

**PUBLIC OPINION AND CANADIAN INTERNATIONALISM AFTER THE COLD WAR:
OBSTACLE, PARTNER, OR SCAPEGOAT ? ***

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PUBLIC OPINION AND CANADIAN INTERNATIONALISM AFTER THE COLD WAR: OBSTACLE, PARTNER, OR SCAPEGOAT ?

There is no consensus on the exact role that public opinion should play in the conduct of foreign and security policy, but few would dispute the fact that this factor is more important than ever in defining the environment in which the key decisions that contemporary international politics today are made. Ideally, a democratic government should be able to rest its foreign policy on a societal consensus that establishes the broad outlines of what is desirable or acceptable for a solid majority of its citizens.¹

This is all the more relevant in the current context, as the strategic imperatives that guided foreign policy during the Cold War have given way to normative considerations that relate more to the conscience of individuals and communities than to conventional notions of "national interest."² Crises in the Balkans, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, East Timor, Kosovo and elsewhere are not perceived as "clear and present dangers" to international stability as much as they are problems of conscience that confront us all as human beings. Although these situations barely scratch the surface of the material and strategic interests of the democratic west, they generate stories and images so horrific that it is nearly impossible to remain indifferent.

In part because of the so-called "CNN effect," western publics have frequently exhorted their leaders to "do something" about the most shocking situations. Moreover, in an environment lacking strategic signposts, it has become increasingly difficult to make decisions regarding international intervention without the support of the population. Although it would be imprudent to assume that the rules of power politics have suddenly become totally obsolete with the end of the Cold War, it is certainly not excessive to underscore the growing "domesticization," and even democratization, of foreign and

1 As Kim Richard Nossal puts it, "those who decide on a country's course in world politics cannot divorce themselves from the interplay of undercurrents, of mood, tone or of milieu, of a climate of feeling that almost imperceptibly insinuates itself into concrete ideas and actions." Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, 3rd Ed. (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 138.

2 Lawrence Freedman, 'Victims and Victors: Reflections on the Kosovo War', *Review of International Studies* 26 (July 2000), pp. 335-358.

security policies since that historic event, particularly when it comes to peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention. In short, security affairs are no longer the exclusive purview of an élite few; they definitely should, and, more and more, they do involve the public at large.

In light of this trend toward the democratization of foreign and security policy, it becomes increasingly important to learn how public opinion actually behaves in the turbulent environment of post-Cold War world politics. "Wars of conscience," as *The Economist* has dubbed them, have stimulated public interest for certain kinds of international events and served to catalyze humanitarian intervention by western governments. Beyond that, however, they also underscored the limitations of intervention in conflicts that have deep roots and complex dynamics, and where there seldom are easy solutions. Thus, as western publics have been subjected for ten year to the depressing spectacle of the series of mishaps and failures that marked the United Nations' record in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, it is legitimate to ask how this roller-coaster ride has affected their perceptions and reactions.

In the complex, turbulent and uncertain context of the post-Cold War period the problem of the stability and reliability of public opinion on foreign policy takes on a particular significance. In this difficult context, the fundamental question that motivates our analysis becomes: Can public opinion constitute a firm basis to support, or even inspire, policy decisions regarding foreign intervention or peacekeeping operations, or should it be dismissed as an epidemic reaction to the crisis of the day?

Although this question is relevant for most of the democratic countries that have contributed to humanitarian interventions or peacekeeping operations in the past decade, the Canadian experience is interesting inasmuch as it can be associated with a political "culture," shared to a large extent by élites and the mass public, in which the values of internationalism and humanitarianism have deep roots. As Peter Katzenstein has noted, Canada may be the first "post-modern" country on the international scene, inasmuch as its foreign policy is shaped by a consensus in which these values already have pride of place. As Kim Richard Nossal and Stéphane Roussel recently commented, "Canadian foreign policy is still strongly marked by the idealism of Lester B. Pearson. It is deeply based on the respect of for the Charter of the United Nations and the search of international

stability."³ At the core of this consensus lies Canada's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, and a substantial part of this paper addresses this policy area as a litmus test for the stability and reliability of public opinion in a turbulent world.

As an enthusiastic participant in the UN's "Agenda for Peace" in the early 1990s, Canada was directly confronted with the abrupt rise of the "second generation" of peacekeeping, as its soldiers were engulfed in the quagmires of Bosnia and Rwanda. Witnessing these crises and the seemingly intractable challenges that lay ahead for Canada's peacekeepers, several commentators were prompt to announce the death of Canadian internationalism, noting that, in their view, the Canadian public was retreating to its domestic concerns and turning its back on world problems. Explicitly or implicitly, their comments were tied to the commonly held belief that public opinion on matters of public policy, especially foreign policy, is incoherent, volatile and thus, in the end, irrelevant in the calculations of decision makers.

Are these perceptions well founded? Is Canadian internationalism really falling apart? Is public opinion on foreign policy as brittle, timid, incoherent and volatile as many observers like to portray it? In this paper, we address these questions by examining recent trends in Canadian public opinion, notably the public's perceptions of a key dimension of Canada's foreign commitments since the end of the cold war: participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations. We find that, contrary to the common wisdom, there is little reason to point to public opinion as the source of a weakening of Canada's commitment to internationalism.

This paper thus questions the notion that the Canadian public is incapable of supporting a constructive internationalism in the post-cold war world. In a first section, we briefly sketch the arguments of those who announce the end of Canadian involvement in world affairs and we present the foundations of internationalism in Canadian public opinion. The second, third and fourth sections summarily present and analyze the evidence that leads us to conclude that the news of the death of internationalism in Canadian public

3 Kim Richard Nossal and Stéphane Roussel, "Canada and the Kosovo War: The Happy Follower," in Pierre Martin and Mark R. Brawley, eds., *Allied Force or Forced Allies? Alliance Politics, Kosovo and NATO's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Forthcoming 2001).

opinion have been exaggerated. Public opinion, we conclude is not the obstacle to an internationalist policy that many seem to decry. Neither should it be the scapegoat on whom the blame for the shortcomings of Canada's foreign policy are all too often pinned. Rather, we argue that the public can and should be treated as a full partner in the making and implementing of a constructive internationalist policy.

Is It Really the End of Internationalism in Canadian Public Opinion?

In recent debates over Canada's "identity crisis" in international affairs, just as in many debates centered around issues of identity and values, emotions have a way of blurring facts, and reasoned dialogue may be the first casualty. As a consequence, the existential debate over Canada's place in the world—and about its alleged acute case of isolationist *angst*—may have, to some extent, generated more heat than light.

Specifically, the discussion of these issues is in many ways marked by oversimplifications which do little to foster reasoned debate. First, commentators tend to enlarge the definition of isolationism to the extent that everything becomes matter for concern, everything becomes a symptom of retrenchment. This attitude is obvious, for example, in the critiques addressed by some internationalists against the notion of "niche diplomacy", or that of "selective engagement."⁴ In other words, any change in policy that results in even the most modest reorientation in Canadian foreign commitments is seen by isolationists as a vindication for their position, and decried by the "purists" of internationalism as a step down a dangerous slippery slope. These critics, however, tend to ignore that, when it comes to the two "pillars of Canadian internationalism," foreign aid and peacekeeping, past policies have generally been compromises between the desirable and the possible, or between the interests of Canada abroad and the means available to pursue them. In practice, Canadian policy was more driven by the modesty of its means and by its prudence rather than some sort of relentless commitment to starry-eyed idealism.

4 Jean-François Rioux and Robin Hay, "Canadian Foreign Policy: From Internationalism to Isolationism?" *International Journal* 54 (Winter 1998-1999), pp. 57-75.

In recent discussions of Canada's foreign policy, and particularly its participation in UN peacekeeping, it is increasingly common to hear judgments that would lead one to believe that Canada is becoming more and more isolationist. This is often attributed to the notion that Canadians themselves are less and less inclined to support international involvement, notably when it comes to multilateral interventions in seemingly intractable internal conflicts or humanitarian crises.⁵

Sometimes the death of internationalism is extrapolated from "facts" pulled out of their proper context and interpreted as if they were, in and by themselves, definitive evidence of retrenchment. For example, in December 1997, Paul Koring of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* lent a great deal of significance to the fact that the withdrawal of Canada's blue helmets from Haiti signaled a draconian reduction of the country's commitment to peacekeeping. In 1998, he wrote, "there will be fewer than 250 Canadian peacekeepers scattered around the globe wearing U.N. blue berets."⁶ Of course, the article only briefly mentions, almost as an afterthought, that more than 1300 Canadian soldiers were deployed in the former Yugoslavia as part of the Stabilization Force (SFOR). No mention either was made of the fact that if Canada's contribution to peacekeeping decreased by two-thirds between 1994 and 1997, those of France, Britain and almost every other contributor to U.N. peacekeeping decreased in similar proportions.

When it comes to foreign aid, another symbol of Canadian international altruism, the press has also insisted recently on the fact that the budget for foreign development assistance decreased from 0.45% of GDP in the early 1990s to 0.32% in 1996.⁷ Although deplorable from the internationalist point of view, this apparent setback is in fact less a demonstration of retrenchment from an idealized past than an illustration of the enduring fact that the Canadian government never really lived up to its promises in the area of

5 See notably Rioux and Hay, "Canadian Foreign Policy: From Internationalism to Isolationism?", and other contributions in the same issue of *International Journal* by Jocelyn Coulon, Robert Bothwell, Douglas Alan Ross and Douglas Bland.

6 Paul Koring, "Haiti Pullout Reveals Shrunken Role," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto: December 15, 1997).

7 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *Efforts et politiques des membres du Comité d'aide au Développement*, Rapport 1992 (Paris: OECD, 1998) 111.

development aid. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, foreign aid never totaled more than 0.5% of GDP.⁸

In general, the debate over the return of isolationism in Canada tends to exaggerate both the extent of changes and the baseline from which such change might be measured. Moreover, the politicization of this debate tends to divert attention from a more basic question: did the end of the cold war and the cascade of events that have marked the last decade lead Canadians to reexamine the dominant ideas that have been the underpinnings of Ottawa's foreign policy in the last 50 years? In other words, is it possible to observe in Canadian public opinion the signs of a change as fundamental as that which marked the passing of two world wars? These questions are important to the extent that any democratic government should be able to base its foreign policy on a societal consensus that establishes the limits of what is desirable or acceptable by a majority of citizens. In other words, it is possible to assume the existence of a stable, long-term consensus between élites and society when it comes to defining the principles and values that underlie policies in a given area. The challenge, however, is to measure these core beliefs and to evaluate changes over time in ideas which typically remain latent.

Both in Canada and in the United States, the Cassandras of internationalism have tended to get around such difficulty: they simply interpret the so-called "moods" of the public by extrapolating them from opinions expressed by élites or the media, without expending much effort in verifying whether their claims accurately reflect what the public thinks. Among these critics, as Rioux and Hay contend, there is much talk about the general public's "chronic lack of interest for foreign affairs," its "broad skepticism vis-à-vis foreign commitments," or about the increasingly introspective mood of Canadians. Rioux and Hay also note that critics see the sources of retrenchment affecting the foundations of Canadian foreign policy in the rise of populist and anti-statist sentiments, notably in western Canada, or even in the preoccupation of Quebecers for the redefinition of their relationship with Canada.⁹ Some élites have advanced the notion that many Canadians

8 Andrew F. Cooper, *Canadian Foreign Policy: Old Habits and New Directions*, (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 222.

9 Rioux and Hay, "Canadian Foreign Policy."

are tempted to retrench from foreign affairs out of a “them versus us” sentiment. According to Joe Clark, “public opinion is more hostile, particularly to international initiatives,” but the former prime minister did not feel compelled to substantiate this affirmation with an objective measure of this opinion.¹⁰

In this paper, we seek to take some distance from those who announce the end of internationalism and the advent of a new isolationism. More specifically, we seek to analyze more rigorously one of the key components of this debate, namely the position of public opinion in the last few years when it comes to defining the place and role of Canada in international affairs. First, however, we turn to a more general presentation of our approach.

Public Opinion and internationalism: A Moving Target

Analyzing collective attitudes on a concept such as internationalism requires response to two basic questions: What does internationalism or isolationism represent for the public, and how can we study this issue in a systematic way? For the first question we adopt the notion of dominant ideas as used by Bruce Doern and Richard Phidd, and also by Kim Nossal. As Nossal argues, any political culture is characterized by ideologies, which he defines as “more or less systematic ways of thinking, both normatively and empirically, about social, economic and political relationships among humans in society.”¹¹ A political culture, however, can also be structured around dominant ideas, which we interpret as explicit or implicit, but generally coherent, sets of principles and assumptions that tend to structure the opinions of individuals in a given area of policy activity. From this vantage point, the analysis of public opinion can be based upon the assumption that a large number of individuals in a society—perhaps even a solid majority—share a set of “dominant ideas,” and that these ideas are likely to shape their views and influence the way they perceive governmental actions in a given policy area.

10 Joe Clark, “The First International Country,” *International Journal* 52 (Autumn 1997), 542.

11 Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, 138.

This position is also related to the more specific debate over the place of public opinion in the conduct of foreign policy, which is centered around the so-called Almond-Lippmann consensus. In this debate, the conventional view, inspired by the writings of journalist Walter Lippmann and political scientist Gabriel Almond in the 1920s and 1950s, holds that public opinion on foreign policy issues is highly volatile, incoherent and thus essentially irrelevant.¹² More recently, however, a significant body of research has questioned the empirical validity of the Almond-Lippmann consensus, noting that public opinion on foreign policy tends to be more stable, coherent and more relevant than many assume.¹³ This does not mean that the public is perfectly informed about international events or that the opinion of each individual citizen always changes in the same rational way in response to the same events. What it does mean, however, is that the public as a whole tends to hold relatively stable opinions, and that these opinions can change in a reasonable and predictable fashion in response to real changes in the circumstances of foreign policy.¹⁴ One of the bases for the stability of opinion on foreign affairs is the fact that it tends to be founded—explicitly or implicitly—on a set of core values that allow most individuals to form reasonably coherent, albeit summary, opinions about complex issues, even if they know remarkably little about the details of these issues.

In short, we posit that even if each individual member of the public may not be a patented expert in international affairs, public opinion generally evolves in reasonable ways and therefore that, under certain conditions, we can infer interesting lessons from a careful observation of its movements. The next step, before we look at the data themselves, is to establish the main components of what is called internationalism in Canadian foreign

12 This debate is summarized and analyzed in Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (December 1992), 439-66.

13 Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mark Peffley and Jon Hurwitz, "International Events and Foreign Policy Beliefs: Public Responses to Changing Soviet-U.S. Relations," *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (May 1992), 431-61.

14 Page and Shapiro explain the logic behind this proposition in *The Rational Public*. For an empirical application to the Canadian context which tends to support this hypothesis, see Anne-Marie Boissonault and Pierre Martin, "La stabilité et la cohérence de l'opinion publique canadienne sur les enjeux de sécurité," Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, St. John's, Newfoundland, 8-10 June 1997.

policy and, of course, those of its counterpart, isolationism. According to Kim Richard Nossal, the dominant ideas that underlie internationalism in Canada are articulated around a series of interrelated assumptions.

1. Each country is interconnected to the rest of the world and hence dependent on world stability for its own security: peace is indivisible.
2. This predicament demands that Canada engages actively in world politics; it cannot avoid it.
3. This engagement on the part of Canada takes two main forms: a) Canada has to play a constructive part in the prevention and management of conflicts; and b) Helping the international community tackle global issues such as world poverty, environmental scarcity or human rights violations is perceived as an important contribution to world peace.
4. Multilateralism as opposed to unilateralism—i.e. a commitment to international institutions—is seen as the preferred way to approach global issues and to enhance Canada's influence.
5. All the above views are of course predicated on a willingness from the part of average Canadians to spend national resources for the cause of world peace.¹⁵

When it comes to the Canadian public's more specific support for U.N. peacekeeping activities, we can also identify dominant ideas that tend to shape perceptions and opinions. In an exhaustive study of this dimension of Canadian foreign and defense policy, Joseph Jockel identified some of the elements underpinning Canada's peacekeeping "credo."¹⁶ First, Canadians are reluctant to see their country in a *Realpolitik* perspective. Values, not power and interest, should guide Canada's foreign policy. To illustrate this point, Jockel cites a participant in a focus group sponsored by the Department of National Defence: "Canadians feel that they should go out and do good in the world." Second, for many Canadians internationalism enhances diplomatic influence. As Canada helps others, the reasoning goes, it improves its image abroad and thus gains influence. Third, there remains a latent anti-American bias in Canadian political culture. Canadians like peacekeeping, for example, because it distinguishes them from the United States and, contrary to other types of military involvement, it does not make them feel like junior partners to their giant neighbor. Peacekeeping, in this sense, has helped Canada

15 Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, 154-58.

16 Joseph T. Jockel, *Canada and International Peacekeeping* (Washington and Toronto: Center for International and Strategic Studies and Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1994), 13-22.

develop a distinct international identity. The same type of argument can be made with respect to international aid, which can be interpreted both as a means of distinguishing Canadian policy from that of the United States and as a way to contribute to international security stability in ways other than through military involvement in Europe.

In contrast with this relatively complex picture—and in contrast with the American case where isolationism has been more thoroughly articulated into a coherent doctrine—the components of the Canadian isolationist credo are rather simple, if not simplistic. Again according to Kim Richard Nossal, this credo might include the following propositions:

1. Canada can isolate itself from international turmoil because, to borrow the famous words of Senator Raoul Dandurand, Canada is a "fireproof house."
2. Two world wars have taught Canadians that avoidance of European politics and alliances was a legitimate tool of statecraft, and that it was necessary, from this point of view, to be wary of international organizations that can drag the country into conflicts that are simply none of its business.
3. Charity begins at home.
4. Finally, isolationists hold a belief in the rightness of acting unilaterally.¹⁷

This brief overview of the main themes of internationalism and isolationism as expressed by élites and in the conventional wisdom of analysts raises the next question mentioned at the outset: How do we observe the presence of these ideas and, more importantly, how can we assess their evolution in public opinion over time? To this end, we adopt the method proposed by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro in their long-term study of U.S. public opinion on foreign policy and other policy issues. This exercise is, of course, constrained by the relative paucity of survey items on foreign-policy issues that are routinely repeated over long periods of time. Thus, to get a clearer picture of the evolution of opinion on a central pillar of Canadian internationalism, we also take a closer look at the evolution of opinion about participation in peacekeeping operations, an issue that has attracted the attention of pollsters in the 1990s.

17 Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, 151-54

Internationalism and Public Opinion in the 1990s

The most important change in the relationship between public opinion and Canadian foreign policy in the 1990s perhaps has been the degree to which opinion has been taken into account. Indeed, although there is a fair amount of evidence that Canada's international involvement was widely supported by the public during the cold war, consistent measures of this support are few and far between. At the most basic level, a good measure of internationalism in the general public would be whether the public purports to show any interest in international affairs. As Figure 1 shows, this measure suggests that there has been relatively little variation in the level of attention given to international affairs by the general public. Indeed, the level of interest has remained consistently high throughout this period. The question of whether this sustained interest can be directly related to a solid support for Canadian involvement in world affairs, however, can only be answered tentatively.

A comprehensive poll conducted in April 1998 suggests, however, not only that Canadians care deeply about international events,¹⁸ but also that they still want their country to exercise more power and influence in order to make the world a better place. Fifty-five percent of the respondents in that survey felt proud of Canada's role in the world and 64 % said they felt prouder than they did a decade ago, although the majority claim that the government has done a poor job in explaining its policies to the public.¹⁹

Remarkably, one of the reasons why Canadians remain interested in world events may be that many believe the planet has become not safer but more dangerous in recent years.²⁰ Moreover, whether or not they believe the world has become more dangerous,

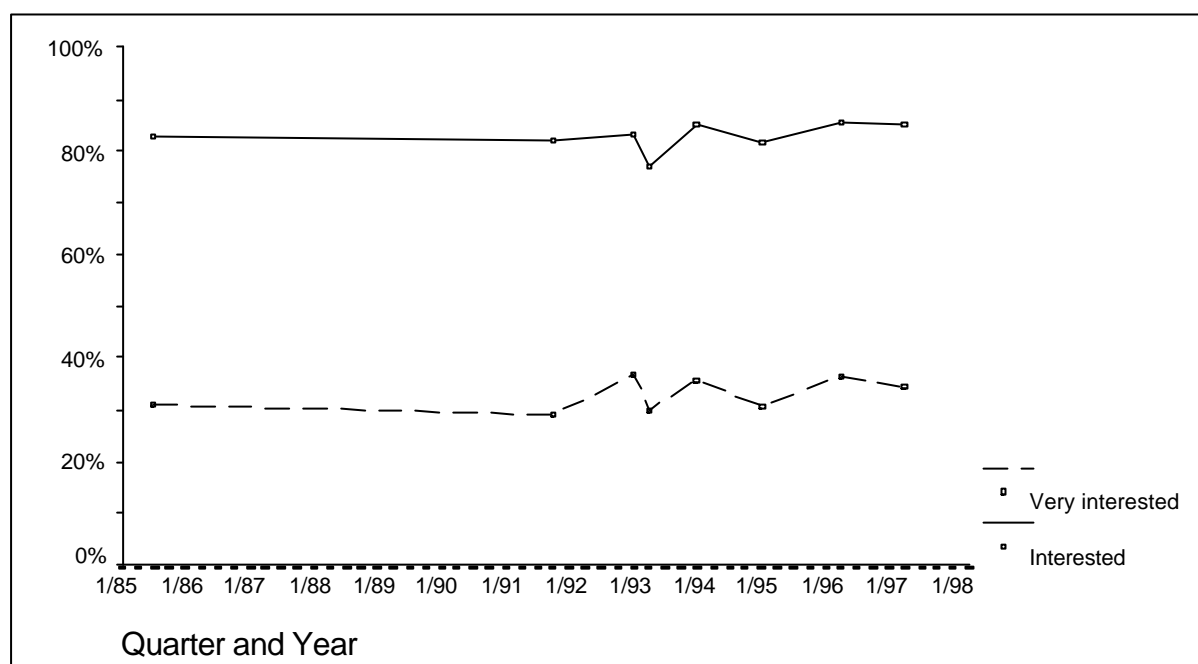
18 The wish of Canadian to see their government devote more attention to foreign affairs emerges strongly from the Compass/Southam/IISS survey . Respondents were asked twice about how much attention they should be devoted to the subject. Those wanting more attention devoted to foreign affairs outnumbered those wanting less by at least 2:1 (Second Article in the Southam News/Canadian National Committee of the ISS Poll on Foreign Policy, Friday, April 24, 1998).

19 First Article in the Southam News/Canadian National Committee of the ISS Poll on Foreign Policy, Friday, April 24, 1998.

20 According to a 1998 poll, 48 % Canadians agree that, compared to a decade ago, the world is more dangerous 37 % believe it is less and 7 % think the level of danger is unchanged. Giles Gherson, 'Canadians are Activists at heart', New Poll Finds, *Ottawa Citizen*, Friday April 24.

virtually all believe that war remains a possibility: Only 18% of Canadians agree that "war is no longer possible" in the present international environment.²¹

Figure 1: Interest in International Events, 1985-1997²²



There are several signs that support for an active international role remained relatively strong in the public during the cold war, but the change in context makes comparisons with recent years difficult. For example, surveys taken both in the late 1960s and in the late 1980s showed strong support for the stationing of Canadian troops in Europe (about 70% approval),²³ but this issue became moot when the government recalled the troops. Similarly, support for Canada's participation in NATO remained high through the 1980s although it declined slightly—from 90% approval in 1983 to about 78% in 1990—with the gradual realization that the security environment was changing

21 Fifth Article in the Southam News/Canadian National Committee of the ISS Poll on Foreign Policy, Friday, April 24, 1998.

22 Sources: 1985 and 1991, Decima Research: "How interested would you say you are with events or issues on the international scene? Would you say you are... very interested, somewhat interested, not too interested, or not at all interested?" 1993-1997, Goldfarb Report: "How interested would you say you are with events or issues on the international scene? Would you say you are... very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?"

23 *Gallup Report*, April 1968, 24 August 1987, 26 February 1990.

considerably.²⁴ Although one could interpret this drop of 12 percentage points as a setback, it is consistent with the changing security context and support for NATO remains comfortably above the majority level. In 1997, a Goldfarb survey showed that 70% of Canadians believed Canada should place a very high (24%) or a fairly high (46%) priority on its role in NATO.²⁵ In July 1999, after the bombings in Kosovo, the same pollster measured stronger figures: 73% believed Canada should place a very high (32%) or a fairly high (41%) priority on its role in NATO.²⁶ In 1998, 67 % of Canadians expressed the belief that NATO was the only alliance capable of standing up to agressor nations against 35 % that consider NATO is now outdated.²⁷

Support for other international organizations also has remained relatively high in the 1990s, particularly in the case of the United Nations, although their actions have been consistently criticized in the media. Of all the organizations mentioned in the 1997 Goldfarb survey, Canadians give the highest priority to the U.N. (very high priority: 40%; fairly high priority: 48%).²⁸ Again in 1999, Goldfarb finds that Canadians give an even higher level of priority to the U.N. (very high priority: 51 %; fairly high priority: 36%).²⁹

Few repeated questions are available to compare support for multilateral organizations between the 1990s and the previous decades. In 1995, for example, Gallup asked the following question: "Is your respect for the United Nations Organization increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same as the years go by?" In large part because

24 Data from the *Decima Quarterly* polls # 16 (1983); # 31 (1987), # 42 (1990), Question # R761. The data were made available by the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Neither the original source or collectors of the data nor Queen's University bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

25 The Goldfarb Report 1997, Question S.6 Q19b-7.

26 Canada, Department of National Defence, news release, "Les Canadiens et la défense: les Canadiens appuient les FC au Kosovo," June 1999.

27 Fifth Article in the Southam News/Canadian National Committee of the ISS Poll on Foreign Policy, Friday, April 24, 1998.

28 The Goldfarb Report 1997, Questions S.6 Q19b-1 to S.6 Q19b-7. Indeed, of all organizations mentioned in the Goldfarb survey in 1997, only the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Francophonie were not considered a high priority by a majority of Canadians, although the latter was considered a high priority by a solid majority of Quebecers.

29 Canada, Department of National Defence, news release, "Les Canadiens et la défense: les Canadiens appuient les FC au Kosovo," June 1999.

of the difficulties encountered by U.N. peacekeeping troops on the field in the former Yugoslavia, 39% said their respect was decreasing, in contrast to only 9% who said it was increasing and 42% whose opinion remained the same. The U.N., concluded Gallup analysts, was losing respect among Canadians.

*Table 1: Respect for the United Nations, 1970-1995*³⁰

	Increasing %	Decreasing %	Same %	No opinion %
1972	20	25	36	19
1980 (May)	18	42	28	13
1990 (September)	34	22	33	12
1995 (August)	9	39	42	10

The long-term data shown in table 1, however, suggest that responses to this questions are sensitive to context and were as likely to change during the cold war as they have been in the 1990s. In sum, there does not seem to be a linear trend away from the U.N. in Canadian public opinion. More recent surveys confirm that the U.N. remains a major focus of attention for the Canadian public.

A detailed and very positive picture of internationalism emerges from an April 1998 survey conducted by Compas for the Southam chain of newspapers. Three general observations were made by the survey's authors, which tend to support our main arguments. First, even though the general mood in foreign policy circles tended to be skeptical regarding the public's commitment to an internationalist foreign policy, the survey finds that the opposite is true: "Far from being parochial or isolationist, Canadians appear to have convictions, often devoutly democratic, about almost everything in the international arena."³¹ Second, this internationalism is more likely to be driven by values rather than narrowly defined interests. This, for example, leads the public to be critical of policies that tend to place the interests of exporters ahead of the promotion of human rights and

30 *The Gallup Poll*, September 7, 1995.

31 "Megaphone Moralism and Tax fatigue: Twin Pillars of a Multi-Faceted Public Opinion," Summary description of the Compas survey, (http://www.compas.ca/html/archives/southampoll_surv.htm), April 24, 1998..

democracy. In an era marked by the imperatives of fiscal discipline, however, this "moralism" is somewhat tempered by more general constraints on public spending. Third, the survey notes that while the public has been supportive of the orientations of Canadian governments in the 1990s, "[t]he public believes that the government has done a mediocre job of explaining or communicating its policies."³²

On the whole, it would appear that the news of the death of internationalism in Canadian opinion have been, to use a well-worn phrase, vastly exaggerated. Moreover, the public's critical assessment of the government's ability to explain and defend its policies suggests that internationalism persists as a core value of most ordinary Canadians in spite of, rather than because of, the government's performance in communicating the values and priorities that still guide, willy-nilly, its foreign policy. Too often, public opinion is derided by foreign-policy élites as a constraint on a policy of constructive international involvement. The evidence suggests otherwise, and as the next section shows, this observation also applies to public opinion regarding Canada's participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations, which we address in the next section.

Public Opinion and Peacekeeping³³

The participation of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in U.N. peacekeeping operations was doubtless one of the most visible dimensions of Canada's foreign-policy commitments in the 1990s. For several reasons, this policy area is a fitting test of the hypothesis that Canadian public opinion is abandoning its support of internationalism. First, the 1990s were a particularly inward-looking period in Canada's political life, from the failure of Meech Lake in 1990 to the 1995 sovereignty referendum in Quebec, to the ongoing post-referendum soul-searching—not to mention the rocky road to balancing the

32 The Compas poll asked respondents: "How good a job has the government done in giving you enough information to have an informed opinion about the various choices involving foreign policy, foreign aid, and defence policy?" The responses were: 5% very good, 34% good, 38% poor, and 20% very poor. "Federal Government Performance: High Pride and Middling Confidence," (http://www.compas.ca/html/archives/fedgovperf_surv.htm)

33 This section borrows and updates material from our previously published article: Pierre Martin and Michel Fortmann, "Canadian Public Opinion and Peacekeeping in a Turbulent World," *International Journal* 50 (Spring 1995), 370-400.

public account books. In this context, ordinary citizens might be excused for not paying much attention to foreign events, but they nevertheless did continue to pay attention, as figure 1 shows. Second, the nature of peacekeeping itself has changed, and this activity now involves considerably more risk than it did in the past. Third, for the first time in decades, strong critical voices were heard against further commitments of Canadian troops to U.N. peacekeeping, precisely because of this increased risk. Indeed, this criticism came from politicians, the media, and even from the military, who repeatedly claimed that public opinion—whose feelings they claimed to share—had had enough of peacekeeping. Fifth, and certainly not least, the assassination of a young Somalian by a Canadian soldier and its cover-up by defense officials did little to foster sympathy toward peacekeeping in the general public.

Support for peacekeeping in the Canadian public dates back to the creation of the United Nations, when a survey found that 78% of citizens approved the participation of their country's soldiers in the nascent U.N. peacekeeping force.³⁴ This support has remained firm in the decades since, as Canadian troops were assigned to virtually every peacekeeping mission undertaken by the U.N.. In the 1980s, for example, more people (between 30% and 40%) mentioned it as their preferred priority for the armed forces than any other role.³⁵ The end of the cold war did not seem to affect this preference, and in surveys taken from 1990 to 1992 (using a different question), peacekeeping was given a higher priority than any other role.³⁶

What makes the durability of this public support remarkable is that Canada's experience with peacekeeping has often been difficult and frustrating. There were positive moments, as in 1956, when Lester B. Pearson won a Nobel prize for his role in helping to resolve the Suez crisis with the help of U.N. peacekeepers, or in 1988, when Canadian

34 Jack L. Granatstein, "Canada: Peacekeeper," in Alastair Taylor, David Cox and Jack L. Granatstein, *Peacekeeping: International Challenge and Canadian Response* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1968), 96.

35 Decima Research, *Reports to the Department of National Defence*, Studies # 2136 (Dec. 1986); 2672 (Nov. 1987), 2846 (March 1988), 3726 (February 1989).

36 Longwoods Research Group, *Report to the Department of National Defence*, LC2136 (Nov. -Dec. 1990); Centre de recherche sur l'opinion publique (CROP), *The Canadian Armed Forces: Perceptions and Attitudes of Canadians*, (Report # 92411), November 1992.

soldiers were given their share of the credit for the Nobel prize awarded to all U.N. peacekeepers. But there were also bitter moments, such as Canada's involvement in Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva agreements, the Congolese quagmire of 1960-64, and the dismissal of Canadian peacekeepers from Egypt in 1967.³⁷ Indeed, Pearson's successor, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was much less enthusiastic about peacekeeping, and his government's 1971 defense white paper seriously questioned its effectiveness. Nonetheless, as John Holmes wrote in 1968, peacekeeping remains a part of the country's image of its role in the world.³⁸

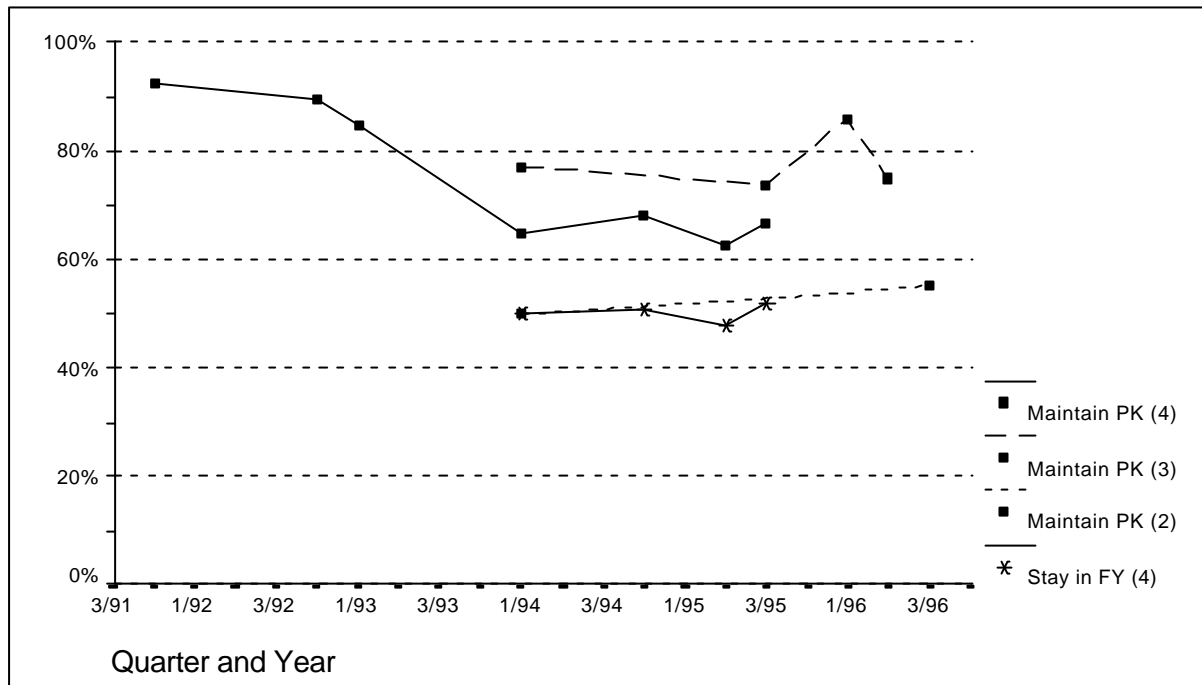
Even if the cold war was not always easy for peacekeepers, the end of this period signaled the start of a roller-coaster ride that would submit the public's support for peacekeeping to a severe test. During the Gulf war in 1990-91, it was claimed that participation in a U.S.-led operation would undermine Canada's credibility as a peacekeeper, but this debate had little effect on the public and, as Figure 2 shows, a December 1991 survey found a nearly unanimous approval for increasing (44%) or maintaining (48%) Canada's contribution to U.N. peacekeeping. From this point, the public followed the unfolding stories of peacekeeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia, in Africa and in Haiti attentively. In May 1993, Decima asked respondents to identify which of the many "trouble spots around the world" concerned them the most, personally. Without the help of a list, 52% answered Yugoslavia or Bosnia; Somalia came a distant second, with 8%. In all, 63% said they were somewhat or very familiar with the involvement of Canadian peacekeeping troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In a May 1995 survey, a wide majority of 77% considered peacekeeping the most important international role of the CAF, far beyond alliance participation, and 39% considered it the most important contribution Canada has made to the world, far above the second choice, foreign aid (13%).³⁹

37 For a good historical account of the Canadian Experience in United Nations peacekeeping operations, see Fred Gaffen, *In the Eye of the Storm: A History of Canadian Peacekeeping* (Toronto: Deneau and Wayne, 1987).

38 John Holmes, "Preface" to Taylor et al., *Peacekeeping*, ii.

39 Insight Canada Research, *Canada and the World: Public Attitudes Regarding Foreign and Defence Policy* (Toronto, 1995).

Figure 2: Evolution of Public Opinion about Peacekeeping, 1991-1996⁴⁰



40 Numbers in parentheses refer to the response options available in different questions on support for Canada's participation in U.N. peacekeeping. The figure is based on answers that favor maintaining or increasing peacekeeping commitments.

Maintain Peacekeeping (4): December 1991 and October 1992 (CROP/Environics): "In the future, do you think Canada should participate in more, the same number of, fewer, or no peacekeeping missions around the world?"; March 1993 (average of two surveys) (Decima): "How about the future? Do you think that Canada should participate in more, the same number, fewer, or no peacekeeping missions around the world?", (CROP/Environics): same as above; January 1994, December 1994, June 1995, September 1995 (Gallup): "Do you believe that Canada's role in United Nations peacekeeping efforts around the world should increase, remain the same, decrease, or be eliminated altogether?"

Maintain Peacekeeping (3): February 1994 and July 1995 (Harris): "In terms of its future commitment to the U.N. peacekeeping forces in general, do you think Canada should increase its role, keep its role about the same as it is now, or reduce its role?"; February and April 1996 (Goldfarb): "Should Canada become more involved, less involved or maintain the same level of involvement in peacekeeping activities?"

Maintain Peacekeeping (2): January 1994 and July 1996 (Angus Reid): "Canada, along with other members of the U.N., has participated in various United Nations peacekeeping efforts around the world—indeed, Canada has participated in more of these efforts than any other country. In your view, should Canada continue to play a leading role in U.N. peacekeeping efforts, or should we reduce our participation in these U.N. undertakings?"

Stay in Former Yugoslavia (4): January and December 1994, June and September 1995 (Gallup): "Do you believe that Canada's presence in the former Yugoslavia as part of the United Nations Peacekeeping forces should increase, remain the same, decrease, or be eliminated altogether?"

In the beginning of Canada's involvement in the Balkans, as figure 2 shows, the public was enthusiastic. A majority of Canadians, shocked by the violence in the former Yugoslavia, offered their support for a strong Canadian presence. In fact, they showed more activism than ever before and, as the U.N. created new mission after new mission (14 between 1988 and 1993), Canada joined all but one of them, most notably UNPROFOR, UNTAC (Cambodia) and UNOSOM. Moreover, Canadians wanted to do more. As echoed by Ernie Regehr from Project Ploughshare: "Canada needs to have a very interventionist foreign policy," and the kinds of specialized interventions embodied by peacekeeping operations is at the measure of its capacities.⁴¹ According to a Gallup poll taken in September 1992, 64% of Canadians accepted that Canadian forces in Yugoslavia use their weapons to enforce peace. Only 26% opposed such use.⁴² This activist phase, lasted two years (1992-1993) and—in the words of Andrew Cooper—reflected a "virtually unanimous backing for peacekeeping at the societal level."⁴³

By the end of 1993 however, many critical voices were beginning to make themselves heard. Chief among them was General Lewis MacKenzie, who strongly criticized the poor showing of the U.N. in the Bosnian quagmire. Consequently, peacekeeping increasingly received a hard look from public opinion leaders and the media. Specifically, in view of the obvious failure of the U.N. to meet the high expectations of the international community in Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda, observers started to ask if the whole thing was worth the effort. Peacekeeping had become much harder and more dangerous without becoming more efficient.

This crisis was occurring at a time when the Canadian military establishment was facing severe resource constraints. Canadian commitment to peacekeeping forces had increased from 2,000 to 4,500 troops in a short period, and Ottawa's contribution with respect to expenditures on international peacekeeping operations increased from \$10-12

41 Regehr testified before a Special Joint Committee of the House and Senate Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, on May 5, 1994, cited in Cooper, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, p. 188-89.

42 *The Gallup Report*, October 26, 1992.

43 Cooper, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, 188.

million in 1990-1991 to \$130 million in 1993-1994. At the same time, the defense budget was slashed from \$12.8 billion to \$10.5 billion.⁴⁴

In addition, Canadians realized that the uniqueness of their country's role on the peacekeeping scene was dwindling. The participation of great powers, such as the United States, in U.N. operations and the increasing number of peacekeeping countries threatened to dwarf Canada's contribution and reduce its leadership role in this field. Moreover, Canada's exclusion from the peace process in the former Yugoslavia was perceived as a slap in the face, making it all the more difficult to defend continued involvement in the region. All in all, it would not be exaggerated to say that, from 1993 to 1997, Canadians' faith in peacekeeping was submitted to a severe shock treatment. How did this crisis affect the public's support for what was increasingly perceived as the most important international role of the CAF?

At a general level, attitudes toward U.N. involvement in conflicts evolved during this period. The proportion of those willing to accept U.N. intervention in sovereign countries increased somewhat between 1991 and 1993, from 58% to 65%, while opposition dropped from 39% to 30%. In February 1994, Louis Harris asked a slightly different question and got similar results: 57% agreed that it was "time the U.N. took a more active role in working to end conflicts around the world." This suggests that support for the principle of U.N. activism in conflict resolution solidified through the crisis. In October 1995, Canadians, while maintaining their support for U.N. peacekeeping efforts, still indicated a clear willingness to accept a relatively high level of risk, including being involved in situations where the use of force would be required.⁴⁵

The most revealing series, however, is the movement of opinion on Canada's own commitment to U.N. peacekeeping missions, as registered in figure 1. If surveys taken between 1991 and 1993 yielded impressive majorities in favor of increasing or maintaining Canada's commitment, support dropped sharply in January 1994. Can this shift be

44 *Ibid.*, 189.

45 Environics Research (October 1995). Question: "In recent years, the United Nations has become more active in trying to stop conflicts in areas that require the use of much more force than in the past. Do you think Canadian troops should or should not continue to participate in these United Nations operations?"

dismissed as a mood swing, as the conventional view of public opinion on foreign policy issues would have it? In fact, this series suggests a public opinion that is far from volatile. As the data suggest, there was a readjustment, due to the increasing cost of peacekeeping involvement, followed by a relative stability, or even slight improvement on all indicators of support of involvement.

Considering the growing controversies that surrounded the presence of Canadian contingents in Somalia throughout 1993 and in Bosnia in December 1993 and January 1994,⁴⁶ on the contrary, this drop is quite understandable, and it can reasonably be explained. Events in Bosnia, in particular, caused a commotion. The episode of the kidnapping and 'mock execution' of 11 Canadian soldiers by a group of Bosnian Serbs received enormous coverage during the whole holiday period. On January 4, just days before Gallup made its survey, the new Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, presented a confused picture of his government's stand on Bosnia when he declared that he was seriously considering the removal of Canada's peacekeeping troops. From that moment, as the parallel evolution tracked by Gallup suggests, peacekeeping was closely intertwined in the public's mind with the particularly difficult Bosnian situation, and perhaps also with the government's hesitations. After that initial shock, however, Gallup registered only little movement in two years, within the narrow band of 48% to 52% for opinion about the involvement in the former Yugoslavia, and between 63% and 68% for peacekeeping operations in general. In these polls, the proportion of those wishing to eliminate peacekeeping involvement altogether never exceeded 17% (these figures are based upon respondents expressing an opinion).

Does this mean that the long-standing Canadian public support for peacekeeping involvement is starting a long-term downward slide? The results of subsequent polls suggest, to the contrary, that Canadian support for peacekeeping missions was resilient enough to weather such a storm. When the federal government decided, on March 9, 1994

46 For a useful account of events surrounding Canada's participation in peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and in the Great Lakes region of Africa, see: Stéphane Roussel, "Chronologie: Le Canada et le conflit yougoslave," Working Paper no. 4, and Myriam Gervais, "Chronologie des événements liés au conflit de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs (Rwanda et Est-Zaïre)," (Université de Montréal/McGill University: Research Group in International Security, 1998).

to go ahead with a six-month extension of its U.N. mandate in Bosnia, a poll taken immediately after showed that 52% approved of the further involvement of Canadian troops in Bosnia (41% disapproved).⁴⁷ Subsequently, the proportion of respondents in favor of maintaining Canada's commitment in Yugoslavia went up again at the time of the Dayton accords. Although the Somalia inquiry was in full swing at the time, eroding some of the public's confidence in the military élite, 59% of Canadians favored participating in IFOR. This level of support gives a measure of the strength of the public's support for involvement in international peace efforts. Moreover, this did not reflect blind optimism. In fact, respondents in the same survey were pessimistic—or perhaps lucid—about the prospects of lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia: 61% thought lasting peace was unlikely.⁴⁸ Finally, a survey conducted in the midst of the air war over Kosovo showed that, in spite of the prevailing mood of pessimism at the time regarding the capacity of the UN to fulfill its peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, Canadian participation in UN peacekeeping remained at the top of the list of their country's realizations on the world scene that made them the proudest. The same survey also found that the public thought Canada should give the UN a higher degree of priority than NATO in its foreign policy.⁴⁹

Critics of opinion surveys sometimes note that the public seems to hold opposite views on some issues. In the case of peacekeeping in the 1990s, this critique appears founded. The public has strongly supported the principle of U.N. peacekeeping but, at the same time, it has had persistent doubts about intervention in the former Yugoslavia and about Canadian involvement in that dangerous context. In short, although a large majority approves of U.N. peacekeeping operations, their support is sensitive to risk and cost—all

47 Environics, March 1994, as reported in *Canadians on Defence: 1994-1995 Yearbook* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1995), 2.

48 Goldfarb Report, April 1996. S.6 Q.19b: "In light of recent American and European efforts to negotiate a ceasefire and peace agreement in Bosnia, how likely is it that lasting peace will be achieved there?"; S.6 Q.19c: "In the event that there is an eventual peace agreement in Bosnia, Would you strongly favour (12%), somewhat favour (47%), somewhat oppose (27%) or strongly oppose (13%) sending Canadian troops to act as peacekeepers in that country?"

49 When asked to choose two or three realization about which they felt proudest from a long list, 53% mentioned participation in peacekeeping, ahead of all other choices. The poll was conducted by Goldfarb in June 1999 and reported in "Les Canadiens et la défense," Department of National Defence press release, July 1999.

the more so when the costs and the risks are closer to home. In this context, does the drop in support indicate a fundamental shift in values? In our view, this conclusion misses the mark completely. A simple economic analogy can illustrate the point: if the price of a product goes up and the volume of sales go down, can we immediately conclude that the demand for the product is weaker? Naturally, the answer is no, and the same reasoning applies for political support. When support for a policy option goes down as the "price" of that option goes up, we cannot conclude that the values that are at the foundation of this support are weakening.

In sum, because the level of risk and complexity associated with the new type of "peacebuilding" missions is higher than it used to be in the case of traditional peacekeeping, it is not surprising that the public is significantly more cautious. One cannot, however, jump to the conclusion that the public has abandoned its long-standing support toward Canada's active involvement in U.N. peacekeeping. A strong case can be made that the public learned something from the turbulent experiences of the 1990s. Participants in focus groups held across the country in September and October 1997 expressed the feeling that peacekeeping is a practice that should be maintained. They felt, however, that the government should make sure its troops have a "clear mandate," that Canada sends "people who are trained in peacekeeping and not in hostile actions," and that "if we are going to do it, we should do it properly." Participants also voiced concerns about the fact that Canada has limited resources and should be careful about allocating them outside the country.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the 1998 Compass survey shows that one of the reasons the public would be ready to support an increase in the defense budget is to ensure that "our troops are well equipped and don't risk their lives needlessly in overseas conflict."⁵¹

These attitudes, in our view, are coherent and compatible with the expression of a cautious internationalism. Even if the public is not familiar with terms like peacebuilding and peace enforcement, surveys show that the average Canadian differentiates between

50 Pollara, *Views of Canadians on Foreign Affairs and International Trade: September 29th-October 2nd, 1997* (Toronto: Pollara Strategic Public Opinion & Marketing Research, 1997), 7-8.

51 Fifth Article in the Southam News/Canadian National Committee of the ISS Poll on Foreign Policy, Friday, April 24, 1998

peacekeeping *per se* and the larger task of promoting international peace. In fact, surveys show a clear preference for the latter, which seems to indicate an open mind as to alternative ways and means to promote peace and conflict resolution.

There is little doubt that the debate on the place of peacekeeping in Canadian security policy will continue in the future, and public opinion will be called upon as a witness for both the prosecution and the defense. What is even more likely, however, is that participants in this debate will invoke the kinds of misconceptions about the instability and incoherence of public opinion that are so common in expert comments about foreign policy. By contrast we observe that public opinion on peacekeeping tends to be stable over time and to react in reasonable and predictable ways to external events.

A set of core beliefs can be traced in public opinion surveys. In general, Canadians take an internationalist view and surveys do not show a clear tendency towards isolationism. Rather, they suggest a willingness to support conflict prevention or conflict resolution, with a distinct preference for peaceful means of intervention. Although the nature of conflict is changing and such international intervention—notably the U.N.'s role in the Bosnian tragedy—has remained utterly frustrating, the public's commitment to the principles behind such interventions is still strong.

Moreover, the perception of the Canadian Armed Forces has unquestionably been affected by the Somalia inquiry, but polls on this issue show that the public is able to discriminate between, on the one hand, the shortcomings of individual soldiers or the defense establishment's excessive penchant for secrecy, and, on the other hand, the professionalism of most members of the CAF and the usefulness of their work. Finally, although the public's demand for reduced defense budgets has put some pressure on the military, pressures for cuts in the military budget are not stronger than they may be in any other areas of activity.

The Test of War: Public Opinion and the Kosovo Crisis

Changes in the nature of peacekeeping operations and the sustained salience of the Canadian Forces presence in the Balkans through the 1990s has tested the Canadian public's support for military interventionism abroad. Another test of this support came in the spring of 1999, as Canada found itself enmeshed in a shooting war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over the fate of the small, little-known predominantly Albanian enclave of Kosovo. Of course, Canada was not responsible for, and only very marginally involved in, the chain of events that led NATO to wage war against Serbia. Nonetheless, when the regime of Milosevic intensified its offensive against the Kosovar Albanians, openly defying the ultimatum imposed upon Serbia by the western powers at Rambouillet, the United States and NATO had little choice but to resort to force. Although the UN Security Council had passed key resolutions condemning Yugoslav actions in Kosovo, it was generally understood that Russia and China would veto any resolution calling for the use of force against Yugoslavia. Absent the legitimacy conferred by a UN mandate, NATO leaders saw themselves as having the choice between acting alone and letting Milosevic's policy of "ethnic cleansing" run its course in Kosovo. For the United States and the main powers of NATO, the immediate goal was to stop the violence against Kosovar Albanians, but the credibility of NATO was also at stake. They chose to strike.⁵²

As a relatively small partner in the Atlantic Alliance, Canada was more or less presented with a *fait accompli*. Given that NATO is the cornerstone of Canada's security policy, the option of opposing the Alliance's use of force outright was perhaps unrealistic for the Canadian government. There was a choice to make nonetheless, between "non-opposition" and active participation, and Canada chose the latter. The Canadian contribution to the Kosovo air war—eighteen CF-18 aircraft took an active part in the bombing—was small when compared to the massive U.S. deployment, but it was larger than several other NATO members of the same size, and the interoperability of the

52 For accounts of this episode, see: Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); and the contributions in Pierre Martin and Mark R. Brawley, eds., *Allied Force or Forced Allies? Alliance Politics, Kosovo and NATO's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Forthcoming 2001).

Canadian contingent with its U.S. counterpart made its contribution relatively substantial. On the diplomatic front, in addition, Canadian officials at times seemed to be willing (if not necessarily eager) to join the "humanitarian hawks" who, led by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, advocated preparation for a ground invasion. Why did Canada choose to play an active role rather than take a free ride? External factors only provide a limited explanation. The notion of "alliance entrapment" perhaps explains the absence of opposition, but not more. That Canada would have acted out of a clear sense of threat to its national security, in the traditional sense, also seems far-fetched.⁵³

To explain Canada's action, we must turn to internal factors, including public opinion. The latter, we argue, did not act as a constraint, but neither was it, in an immediate sense, the driving force. Interestingly, while public support for international intervention most often is driven by demonstration of strong leadership on the part of policy makers, we do not find strong evidence that opinion actually followed the leaders in this case. Why, then, did public opinion hold firm? To answer this question, we must first show that public support for the NATO air strikes was in no way a foregone conclusion.

Several factors indicate that public opinion about the NATO air war over Kosovo, and about Canada's participation in the war, could have been a great deal more skeptical. First, the war was presented to Canadian policy makers as a *fait accompli*, and the feeling of being pushed around by their powerful neighbor is a historic source of irritation for the Canadian public.⁵⁴ The lack of a UN mandate to legitimize the NATO strikes also might have been expected to fuel public opposition, but few critics made it a central part of their argument.⁵⁵ The absence of a public debate about Canadian participation in the war, and

53 For a case study of Canada's decision to participate in the war over Kosovo, see: Kim Richard Nossal and Stéphane Roussel, "Canada and the Kosovo War: The Happy Follower," in Martin and Mark, eds., *Allied Force or Forced Allies?*

54 This attitude is documented in a recent qualitative study of Canadians' attitudes toward Canada-U.S. defense relations. The authors of the report, however, qualify anti-American attitudes as "soft" rather than "hard." Les Études de Marché Créatec +, *Canadian Views of the Canada-US Defence Relationship: Qualitative Study*, Report to the Department of National Defence (Montréal: Créatec +, June 2000).

55 Such critics included the Bloc Québécois opposition critic for foreign affairs, international law professor Daniel Turp, who later nuanced his legal interpretation of the case. The Montréal daily *Le Devoir* also decried the absence of a clear legal mandate, but most of the major newspapers gave their approval to NATO's interpretation of its legal mandate.

the Liberal government's questionable decision not to delay a parliamentary recess to debate the Canadian Forces' implication the day after the bombing started, also generated a fair amount of criticism in the press and among opinion shapers. The government held hearings and public forums later in the course of the conflict, but that seemed almost an afterthought. Finally, the conduct of the war itself gave plenty of opportunities for opponents to raise major concerns. As days of bombing turned into weeks, and then months, and as the mishaps and collateral damages accumulated, there was increasing concern, in Canada as elsewhere, over the moral justification for NATO's action. Moreover, as the strikes initially led to an intensification of Serbian violence against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, several commentators worried publicly that the NATO strategy was not only morally questionable, but also counterproductive.

In this context there was no foolproof guarantee that public opinion would necessarily hold firm, but it did. In early April, when it had already become evident that there would be no quick and easy resolution to the Kosovo issue, a sizable majority of the Canadian public approved both NATO's actions and Canada's involvement. A Compass poll conducted for the *National Post* showed 79% of support for NATO's actions and 72% approval of Canadian involvement in the bombing. As many as 57% even favored sending ground troops if that became necessary.⁵⁶ Another survey, conducted between April 8 and 10 by the Angus Reid Group, found that two-thirds of the respondents approved both of NATO's actions and Canada's part in them. A slightly lower proportion (60%) approved the resort to ground forces, including Canadian soldiers, if that became necessary. The same poll showed high levels of sympathy for Kosovar refugees and a professed "moral obligation" for Canada to help them.⁵⁷

56 Robert Fife and Joël-Denis Bellavance, "57% of Canadians favour sending combat troops," *National Post* (April 11, 1999), p. 1.

57 Angus Reid Group, "News Release," Angus Reid/CTV/Globe and Mail Poll, April 11, 1999. The questions and response distribution were as follows. "NATO air forces are currently bombing targets throughout Yugoslavia. Overall, do you support or oppose the decision of NATO to attack Yugoslavia?" (Strongly support: 36%; Somewhat support: 30%; Somewhat oppose: 14%; Strongly oppose: 17%); "And do you support or oppose Canada's decision to be a part of the NATO air attacks on Yugoslavia?" (Strongly support: 40%; Somewhat support: 29%; Somewhat oppose: 12%; Strongly oppose: 18%); "Some observers believe the only way to stop what is happening in Kosovo is to send in NATO ground troops. Would you support or oppose sending ground troops into

Even after the conflict had dragged on for several more weeks, the level of support for the intervention remained relatively high. An Environics Group poll conducted between May 17 and 30 found that 57% approved of Canada's participation in the air strikes against Yugoslavia (31% disapproved). Interestingly, a sizable majority claimed to have followed the conflict somewhat or very attentively.⁵⁸

In the level of its support for the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, the Canadian public ranked among the highest of all the NATO members, even though Canada was perhaps one of the least affected by the conflict in terms of its geostrategic interests, in the traditional sense. Indeed, among NATO countries, there seemed to be a negative correlation (albeit far from a perfect one) between the level of public support for NATO's Operation Allied Force and the geostrategic stakes of the country, the latter being defined in terms of proximity to the war zone and/or need of NATO as security guarantor against a clear external threat (e.g. the three newest members of NATO). Support was high in the U.S. and Britain, the alliance leaders, but it was also strong in Canada, and even stronger in Norway and Denmark. In these smaller countries, support was arguably driven more by the professed humanitarian goals of the intervention than by its potential impact on these countries' physical integrity, or even their credibility or reputation in the "power game." In countries such as Greece or the Czech Republic, however, the public was strongly opposed to NATO's war, but it was strategic necessity that compelled them to grudgingly accept not to deviate too much from the Alliance's line.

As Mark Brawley and Pierre Martin conclude in their comparative overview of alliance politics in the Kosovo war, it was a "combination of strategic necessity and moral

Kosovo?" (Strongly support: 31%; Somewhat support: 28%; Somewhat oppose: 15%; Strongly oppose: 23%); "And would you support including Canadian troops with the NATO ground troops which go into Kosovo?" (Strongly support: 31%; Somewhat support: 30%; Somewhat oppose: 11%; Strongly oppose: 27%)

58 Canada, Department of National Defence, news release, "Les Canadiens et la défense: les Canadiens appuient les FC au Kosovo," June 1999. In the French version of the questionnaire, the first two questions were: "Comme vous le savez peut-être, le Canada fait actuellement partie de la force de l'OTAN qui mène des frappes aériennes contre la Yougoslavie. Suivez-vous cette campagne très attentivement (27%), assez attentivement (47%), pas très attentivement (18%), pas du tout (8%) ?" "Êtes-vous d'accord ou pas d'accord avec la participation de troupes canadiennes à ces frappes aériennes? (D'accord: 57%; Pas d'accord: 31%; Pas d'opinion: 12%).

obligation that allowed the allies to hold together [...] in NATO's first war."⁵⁹ In the Kosovo war, interests and values were inescapably intertwined. For a country such as Canada, however, it is clear that the latter provided the bulk of the motivation, both for the government's policy response and for the public's support. What is also clear is that public support was not a by-product of strong leadership on the part of the Canadian policy makers. As Canada was called into war by virtue of its alliance obligations, its choices were more or less dictated by the internal logic of its security policy, in which humanitarian considerations loom large. The public came to the same conclusions on its own and gave its support, even though its leaders were severely criticized for their slowness in engaging a public debate on the intervention.⁶⁰ The war itself was short, and its cost for Canadians were low, so there was no real need for strong leadership to retain public support. There is no guarantee that such a test might never come in the future.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed some of the underlying issues concerning the role of public opinion in the apparent retrenchment from Canada's tradition of internationalism in the 1990s. In general, we have found public opinion to be more resilient in its internationalism than many commentators have noted. This was particularly true in the case of support for Canada's participation in UN peacekeeping operations and support for joining NATO in Operation Allied Force. Of course, we do not argue that it is impossible to extract any sign of retrenchment from surveys, or that the Canadian public will cling to internationalism regardless of cost. Indeed, when survey questions are phrased in a way that makes the cost of international involvement particularly salient, the public tends to

59 Mark R. Brawley and Pierre Martin, "Balancing Acts: NATO's Unity and the Lessons to Learn," in Martin and Brawley, eds., *Allied Force or Forced Allies?*

60 For example, even if it endorses NATO's actions, the *National Post* insisted that there should have been an open parliamentary debate on Canada's involvement within days of the conflict's initiation. See the newspaper's two major editorials on the matter: "Disturbing Silence on NATO Action," March 31, 1999; "Why No Vote?" April 13, 1999. For the Montréal daily *Le Devoir*, whose opposition to the intervention contrasted with nearly all other major Canadian newspapers, the lack of public debate only contributed to enhance the perception that Canada's foreign policy simply trailed that of the United States. "Une ombre au débat," *Le Devoir*, April 14, 1999.

drape its internationalist inclinations in considerable nuance and caution. The same, however, could be said of public opinion in any area of government activity and—more to the point—of public opinion on foreign policy before the 1990s. This is why we focused on comparisons between identical or nearly identical questions asked in different periods, to assess changes in opinion rather than base our judgment on a one-time snapshot.

Admittedly, more work is needed to paint a broader and clearer picture of the evolution of public opinion on Canada's foreign commitments. For example, we have not examined here the key dimension of foreign development assistance, whose budgets never caught up with the government's promise to conform to the international norm of 0.7% of the gross domestic product. Although public opinion in this area has varied over the years, there does not seem to be a distinct downward movement that would be clearly distinguishable from the more general tendency to resist government spending in a time of fiscal austerity. It is worth noting that throughout the 1990s, proponents of a reduction of the foreign aid budget have remained a relatively small minority—albeit a more vocal one than in the past. As Cranford Pratt has noted, even if the altruistic motives that underpin foreign aid are still there to a large extent, a combination of changes in the context of international development and changes in Canadian society has "softened" the public's support for a generous program⁶¹ This may be the case but, just as the humane internationalism that long characterized the public's perception of this policy was largely due to the persuasive leadership of opinion leaders, the instrumental and narrowly mercantile turn that has characterized recent policy orientations in this area may be more readily explainable by ideological changes at the élite level rather than in the public at large. Whether some of the surpluses anticipated in the near future is directed towards a more convincing substantiation of Canada's internationalist reputation will prove a crucial test of the connection between the apparent wishes of the public and the capacity of its leaders to deliver the goods.

61 Cranford Pratt, "Humane Internationalism and Canadian Development Assistance Policies," in C. Pratt, ed., *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 334-70.

Many commentators have also observed that the public tends to be increasingly wary of its political leaders and less deferential to their authority. From this observation, many infer that an internationalist foreign policy is much more difficult to sustain. In general, however, when political leaders demonstrate conviction in pursuing their policy objectives, and when they take the time to explain why the difficult choices that they make are necessary to pursue the values and principles shared by most of their constituents, public opinion rarely poses itself as an obstacle to a constructive foreign policy. When leaders are wavering on their commitments or compromising on the principles that underpin the citizens' belief in internationalism, however, one should not be surprised if a warier and less deferential public reserves its judgment, or even withdraws its support for their international actions.

In sum, we do not deny that there have been signs of retrenchment in Canadian internationalism. We agree that this trend can only be partly explained by changes in the international context, and that it also has domestic causes. Nonetheless, our reading of the available evidence leads us to conclude that, although public opinion is a convenient scapegoat for the apparent lack of political will to support a constructive internationalist policy, the real obstacles lie elsewhere.

When the public is treated as a legitimate partner in the elaboration and conduct of foreign policy, even when choices become difficult and costly, there is no reason to assume that it will pose itself as an obstacle. To explain the connection between internationalist values and the sacrifices needed to implement policies that convincingly reflect these values requires political skills and even perhaps some courage on the part of policy makers. Public opinion is not the obstacle, and the silent internationalist majority is entitled to expect political skill and courage from its leaders in defense of their values. But if the public does not insist on demanding to be treated as a full partner in the foreign-policy process, it is more likely to be treated as a scapegoat by those who never seem to lack political skills but sometimes seem to run short of another key ingredient in the formula.