IN DEPTH
Canada's Military

Canada: The World's Peacekeeper

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Owen Wood | CBC News

The 89 Canadian peacekeeping service awards handed out by the Governor General in September are only the first of many such awards that will honour Canadians who have taken part in the quest for world peace.

Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson hands out Canadian peacekeeping service medals

Over the years, more than 125,000 Canadian military personnel have served on peacekeeping missions for the United Nations – more than any other country.

Though the term "peacekeeping" didn't become widely used until 1956, the UN began deploying peacekeepers almost 10 years earlier. And Canadians have been a part of it since the beginning.

In the 1947 United Nations General Assembly, the UN endorsed a plan that would separate Palestine, creating the state of Israel and leaving the rest for the Palestinian Arabs. The plan was not accepted by the Palestinian Arabs and Arab states, and hostilities broke out in May 1948.

That same month, the UN sent out its first observers to help calm the situation. Under the name the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, UNTSO, their goal was simply to act as an international watchdog, supervising the truce between the two groups.

UNTSO has become the longest-running UN peacekeeping mission. However, its goals have changed over the years. After supervising the General Armistice Agreements of 1949, UNTSO activities spread over territory held by Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syrian Arab Republic. In 1967, following the Arab-Israeli war, the organization watched over the ceasefire in the Suez Canal area and the Golan Heights . Now, UNTSO works along with other UN forces to keep peace in the Middle East.

In 1956, Lester B. Pearson, probably the most important figure in Canadian peacekeeping history, had an idea about how to solve another international conflict in the Middle East.

France, Israel and the United Kingdom had been trying to stop Egypt from taking control of the Suez Canal. Pearson, Canada's secretary of state for external affairs, proposed an international force under the UN flag be deployed to ease the conflict.

The first UN peacekeeping force, UNEF 1, supervised the withdrawal of armed forces from Egyptian territory and served as a buffer between Egypt and Israel after the withdrawal. Led by Canadian General E. L. M. Burns, who commanded UNTSO, the mission lasted until May 1967 when Egypt managed to compel the UN forces to leave. But in 1973, they returned to the Suez Canal under a second UNEF mission, which lasted for six years.

Pearson's vision won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957.

In 1988, the Peace Prize went to the United Nations for 40 years of promoting peace. But the best was yet to come.

With the end of the Cold War, the world saw a new era of international cooperation that, among other things, made way for an explosion of UN peace missions. Of the 53 peacekeeping missions coordinated by the UN since its inception, 35 began after 1990. Fourteen, including UNTSO, are still ongoing.

In total, more than 750,000 military troops and police – more than 125,000 of whom are Canadian – and thousands of civilians from around the world have served as peacekeepers.

Considering the volatile conditions peacekeepers are thrown into, only 1,450 have been killed while performing their duties. This includes 107 Canadians.

Canada continues to play an important role in the effort to achieve world peace.

In 1994, the Canadian government established the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Centre on the site of a former military base in Clementsport, Nova Scotia. The centre provides

research, education and training for peacekeepers from Canada and abroad.

At the 50th annual general assembly of the United Nations in 1995, Canada presented a study on the UN's rapid reaction capability. The study, *Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations*, focused how to improve the UN's ability to react quickly in times of crisis. So far, 19 of the report's 26 recommendations have been adopted.

The Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal, CPSM, was created to honour the country's long history of participation in international peace efforts. Those honoured include veterans, police officers, civilians and current members of the armed forces who were deployed on peacekeeping or observer missions outside of Canada for at least 30 days.

The idea for the award came from the UN winning the Peace Prize in 1988, which also inspired the construction of Canada's National Peacekeeping Monument in Ottawa.

Reconciliation, which served as the backdrop for the presentation of the first CPSMs in September, shows three peacekeepers at the intersection of two stone-clad walls that represent opposing factions. The monument is inscribed with the following words, from a most appropriate source:

"We need action not only to end the fighting but to make the peace... My own government would be glad to recommend Canadian participation in such a United Nations force, a truly international peace and police force." – Lester B. Pearson, November 2, 1956