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4 *Reluctant Peacekeeper*

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Charles C. Penland

Director

Queen's Centre for International Relations

April 2008

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## **Reluctant Peacekeeper: Canada and the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai, 1979-1982**

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2006 marked the twentieth anniversary of the commitment of the Canadian Forces to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). The orange-bereted, US-led force, established in the wake of the Camp David summit of 1979, replaced the United National Emergency Force II which itself deployed to the region five years earlier following the Yom Kippur War. The MFO, headquartered in Rome, incorporated new concepts of how to employ technical intelligence-gathering methods in a peacekeeping and confidence-building environment. Unlike most Cold War peacekeeping operations, the MFO operated in comparatively benign environment, the wind, sand, and landmines of the desolate Sinai peninsula notwithstanding.

Yet the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau was reluctant to commit Canadian military personnel to join the MFO when it was canvassed by the United States, Egypt, and Israel in 1981. It was only after the Mulroney government took over in 1984 that the policy was reversed with the first Canadians joining the Sinai-based force in 1986. Canadian peacekeeping mythology would have us believe that Canada took the lead and enthusiastically contributed to every peacekeeping mission since 1945. This case study will challenge this mythology. Additionally, this study will examine the factors which contributed to making Trudeau and his unelected and elected advisors reluctant peacekeepers. Indeed, the MFO decision was an occasion where the so-called "Sharp Criteria," established by Secretary of State Mitchell Sharp in the mid- 1970s to move Canada away from automatic commitment to peacekeeping, were in part employed to justify the decision not to commit to the MFO.

In effect, the Trudeau government's decision in 1980-81 became a

MFO decision further cements the case that the Trudeau government's national security policy had, by the 1980s, completely diverged from the clear directions established during the first half of the Cold War, particularly those established by Lester B. Pearson, and also diverged into a contradictory posture driven by more by catering to Third World opinion, and indulging in anti-American prejudices than by a clear calculation of Canadian national security interests.

## **Setting the Scene**

The 1973 Yom Kippur War (called the War of Ramadan or the October War in Arab countries) in which Israel was subjected to surprise attack by Egypt and Syria on 6 October dangerously destabilized the Middle East and set the United States and the Soviet Union on a collision course. At the height of the conflict, the massive conventional force losses sustained by the Israelis prompted them to explore the use of nuclear weapons against their Arab antagonists: at one point when the Israeli military position nearly collapse Israeli nuclear weapons were armed and prepared for uploading onto their delivery aircraft. A hurried airlift of American weapons and aircraft bolstered the Israeli forces. When the Israeli Defence Force turned the tables on the Arab armies the possibility that the Soviet Union would overfly NATO territory and intervene with airborne forces to prevent the destruction of Egyptian forces prompted a nuclear "flourish" by the Nixon administration, which moved nuclear-capable strategic forces to DEFCON 3. The 'oil weapon' was subsequently deployed against the West by angry Arab nations which in turn delivered hammer blows to the economies of Western Europe and North America (Blum, 2003, pp. 223-229; Israelyan, 1995; Rabinovich, 2004, pp. 268-270).

It was the Israeli and Egyptian military commanders in the Sinai who, with the consent of their governments, entered into ceasefire discussions at a site called Kilometre 101. At this point, Israeli forces had crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt, cut off the bulk of the Egyptian Army in the Sinai, and threatened to move on Cairo. The Soviets prepared to intervene to protect Egypt. These initial talks, held in late October-early November 1973, were the basis for a drawn-out series of step-by-step peace moves conducted by the warring parties. In time, this would lead



to the establishment of the MFO, but getting there was not a straightforward journey (Stein, 1999, pp. 101-113).

The situation in the Sinai between Egypt and Israel was very different from but linked to a similar situation on the Golan Heights, where Israeli forces counterattacked and came within artillery range of the Syrian capital, Damascus. The intervention by Iraqi armoured forces presented further complications, as did the political intervention of other Arab states who demanded that the Palestinian issue become part of the larger peace agenda. What moved the process along, however, was that the Israelis were on the brink of exhaustion. At the same time, the Israeli leadership saw Egypt as a *schwerpunkt* in the ongoing Arab-Israeli antagonism: Egypt was the leader of the Arab world. If peace could be made, then the other Arab states might back off. The Americans, led by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, saw an opportunity to wean the

disengagement of Israeli forces from ceasefire to withdrawal from the Sinai during the Suez Crisis in 1956 took three months (United Nations, 1996, pp. 44-49).

The involvement of the United Nations and what would be called the Second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II in this paper) was problematic, though the force's existence presaged MFO. It would be easy to portray UNEF II as having the importance or stature of its 1956 predecessor, but what emerges from accounts is a very different picture. There were those in the UN who wished UNEF II to be a successor to UNEF and who pushed hard for a central role for the UN in the diplomacy of the Yom Kippur War endgame (Urquhart, 1987, Chapter XIX). However, none of the parties, Israel, Egypt or America, was comfortable with this, the Israelis least of all because the presence of UN forces in the past had failed to deter Egyptian preparations for attack in 1967. The UN was relegated to observer status in the negotiations, though UN Security Council resolutions were used for umbrella legitimacy. As Kissinger told Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, "What do you care if Dr. Waldheim sits at the head of the table? It will make him happy and won't harm anyone. I promise you that his role will only be ceremonial. The United States and the Soviet Union will run the show." (Golan, 1976, pp. 126) Indeed, UNEF II initially had a limited role and that was to observe the resupply of the trapped Egyptian Third Army and ensure that that supply did not contain military items like ammunition. In time, UN representatives were included as observers in disengagement talks and UNEF II was employed in establishing a buffer zone, but it was really the trilaterally-brokered Sinai I and Sinai II agreements that were critical from the perspectives of both the Egyptians and Israelis in disengagement and long term confidence building, not diplomacy conducted by the UN as an institution or a mass influx of Blue Helmets.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, Sinai I permitted the belligerent forces to formally accept UNEF II's presence and accepted a demilitarized buffer zone that was

establishment of the Sinai Field Mission (SFM) (Mackinlay, 1989, pp. 160-164).

In addition to strategic nature of the passes, Israel possessed a signals intelligence facility on the high ground inside the passes (Um Hashiba). The continued operation of this facility was deemed critical by Israel to any confidence-building effort. If Israeli withdrew, it would lose the site. UN operation of the site was, clearly, unacceptable. Trilateral discussions resulted in a plan to deploy a series of sensors (seismic, low-light television, and radio interception) throughout the Gidi and Mitla pass areas and approaches to them. An American contractor, E-Systems, which conducted 85% of its business with the American intelligence community including the handling of computer systems for the NSA's RHYOLITE signals intelligence satellite (Keefe, 2005, pp. 22-23), was asked to send a civilian monitoring group to deploy and man these systems. Plans were also made to have E-Systems take over the Um Hashiba site and then to construct an equivalent site on the Egyptian side: information collected by these sites would be fed to both sides. The combination of E-Systems ground monitoring, openly-declared signals intercept and SR-71 overflights was the basis for Sinai II. The Sinai Field Mission, established in 1976, would handle the ground-based sensor systems (Crickmore, 1993, pp. 105-106; Homan, 1983, pp. 1-13; Shlaim, 2007, pp. 337-338; Vannoni, [www.cmc.sandia.gov](http://www.cmc.sandia.gov)). UNEF II continued to monitor the buffer zone, but had no real relationship to the SFM, signals intelligence, or the SR-71 overflight confidence building measures. Clearly, when it came to having access to Cold War-era national technical means of verification the UN was not to be trusted. Indeed, it is not clear that the UN or UNEF II was structurally capable of processing this kind of information in any case.<sup>4</sup>

## **Canada and the Middle East**

Canada's involvement in UN peace efforts in the Middle East started in 1954, when Canadian observers deployed with the UN Truce Supervision Organization. The augmentation of UNTSO with the first UN Emergency Force in 1956-57 and its leadership by Canadian Lieutenant General E.L.M. Burns was possibly the high point of Canadian international prestige during the first two post-Second World War decades. Canadian interests in stabilizing a vital area on the periphery of the NATO

area were paramount and UNTSO and UNEF were critical components of that policy. It all collapsed by 1967. Egypt ordered UNEF out of the area and in turn Israel conducted a pre-emptive strike and seized the Sinai. Canada and the Pearson government were badly humiliated and the idea of UN peacekeeping reached its nadir as other UN efforts were on the brink of failure in Yemen, the Congo and Cyprus. The Trudeau government, on its accession to power in 1968, was at best lukewarm to the utility of UN peacekeeping and discouraged foreign policy enthusiasts from pursuing similar efforts, particularly in the Nigerian civil war (Maloney, 2002, pp. 236-240).

It is all the more surprising, then, that the Trudeau government met the call to join UNEF II in 1973. The Trudeau cabinet wanted to sit on the fence and not engage in any proactive diplomacy. Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs, told Cabinet that Canada would only have to make any serious decisions if the “existence of the State of Israel was at stake, or if the Arabian countries took action to reduce oil supplies to the U.S” (ATI PCO, 11 Oct 1973). This was a far cry from the ‘forward leaning’ Canadian policy posture of the 1950s and 1960s. The Cabinet decision to commit a logistics battalion, a signals squadron, and an air transport unit to UNEF II was almost reactive and cursory compared to the process which produced UNEF in 1956: there was not even a discussion of larger Canadian interests in the region. It appears as though the Trudeau government, sighing and shrugging, finally gave in to the repeated requests of UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim once he gave assurances that the Canadian force would be backed by the UN Security Council, would operate with the consent of the belligerent parties, would have freedom of movement, and have the requisite privileges and immunities of a contribution to a multinational UN force (ATI PCO, 29 Oct 1973). The only hint that there were some interest-based background issues was when Sharp informed Trudeau that he wanted to be sure that the Arab nations agreed that Canada was an acceptable candidate for UNEF II. There may have been some concern that participation by Canada in Middle Eastern peace efforts might be of some annoyance to the Arab world and that this could adversely affect Canadian interests, though these remained undefined by the Cabinet for the time being (ATI PCO, 1 Nov 1973).

In the initial discussions about UNEF II, Canadian policymakers were told by the foreign policy professionals that the mission was not going to be completed in six months: Cabinet agreed anyway. Once Canada



Attempts to develop a policy the previous year, however, included mention that “peace and stability in the Middle East are of immediate importance to Canada and we have a capacity to contribute to this objective through our peacekeeping activities” and that “the role of peacekeeping is central to the success of the new Sinai agreement...and Canada has a substantial and well-recognized part to play” (ATI PCO,

## **Camp David and Beyond**

On 19 November 1977, Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem, thus breaking the peace deadlock. By January 1978, stalled military-to-military talks were re-vitalized, and within nine months, in September 1978, Sadat met with the recently-elected hard line Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin at the US presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland. The Camp David Agreement, signed on 17 September, had two sections. The first was designed to be the basis for regional discussions between Israel and the Arab states surrounding it on the future status of the Palestinian peoples in Gaza and the West Bank. The second was a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel which would provide for a phased Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, not just military but civilian settlements, over the next three years. The United States would oversee this withdrawal (Touval, 1982, pp. 292-294).<sup>5</sup>

Camp David by no means precluded the continuation of UNEF II and the Sinai Field Mission as peacekeeping entities in the Sinai. The preference for American oversight was the important factor. Egyptian and Israeli suspicions that the UN might not stay the course were so much in evidence that US President Jimmy Carter reassured both parties on 26 March 1979 that the US would organize a peacekeeping mission if the UN failed to do so (Quandt, 1993, p. 323). The reasons for this backup plan were related to the Cold War and the Soviet Union.

The Soviets came out losers in the 1970s Middle East influence game





conversation that he believed Canada, as a friend of both Egypt and Israel, could play an important role in promoting progress towards peace." Though Canada's ambassador in Cairo made the point that "Sadat's Egypt is the only Arab peacemaker in the Middle East," Trudeau pirouetted away and remained aloof and non-committal (ATI PCO, 3 Dec 1980).

It is clear that External Affairs personnel in Ottawa were extremely keen to re-engage and were nearly ecstatic when they learned from back-channels that the US was on the verge of asking Canada and Australia to contribute to the possible "Multinational Peacekeeping Force" (ATI PCO, 5 Mar 1981). "Canada is on everybody's list of desirable participants," a breathless cable from the embassy in Tel Aviv noted. "Canada and Australia were considered by all three governments to be ideal participants," noted a diplomat reporting on a trilateral MNF planning meeting. In theory, Canada, Australia, one Latin American country and an African country, plus the United States would make up the 2000 to 4000 man force. Canadian diplomats waited with bated breath for a formal request (ATI PCO, 5 Mar 1981).

There was some concern, however. In the past, Israel had not permitted UNEF I to operate on its territory and had a long-standing antagonistic relationship with UN forces, including Canadian forces, stationed in the region. How did Israel feel about Canadian participation in the MNF? Apparently, "the multinational nature of the force which is to police the Sinai is of greater importance to the USA and Egypt than it is to Israel," one analysis explained. Israel was more interested in the fact that commitment to the MNF was a public declaration in support of the peace process: the two were linked. If Canada did not join the MNF, the Israeli interpretation would be that "Canadian policy had moved significantly closer to the rejectionist [Arab] states." The "rejectionists" were still attempting to link the Palestinian issue with the Egyptian-Israeli peace process and demonstrate that Egypt was betraying them and the Palestinians. Canada's ambassador in Tel Aviv noted that "our decision would turn upon whether Canada's view of its self-interest includes a perception that we benefit sufficiently from stability in the Middle East to justify a Canadian contribution (in one of the very few ways we are able to contribute significantly) to maintaining that stability." He correctly noted that "If we should decide to participate our troops may find it a refreshing change to be placed between two countries at peace with each other. At the same time the MNF will be there not only to see that things don't go wrong but also to put them right if they do. It won't be a swan in the Sinai"

(ATI PCO, 6 Mar 1981). The bottom line, according to his counterpart in Cairo, was that “the real question is whether we want to be players in the region as the occasion offers. The decision [to commit to MNF] will assuredly weigh on how seriously Canada is viewed as a potential commercial and economic as well as a political partner” ATI PCO, 11 Mar 1981).

There was a lingering belief, however, that Canadian interests in Saudi Arabia and Iraq would be adversely affected if she committed to the MNF. Canadian representatives in Jeddah reminded the Privy Council Office that Saudi Arabia was “Canada’s most important Middle East market and other moderate Arab states as well as the whole Muslim world” might react badly. The Saudis opposed Camp David ostensibly over the Palestinian issue and broke relations with Egypt. Anything that “reduces Arab leverage on Israel with regard to the Palestinian question and Jerusalem is viewed with disfavour,” according to a Canadian observer. Achieving Canadian objectives of regional security and friendship with Israel were laudable, but Ottawa had to counterbalance this with the fact that “Saudi Arabia is at present interested in Canadian-made armoured vehicles as part of a program to increase security. The main threat as perceived by the Saudis comes from Soviet expansionism and its support to radical countries in the area” (ATI PCO, 17 Mar 1981). Canada’s representative to Iraq chimed in, claiming that “given the currently solidifying relations between Canada and Iraq, we would of course have preferred that the question of Canadian participation in MNF had not arisen” (ATI PCO, 20 Mar 1981).

The issue of how the United States could simultaneously support Israel *and* Saudi Arabia, the latter with billions of dollars worth of AWACS and F-15 aircraft, and *not* have this apparent contradiction affect American interests in MNF participation, was not raised.

Note that the dialogue between the Canadian ambassadors and External Affairs in Ottawa was not low-level activity obscured from the PCO’s view. The PCO man who assumed responsibility for foreign and defence relations, Robert Fowler, was copied on all of the message traffic on the Sinai MNF issue. The implications of this are significant. In effect, the professional advice of the External Affairs establishment in Ottawa and more importantly, the ability of the elected minister to develop a professional opinion and present it to the elected members of Cabinet as the sole provider of advice on foreign policy, was in question. The PCO, with its abnormally close relationship to the Prime Minister’s

Office under Trudeau, provided, when necessary, a completely separate foreign policy monitoring capability which in turn could be used to challenge, block or otherwise interfere with ministerial advice if it were in contradiction to the views of unelected individuals in the PCO and PMO.

unspecified by Fowler and there appears to be no discussion of this issue elsewhere at the time. It is difficult not to conclude that the opinions in this memo reflected Fowler's thinking, not the supposed opinions of unnamed "officials" or untitled "reports" (ATI PCO, 26 Mar 1981).

The Rapid Deployment Force issue would pop up time and time again and be used to justify Canadian non-participation in the MNF. The American RDF was established in 1979 as a focal point for Persian Gulf-area contingency planning after the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In time a corps-sized formation was assigned to the RDF which eventually evolved into a joint command for American operations in that region (in time, the RDF would become today's Central Command or CENTCOM). Some believed that any American battalion assigned to the MFO would be used as part of an advance guard for the RDF if required: initially, the American MFO battalion in the 1980s was drawn from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division or the 101<sup>st</sup> Airmobile Division (both formations tasked to be part of the Rapid Deployment Force) and was stationed at the airfield at Ras Nas Rani in the Sinai. There thus appeared to be some basis for believing that this was in the minds of some American planners: whether it was policy or just contingency planning is another matter (ATI PCO; 26 Mar 81; Davis, 1982; Mackinlay, 1989, pp. 191). However, shying away from Canadian participation in the force because of what the Americans *might* choose to use their contingent for *if* something went wrong elsewhere was not really sufficient grounds to reject participation.

Mark MacGuigan was informally approached by Alexander Haig on the possibility of a Canadian contribution. After discussions with DND, MacGuigan's staff crafted a memo for Trudeau to lay out the pros and cons. The External Affairs memo used Australia's reticence to commit to MNF (on the basis that it was not a UN mission) and the mysterious Rapid Deployment Force linkage as arguments against participation. This time, some in External believed that evacuated Israeli air bases in the Sinai would be used to house the American RDF, which had as its mission the protection of Saudi Arabia. At this point (April 1981) the arguments in favour of Canadian participation revolved around reaffirming Canada's support for and role in Middle East peace, and, importantly, "[it] would be a positive response to a major request from our principal ally and would permit us to demonstrate to the new administration at an early stage our willingness to share the defence burden" (ATI PCO, 26 Mar 1981).

The arguments against, in priority, were: that the MNF was not UN; that the force “may not be necessary”; that the force’s limited international participation would strengthen “the impression in the region that the Camp David process is basically an enterprise of a small Western group”; that Canada would “impair relations with other Arab countries” and that it “could affect our acceptability in the two UN Middle East peace-keeping operations.” Finally there was the RDF canard. Again, the RDF issue was not elaborated on and it appears to have been thrown in to bolster the argument that the force would somehow not be impartial.

Once again, Robert Fowler acted as intermediary between the Secretary of State for External Affairs and the Prime Minister. His affixed cover memo to Trudeau noted that “Mr. MacGuigan does not come to a conclusion, although we understand many officials in External Affairs are less than enthusiastic [about the MNF]....We tend to share these reservations, especially since the existing USA, Egyptian and Israeli force in the area seems to continue to monitor troop movements.” Again, Fowler bent the intent of the Sharp Guidelines, stating that “the proposal would contravene Canada’s established guidelines for peacekeeping participation” and that participation “would damage Canadian interests and compromise impartiality throughout the Middle East” (ATI PCO, 6 Apr 1981). Bold words, and in the main incorrect ones since Canadian involvement in the MNF would not, in fact, violate the Sharp Guidelines. Once again, we are confronted with the use of “we” which appears to mean Fowler and no-one else.

The difficulties the United States was having getting “buy-in” to

important psychological ramifications in the larger Cold War (ATI PCO, 6 May 1981).

In a reversal, the Canadian ambassador in Jedda, Jacques Roy, suddenly declared that initial fears of Arab backlash were not as bad as estimated and that “potential participants might profit from a positive decision.” Did this reflect a Saudi shift in attitude, or the embassy’s? It was hard to tell, but “failure to establish suitably composed MNF would be unfortunate.” Perhaps Canada could find “good possibilities of influencing the direction [of American] policy.... Canada should be in a very good position to exert influence as few countries can match our credentials for credibility” which was in part “based on low proportion of Mideast oil in our total oil requirements.” Indeed, using Canadian participation in the MNF to pressure the Americans to in turn pressure Israel on the Palestinian issue and then leverage this with the Saudis was a possibility. It was also conceivable that Canada could go further and influence others to join the MNF, which would make the Canadian position even stronger. This in turn could be a springboard for Canada to once again take a seat at the table of the Middle East peace process (ATI PCO, 25 May 1981a).

This creative approach came at a time when the outlines of the MNF were emerging from talks between the Americans and the two former belligerents. The MNF would be about 3000 personnel, with three battalions, one of which would be American. The MNF would also have an air component with transport helicopters, and a sea-going coastal patrol component. As for command and control, the planned MNF would have a civilian director general and a military force commander. Italy and Fiji were being sounded out as contributors, as was Australia (ATI PCO, 25 May 1981b).

What about Canada’s relationship with Kuwait? The Canadian diplomatic staff in Kuwait City noted that, in particular, Kuwait’s preoccupation was with Lebanon at this time, and “responsible officials would not pay much attention to contrived linkage” between the MNF and RDF (ATI PCO, 26 May 1981). The Canadian views from Jedda and Cairo remained positive: Canada stood to gain from joining the MNF. The embassy in Washington declared that Canada’s involvement or non-involvement wasn’t really important to the Reagan administration, though the Egyptians were starting to apply pressure for Canadian involvement again (ATI PCO, 31 May 1981; 5 Jun 1981; 2 Jun 1981a; 2 Jun 1981b).

The MNF matter was deemed important enough for more detailed External Affairs study. Before it could be presented to Cabinet, however, Robert Fowler apprised Trudeau on the situation as he understood it based on his interpretation of the External message traffic. Mark MacGuigan and Defence Minister Gilles Lamontagne were going to discuss the issue, but Fowler wanted Trudeau to be directly involved because, as he put it in his memo to Trudeau, “you had indicated in the margin of our earlier memo that you shared our reservations about Canadian participation.” Fowler also noted that “your experience and knowledge of the domestic as well as foreign policy implications of previous Middle East issues could assist Mr. MacGuigan” and that “your involvement and interest might encourage ministers to take a broader view.” This implied that such a “broader view” was that of Fowler himself and not of the policy professionals in the field, or of the elected representatives. Fowler told Trudeau that there was “an absence of a military requirement for this force,” a statement that was not supported by any documentation and that flew in the face of what the Israelis and the Egyptians wanted. The “lack of UN auspices” card was deployed once again (ATI PCO, 5 Jun 1981b).

Fowler took a swipe at Jacques Roy, suggesting that if the course of action he favoured was followed, “such a move by Canada would be high profile diplomacy by our standards and would not please the domestic Jewish community, nor the Americans, Israelis or Egyptians.” Using the royal “our”, Fowler ended by noting that “In our view, the foreign policy factors including Canada-USA relations argue against Canadian participation (Ibid.)” How he reached this conclusion is baffling, given the contents of the memo. The position seems to reflect his preference, and no one else’s. By trumping the External Affairs eighteen page study with a three and a quarter page memo, Fowler was able to frame the debate for Trudeau before the elected representatives could present their case.

The External study, which had DND participation, was the first examination thus far of the military implications of sending troops with the MNF. There was an informal request by the US for an infantry battalion, but DND explored a range of possible contributions. The three options were: an observer group of 40 men; an air unit (most likely helicopters); and a 500-man battalion. The observer group was easy to send, but sending an air unit was deemed to “cause a degradation in the Canadian

Forces' capability to meet operational commitments and respond to do-



The impact on Australia's decisionmaking process vis-à-vis the MNF was dramatic: the Australian Prime Minister noted that "such a decision would require Australia also to decide immediately against participa-

for some reason, even today (ATI PCO 23 Jun 1981; 24 Aug 1981). Later, however, the reasoning from the embassy in Washington suggested that a positive decision to join MFO would “have little or no beneficial effect on those concerned with economic issues in the administration or Congress who are most vocal in opposition to Canada’s investment and finance policies.” Again, these policies were not identified or elaborated on, but a visit with Alexander Haig revealed that “the USA would like to have Canada join the Sinai peacekeeping force, but recognized that [Canada] had borne more than our normal share of similar operations in the past.” Joining MFO would “probably have very little linkage with other aspects of the bilateral relationship” (ATI PCO, 27 Aug 1981).

The situation as it stood in September 1981 was summed up in a memo to Trudeau, ostensibly from MacGuigan but signed by “LRC” who added his own opinion as marginalia. Now, for the first time, Israel expressed interest in a Canadian contribution, the reasons being obscure. Egypt was pleading again and again for Canadians. The Americans were now sounding DND out on sending a signals unit, while Norway was sending the force commander. There was no Arab backlash, so far. The author of the report noted that “there are strong reasons both for and against participation. MacGuigan/LRC recommended that Canada not make a decision and sit on the fence. LRC’s marginalia stated that his people “remain strongly *against* participation in the force,” reasons unspecified (ATI PCO, 25 Sep 1981).

On 6 October 1981, Anwar Sadat was gunned down by Muslim extremists who were opposed to peace with Israel. Australia was now interested and suggested that it would join MFO if Canada did and if the United Kingdom would consider the possibility. MacGuigan’s people in External who were opposed to MFO, however, saw this as a perfect opportunity to stall “until the dust settles.” Others thought Canada should leverage participation and use it to pressure the US and Israel, presumably on the Palestinian issue. MacGuigan admitted, finally, his reasons for opposition: “I did not see sufficient advantage for us given, on one hand, the opposition of Arab countries to our participation and on the other hand, Israel’s questionable good faith in the West Bank part of the

desirable." The mysterious LRC added in pen, "but linked to the actions on the Palestinians!" MacGuigan did not favour any change to Canadian Middle East policy. Indeed, one factor among many was a pending trade agreement with Iraq, which opposed Camp David and the MFO. Gilles Lamontagne agreed with MacGuigan, and was prepared to support whatever decision was made by Trudeau (ATI PCO, 13 Oct 1981).

MacGuigan informed Trudeau that four new countries had agreed to join the MFO: the Netherlands, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The reasons for this sea change related to an announcement by the European Community that assistance in the Camp David process via the MFO contributed to Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and that this was related to EC aims regarding Palestinian self-determination and PLO participation in a larger peace process. This caught External off-guard: elements within External wanted to make an announcement that Canada would participate sometime in the future, in order to get Canada's oar in now without making a formal commitment. MacGuigan was concerned that a Canadian announcement one way or the other would be the wrong move and urged caution, until "the dust has settled" yet again (ATI PCO, 9 Nov 1981a). Fowler's cover letter to MacGuigan's memo countered External: "I share Mr. MacGuigan's distaste for a position which would have us commit ourselves to participating in a force in which we are not now needed." Fowler favoured an approach which would "force upon Israel the realization that even her friends cannot be expected to wait forever for realistic policies from Tel Aviv. It would allow Canada to join the Europeans in proving to the Arabs that we are not dogmatic and it would ensure that we would not be isolated in our current conservative posture by what appears to be new flexibility in Washington's approach...." Canadian policy makers, having boxed themselves in, now were not sure how to take advantage of a situation where everybody else who had been reticent before was bandwagoning onto the MFO. Canada'sy10.Twy!Lare1

United States that a Canadian contribution was not needed immediately. Canada's ambassador challenged Ottawa on these points, and indicated that they would be perceived as "provocative" and "misleading". The Americans were told, eventually, that this policy statement was designed to "meet US interests so as not to deter other potential contributors." Such "polite fiction" was no longer "necessary, nor desirable" (ATI PCO, 17 Mar 1982). The Canadian representatives in Cairo chimed in with a request for a more "forthright" explanation. None was provided by the PCO or the PMO (ATI PCO, 19 Mar 1982). The MFO issue for Canada appears to have died when the Begin government mounted the massive operation against the PLO in Lebanon in June 1982.

### **Operation CALUMET: The Mulroney Government Decides**

The MFO was formally established on 25 April 1982. Contributing nations included Australia, Colombia, the United Kingdom, Fiji, France, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Uruguay, and the United States. Canada was conspicuous by her absence. The negotiated agreements provided for four limited force zones, A through D. Zone A had an Egyptian mechanized division of 22 000. Zone B had four Egyptian border units totaling four battalions equipped with light weapons and wheeled vehicles. Zone C had only MFO units and Egyptian civilian police. Zone D, the only zone in Israel, was limited to four Israeli infantry battalions. There were aerial and naval restrictions as well over and around the Sinai peninsula. The Sinai Field Mission continued with its verification activities, which were tied into MFO operations, while the three MFO infantry battalions occupied Zone C and a Civilian Observer Unit maintained contact between both sides (Homan, 1983, pp. 1-13). Israel evacuated all Sinai settlements and military bases in a manner not unlike operations seen in the Gaza Strip during September 2005.

In September 1984, Brian Mulroney, leading the Progressive Conservatives, defeated John Turner's Liberal Party and became Prime Minister. In early 1985, Australia announced that she would withdraw from the MFO. In April the Mulroney government announced that Canada would deploy a helicopter unit consisting of 140 personnel and nine CH-135 Twin Huey utility transport helicopters to the mission. On 31 May 1986, the first Canadian elements of the Rotary Wing Aviation Unit arrived

to begin reconnaissance and verification operations (Dabros, 1986, pp. 32-35).

The Mulroney decision to join MFO was comparatively uncomplicated: Australia was leaving the force (she would re-join in 1993), there was a gap in the force's helicopter lift requirements, the three Camp David players reiterated long-standing requests about Canadian suitability, and the Mulroney government, interested in repairing damaged relations with the United States, authorized Operation CALUMET. Canadian airmen and helicopters served with the MFO until 1993. From 1993, approximately 25 Canadian Forces personnel served with MFO on six month rotations in a variety of support and staff capacities. By the early 2000s, the bulk of Canada's contingent was reserve personnel. Canada still serves in the Sinai.

## **Conclusion**

A study of Canada and the MFO provides significant insight into the national security policies of the Trudeau era while at the same time affording us an opportunity to gain an understanding of how Canada chooses to, or in the case of the MFO, not to commit military forces to overseas endeavours. In the Canadian decision-making process for this period, there were eight "players" each of whom can be characterized in approach to the MFO decision. Canadian ambassadors in Arab countries (excepting Egypt) had a "cautious" view, fearing backlash and loss of influence. Canada's ambassador in Washington DC had a "skeptical" view, believing that joining the MFO would not assist him in the bi-lateral relationship with the Americans. National Defence possessed a "disinterested" view: there were other, more important things to do in the Cold War; MFO was "do-able" but not a priority. The Secretary of State for

benefits for Canada both regionally and with the Americans. It is fair to suggest that Robert Fowler held an “opportunistic” view, generating reasons not to commit to the MFO to please his boss, the Prime Minister, while at the same time leaving escape hatches by feigning impartiality in the debate and using data selectively. Ultimately, however, the Prime Minister held an antagonistic view: Trudeau was disinclined to help the Americans and used the data provided to him to justify this position.

As with any other human endeavour, it will always be the clash of personalities, not the clash of civilizations, that determines which directions are taken, for better or worse. The failure to re-define Canadian Middle East policy in light of the dramatic events of 1979, rigidity in holding an allegedly impartial position, the use of bogus arguments, miscalculated “fence sitting,” combined with the seam of anti-American policy running throughout the Trudeau era put paid to the possibility that Canada might strive to reach the heady heights of influence it had in the 1950s and 1960s. By not committing Canada to the MFO, Trudeau’s vision refused to take in that view and contributed to the decline in Canadian global influence. Canada, supposedly the great peacekeeping “moral superpower,” could therefore in no way take credit for the peace process which has held so long between Egypt and Israel. Only the soldiers and airmen of Operation CALUMET, labouring in obscurity in the Sinai, can claim any credit for Canada in the realm of the MFO, certainly not Canada’s political leadership.

## Notes

1. Soviet penetration of Israel is discussed in both Black and Morris, (1991) and in Raviv and Melman, (1990). Dan McKinnon alludes to the Aswan Dam targeting issue in Mackinnon,(1987) p. 53.
2. UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim became the butt of jokes by the delegations who likened him to a waiter at a posh restaurant, rushing between delegates but with little to offer. See Stein, (1999) pp. 113-119, 151-153; Quandt, (1997) Chapter 8. See also Golan, (1976).
3. Gidi and Mitla passes are essentially choke points in the western Sinai. Control of these positions blocks an advance on Israel's western borders and forces an assaulting force to go around along the Mediterranean route (vulnerable to air attack) or by diverting to the southern point of the Sinai Peninsula to Sharm al Sheikh and then north-east, which traverses rough terrain and takes an attacker into the Negev Desert.
4. Note that this controversy lay at the heart of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) experience in Iraq in the 1990s: what was verification and what was intelligence gathering? A USAF TR-1 recce aircraft was deployed as part of the UNSCOM mission and special arrangements were made to provide imagery to UN bodies, but there was great hesitation to do so and at least one UNSCOM inspector may have compromised the collection capabilities to a third party.
5. Text of Camp David documents are found in Bickerton and Klausner, (1995) pp. 195-210.
6. See marginalia.

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