two defence establishments reacted in very similar ways. Both adopted variations of the 'three-block' approach. The three-block concept holds that the military must be prepared for a spectrum of challenges and may be called upon in a given

conflict, sometimes simultaneously first, to fight, second to peace keep and third to provide humanitarian relief.

In a real sense the various, and increasingly robust Balkan operations can be seen as but preludes to, or preparation for the most difficult peace enforcement operations in which Canada and the Netherlands have been engaged in a failed state, namely those in Afghanistan. The latest Dutch and Canadian military engagements in that country under the aegis of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are strikingly similar. Both the Dutch and the Canadians are located in the southern part of the country, not far from Pakistan, where the Taliban are strong and the combat persistent. The Dutch are in Uruzgan province, while the Canadians in neighbouring Kandahar. In the summer of 2008 there were 1770 Dutch troops in country and 2500 Canadians. Thus far (September 2009), 19 Dutch military personnel have died there, as have 130 Canadians.

No more 'affairs'

In the epilogue, Dr. Klep also aptly comments that new-style peace enforcement missions 'to a great extent are unpredictable and often riskier than originally thought' and he points to the Dutch participation in ISAF:

> Instead of being able to dedicate itself, as hoped, to reconstruction, the Netherlands contingent in Southern Afghanistan found itself quickly caught up in a tough and dangerous guerilla war met Taliban fighters. The Canadian ISAF contingent had the same experience (270).

Yet there have been no more 'affairs'. This is not to say that there have not been lengthy and heated debates in both Canada and the Netherlands about Afghanistan. There obviously have been, and both countries have come to similar conclusions; the Netherlands is to bring its combat role there to a close at the end of 2010 and Canada will be following suit in early 2011. There have, however been no allegations of wrongdoing by the military that have led to sustained national debates or have unleashed the domestic fairly lengthy domestic processes of the three 'affairs' of the 1990s, as described so well and comprehensively in this book.

It remains hard to say with certainty why there have been no more peacekeeping 'affairs' in Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium. Maybe it comes from the overall realization in the international community how very difficult peace enforcement can be and that has, in turn, contributed to a reluctance to undertake new operations that might go wrong. Thus there has been no operation in Dafur and the international peace enforcers have not been back to Somalia. Maybe the armed forces have indeed been more 'responsible'. Yet – probably inevitably – there have been incidents of

misconduct in recent operations; Klep mentions one Dutch incident in Iraq. It may be that with the old model of blue-bereted peacekeeping fading, we just are not shocked as much anymore when some things go wrong. Given the difficulties and dangers our forces face in modern peace enforcement, that is no doubt a reasonable stance.

Because Klep was so cautious in his epilogue over why there have been no more peacekeeping 'affairs' and whether this may be at all attributable to the three countries having learned the lessons of Somalia, Rwanda, and Srebenica, it would be useful to hear from him on these two matters.

One final point. The focus of *Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica* is, of course, how the three crises played out as domestic political dramas. There were special inquiries established in all three countries. Klep writes that in all three, the inquiries and their final reports were 'highjacked' by governments, the media, or other outsiders. Having adopted such a loaded term as 'highjacked' that implies illegitimacy or a dysfunctional political system, Klep should defend it. To be sure, the reports were not always used 'as intended' by the inquiries. But what right did these inquiries themselves have to determine the intent? Don't interest groups have the right to pursue their interests and the media to seize on news material? And don't democratically-elected governments have the right to govern according to the law, too? In Ottawa, the Chretien government, relying on its majority status and the tight party discipline of the Canadian political system, went so far as to bring the Somalia Inquiry to a halt. But is there any reason to believe that the 'highjacking' and closing of the inquiry prevented any essential truth about Somalia from coming out?

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Binnenland ontmoet buitenland

De nasleep van onderzoekscommissies naar ontspoorde vredesmissies

PETER VAN KEMSEKE

When the Home Front meets Foreign Parts. The Aftermath of Commissions of Inquiry into derailed Peace Missions

Peace Missions take place in difficult and volatile circumstances. It is therefore hardly surprising that some peace missions become 'derailed'. Christ Klep zooms in on three 'derailed' missions in his book and focuses on the value of Commissions of Inquiry which are subsequently set up as a result of public and political pressure. Do they succeed in revealing the 'how' and the 'why' of such derailments and – above all – identifying those who are responsible? Based on a broad spectrum of questions and extensive source materials, Klep concludes that 'the number of escape routes from the labyrinth of responsibility is practically infinite'; a clear message for all those taking part in international and domestic politics. It is here that the author skillfully and expertly succeeds: exposing the complex entanglement of domestic and foreign policy, even concerning events that sometimes happen away from the capital city.

Drie ontspoorde vredesmissies

Kunduz, Noord-Afghanistan, 4 september 2009. Een NAVO-luchtaanval tegen Talibanstrijders die twee bevoorradingstrucks hadden gekaapt doodt niet alleen een aantal van die Talibanstrijders, maar kost ook het leven aan een groot aantal burgers. Een onafhankelijke Afghaanse mensenrechtenorganisatie meldt kort na de feiten dat niet minder dan zeventig onschuldige burgers zijn omgekomen, een getal dat al snel wordt overgenomen door de westerse pers. Daags nadien spreekt NAVO-bevelhebber Stanley McChrystal de bevolking toe op de Afghaanse televisie. Hij stelt de 'possible loss of life or injury to innocent Afghans' zeer ernstig te nemen en belooft een onderzoek, waarvan de resultaten openbaar zullen worden gemaakt. Onmiddellijk daarna bezoekt hij de plaats van het incident. Hij spaart daarbij zijn kritiek op de operatie niet.