

“‘WHO IS THE ENEMY’: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY, CANADIAN PEACEKEEPERS IN CROATIA (1992-1993)”

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Delivered: 16.7.2026

Language: English

Corrected: 20.8.2026

Type of paper: Review paper

Accepted: 14.9.2026.

DOI number: 10.5937/vojdelo2603009H

Abstract: In the former Yugoslavia Canadian Peacekeepers were plunged into a conflict more complicated and violent than they expected. Their initial perception of the belligerents was one of confusion and shock because of the carnage they witnessed. Canadian Peacekeepers initially struggled to understand the warring factions and how to provide security for local civilians who had gone into seclusion or fled their communities. They recognized their own limitations and strengths and learned from the unpredictable and often dangerous, boots-on-the-ground actions they experienced. The Canadian Peacekeepers established themselves as trained, disciplined soldiers who should be taken seriously, and they also learned how to quickly adapt, and even integrate new perspectives of the belligerents. This included untangling the region's complicated history, appreciating local values and principles, and recognizing the complex interweaving of identity and relationships (historical, ethnic, cultural, geo-political, and religious) of the belligerents and the civilian populations. Canadian Peacekeepers learned that forging goals and projects based on common needs was not only mutually beneficial but illuminated local networks including the role of women in sustaining families and their communities.

This article focuses exclusively on the Canadian Peacekeepers who served in Croatia during the first two years of UNPROFOR's Operation Harmony (1992-1993) and describes the initial struggles of the Canadians, and the actions they took to better understand the belligerents and foster security and humanitarian support in a land torn by war. The sources for this paper incorporate numerous first-person accounts of Canadian veterans and a broader historiographical context that includes perceptions of the enemy, culture and behaviour, and social identity theory.

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In Croatia, Canadian Peacekeepers repeatedly asked: “who are these belligerents, why are they enemies, and what is my purpose in this conflict? In the midst of a nation broken by war Canadian Peacekeepers learned to distinguish between perception and reality.

Keywords: *Canadian Peacekeepers, Operation Harmony, UNPROFOR, Croatia, culture and behaviour, war.*

Introduction

“We were not at war, but the people who were there were at war”(Jones, 2005).

LCol Jones, Commander (Roto 0), CANBAT 1

In late 1991 Captain Michael Rouleau arrived in Croatia as a Canadian military member attached to the European Community Monitor Mission in the Former Yugoslavia [ECCM] (Doyle, 2018, pp. 415, 417).² Prior to arriving in theatre, he was given only a cursory background on the belligerents and was told he was part of a diplomatic mission – not military – to monitor and observe but not to intervene (Lukic, 2003, pp. 186-187).³ Rouleau experienced the very opposite. While on escort duty, he was suddenly flagged down by a Croatian Colonel who frantically blurted out, “*Things have gone to shit...We don’t have any EC people here...You’ve got to help us*”.⁴ Rouleau glanced at the window of the van where the prisoners were held and almost jumped back in fright. A “gaunt animal face” stared at him which “didn’t look like a man at all”. The situation was extremely tense as Rouleau stepped into a cluster of soldiers from opposing sides who were holding Kalashnikov rifles and wearing hand grenades. After the necessary paperwork was signed, it was time for the prisoner exchange. As they climbed out Rouleau was shocked at what he saw:

2 On 1 September 1991, a memorandum of understanding directed that Canadian military members could be tasked to the ECCM to monitor the cease-fire between the governments of Croatia and what the Serb majority in Croatia called the Republic of Serbian Krajina (Doyle, 2018, pp. 415, 447).

3 Despite its designation as a diplomatic mission the ECCM monitors were in an unpredictable and deadly conflict zone. On 7 January 1992 a Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) jet shot down a helicopter clearly identified as part of the ECCM killing five observers (Lukic, 2003, pp. 186-187).

4 This was not the normal standing operating procedure (SOP). Negotiations were supposed to precede prisoner of war exchanges with the location and timings agreed to by both sides well in advance. Then pre-selected ECCM monitors were to represent both sides (Vachon, 2006).

They all had their chins touching their chests, obviously something they had been schooled to do during their time in captivity. With their heads down, and each head touching the head of the prisoner in front, they walked forward like a big caterpillar. They wouldn't look up. Most were badly beaten; two were carried out on stretchers (Granatstein & Lavender, 1992, p. 156).

Rouleau was a professional soldier, but what he witnessed left him deeply unsettled and prompted deeper questions: "who are these belligerents, why are they enemies, and what is my purpose in this conflict?"

This paper examines why Canadian Peacekeepers struggled to understand the warring factions and their own role as part of UNPROFOR's Operation Harmony. Were the belligerents a trained, state-sponsored force, a cluster of undisciplined, angry combatants, or elements of both? Over time, spontaneous, dangerous, as well as meaningful engagement with belligerents and civilians helped Canadian Peacekeepers recognize the complex interweaving of identity and relationships (historical, ethnic, cultural, geo-political, and religious) of the Croat and Serb peoples in Croatia. But recognizing their own unawareness was not enough. For Canadian Peace Support Operations to fulfill their mandate they needed to quickly adapt, display flexibility, and integrate doctrine shift in theatre. Furthermore, the historical genre of perceptions of the enemy and social identity theory will help illuminate the success of Canadian Peacekeepers in reaching these goals.

Canadian Peace Support Operations in the Balkans (1992-2004)

Between 1992 and 2004 more than 40,000 Canadian soldiers were deployed to the Balkans. Canadian Peace Support Operations in the former Yugoslavia can be generally described in two separate phases: the United Nations Peacekeeping mandates (1992-1995) and the NATO military operations (1995-2004).

Between April 1992 and March 1995 some of Canada's Peacekeepers were part of UNPROFOR's⁵ Operation Harmony, which deployed in Croatia⁶ to the United Na-

5 Between 1992 and 1995 the Canadian UNPROFOR operations included: Operation Canengbat (Engineers), Operation Cavalier (CANBAT 2), Operation Harmony (CANBAT 1), Operation Mandarin (Logistics), Operation Mesusa (Electronic Warfare), and Operation Panorama (Forward Air Controllers).

6 In 1992, part of CANBAT 1 was sent to secure the airport and other strategic locations in and around Sarajevo, Bosnia.

tions Protected Area (UNPA)⁷ Sector West in Slavonia and Sector South covering the historic regions of northern Dalmatia and Lika, including areas of the self-declared Republic of Serbian Krajina. It included a “battle group” (CANBAT 1) with infantry and engineering components and involved seven deployments of Canadian soldiers (Rotos 0-6) on six-month rotations. This article focuses exclusively on the first two years of this mission.

LCol Michael Jones was the first Canadian battalion commander in the former Yugoslavia. He met each of his echelons when they arrived in theatre and told them that as part Canada’s first Peacekeeping mechanized infantry battalion they were in a “real operational theatre” and while they were not at war, the people who were there were at war (*Jones, 2005*). Yet, Jones and his soldiers knew next to nothing about the war, those engaged in it, and how to soldier in it. They were about to experience their own trial by fire.

Perceptions and Reality: Struggling to understand dangerous, unpredictable belligerents

Between 1992 and 1995, UNPROFOR was caught between conflicting views. Croatian officials believed that the role of UNPROFOR was to reassert Croatian dominance over areas under the control of Krajina Serb authorities by disarming Serb forces and retrieving displaced Croatian refugees. In contrast, the Serb authorities assumed the Canadian Peacekeepers would provide security for Serb-held areas and help protect their autonomy (*Klemenčić & Schofield, 2001, p. 29*). Each side claimed the UNPROFOR mandate in its own interests.

UNPROFOR was mandated, within the UNPAs, to disarm and demobilize all armed forces including: the Croatian National Guard, the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), the territorial defence units, and other paramilitary and irregular forces. The UN civilian police monitors were to supervise the actions of local police to ensure that individuals (and their human rights) were being protected. UNPROFOR was also

⁷ The purpose of UNPAs was to demilitarize them and create “safe havens” so that all persons residing there were protected from fear of armed attack. This concept was first proposed by humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross to avoid residents ultimately becoming refugees. The purpose of Pink Zones was to establish a measure of security in areas adjacent to UNPAs and control the movement of civilians into UNPAs areas and provide immigration and customs roles where UNPAs bordered on international boundaries.

tasked to assist the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in supporting refugees and to escort convoys providing urgently needed provisions for local civilians. UNPROFOR struggled to achieve these mission tasks even as its mandate was expanded into Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia (*Nation*, 2003, 24-37, 24-42; *Cicic*, 2017, pp. 30-52; *Stamkoski & Cohen*, 1995, p. 241; *Williams & Scharf*, 2017, p. 11-80; *Berdal*, 1995, p. 229).

At the strategic level, what emerged was growing Croatian and Krajina Serb disenchantment with the UNPROFOR. As the months passed, they accused UNPROFOR of being little more than a "disengagement" mission, patrolling lines of confrontation and reporting incidents, but not actually engaging in the UNPAs. The Croats and Krajina Serbs branded UNPROFOR as "Cypriotisation"—a derogatory reference meaning ineffectual peacekeeping in Cyprus. But this branding was wrong. During their first two years in Cyprus Canadian Peacekeepers suppressed active conflict and established secure zones (*James*, 2001). Still, by January 1995, Croatian President Franjo Tudman's discontent led to his demands that UNPROFOR's mandate in Croatia end. This statement was a diplomatic signal that the status quo had changed and cleared the way for military actions, such as Operation Storm (August 1995) and Tudman's ultimate goal—regaining control over the entire territory of Croatia—accomplished in the Erdut Agreement (November 1998) and the completion of peaceful reintegration in January 1998 (*Klemenčić & Schofield*, 2001, p. 30).

For Canadian Peacekeepers, Operation Harmony was not a disengagement mission. As soon as they were "boots on the ground" they found themselves in a dangerous conflict zone. For instance, during their first month in Croatia, Roto 0 intelligence reports recorded 115 cease-fire violations every day - a number unprecedented for Cyprus but actually considered "calm" for Yugoslavia (*3rd battalion Intelligence Report*, 1992).

Canadian Peacekeepers were alarmed by the carnage they witnessed and struggled to understand it. Shortly after arriving in Croatia, a Canadian combat engineer was troubled by the destruction he observed in Vukovar, which he perceived as possible evidence of scorched-earth tactics and retaliatory destruction:

This was unlike anything that I had ever seen...there would be a factory... [with] tank rounds through it to render it useless and...apartment buildings had lots of artillery and tank rounds...so they would be uninhabitable...there was debris everywhere...we were quite astounded by what we were going into (Mann, 2007).

The retaliatory destruction and ethnic cleaning impacted other Canadian soldiers:

Prior to our arrival [there was] a lot of ethnic cleansing. The Serb houses got burned down in the Croat areas and...the Croat houses got burned down by the Serb side of the battle...which...was still ongoing. When we were there you would still see a house getting blown up. And...we would go and query with the locals what that was...[and we were told]...they had left and gone to the other side so they blew the house up so they wouldn't come back (Chadder, 2006).

For Canadian Peacekeepers the belligerents were unpredictable. As one sapper noted, "I can certainly remember personally going into some areas where shots were fired - shots were fired in our direction (Chadder, 2006)." In addition, Canadian Peacekeepers learned that meetings with the belligerents included a measure of instability, often because of alcohol:

Every meeting that you went with either the Croat side or the Serbian side...there would be 12 or 14 of them and two of you. And the first thing they would do would bring up a bottle of Slivovitz and a bottle of brandy and...start pouring and say, "Right, we'll discuss business once we finish these bottles."...So we'd be drinking a little bit of Slivovitz amongst lots of cups of coffee. And this would be seven or eight o'clock in the morning...[And even]...soldiers [we met with]in the trenches there wasn't much going on so they would be drinking and just firing pot shots at each other (Chadder, 2006).

Capt Vachon learned that unpredictable belligerents could have pre-determined expectations:

So long as you were doing what they wanted, they would support you. As soon as you stopped doing what they wanted, you were against them; you were seen as being biased and it became more difficult...we got the impression the two factions were using us as pawns (Vachon, 2006).

The experience of Vachon was noted by other Canadian officers as well (Russell, n.d.).

Canadian Peacekeepers adapted to dangerous and unpredictable circumstances as disciplined, professional soldiers. After the third battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI) completed their deployment in April 1993 (Roto 1), Major General J.M.R Gaudreau, the commander of the Canadian contingent (CANCON) commended CANBAT 1 for adhering to the UN rules of engagement: "you have been under fire and fired back." Furthermore, Lieutenant Colonel G.W. Nordick, CAN-

BAT 1's Commanding Officer, praised his soldiers for their expertise and accomplishments amid the warring factions:

You have been tested as few other Canadian battalions have ever been tested outside of combat. On the negative side you have been shot at, mined, grenaded, struck by anti-tank weapons, mortared, run over, beaten, robbed, spat on, threatened, and maligned as arrogant, brutal and insensitive foreigners...Professionally, you have manned mobile and permanent check points; conducted vehicle and foot patrols; escorted and protected engineers, humanitarian aid convoys, utilities crews, funeral parties, village visitors, and dignitaries; you have driven nearly 1,000,000 kilometers; built large semi-permanent camps; cordoned and searched houses; returned fire in anger; captured and disarmed angry and violent men; lifted minefields and booby traps; stood your ground before hostile crowds; protected prisoners; dug real defensive positions and even prepared for war" (Boyne, 1992–1993, p. ii).

Nordick's words described the vast scope of the unit's accomplishments in theatre but didn't provide solace to the mental struggles affecting Canadian Peacekeepers:

Yugoslavia...was being ripped to shreds violently, her population starving, without water or electricity and most homes and businesses destroyed. Shells and mortars landing indiscriminately and without warning...[and] their economy in the dumpster and...seven million mines buried along the Croatian border...The people were consumed by hatred of each other...It kept going through my mind; I could leave when my tour was over. I would see my family again. We would be safe. I would have respite; I would never have to think of this again. How very, very wrong "I" was. Those images follow me in my sleep and even my waking hours. Vivid dreams, flashing at breakneck speed through my mind. Unable to control the speed or the images, I am another innocent victim destined to repeat over and over in my mind the nightmare of those six months. Hold the tears, just pass the whiskey (Harris, n.d.).

Another Canadian Peacekeeper went back to Germany on furlough halfway through his tour. The first night, he awoke in a cold sweat with his hands clasped around the neck of his girlfriend. She was not hurt, but they were both badly shaken. For the Canadian Peacekeeper, it was a subconscious response to try to understand what he had experienced, and for the question he kept asking and for which he had no answer, "Who were these belligerents and how could they commit such horrendous acts (Cpl A, 2025)?"

Perceptions and Reality: “Who are these belligerents?!”

Victorious military commanders, strategists, and historians have stressed the importance of one's perception of the enemy. For centuries they have asked: who is the enemy; what is the enemy's strength and military objectives; how is the enemy supported by political power; and what is the enemy thinking? Answers to these questions are critical for mission success.

Successfully perceiving one's enemy embodies much more than a critical assessment of an opponent's military capabilities; it must also include an honest assessment of one's self. As General Sun Tzu declared in 520 BCE, “know the enemy and yourself”. More recently Col. Ash noted:

“Perception of the enemy is a paramount factor in the cause and termination of war...Perception rules morale and transcends reality – it is relevant for the genius and the moron...Perception transformation is embracing integration (Ash, 2002, pp. 6-7).”

Perception of the enemy is a factor that affects military outcomes and is relevant to all military members regardless of their competence or character. Furthermore, it is not static but dynamic because “perception is transformative and embraces integration.” How is this perception transformative and what is the integration that needs to occur?

Since the Second World War, multiple academic disciplines have embraced “perceptions of the enemy” as a serious field of study (*Kaplowitz, 1990, p. 41; Fettweis, 2015, pp. 164-165*) and yet it was not included in the Canadian pre-deployment instruction.

The Canadian Peacekeepers who deployed to Croatia on the first roto had little opportunity to initially ponder the belligerents. Part of the problem was their haste to deploy – often with very little warning or workup training. For instance, one of the senior engineers was manager of a six-hundred-million-dollar procurement program when he suddenly received a phone call:

I was phoned and given zero time...to decide whether I was going or not but insisted on half an hour to call my wife first...called back and said, “Yes I would go.”...Two weeks later...[I was]...in Frankfurt, only, to find nobody at the Croatian desk...[suddenly] a woman comes flashing into the place and hustled us out the door like we were a bunch of thieves, put us on the bus and took us over into the Netherlands because Croatia wasn't allowed to fly out of Germany at the time...They

had no tickets for us...[so we paid ourselves]...Had no briefings on the situation in theatre and had no pre-deployment training. Had no weapon and didn't even have a Blue Beret (Sherwood, 2006).

LCol Aikman had some initial training but also found it insufficient to prepare him for his new position in the Balkans:

I was sent on a week-long training...[but] I received only...one brief outline of the situation from the Canadian perspective...Beyond that, it was my own reading that got me up to speed. I have to say that although I felt I had read in, it was way short of what I needed...The learning curve was really steep when I got there...[and I]...had to unlearn...[some aspects of my]... pre-deployment briefing (Aikman, 2005).

The primary engineering unit that deployed on Roto 0 had less than three weeks to prepare following the warning order. Once in theatre, the unit lamented their pre-deployment training:

With the support of brigade headquarters, unit personnel were given an outline of events in Yugoslavia...In retrospect, most unit personnel found the briefing to have been of marginal value, but everyone believed that they were receiving all existing information (Engineer Lessons Learned, 2007).

One of the most glaring weaknesses for 4 CER was a lack of suitable maps. Maps issued on pre-deployment training were from 1948 and thus outdated. Once in theatre engineers adapted to the situation and tried to get by with Michelin road maps, but as the engineer commander lamented, "I cannot have my pers wandering into hot areas due to lack of proper maps (*Engineer Lessons Learned, 2007*)."

When he received his warning order on Roto 0 Jones immediately engaged his infantry soldiers in pre-deployment training. But he was given no means to brief his soldiers on the Balkans so out of necessity he had to act spontaneously and creatively. He employed one of his sergeants of Serb descent to prepare a cultural language checklist and to conduct briefings for the regiment(*Jones, 2005*).

Upon reaching Croatia, Canadian Peacekeepers soon learned they needed to discard pre-determined stereotypes and appreciate the belligerents as belonging to complex, intertwined and multi-layered communities and families. As Jones noted:

It wasn't...just Croats or just Serbs...It was all mixed together...you might have a family that was divided. The son might be on the Croat side, and the dad might be Serbian...In fact, the local Croat command-

ers had bodyguards, of whom two or three were Serbian, and vice versa for the other side. So, it was all a big mix (Jones, 2005).

Canadian Peacekeepers arrived in theatre ill equipped to understand the culture of the Croat and Krajina Serb peoples and so they asked, “who are these belligerents?” Unravelling a complex history was a first start.

Perceptions and Reality: Untangling a complicated history

During Operation Harmony, much of the direct Canadian dialogue with the belligerents at random checkpoints, during patrols, and in key leader engagement with local military leaders or police involved a history lesson. For instance, almost every one of Vachon’s meetings with local military leaders began by listening to an impromptu, passionate speech about past rights and wrongs:

You weren’t able to go to a meeting between the factions that didn’t start with a summary of the history starting from 1705 to the current day with all of the atrocities that took place...some were myths, others were stories that people had created over time, but they were advanced by one side or the other with all of the issues surrounding the complex situation in Yugoslavia during World War II, with the Ustasha, [and] the Chetniks... (Vachon, 2006).

Canadian Peacekeepers struggled to unpack these impromptu history lessons to discern fact from fiction and to better understand a deeply complex and abstruse history.

After extensive travel throughout the Balkans during the war and after visiting a Canadian headquarters, a journalist wrote a personal, subjective, raw and unfiltered historical perspective. It does not reflect the historical interpretation of the author of this article, yet the journalist’s assessment resonated with some Canadian Peacekeepers (Miller, 2025). The following is a paraphrased version of his comments:

The Serbs [opposed] the Croats because...Serbs were killed by Croatian Ustache...during World War II...When Croatia declared independence along with Slovenia in 1991, Milosevic mobilized the Yugoslavian Army (JNA) to fight for Croatian Serbs living in the Krajina region...The Croats [opposed] the Serbs because they were aligned with Russia and communism and they were enemies during World War II. The Bosnians

[opposed] them both because [Bosnia had been invaded from east and west over the centuries] ...And both Serbs and Croats [opposed] the Bosnians because they succumbed to the Turks...in the fourteenth century...The Turks...were [opposed]...by the [others because of historical events from the mid-14th to early 20th centuries] ...This [is a] ...tangled history (Campbell, 2000, pp. 59-60).

The journalist's description was not endorsed as Canadian policy.

Sometimes the impromptu history lesson included a spontaneous visit to a nearby location:

They wanted to show us the atrocities; they would bring us to see them so that we would take all of it out of context, or they would tell their side of the story and say, "That is how it happened," and we would report it, and we were part of the problem in that way. Sometimes they would even go so far as to put [us] in danger so that [we would] see the other side's reaction, so that they could say, "Look, it's the other side that did this," and we would report it (Vachon, 2006).'

Because some of the belligerents demanded that Canadian Peacekeepers report their history lessons up their chain of command, Canadians needed to know historical truth and report accordingly. But untangling a complicated history was only a start, Canadian Peacekeepers also needed to better comprehend what also triggered the unpredictable actions of some belligerents.

Perceptions and Reality: Understanding Culture and Behaviour to Foster Everyday Peace

During Operation Harmony Canadian Peacekeepers discovered that the warring factions could become violent suddenly and unpredictably. For instance, in May 1993 a company of Canadian soldiers were providing escort duty and check points for a road being built between two villages from opposing belligerent groups. A month later, as the road was nearing completion, a third belligerent group suddenly rushed towards the Canadians. The Canadian soldiers went into a defensive position and the belligerents swarmed past and destroyed the village at the end of the road. It was an "unprovoked attack on civilians by an unpredictable belligerent (Hewitt, 1998 pp. 1-2)."

Serving in a volatile conflict zone, Senior CANBAT leaders recognized that Canadian Peacekeepers needed to be regarded as a credible military force:

I think our fighting capability ... the armed APCs...the fact that we do carry firearms...was very important...They got the feeling we were professional soldiers...We showed them that we were more than willing to use the means that we needed to get our job done...The forces were belligerent and right to the day we left we always were aware that we had to be very careful...especially in the early evening or late evening timeframes,' perhaps because they had had the entire day to drink their fill (Des Lauriers, 2007).

Yet, a strong military force was not enough to mitigate the prevailing mistrust and anxiety that plagued Canadian Peacekeepers. The same Canadian soldier who praised their own fighting capacity above also lamented:

[Interactions]...with local communities covered 'a wide spectrum,' ... I'm talking about the Croatian side and the Serb side...[and] both of them in my perspective, were not to be trusted...We would encounter them [in] very small groups...usually two or three soldiers with no leadership and probably having taken down three and four beer that evening. That was our biggest worry. Because you would arrive at a checkpoint that would just appear out of nowhere. Clearly, a lot of the time they were under the influence of alcohol...So, very dangerous situations...some of them were pretty tense (Des Lauriers, 2007).'

To understand who they were dealing with Canadian Peacekeepers needed a change in perspective. If Canadian Peacekeepers hoped to understand the belligerents' identity, chain of command, and regional network, Canadian Peacekeepers needed a new way to build trust with the local population. Part of this was a new perspective. Besides unpacking the regions' complex history, Canadian Peacekeepers needed to understand the belligerents' culture, behaviour, and the nature of conflict itself.

From the top down, at its highest strategic level, the origin of conflict is connected to a key strategic motivation. In his recent study, David Day argues that conquest occurs because of "supplanting societies": "The history of most societies can be best understood when they are seen as part of a never-ending struggle in a world of shifting boundaries to make particular territories their own (Day, 2021, p. 7)." In the 1990s the former Yugoslavia dissolved into a series of competing "supplanting societies" as shifting boundaries and a desire for the other's territory were significant motivations

for war. But Canadian Peacekeepers needed to understand the cause of these "supplanting societies" and strategic culture provided an answer.

There are more than 20 scholarly interpretations of strategic culture. In 2023 Kuznar and Popp identified the common factors in each description and fashioned this definition:

An actor's strategic culture is composed of beliefs, experiences, assumptions, attitudes, and patterned behaviors that shape perceptions and preferences about its security-related interests, objectives, and activities (Kuznar et al, 2023, p. 8).

In 2005 the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) (part of the US Department of National Defense) brought together specialists in the study of strategic culture. They identified four dominant strategic cultural variables: identity, values, norms, and perceptions. These four factors possessed merit on their own in what could be called separate nodes, but historians discovered that when they were interconnected, those connections provided a model to help explain the link between strategic culture and strategic behavior and the origins and connectivity of conflict (*Johnson, 2006, p. 18; Johnson, 2021, p. 182*).

Conflict occurs when culture and behaviour collide. To explain this process Jim Orford has proposed Social Identity Theory. It is a theoretical construct which states that individuals perceive groups around them as friends or enemies based on one's own individual needs. These perceived values and needs connect a person to other like-minded individuals, in what Orford calls their in-group. In contrast, when a person feels disconnected from others based on social differences, those others are that person's out-group. Between the in-group and the out-group are traitors who have deliberately betrayed the in-group; and another group Orford refers to as "contaminated", who are suspected of betraying the in-group. Furthermore, each of the groups identified in Social Identity Theory need to be understood from the lowest level, that is from the perspective of each person's deeply rooted personal beliefs and values themselves, including one's own emotions, and basis of self-esteem (*Orford, 2023, p. 108*).

Social identity Theory is relevant because of the way regional and national tensions can be either exacerbated or diminished by the needs and values of individuals at the tactical everyday level. Greta Uehling has noted that actions to incite or prolong conflict occur when soldiers and civilians appeal to their in-group using collective values and needs that foster a national identity and belonging (*Uehling, 2023, p. 21*). In contrast, Roger McGinty has explained how the shared needs of an in-group can also disrupt conflict by fostering pro-social relationships based on mutual needs and values (*Mac Ginty, 2021, p. 2*).

These needs and values are so important that they can cause a person to quickly change how they perceive themselves and even change rigidly held aspects of culture and behaviour. As J.L. Johnson and C.P. Twomey have noted, pragmatic material concerns—needs and values connected to basic life requirements – can influence one's behavior and may also actually override an understanding of one's own culture (Johnson, 2021) (Johnson, 2006). In effect, the importance of these needs and values, as understood through social identity theory, can directly foster “everyday war” or “everyday peace” (Twomey, 2008).

As has already been noted, Canadian Peacekeepers in the first rotos of Operation HARMONY had limited pre-deployment training and knew very little about the needs, behaviour or culture of the belligerents in Croatia. We have also seen that some Canadian Peacekeepers reacted to the violence and destruction with pessimism, horror and mistrust. But other Canadian Peacekeepers discovered an alternative mindset and response.

Without realizing it at the time, some Canadian Peacekeepers actually engaged in the principles of social identity theory to understand the belligerents – their needs and values, and interconnected relationships – in an attempt to nurture “pro-social relationships” and eventually create “everyday peace”. For one Canadian Peacekeeper this meant a shared desire for a peaceful democratic process in Croatia. During the 1992 Canadian national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, a Canadian soldier noted:

Here we are, front line soldiers in a once communist country, voting in Canada's National Referendum. Even thousands of miles away from home, our country cares about our opinions, and honours our right to vote...and with our help, Croatia will soon enjoy the same freedom (Clarke, 1992–1993, p. 4).

Other military leaders within CANBAT 1 used religion to help identify common needs and values. Padre Perrin and Padre Merriman, the Roman Catholic and Protestant military chaplains on Roto 3 referred to the Croat and Serb military and civilian belligerents as brothers and sisters in Christ and reminded the Peacekeepers that part of their role included the biblical injunction from the Sermon on the Mount: “blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God”. Their message took on added credibility after the chapel, cross, and crucifix were vandalized and the Padres urged understanding not revenge (Merriman, 1992–1993, p. 23).

Another chaplain and his comrade advocated for the needs and values of the belligerents, even if it put himself in danger. While travelling in a UN convoy, Padre Belisle noticed two seriously wounded women and lying next to a deceased man. Local police refused to help, so the Padre and Sgt Forest attempted a rescue. As the Sgt

crawled out to reach the terrified victims, the Padre stayed exposed to enemy fire and returned fire to shield his comrade. The women were eventually rescued and taken to a local hospital. When Padre Belisle and Sgt Forest visited the women a week later, one of the women kissed the Canadian Peacekeepers and through tears said, "if it wasn't for you, I'd be dead, you saved my life (Hewitt, 1998, pp. 38-39)." Saving the lives of these women promoted everyday peace.

Jones acknowledged the need for new approaches to better understand the belligerents – their needs and values and their interconnected relationships-- and proactively created his own plan. He leveraged experts within his unit and expanded his liaison teams from the usual four to twelve members. He also imbedded interpreters within those teams and directed them to develop relationships with both the belligerents and with the local civilians. Part of this was a doctrinal shift as he realized that the belligerents were enmeshed with the local populations in a way that was unique to the Balkans:

I had my information sergeant, Vladislav Jevik...[deployed]...to the Serbian side because he was Serbian...[and] he was my rock on the Serbian side...Those interpreters helped us a great deal in establishing relations...with everything related to logistics services...rations, water and the medical side of things as well...Interpreters played another role as well...The interpreters were required to make...and this was on both sides...reports to the military and government authorities on each side. And we took advantage of that on a number of occasions to pass along messages to those authorities when things were not necessarily going how we wanted them (Jones, 2005).

Part of Jones' approach was self-serving because he needed the support of local belligerents and civilians to secure the contracts to support his soldiers' logistical needs. But it also allowed him the means of indirect communication with the belligerents' chain of command and provided effective reconnaissance. For instance, because of reports from his liaison teams he was able to report that his sector was occupied by eighty percent Croats and twenty percent Serbs, and that the civilian population had a very positive attitude to the CANBAT 1 troops (Jones, 2005).

Canadian Peacekeepers also developed new approaches based on common needs and values that provided fresh insights into community networks. The results were impressive and mutually beneficial to both sides:

[For the] local civilian population...we were an unknown factor but...we very quickly did a lot of things in the local community. We helped tear down some dangerous buildings. We cleared some rubble for them...We very quickly established meetings with local mayors, councilors and

townspeople to see what we can do to help. How can you help us? We want electricity from your municipal forces, but can we help you get your generator systems back up and running...We were buying local resources. We needed lumber. We needed plumbing supplies...We needed food...We only came really with enough rations for 30 days, hard rations. So very quickly we set up kitchens...When we wanted to bed down all the units we would clear an area in a farmer's field...Then we would want to gravel at least the roadways and pathways throughout that area. We spent millions of Canadian dollars buying gravel locally. Of course, the local population appreciated that very, very much. Gas and petroleum products, something we needed, and the UN was not giving us, the Canadians becoming something of a local industry (Des Lauriers, 2007).

As the years progressed there would be challenges in the local supply chain, and yet overall, it provided a vital source of rations, gasoline, fuel and medical facilities (Jones, 2005). The Canadian infusion into the local economy was fostering everyday peace.

Canadian Peace Support Operations also leveraged gender to understand and engage with the belligerents and civilians. The text of the Vance Peace Plan (January 1992) and the Dayton Peace Agreement (November 1995) made no mention of women or gender equality and women were not involved as negotiators, witnesses, mediators, or signatories. This is tragically ironic considering the suffering women uniquely endured. It is also dramatically ironic because of the vital role these women had within their communities. In fact, women were not only primary stakeholders in sustaining the material needs of their families, but they also understood the interconnected and complex relationships between the belligerents and the civilians and served as conduits between these groups and Canadian Peacekeepers. For instance, there were countless examples of Canadian Peacekeepers who unofficially "adopted" Croatian or Serb families and organized unit events (like Christmas parties with the help of the Padres) and fed hungry families by donating part of their own rations to local wives and mothers. In return, these women helped the Canadian Peacekeepers better understand the values and principles of the belligerents and the civilians.

Women in Croatia also surprised Canadian Peacekeepers by displaying a remarkable ability to bind communities together. For example, when Canadian Peacekeepers arrived for their first visit to one village in Croatia to distribute water and food to the local population, they were met by a group of women and shocked that these women had anticipated the Canadian soldiers. From their meager provisions they had a meal ready for the newly arrived Canadian strangers. In follow-up meetings those

Canadian Peacekeepers learned that it was the women (not the male combatants or the male civilians) who had already established a logistical network to distribute the much-needed supplies. When the actions of these women were reported higher, the response came back to not report this to the press because higher would find it difficult to explain. Higher was still learning that civilian women were often the ones creating everyday peace (Sgt B, 2025).

When women could not foster everyday peace within their own communities they went to extraordinary measures to protect their children and try to ensure their safety regardless of the cost. The sacrificial acts of mothers impacted Canadian Peacekeepers.

We were permitted a 72 hr leave from the country and...traveling across borders was easy for us blue bonnets, but to do so meant driving through the thousands of refugees trying to escape the ravages of war in their homeland. Pity, sorrow, helplessness were emotions that washed over each of us as we passed the terrified faces of the parents, the mystified faces of the innocents dumbly observing our motion with glazed eyes...We could leave...they were captives, most likely destined to be systematically eliminated by the belligerents...After 72 wonderful, relaxing hours in Hungary...we returned back through the border mayhem, reinforcing in me the hopelessness of these poor displaced people without possibility of escape, and facing almost certain death, begging that at least someone take their children to safety. Watching mothers offering their children to perfect strangers in an effort to spare them was very emotional (Harris, n.d.).

Civilian women in a war-torn communities affirmed the importance of common needs and values and showed the Canadian Peacekeepers how their unique roles could foster everyday peace.

Conclusion

In the former Yugoslavia, Canadian Peacekeepers were plunged into a conflict more complicated and violent than they anticipated. The Canadian soldiers who served in Croatia during the initial rotations (1992-1993) of UNPROFOR's Operation Harmony struggled to understand the complex historical, cultural, and security environment of the warring factions and the local populations. Canadian Peacekeepers quickly realized that their pre-deployment training had not properly prepared them for what they faced in war torn Croatia. Unpredictable, dangerous, boots-on-the-ground engagement forced the Canadian Peacekeepers to acknowledge that the belligerents included diverse and overlapping elements of trained and organized state and para-state formations as well as undisciplined and irregular combatants. As professional soldiers, Canadian Peacekeepers provided a strong military presence and also recognized that they needed to quickly adapt and even integrate new perspectives of the belligerents and the local populations. This included untangling the region's complicated history, appreciating local values and principles, and recognizing the complex interweaving of identity and relationships (culture and behaviour) of the belligerents and the civilian populations. Canadian Peacekeepers learned that forging goals and projects based on common needs was not only mutually beneficial but illuminated local networks including the role of women in sustaining families and their communities.

Did Canadian Peacekeeping matter? Specifically, what impact did Canadian Peace Support Operations have during the first two years of Operation Harmony in Croatia? Considering their hasty deployment to theatre, minimal pre-deployment training, insufficient understanding of the complex nature of the belligerents, immediate engagement in a dangerous conflict zone with warring factions who didn't want them there, it begs the question: did Canadian Peacekeepers actually make a difference?

One Canadian Peacekeeper answered this by examining how the community changed with the presence of the first rotations. As he noted:

[When we arrived] ...it was literally a ghost town. The town was shut down. There was...virtually nobody, living in the town...We went and did a number of projects for them...[and]...there were still lots of minefields and children running through fields losing legs because of mines...[but] we attempted to go out and improve the area as much as we could...[and] the local population came back...within a...[couple]...months, the town was a thriving town (Chadder, 2006)

Jones, too, was pleased that throughout their deployment there were tangible signs that "the local population's return to normal life took place gradually" with some achievements unique to their rotation within UNPROFOR:

...there started to be family and friend gatherings on both sides... [and]...the farmers who had their fields on the other side of the front line could go and work their fields. That was...[unique within]... the United Nations Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia (Jones, 2005).

Finally, according to another Canadian Peacekeeper the evidence that they had fostered "everyday peace" was unmistakable.

When I got there, I never saw a child. I never saw a woman under 65 for the first two months. All I saw was drunk...[soldiers]...standing on the corner firing AK47s with a bottle of Sljivovica in their hands. Several bullets through my vehicle, it happened quite often. But two months in, all of a sudden, driving down the road with my window open, I hear kids playing...Wow, I went to the local pizza shop and a young girl came out and served me pizza. I went, "Oh, my lord, I thought all of these people were dead." ... So the deployment 'made a difference to the people in the community...[and] for the time I was there, for what I could do, I made a difference. I walked away feeling good for that...' (Sherwood, 2006).'

The accomplishments of Canadian Peacekeepers in the first rotos of Operation Harmony requires nuance – especially in their struggle to reconcile their United Nations mandate with the reality of being thrown into a nation being ripped apart by war. The Canadian Peacekeepers did not achieve substantial disarmament and demobilization of the belligerents as mandated in their UNPROFOR orders, but they did coordinate the laying down of arms and prisoner exchanges. While the belligerents continued to exchange gunfire and Canadian Peacekeepers were frequently in danger, yet through their checkpoints, Ops, escorts, patrols, and presence they brought a measure of security and fostered elements of "everyday peace" for the local civilian populations.

The Canadian Peacekeepers were trained, disciplined, professional soldiers who proved that they should be taken seriously. They were both an effective military force and a valuable military presence that embodied the principles of social identity theory to understand complex belligerent and civilian populations, and foster relationships based on the perceived needs and values of each group.

The findings of these Canadian Peacekeepers are consistent with the principles of social identity theory and support the premise that peacekeepers could be deployed with substantial unknowns and misunderstanding and yet eventually come to terms with what was needed to understand the needs and values of warring factions and civilians who existed within complex inter-relationships. In short, they learned how to

operate as a multi-dimensional force: providing a presence of military strength to keep the peace (especially on patrols and in negotiations) and serving a humanitarian role providing relief and hope as bridge builders for local civilians.

What was the perspective of the Canadian Peacekeepers from the Croat and Serb perspective? How effective were the other UN battalions in the mission? What impact did the early rotations of Operation Harmony have on the UN and NATO missions that followed in the Balkans? Those are some of the important questions beyond the scope of this article but that will be addressed in the forthcoming official history.

Years of war and carnage continued in the Balkans. Yet, the Canadian Peacekeepers who served in the initial rotations of Operation Harmony sowed the seeds of peace, proved that UNPROFOR missions could make an important impact, laid the foundation for the IFOR and SFOR NATO missions which followed, and provided hope to a broken region that eventually “everyday peace” could happen.

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S u m m a r y

Canadian Peacekeepers In the former Yugoslavia were plunged into a conflict more complicated and violent than they expected. Their initial perception of the belligerents was one of confusion and shock because of the carnage they witnessed. Canadian Peacekeepers initially struggled to understand the warring factions and how to provide security for local civilians who had gone into seclusion or fled their communities. They recognized their own limitations and strengths and learned from the unpredictable and often dangerous, boots-on-the-ground actions they experienced. The Canadian Peacekeepers established themselves as trained, disciplined soldiers who should be taken seriously, and they also learned how to quickly adapt, and even integrate new perspectives of the belligerents. This included untangling the region's complicated history, appreciating local values and principles, and recognizing the complex interweaving of identity and relationships (historical, ethnic, cultural, geo-political, and religious) of the belligerents and the civilian populations. Canadian Peacekeepers learned that forging goals and projects based on common needs was not only mutually beneficial but illuminated local networks including the role of women in sustaining families and their communities.

The article focuses exclusively on the Canadian Peacekeepers who served in Croatia during the first two years of UNPROFOR's Operation Harmony (1992-1993) and describes the initial struggles of the Canadians, and the actions they took to better understand the belligerents and foster security and humanitarian support in a land torn by war. The sources for this paper incorporate numerous first-person accounts of Canadian veterans and a broader historiographical context that includes perceptions of the enemy, culture and behaviour, and social identity theory. In the midst of a nation broken by war Canadian Peacekeepers learned to distinguish between perception and reality.

Keywords: *Canadian Peacekeepers, Operation Harmony, UNPROFOR, Croatia, culture and behaviour, war*

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