

## Archived Content

Information identified as archived on the Web is for reference, research or record-keeping purposes. It has not been altered or updated after the date of archiving. Web pages that are archived on the Web are not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards.

As per the [Communications Policy of the Government of Canada](#), you can request alternate formats on the "[Contact Us](#)" page.

## Information archivée dans le Web

Information archivée dans le Web à des fins de consultation, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Cette dernière n'a aucunement été modifiée ni mise à jour depuis sa date de mise en archive. Les pages archivées dans le Web ne sont pas assujetties aux normes qui s'appliquent aux sites Web du gouvernement du Canada.

Conformément à la [Politique de communication du gouvernement du Canada](#), vous pouvez demander de recevoir cette information dans tout autre format de rechange à la page « [Contactez-nous](#) ».

Research Essay

**STRESSORS AND STRESSES ON PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR OPERATIONAL-LEVEL COMMANDERS**

by

Colonel Richard A. Hatton

Advanced Military Studies Course 1

Canadian Forces College

24 November 1998

# **STRESSORS AND STRESSES ON PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR OPERATIONAL-LEVEL COMMANDERS**

## **Introduction**

“Command at the highest levels involves ultimate responsibility for a military force, which includes the consequences of military action in the civilian, political and social spheres. ...To be effective, a commander at the strategic and operational levels requires a wide range of qualities and skills in addition to strictly military expertise.”<sup>1</sup> Canadian Forces doctrine includes the human dimension in its definition of command as “the exercise of the authority vested in an individual for the direction, co-ordination and control of military forces”<sup>2</sup> as well as in its emphasis on the human component as the most important component of command. Even operational level commanders must cultivate the human element to inspire and direct the activity of their commands.

The subject of stress in combat and its effects on individual combatants and small units has long been studied and the supporting literature is abundant. Considerably less research has focussed on stress-related issues facing the senior commander and until very recently, relatively little has been written about stress experienced in peacekeeping operations. The changing nature of peacekeeping has given rise to the need to understand the nature of stressors inherent in those types of operations and of their consequences for individual health and organisational effectiveness.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how stressors which are based on the context of contemporary peacekeeping operations have potentially significant impacts on operational-level commanders and on the effectiveness of personnel and organisations under their command, which are not yet sufficiently understood nor adequately addressed in the Canadian Forces.

---

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Forces Publication, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command (Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, Land Force, 1996) 6.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Forces Publication, Command 4.

The paper will concentrate on stressors and stresses experienced in peacekeeping operations and on considerations relevant to the operational-level commander (e.g. UN force commander) or senior staff operating at that level.

It will begin by briefly introducing the nature of stressors and stresses experienced in military operations and the impacts on individuals and organisations. It will then consider the nature of contemporary peacekeeping operations, highlighting those aspects that could contribute to a particular context of “chronic peacekeeping stressors.” Considerations of chronic or contextual stressors on peacekeeping operations will include the personal experiences of the author’s service with UNPROFOR in Bosnia and the emerging literature reporting on this and other recent UN missions, primarily in the Former Yugoslavia. The discussion will relate how those chronic stressors on peacekeeping operations, sometimes combined with traumatic stressors, produce stresses which some experts have recently called “Peacekeeping Stress.” These stresses potentially affect the quality of the commander’s decision-making and personal relationships with subordinates as well as jeopardise his own and his soldiers’ health and effectiveness.

The paper will discuss some considerations for operational-level commanders relating to stressors and stresses on peacekeeping operations, and will suggest measures that a commander could take to mitigate the harmful influence of some of his mission’s chronic stressors. In view of the likelihood of continuing Canadian Forces (CF) participation in difficult and complex peace support operations, the paper will call for more research and analysis focussed on stressors and stresses experienced by CF personnel on those types of operations and for greater awareness and involvement of senior military officers in dealing with this important issue.

### **Stressors and Stresses on Military Operations**

Stressors may be defined most simply as sources of stress. A stressor is a relatively objective characteristic of the environment, which can be verified outside of the

individual's experience. Stress itself has been interpreted variously and there is no single agreed definition. The author prefers Breakwell's and Spacie's description of stress in practical terms as "occurring when an individual is faced with demands that he or she finds impossible to satisfy. The demands can call for physical action, mental analysis or emotional reactions. The essential defining characteristic is that the individual must feel incapable of satisfying the demands made."<sup>3</sup>

Stress is a highly subjective phenomenon and reactions can vary widely. Strain is viewed as the individual's psychological, physiological or emotional reaction to the stress. Symptoms have been variously interpreted, but they can be generalised to include cognitive deficits, emotional disturbance, physical illness and behavioural disturbance. The pattern of symptoms is determined by the nature of the source of the stress, the history and nature of the individual and the context in which stress is experienced.<sup>4</sup>

Although the measurement of stress is complex, the abundant research concerning stress symptoms points out that stress impairs the social, psychological and physical functioning of the individual. People experiencing stress are more likely to report psychological changes such as irritability and anxiety at work and at home, more frequent technical mistakes and errors in judgement. As stress seems to weaken the auto-immune system, stressed individuals are more susceptible to disease. Long-term physical effects of stress include chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and asthma attacks. There is evidence that continued stress is associated with changes in behaviour such as increased substance abuse, usually alcoholism, and can lead to increased likelihood of marital breakdown and suicide.<sup>5</sup> Organisational outcomes of stress can include job dissatisfaction, job turnover or turnover intentions and degradation of job performance.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Glynis Breakwell and Keith Spacie, Pressures Facing Commanders (Camberley UK: The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997) 4.

<sup>4</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> C.D. Lamerson and E.K. Kelloway, "Towards a Model of Peacekeeping Stress: Traumatic and Contextual Influences" Canadian Psychology Vol 37(4) (Canadian Psychological Association: 1996) 257-258.

A moderator may be defined as a variable that affects the relationship between two or more other variables. Various moderators have been considered by researchers to affect the relationship between stressors and stress appraisal and subsequent stress reaction. Moderators of stress which are frequently cited in the literature are work group (or unit) cohesion, social support and confidence in unit leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Work group cohesion has been posited as providing an inoculating effect from combat/traumatic stressors ... such that individuals working in cohesive units experience less deleterious effects as a consequence of exposure to traumatic stressors. The moderating effect may be attributable to either the increased confidence in the abilities of peers and leaders or the provision of social support by other work group members.<sup>8</sup>

In a study of Israeli Army units, Gal has associated high confidence in leaders with better unit performance and fewer adverse effects of stress reactions.<sup>9</sup> In his survey of returning Canadian Forces peacekeepers, Farley reported that confidence in unit leadership and group cohesion significantly predicted decreased stress reactions.<sup>10</sup>

In the identification of stressors as sources of stress, most analyses distinguish between stressors associated with the individual, those generated by the employing organisation and those which are external to the organisation. As part of a recent study for the British Army, Glynis Breakwell and Keith Spacie conducted over 100 interviews with army officers who experienced high or moderate intensity operations, mostly in the Gulf War or in Bosnia with UNPROFOR or IFOR. Their study developed a practical “Typology of Stressors,” divided into four principal types: “Organisational,” “Physical,” “Interpersonal” and “Psychological”. The resulting list of stressors is summarised in Figure 1 below:

---

<sup>7</sup> K.M. Farley, “Stress in Military Operations” Working Paper 95-2 (Willowdale ON: Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, 1995). Also see various researchers cited in Lamerson and Kelloway 256.

<sup>8</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 256.

<sup>9</sup> Reuven Gal, A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier (New York: Greenwood, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Farley 9.

Organisational	Physical	Interpersonal	Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● organisational culture</li> <li>● cross cultural contacts</li> <li>● working between/across organisations</li> <li>● mission drift</li> <li>● public interest/concern</li> <li>● training deficits</li> <li>● multiple roles</li> <li>● command arrangements</li> <li>● rules of engagement</li> <li>● political intervention</li> <li>● managing change</li> <li>● communication systems</li> <li>● inequity in recognition</li> <li>● stereotypes</li> <li>● inter-unit rivalry</li> <li>● propaganda</li> <li>● organisational arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● climatic conditions</li> <li>● workload</li> <li>● fatigue</li> <li>● sleep loss</li> <li>● physical conditions</li> <li>● exercise regime</li> <li>● dietary restrictions</li> <li>● equipment</li> <li>● functionality</li> <li>● equipment availability</li> <li>● physical danger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● relationships with superiors (respect)</li> <li>● relationship with peers (mutuality)</li> <li>● relationships with subordinates (discipline)</li> <li>● team dynamics</li> <li>● separation from family/ isolation</li> <li>● loss/injury of comrades</li> <li>● dealing with multiple fatalities</li> <li>● relationship with opponents</li> <li>● relationship with civilians</li> <li>● negotiations</li> <li>● non-operational life</li> <li>● post-operational life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● lack of knowledge or skill</li> <li>● memory limitations</li> <li>● capacity to delegate</li> <li>● fear of failure/reputations</li> <li>● ambition</li> <li>● physical fear</li> <li>● reaction to the Media</li> <li>● moral repugnance</li> </ul>

Many researchers have distinguished between acute, catastrophic and chronic stressors. Chronic stressors have been defined as having no specific time onset; they may be frequent or ongoing in occurrence and may vary in intensity. Acute stressors have a specific time of onset, occur very infrequently, and are of high intensity. Examples of acute stressors include getting fired from a job or being involved in a shooting incident. Catastrophic events share many of the same characteristics, but involve more significant threat to life to a larger group and/or prolonged suffering.<sup>12</sup> Considerable research has been conducted concerning individuals' reactions to traumatic events. Various labels have been given to the nature of traumatic stressors, such as combat stress, critical incident stress and rescue stress. Traumatic stressors may be either acute or catastrophic.

A number of studies in recent years have begun to observe particular stress syndromes in military personnel participating in peacekeeping operations. The phenomenon has been given various and nearly synonymous labels such as "Peacekeeper Stress,"<sup>13</sup> "Peacekeeping Stress,"<sup>14</sup> "UN Role Stress,"<sup>15</sup> and "UN Soldiers' Stress Syndrome."<sup>16</sup> This paper will use the term Peacekeeping Stress. There is increasing recognition that peacekeeping may incorporate significant exposure to traumatic events, including combat-like conditions such as exposure to direct attack from small arms, rocket, mortar or artillery fire, contact with land mines, witnessing the death or injury of others and handling of wounded or dead bodies.<sup>17</sup> Examples of such missions include UNPROFOR in the Former Yugoslavia and UNAMIR in Rwanda.

In addition to the acknowledgement of exposure to traumatic events, there is also increasing recognition that other more chronic or contextual stressors are associated with peacekeeping operations. In their study of peacekeeping stress, Lamerson and Kelloway

---

<sup>12</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 253.

<sup>13</sup> Reuven Gal, "Le Stress du soldat de paix," *Les champs de mars* Aut/hiver. Center d'étude en science sociales de la Défense (Paris: 1996) 175-184.

<sup>14</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway.

<sup>15</sup> C.D. Lamerson, "Peacekeeping Stress: Testing a Model of Organisational and Personal Outcomes" Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (University of Guelph: 1995).

<sup>16</sup> L. Weisaeth, *Preventive Intervention* Paper presented at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Conference (1994). Also see Lamerson and Kelloway.

<sup>17</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway's own research and other works they cited were based on Canadian Forces personnel engaged in UN peacekeeping operations in the Former Yugoslavia, 253-254.



suggest that “peacekeeping is characterised by the occurrence of acute and/or catastrophic stressors in an environment replete with chronic stressors” and they suggest that both traumatic and chronic stressors play an important role in the development of peacekeeping stress.<sup>18</sup>

With a view to considering implications for senior commanders, the nature of these chronic “peacekeeping” stressors will be examined further. Before this will be done, however, it would be useful to consider how the nature of peacekeeping operations has changed in recent years.

### **The Changing Nature of Peacekeeping Operations**

The relaxation of East-West tensions in the late 1980s and early 1990s removed many of the political obstacles that had previously limited the scope of peacekeeping. As a result, the number of UN peacekeeping missions and the number of personnel deployed during those years expanded significantly. Qualitatively, peacekeeping tasks expanded well beyond monitoring cease-fires, to include such complex undertakings as implementing comprehensive peace settlements, monitoring elections and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid. Significantly, whereas peacekeeping forces were previously deployed into areas of inter-state conflict, they increasingly became involved in more complex intra-state conflicts. The new generation of peacekeeping operations began to involve a wider group of participants to include military forces, police, civilian monitors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Previous “traditional” peacekeeping operations had tended to be established under Chapter VI of the UN Charter and usually adhered to the peacekeeping principles of consent of the parties, impartiality and use of force only in self-defence. New generation peacekeeping operations could be established under Chapter VI or VII of the Charter and often did not benefit from full consent of the parties and at times mandated, and used, force beyond self-defence.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 253.

<sup>19</sup> Elinor Sloan and Tony Kellet, “Trends in International Peacekeeping” Policy Briefing (Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, April 1998) 2-5.

A number of these new UN missions experienced considerable difficulty; some were spectacular failures. A full examination of the reasons for these failures is well outside of the scope of this paper.<sup>20</sup> Significant criticisms have been heaped on the UN, member states, the media and others, with plenty of blame for all to share. Examples include poor UN leadership, unclear mission command and control, inadequate or conflicting UN mandates, unrealistic and unreasonable expectations, mission creep, inappropriate rules of engagement, absence of strategic vision, deficiencies in campaign planning, failure of the Security Council to deal decisively with emerging crises, failure of member states to provide adequate forces and media distortion of events.

The changing nature of peacekeeping has required broader definitions to encompass the various types of operations. Use of the more comprehensive term “peace support operations” has come into fashion. There are five forms of peace support operations: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and post-conflict peace-building.<sup>21</sup> According to the United Nations, peacekeeping is “the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well.”<sup>22</sup> The term peace enforcement is defined as “operations carried out to restore peace between belligerent parties who do not all consent to intervention and who may be engaged in combat activities.”<sup>23</sup> Preventive diplomacy is “action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they do occur.” Peacemaking is “action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the UN Charter.” Post-conflict peace-

---

<sup>20</sup> A number of books, articles and papers have been written, many based on personal experiences, regarding the difficulties and failures of the UN missions in Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia. Various articles from different perspectives are in Wolfgang Biermann and Martin Vadset, Eds. UN Peacekeeping in Trouble: Lessons Learned from the former Yugoslavia (Aldershot UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998). Also see L. MacKenzie, Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Elinor Sloan and Tony Kellett 6.

<sup>22</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, An Agenda for Peace (New York: United Nations, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> British Army Field Manual, Vol 5 Operations Other Than War (1994).

building is “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.”<sup>24</sup>

Although there are a number of similarities between peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, the terms clearly are not interchangeable. This paper will focus on peacekeeping operations, although many of the observations and considerations it will make could apply as well to peace enforcement operations.

Since 1994, the number of UN peacekeeping missions and the number of UN troops deployed have declined dramatically. This is largely a result of the unwillingness or inability of the UN Security Council to respond effectively to intra-state conflicts, the reduction of the ability to respond due to the UN financial crisis, the onset of “donor fatigue” in many Member nations and the failure to make substantial progress on UN structural reform. As the UN scaled back on its own involvement in peacekeeping, it has encouraged, or at least allowed, NATO, regional organisations or “coalitions of the willing” under Chapter VII of the Charter to undertake multi-national peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the decline in UN-led peacekeeping operations, a number of missions were conducted or are presently underway,<sup>26</sup> including some very risky new UN missions in Africa. Canadian foreign and defence policies remain committed to multilateral security and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means. Based on history and present policies, the Canadian Forces can clearly expect to continue to be called upon to contribute personnel to peacekeeping operations, whether they be UN-led or NATO-led operations (such as SFOR in Bosnia). Canadian Forces personnel can expect to participate in contingent units conducting such peacekeeping operations and senior

---

<sup>24</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace*.

<sup>25</sup> NATO led IFOR and leads the current SFOR mission in Bosnia. Examples of regional organisations include the CIS in Tajikistan and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Sierra Leone. Examples of “coalitions of the willing” include the Italian-led operation in Albania and the aborted Canadian-led operation intended for the former Zaire.

<sup>26</sup> Examples include UNTAES in Croatia, MINUGUA in Guatemala, UNOMIL in Liberia, MINURCA in the Central African Republic and a series of missions in Haiti.

officers will continue to be in high demand for employment in some very senior command or staff positions, including at the operational level.

Having considered the general nature of stressors and stress in military operations and examined the nature of contemporary peacekeeping operations, the paper will now more closely explore the nature of “peacekeeping stress”.

### **Stressors and Stresses on Contemporary Peacekeeping Operations**

As previously mentioned, Lamerson and Kelloway proposed that both traumatic and contextual stressors play an important role in the development of peacekeeping stress. In their transactional model, they propose that “contemporary peacekeeping deployments are characterised as comprising exposure to traumatic stressors in a context

of chronic stressors” (Lamerson & Kelloway, 2002, p. 279). They propose that “contemporary peacekeeping deployments are characterised as comprising exposure to traumatic stressors in a context of chronic stressors” (Lamerson & Kelloway, 2002, p. 279).

Whereas peacekeeping missions have always contained the potential for danger, more recent peacekeeping m

Forces personnel serving in the types of trades and units which can reasonably expect to deploy frequently on peacekeeping missions.

Peacekeeping missions have been known for a long time, at least anecdotally, to be characterised by chronic or contextual stressors. As stated previously, chronic stressors, as distinct from traumatic stressors, have been defined as having no specific time onset, occurring either frequently or on a relatively ongoing or unchanging basis. They may vary in intensity.<sup>32</sup> Examples of chronic stressors on peacekeeping operations will be explored later in the paper. The author suggests that in contemporary peacekeeping missions, not only have traumatic stressors become more acute and more frequent, but chronic stressors have also become more pervasive and disruptive. This has significant implications for commanders and for armed forces frequently cycling units through such operations.

Reuven Gal, the noted Israeli military psychologist, has studied stress experienced by soldiers on UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, Golan, Sinai and the Former Yugoslavia and by Israeli soldiers who were deployed on internal security operations in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>33</sup> While Gal notes that the ultimate stress faced by soldiers is that experienced in combat, he has concluded that “peacekeeping stress” exists, and has classified peacekeeping stress into four categories: “Situation Stress;” “Professional Stress;” “Organisational Stress” and “Moral Stress”. Gal’s stressed peacekeeper is typified by the soldier who is deployed to a strange land, exposed to people with foreign cultures in a conflict he or she does not understand. He notes that the peacekeeper sometimes faces hostility and life-threatening hazards, is often called upon to carry out tasks for which he has not been trained, may be presented with moral dilemmas which challenge his beliefs and comprehension and is frequently required to respond to situations in a restrained manner, under-utilising his professional combat skills. He observes that such a peacekeeper can suffer a crisis in self-confidence and professional

---

<sup>32</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 253.

<sup>33</sup> Reuven Gal, “Le stress du soldat de paix” 173-184. Although the Israeli security operations in the occupied territories are not strictly speaking peacekeeping operations, many of the military situations are comparable in relation to the experience of stressors and stress.

pride, and due to the nature of the organisation of peacekeeping forces, he might be deprived of the sense of patriotism, unit cohesion, camaraderie and the familiar leadership that would normally sustain him in such situations.

Lamerson and Kelloway contend that in peacekeeping operations, chronic stressors contribute to individual stress reactions in addition to the contribution exerted by exposure to traumatic events.<sup>34</sup> They assert that “Role Conflict,” “Role Ambiguity” and “Role Overload” have significant impacts as contextual stressors. Both intra-role conflict (experiencing incompatible demands within a given role) and inter-role conflict (experiencing incompatible demands from two or more conflicting roles) have long been identified as stressors in organisational research. Role conflict features highly in the literature commenting on the nature of contemporary peacekeeping missions. For example, with UNPROFOR in Bosnia, peacekeepers individually and collectively experienced significant role conflict between the stated mission (humanitarian assistance) and self-preservation, threatened sometimes by the very people to whom the assistance was to be provided. Role conflicts were also apparent between the stated UN mission (facilitate humanitarian assistance) and the Western public/media-expected mission (defend and promote the Bosnian-Muslims, deter the Bosnian-Serbs). With often unclear or conflicting mandates, hostile and unfamiliar situations, imperfect rules of engagement and inappropriate training and preparation, role ambiguity is a significant stressor in peacekeeping operations. Role overload is a frequently studied stressor that exists in peacekeeping operations. This is experienced at all levels, from the overtasked individual to the over-extended unit to the force whose roles have had to expand, sometimes very dramatically, to suit the vagaries of “mission creep” with no increase in resources or reduction of other tasks. Lamerson contends that UN peacekeepers may experience a particular type of role stress -- called “UN Role Stress”-- when they fundamentally disagree with the premises or official UN policies of the peacekeeping deployment.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 254-256.

<sup>35</sup> C.D. Lamerson, “Peacekeeping Stress: Testing a Model of Personal and Organisational Outcomes” Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. (University of Guelph, Ont: 1995). Also see Farley 24.

Other contextual stressors noted by Lamerson and Kelloway include marital or family stressors. Researchers in surveys of personal stress on peacekeeping duties have frequently cited spouse or family separation, lack of family contact, worries over family problems and inability to assist families as significant concerns.<sup>36</sup>

In considering how different stressors interact, Lamerson and Kelloway consider that:

The simultaneous experience of combat and contextual [chronic] stressors has multiplicative rather than additive effects. That is, individuals experiencing a large number of chronic stressors may be particularly vulnerable to exposure to traumatic stressors. Conversely, the experience of being fired on, or seeing friends wounded may heighten the effects of role or marital stressors. This suggestion is consistent with a vulnerability hypothesis, suggesting that personal and environmental factors may make individuals more susceptible to the effects of traumatic stressors.<sup>37</sup>

As discussed previously, Breakwell and Spacie consider key stressors evident on recent military operations to be divided into four principle types: Organisational, Physical, Interpersonal and Psychological. In the light of the forgoing discussion of stressors and stresses and the brief examination of the emerging literature relating to “Peacekeeping Stress,” Breakwell’s and Spacie’s Typology of Stressors (Figure 1) would seem to be a useful and robust framework within which to consider the nature of stressors on contemporary peacekeeping operations.<sup>38</sup> The author believes that of the four types of stressors noted, the operational-level commander on peacekeeping operations is more affected by, and is better able to mitigate, organisational, interpersonal and psychological stressors. Physical stressors, which are more immediate and localised, are largely in the purview of the tactical-level commander.

---

<sup>36</sup> F.C. Pinch “Lessons Learned from Canadian Peacekeeping Experiences: A Human Resource Perspective” (Dartmouth NS: 1994). Also see Farley 20.

<sup>37</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 256.

<sup>38</sup> In the author’s opinion, Breakwell and Spacie’s concise pamphlet Pressures Facing Commanders should be studied carefully and kept close at hand by all officers who command or expect to command military operations, including peacekeeping.

## Organisational Stressors

Chronic stressors relating to organisational considerations have clearly been present in recent UN missions such as UNPROFOR. The literature is replete with references to the lack of strategic vision, inadequate and conflicting mandates, faulty mission premises, flaws in UN organisation and command relationships, inadequate rules of engagement, flawed and unenforceable peace agreements, role conflict/ambiguity/overload, mission drift, *ad hoc* headquarters and unit organisational arrangements, and incompetent UN financial and administration arrangements. The UN is attempting to reform but progress is slow. Recent management changes and staff reductions in the UN Directorate of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) have significantly diminished its effectiveness. The cessation, at the insistence of envious non-aligned nations, of the practice of developed member countries providing professional military officers to augment UN DPKO planning staff on a *gratis* basis, is now stripping that organisation of its talent. In the view of the author, the UN is becoming less able to plan for and cope with future complex peacekeeping operations.

Other chronic stressors that have been evident on peacekeeping operations include national conflicts between participant commanders and staffs, political interference or meddling from certain member states and both direct and indirect pursuit of nations' or private organisations' particular agendas. The author observed the detrimental effects of these elements on force cohesion and mission effectiveness in UNPROFOR in 1995, to the immense frustration of numerous participants, both military and civilian.

The conflict between the organisational culture of military services and the UN can generate stresses on peacekeeping operations. Personnel from Western military cultures frequently expect that there will be clear-cut military solutions to operational problems. Pressures arise when this expectation is unsatisfied and problems cannot be resolved by military means, or solutions are partial or compromises. Western military



officers and soldiers tend to be accustomed to relatively rigid hierarchical structures. They are less comfortable with the looser structures and imprecise direction of the UN.

Officers who fail to recognise this constraint upon their efficacy harbour unrealistic expectations of themselves and of their potential impact. This can result in the experience of subjective stress. [Furthermore] military organisational structure implicitly, and often explicitly, rejects the reality of stress as more than an excuse for inadequate performance... To the extent that this representation of stress is dominant, it acts as a form of stressor in itself for those who face significant pressures.<sup>39</sup>

Military operations have always involved cross-cultural contacts with enemies, local populations and allies, but this contact has become much closer and more pervasive in the multi-national forces and headquarters of peacekeeping missions. Organisations like NATO have the advantage of similar military cultures, experiences of working together and standardised doctrine and staff procedures. The UN has no such advantage. Commanders and staff with markedly different organisational styles, command ethos, degrees of openness, reliability and professionalism are required to work closely together. This introduces unpredictability, challenging expectations and assumptions, diminishing control and results in stress.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary peacekeeping operations tend to be very complex and increasingly multi-dimensional. In addition to traditional military components, UN peacekeeping missions now typically include significant political, police, electoral, human rights, humanitarian and developmental dimensions and components. This introduces a level of complexity in working relationships, decision-making and resourcing in situations which often lack an adequate structure for command, control and co-ordination. The conflicts and delays in arriving at decisions and effective solutions to problems can result in significant pressure on both military and civilian participants.

---

<sup>39</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 10.

<sup>40</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 11.

“Mission creep” or “mission drift” occurs when agencies become drawn into activities that are not core to the original mission. This situation has occurred with military forces on several complex UN peacekeeping operations, certainly in the missions in the Former Yugoslavia, and especially UNPROFOR. Inadequate or unclear Security Council resolutions and mandates often fail to provide clear guidance in adapting to changing situations. Humanitarian organisations, national publics or the media may introduce new expectations, either suddenly or gradually, which contribute to increased demands. Well-meaning military officers, in search of more substantial missions or perhaps enhanced credit with civil organisations, can unwittingly contribute to the process. Problems for senior commanders arise when there are doubts about the central purpose of the mission and when they lack the resources, authority or contributing nations’ support to satisfy new demands. Such uncertainties generate self-doubt and act as sources of stress.

The public and the media, especially in Western countries, increasingly subject military operations and senior officers to intense scrutiny. The case of the operation in Somalia is perhaps most apparent and most painful to the CF. Commanders can feel, sometimes for good reason, that public concerns are misplaced or that media reports may be exaggerated, biased or simply not factual. They may believe that the public does not appreciate or respect the efforts and risks that they and their soldiers take. They may feel helpless to correct media or public misperceptions and intensely frustrated at the failure or unwillingness of higher authorities to help them. They may believe that the bias of media reporting places them and their soldiers at greater risk. Such frustration can generate stress.

The effects of role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload, previously discussed in this paper, are clearly evident and are significant chronic stressors for commanders and troops on contemporary peacekeeping operations.

Political pressures can arise as politicians may have different (and variable) perceptions of aims, priorities and events. Political interference with force commanders or national contingent commanders can significantly undermine military authority, priorities and practices. Furthermore, the diversity and pervasiveness of international media and “instant reporting” of situations, whether factual or otherwise, may diminish the perception of military authority and credibility and interfere with the chain of command and communication processes. These pressures can act as stressors for commanders on peacekeeping operations.

Composite or *ad hoc* organisational arrangements in headquarters and units, including CF national contingents, has become increasingly the norm on peacekeeping operations. Even integrated units may have to be heavily reinforced for operations by individuals or sub-units. Such organisations may, at least initially, lack coherence and stability and are potentially more difficult to control than formed units who normally aim oodons or TjETEM

units in national armies it is more so in *ad hoc* or multinational headquarters and units typical of peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish strong peer group relationships and effective team-building in such organisations.

Because of the increasingly multi-dimensional character of contemporary peacekeeping operations, senior military commanders must co-operate with civilian officials, representing the UN political authority, police, humanitarian or human rights organisations and development agencies. The military commander might be either equivalent in status or subordinate to a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General or another official. He might not be adequately prepared to deal with these complex and sometimes unclear inter-personal situations, which may severely tax both his patience and abilities.

The influence of separation from spouses, family and friends has been discussed previously. Commanders can also feel isolated, not only physically but also psychologically, through the nature of multi-national peacekeeping operations and the power and onerous responsibilities of their position. The sense of loneliness in command is a pressure in itself and magnifies the impact of other pressures.

The nature of contemporary peace support operations frequently brings senior UN commanders into direct contact with members of belligerent or opposing forces (military commanders, warlords, political or faction leaders). This contact may be informal or it may be through negotiations, consultations or joint commissions. The standards of professionalism, honesty and civilised behaviour demonstrated by these opposing leaders may often be highly disappointing to professional Western military officers. This can introduce stressors associated with unpredictability and even a sense of hopelessness.

### **Psychological Stressors**

Commanders who believe they lack knowledge of either the operational situation or of the job that they have to perform are more likely to feel under pressure. This

effectively means that poor briefing and poor training will be likely to precipitate stress. Genuine skill or knowledge deficits interact in complex ways to compound the negative impact of other stressors. They impair competency, retard decision-making and undermine confidence. ...The commander must be aware that the deficit exists for it to have maximum ill effect.<sup>42</sup>

Memory, including long and short-term retrieval capacity, varies widely amongst individuals. Increasingly complex peacekeeping operations place a high premium on a good memory in a commander. According to Breakwell and Spacie, baseline memory abilities will be degraded by sustained operations, lack of sleep, work overload, and poor working conditions. These conditions have certainly existed for senior officers serving in peacekeeping operations such as UNPROFOR. "Commanders who recognise that they are not performing at their normal level can find these memory problems act as prime stressors."<sup>43</sup>

Another psychological factor that can put pressure on senior commanders is a lack of trust in staff or subordinates. On contemporary peacekeeping operations, the perceived inability of some subordinates to perform to the commander's expectations, especially in a complex and multi-dimensional environment, may inhibit the commander's capacity to delegate. Standards in training, military culture and professional abilities can and do vary widely in the military forces of different contributing countries. Often, staff officers from certain countries, some in high positions, are perceived to be unable to competently carry out their duties.

Finally, many senior officers have experienced extreme moral repugnance when faced with horrific situations in the types of intra-state conflicts which have been associated with recent UN peacekeeping operations in the Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Somalia. Such situations have included the wholesale slaughter or abuse of

---

<sup>42</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 24-25. They also state that the commander who is unaware of his knowledge or skill inadequacies may never experience the stress normally associated with them, even though performance may be poor.

<sup>43</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 25.

innocents, including women and children, ethnic cleansing, murder of officials or peacekeepers, starvation and random acts of senseless violence. Despite a sense of professionalism that may sustain some officers, revulsion from the experience of these acts may, at a deep level, act as a stressor.<sup>44</sup>

### **Considerations for the Operational-Level Commander**

In the view of the author, “Peacekeeping Stress” is real and its impact is potentially significant both in terms of individual health and organisational effectiveness.

The ability of the operational-level commander to personally deal with traumatic stressors and stresses may be somewhat limited. The immediate and localised nature of traumatic stressors put them largely in the purview of the tactical level, although the senior commander should at least be supportive of efforts, such as personal coping strategies and interventions available to subordinate commanders and units. Furthermore, the commander should do what he can to reinforce, at the tactical level, the well-established positive influences of unit cohesion and confidence in leadership in moderating the effects of traumatic stress.

Contemporary peacekeeping operations are replete with chronic or contextual stressors. This paper has discussed the nature of some of these stressors and examined how they act to cause stresses which can diminish individual well-being and organisational effectiveness. The author suggests that the operational-level commander is best able to understand and deal with these chronic stressors. This is of the authority and status of his high command position, his direct relationship with the higher-level political authority (e.g. the United Nations), his working association with other mission dimensions and agencies (e.g. political, police, humanitarian, human rights, electoral), his personal contacts with the most senior levels of belligerent forces (e.g. military commanders, political leaders) and finally his personal experience. Tactical-level commanders and organisations are limited in their abilities to influence these aspects and

---

<sup>44</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 27.

the operational-level commander should consider them to be part of the human dimension of his own command responsibilities.

Some researchers have recently studied the nature of chronic stressors on operations and have offered useful ways to categorise and study them. This paper has examined Breakwell's and Spacie's "Typology of Stressors"<sup>45</sup> in relation to contemporary peacekeeping operations and has considered it to be both valid and practical. CF officers preparing for senior command or staff positions on peacekeeping operations would also be well advised to read their pamphlet Pressures Facing Commanders and keep it at hand. Such a typology is not a template to predict and resolve stress-related problems, but a prudent commander could use it as a tool in considering which stressors will have the greatest effect on him and his mission, and thereby help him determine where he should concentrate his efforts.

The nature of organisational and interpersonal stressors in particular, as described by Breakwell and Spacie and expanded upon in this paper, seem to relate to the operational-level commander, both in terms of effects on him and his ability to affect them. Examples of areas in which the operational-level commander could involve himself more to reduce the impact of chronic stressors include clarification of strategic/operational guidance, role clarification and rationalisation, mission creep, organisational arrangements, cross-cultural conflicts, cross-organisational communication, rules of engagement and media/public relations. Other areas such as political interference and UN institutional competence will be more problematic issues to deal with.

Finally, the operational-level commander must understand that he is not immune to stressors on operations. He must recognise the stressors that impact on him and learn to identify symptoms of stress in himself. As discussed previously, this is frequently a problem in military organisational cultures that consider stress to be more associated with failure or an excuse for poor performance, than a genuine medical condition. For the

---

<sup>45</sup> Breakwell and Spacie 9.

sake of his own health and effectiveness, the commander needs to be prepared to employ personal coping strategies and informal support to deal with stress.

The CF has an excellent stress management programme which includes effective preventive briefings and debriefings as well as critical incident stress counselling. Some of Canada's research in this area has been "world class" and Canada has been instrumental in helping the United Nations recognise the problem and adopt a stress management programme.<sup>46</sup> But many senior officers are either unaware of, or shun, stress management programmes which are available in the CF. In the view of the author, personnel deploying with formed CF units are generally being adequately handled, but many members who are deployed as individuals are not.<sup>47</sup> Better vigilance is required on the part of the CF as an institution, and on the part of senior officers themselves, to ensure that appropriate stress management programmes are made available to all individuals and that follow-up action is taken.

The Canadian Forces does not appear currently to have a good appreciation of the extent to which stress is affecting its senior officers. Some of these officers have experienced horrendous situations as commanders or senior staff on peacekeeping operations, and have simply returned back to other high pressure duties in Canada, without ever being properly debriefed or treated. The author suggests that the Canadian Forces need to conduct a comprehensive and scientifically-based analysis to determine the scope of this problem.

## **Conclusion**

Much has been written concerning the subject of combat stress and its effects on both individuals and organisations. Until recently, however, very little research has

---

<sup>46</sup> The UN published its own programme in a note by the Secretary-General, entitled "Human Resources Management: Respect for the Privileges and Immunities of Officials of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies and Related Organizations – Stress Management" A/C.5/49/56 (New York: UN General Assembly, 16 Feb 1995).

<sup>47</sup> These include senior officers commanding UN missions, officers filling HQ staff positions, UN Military Observers and some individual augmentees.



focussed on stress-related issues facing the senior commander and even less has been written about stress experienced in peacekeeping operations. This may be due, in part, to the relatively benign nature of “traditional” UN peacekeeping operations during the Cold War. Since the early 1990s, however, the dramatically changing nature of peacekeeping has given rise to a growing body of research which points to the existence of a phenomenon which some call “Peacekeeping Stress”.

Recent research has pointed out the existence of a number of chronic situations or aspects of the operational environment that may form a context of stressors experienced by personnel serving on contemporary peacekeeping operations. These chronic stressors may, separately or together, result in stress that can degrade the health and performance of individuals and organisations. Furthermore, because of the changing nature of the types of conflict situations (intra-state, ethnic hatred, less consent, more violence) in which contemporary peacekeeping operations have been employed, traumatic stressors have also been increasingly present, compared with previous and more traditional missions. In studying how these stressors interact, some researchers have suggested that “contemporary peacekeeping deployments are best characterised as comprising exposure to traumatic stressors in a context of chronic stressors.”<sup>48</sup> Some of these same researchers have also suggested that the simultaneous experience of traumatic and chronic stressors may have multiplicative rather than additive effects.

This has significant impacts for the armed forces of countries such as Canada, since it appears that Canadian foreign and defence policies remain committed to participation in multi-lateral peacekeeping missions. Senior commanders need to understand the nature of stressors inherent in peacekeeping operations and of their consequences.

A review of the nature of chronic stressors on peacekeeping operations suggests that a number of them may be accessible to the operational-level commander, by virtue of his special position. A prudent commander who understands the nature of stressors and

---

<sup>48</sup> Lamerson and Kelloway 252

stresses and their impacts on individuals (including himself) and organisations, should use the full measure of his authority, personal skill and experience to reduce the harmful nature of stressors which are contextual to his mission.

## Annotated Bibliography

### **Books and Pamphlets**

Biermann, Wolfgang, and Martin Vadset. eds. UN Peacekeeping in Trouble: Lessons Learned from the Former Yugoslavia. Peacekeepers' Views on the Limits and Possibilities of the United Nations in a Civil War-like Conflict. Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 1998. A recently-published book which includes a wide variety of articles, many from highly-placed and knowledgeable authorities, writing from military, political, humanitarian and scientific points of view, concerning the attempts by the international community to help solve the problems in Bosnia.

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. An Agenda for Peace. New York: United Nations Headquarters, 1992. A plan for the United Nations to deal with future crises, written while Boutros Boutros-Ghali was Secretary-General.

Breakwell, Glynis and Keith Spacie. Pressures Facing Commanders. Occasional Paper Number 29. Camberley UK: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997. An excellent pamphlet which discusses the nature of stress and its effects on a commander's decision-making ability on operations. Focussed on commanders and based on over one hundred interviews of senior officers with experience in the Gulf War and Bosnia.

Gal, Reuven. A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier. New York: Greenwood, 1986. An in-depth study of the Israeli Army, written by the former Chief Psychologist of the Israeli Defence Forces. Looks at the complex process employed to shape and motivate leaders and soldiers and devotes a chapter to combat stress reactions and how they are handled in Israel.

Government of Canada Publication. The Dilemmas of a Committed Peacekeeper: Canada and the Renewal of Peacekeeping. Ottawa: Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, June 1993. A report of a parliamentary committee, concerning UN peacekeeping and Canadian contributions after the post-Cold War.

MacKenzie, L. Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1993. A popular account of retired Canadian Forces MGen Mackenzie, the first commander of UNPROFOR.

Manning, Frederick J. "Morale, Cohesion and Esprit de Corps." The Handbook of Military Psychology. Ed. Reuven Gal and A.D. Mangelsdorff. Chichester: Wiley, 1991. 453-470. Discusses morale in military units as a function of cohesion and esprit de corps. Examines the determinants, consequences and methods of assessing morale.

Martini, Sten. "Peacekeepers Facing Horrors of Civil War-Like Conflict: Danish Lessons Learned in Preparing and Taking Care of Soldiers." Biermann and Vadset. 330-345. A description of stress-related reactions of Danish soldiers who served with UNPROFOR and of their treatment by the Danish Armed Forces.

McAndrew, Bill. "The Soldier and the Battle." Military History and the Military Profession. Ed. David Charters et al. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992. 57-72. Discusses stresses experienced by Canadian soldiers in World War II and Canadian policies and practices dealing with it. Also discusses the influence of manpower policies and operational doctrine on battle performance and stress.

Rose, Michael. "Military Aspects of Peacekeeping: Lessons Learned from Bosnia, from a Commander's Perspective." Biermann and Vadset. 153-167. A forceful account of lessons learned from the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia, written by a former Force Commander.

Seiple, Chris. The US Military/NGO Relationship in Humanitarian Interventions. Carlisle PA: Peacekeeping Institute. Center for Strategic Leadership. US Army War College, 1996. A practical account, from a military perspective, of the co-operation between US military forces and NGOs dealing with complex humanitarian emergencies in Turkey, northern Iraq, Bangladesh, Somalia and Rwanda. Makes a number of useful recommendations relating to civil-military co-operation.

Solomon, Zahara. Combat Stress Reactions: The Enduring Toll of War. New York: Plenum, 1994. A study of the effects of stress in Israeli Army units. A detailed study of combat stress reactions in the Israeli Defence Forces. Also studies the effects in members of Israeli society of recurrent participation in war and examines the transmission of traumatic stress from one generation to another.

Stewart, Robert. Broken Lives: A Personal View of the Bosnian Conflict. London UK: Harper Collins, 1993. The personal account of a British Army officer who commanded an infantry battalion with UNPROFOR in Bosnia in 1993.

Taylor, A.J.W. "Individual and Group Behaviour in Extreme Situations and Environments." The Handbook of Military Psychology. Ed. Reuven Gal and A.D. Mangelsdorff. Chichester: Wiley, 1991. 491-505. Discusses the psychological aspects of military situations in combat, PW camps, peacekeeping, civil defence emergencies and extreme environments.

United Nations Publication. The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peacekeeping. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996. A detailed review, from the United Nations perspective, of UN peacekeeping operations, both past and underway in 1996.

Zaccaro, Stephen J. Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual/Empirical Review and Integration. Washington: US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1996. A comprehensive and widely-read study of executive leadership. Reviews several models of leadership and makes recommendations relating to future military research.

## **Published Articles**

Farley, Captain K.M. "Stress in Military Operations." Working Paper 95-2. Willowdale ON: Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, Sep 1995. A detailed study, based on a survey of over 400 soldiers, of stressors experienced by Canadian Forces personnel deployed on UNPROFOR in Bosnia

Gal, Reuven. "Le stress du soldat de la paix." Les champs de mars Aut/Hiver. Paris: Centre d'étude en science sociales de la Défense, 1996. 175-184. A study, written in French, of stress experienced by soldiers on UN peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and the Former Yugoslavia and by Israeli soldiers deployed on internal security operations in the West Bank and Gaza.

Lamerson, C.D. and E.K. Kelloway. "Towards a Model of Peacekeeping Stress: Traumatic and Contextual Influences." Canadian Psychology 37.4 (1996): 195-204. The authors present a conceptual model of stressors, both chronic and traumatic, that are inherent in peacekeeping operations. They also discuss the implications of this stress for personal and organisational functioning.

Pinch, Franklin C. and Diane Forestell. "Notes on Cross-Cultural Contact." Gloucester ON: FCP Human Resources Consulting, Sept 1998. The authors discuss the cultural diversity of military personnel participating in the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the extent of cross-cultural co-operation amongst different national contingents and the impact of this diversity on perceptions within the mission as well as amongst the local population.

Prager, Karsten. "The Limits of Peacekeeping." Time 146.17. Oct 1995. 30-36. A well-researched article which related the considerable difficulties experienced on recent (then up to 1995) UN peacekeeping missions, particularly with UNPROFOR in Bosnia. Discussed weaknesses with the UN system, the complexity of humanitarian interventions and the impact on peacekeepers.

## **Unpublished Articles**

Forand Major-General A. R., Major-General Guy Tousignant, Colonel Charles Lemieux and Colonel Don Matthews. "Ethical Dilemmas of Commanders on Operational Missions: Four Views." The Many Faces of Ethics in Defence. Ottawa: Proceedings of the Conference on Ethics in Canadian Defence, 24-25 October 1996. 30-42. A short account of ethical dilemmas of three Canadian Forces officers, based on their experiences on UN peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Croatia, Rwanda and Haiti and in the Gulf War.

Lamerson, C.D. "Peacekeeping Stress: Testing a Model of Organisational and Personal Outcomes." Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation. Guelph, ON: University of Guelph, 1995. A review of stressors and stress experienced by Canadian Forces personnel on UN peacekeeping operations.

## **Briefings**

Sloan, Elinor and Tony Kellett. "Trends in International Peacekeeping." Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters Policy Briefing. April 1998. A short but well-researched paper describing trends in international peacekeeping since the end of the Cold War.

## **Official Defence Publications**

British Army Field Manual, Volume 5. Operations Other Than War. 1994. British Army doctrine for planning and mounting all types of operations other than war, including peace support operations.

Canadian Forces Publication. B-GG-005-004/AF-000 Canadian Forces Operations. Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, 1997. Canadian Forces doctrine for planning and mounting all types of operations.

Canadian Forces Publication. B-GL-300/003/FP-000: Command. Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, Land Force, 1996. Canadian Forces doctrine for command.

Canadian Forces Publication. B-GL-301-003/FP-001 Peacekeeping Operations. Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, 1995. Canadian Forces doctrine for planning and mounting peacekeeping operations.