



Group of 78 Annual Policy Conference
Ottawa, 26 – 28 September 2014

Conclusions & Recommendations

The following recommendations and conclusions were adopted by the final plenary session of the Group of 78's annual policy conference to provide advice to Canadians and policy makers and as a contribution to ongoing public discourse. The conference included a range of presentations and discussion by over 100 participants with a strong interest in international affairs and Canadian foreign policy.

Conference speakers and participants included historians of World War I, and experts from the diplomatic community, from the military, from academia, from peacebuilding civil society organizations, and some from nations then opposing Canada and its allies--Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey).

While many lessons for enhancing peace and human security in our day were drawn, it was always with the general qualification that: "history rhymes but does not repeat itself".

The discussion of lessons to be learned from the tragic carnage of WW1 must begin by acknowledging the overwhelming, and blindingly obvious, lesson which is that war, once unleashed, sets in motion forces that are often all but impossible to control, such that its ultimate costs - human, social, political, economic, environmental - may far outweigh the value of the objectives sought by the victors. The pre-war build-up of militaries and the web of alliances in place both contributed to the war lasting far longer than most people foresaw. Indeed the supreme irony of "the Great War" was that the "war to end all wars" led to a peace treaty that bore within it the seeds of the next, even more terrible, war.

For all of these reasons the lessons that we have drawn from the conference discussions focus primarily on the overriding need to establish mechanisms, institutions and rules to allow differences to be resolved by peaceful means. At the same, it is worth noting at the outset, that there were also a few unintended consequences of that war which, especially with the wisdom of hindsight, should be considered as positive, including:

- *Increased egalitarianism after the war both in the military and in society, in part as a reaction to the front line experiences of the war.*

- *A greater concern for social justice and labour rights reflecting the strong demands of returning soldiers for a “better world” - and even enshrined in the Versailles Treaty.*
- *Increased acceptance of women’s participation in military, economic and public life, strengthening the suffrage movement after the war.*
- *In Canada the conscription crisis ended the two party monopoly of federal politics, opening the door to the creation of the United Farmers of Ontario and related political movements that provided the roots of the CCF and NDP.*
- *A certain strengthening of national sentiment although it cannot be said that Canada “came of age” in WW I, or at Vimy Ridge. In fact, if anything, the conscription crisis deepened division, and the tragic losses of the war fueled very negative views of the political leadership in many quarters. It was only many years later, in the 1930s during the erection of monuments, that the myth of a “nation emerging from war” grew.*

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I. REMEMBRANCE OF WW1 – Recognizing and broadening how the story is framed

Conclusion

The official Canadian narrative has increasingly portrayed WW1 as the furnace in which glorious military victories like the one at Vimy Ridge forged a new, self-confident nation, but the truth is not so simple. Although the sacrifice, and frequent heroism, of the soldiers is indisputable, the glory of the victory and the unifying impact of the process were emphasized only long after the fact. Indeed, for more than a decade after the war most veterans, like most Canadians, remembered the war largely as a horrific, senseless, and ultimately indefensible, tragedy. It was only in the 1930s, as new war clouds gathered, that this conflict began to be increasingly portrayed as a gloriously nation-building event. Moreover, the claim that the war had been a unifying experience is also difficult to reconcile with the facts since French Canada was deeply alienated by the conscription crisis and the blatant discrimination against the French language within the army, Japanese Canadian volunteers were initially turned away on essentially racist grounds while Aboriginal Canadians who served in the military were nevertheless denied the vote for many years afterwards. Ultimately it is therefore vitally important to think critically about how we, as citizens, understand the war and to ask how, by whom and for what purpose that memory is being framed as it is.

Recommendation 1

National commemorative activities of WW1 in Canada should reflect not only the official version of the war as heroics and sacrifice, but also the diverse experiences of the various communities affected, including those from Quebec, Aboriginal peoples, marginalized ethnic

communities such as the Japanese, and labourers and farmers. Care should be taken by Canada to commemorate the sacrifices of soldiers and civilians but not to glorify war itself.

Conclusion

The World Remembers project focuses on the public commemoration of the individual names of all known Canadian (and other countries') WW1 casualties, interactively challenging people to reflect on the humanity of those who died on all sides of the conflict. It seeks to move the viewer from lifeless statistics to thinking about the human beings to which they refer – a switch in consciousness of the viewer/participant. See <http://www.theworldremembers.org/>

Recommendation 2

Canadian civil society organizations should join with governments in supporting “The World Remembers 1914-1918” project.

II. MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

Conclusion

WW1 was spawned in a world of power politics in which the proliferation of alliances and bilateral treaties both heightened the risk of war and made peace more difficult. Once war had broken out, the ensuing peace process simultaneously sowed the seeds of the next war (because the reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles were effectively “unbearable”) and laid the foundations of a potentially more peaceful world (by creating a League of Nations based on certain basic internationalist principles). In the event the League failed because growing political and economic conflict and instability undermined the ability and willingness of nations to adhere to those principles.

Recommendation 3

For the prevention of future wars Canada and the wider international community should respect the internationalist principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and work towards sustainable peace and security and the elimination of chronic imbalances in the global economy. The United Nations and its regional organizations should therefore be properly funded and supported through expert participation to increase multilateralism’s reach and effectiveness. The evolution of new systems and institutions of multilateralism should therefore be supported to improve global governance and economic stability, including - where necessary - the continuing reform and improvement of the relevant United Nations organizations.

III. TRUTH AND WAR

Conclusion

Advances in media-related technology since WW1 have created greater means of directly communicating the realities of war to the public. However, as long as information, knowledge and images are controlled by nation-states through direct censorship, embedding journalists, or otherwise restricting access, the public will be deprived of its democratic right to know. Journalists also need to be cognizant of the temptation to censor voluntarily or become cheer leaders and morale boosters for military action.

Recommendation 4

Canada should not restrict media access to war zones nor censor media coverage, outside of restrictions for bona fide security reasons, to increase transparency and knowledge of the actual state of a conflict for the Canadian public. Canada should encourage all avenues of information sharing and civil society participation in the analysis to assist in holding governments accountable. Guarantees for whistle blowers and journalists should be implemented.

Conclusion

The conclusion of WW1 set in motion a new world order that saw a revised colonial system, particularly in the Middle East, that has produced problematic repercussions ever since. WW1 also unleashed extreme ideologies that still have echoes today. The resulting alienation continues to fuel terrorism that is central to some of the worst current conflicts. Much of the appeal of the terror groups and organizations to disaffected individuals centres on a search for identity. Groups like al Qaeda and ISIS have successfully used sophisticated communications strategies and social media to recruit new members and propagate antipathy to Western culture and societies. Their narratives exploit genuine political grievances and use religion and identity as tools to sell their “solutions” to very real problems of inequality and exclusion that cannot be solved by military force. Western responses so far have privileged military action and have failed to offer meaningful alternative narratives.

Recommendation 5

To respond effectively to many contemporary conflicts, Canada needs to understand better the extremist ideologies, their attraction to adherents, and the process of domestic and foreign radicalization. Civil society and the public more generally need to be engaged in discussion on the explanation of terrorism and its response to it by our government and its allies. All parties need to recognize that military solutions in isolation from other strategies are not going to be successful and to craft broader, multifaceted solutions that include effectively addressing perceived causes and legitimate underlying grievances and the creative use of social media.

IV. THE COSTS OF WAR

Conclusion

The high cost of borrowing by states to prosecute the Great War intensified the Great Depression little more than a decade later. Payment for military expenditures does not have an accompanying revenue stream to pay back the debts incurred, unlike public investments in infrastructure and goods and services that enhance production. The industrialization of warfare in WW1 over an extended period required massive borrowing. Medical services for injured veterans and support to survivors of killed soldiers were inadequate and increased the suffering of WW1 well beyond 1918. Vets were stiffed on pensions, medical expenditures and other benefits where possible because Canada was bankrupt.

Recommendation 6

Canada should clearly indicate the true intergenerational costs and other consequences of prosecuting a war and honestly communicate it to its citizens who ultimately pay those costs in higher taxes or decreased services.

Recommendation 7

Considering that genuine political grievances underlie most violent conflicts and that many of the world's most acute non-traditional security threats cannot be addressed by the military application of force, Canada should rebalance its allocation of resources from defence to enhance the reach and effectiveness of diplomacy, development assistance and extending human security (the absence of fear and want) to conflict zones to support jobs, education, political participation and democracy, social equity and conflict prevention.

V. POLITICAL CONTROL OF THE MILITARY, AND CITIZEN CONTROL OF THE POLITICIANS

Conclusion

In the complex web of alliances and secret treaties struck in the years before the war, leaders seemed to take decisions to mobilize automatically and civilian control of military decisions appeared to slip from view. Civil society voices of restraint were ignored by politicians or censored and outlawed. War should not be left to the generals, and the decision to go to war should not be left only to the politicians!

Recommendation 8

Canada should respond to the concerns of, and encourage dialogue with, Parliament and citizens and civil society organizations before engaging in combat missions or taking the country to war. Given the role that military alliances play in restricting the ability of individual nations to rethink their war decisions, every effort must be made to ensure that there is sufficient parliamentary debate on and oversight of alliance decision-making processes.

NOTE - The 2012 Group of 78 conference recommendations re Afghanistan and the decision to go to war are referenced in the Conclusions before Recommendation 3.

VI. HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISSENTION

Conclusion

There were challenges to support for the war by adherents of the historic peace churches (which had government promises of exemption) and others who invoked individual decisions of conscience for exemption from military service. They were met by a society and government that viewed obligation to support the war as a duty of citizenship and this view led to the denial of voting rights, coercion, loss of freedom and censorship. Women who had a son or husband in military service received the franchise while other women did not. All these rights were increasingly recognized and advanced because of the experience of dissenters during WW1.

Recommendation 9

Canada should respect and reinforce rather than retract or restrict the human rights of its citizens even when facing real or perceived threats to its national security, including respect for conscientious objection from military service and the right to dissention and public debate on the merits of military or security engagements.

VII. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Conclusion

The harsh measures against internal dissent enacted in WW1 have their contemporary application in measures to counter-act terrorism. Degrading human rights protections is costly for democracy and the diverse communities affected, reduces transparency, and is, in the end, counter-productive. In WW1 there were different points of view among women and women's organizations on peace and support for the military effort. In some countries civil society actually turned citizens and identified minority groups against each other, in support of oppressive state surveillance measures. Harsh internal war regimes made divisions worse in societies, breaking down community and increasing fear.

Recommendation 10

Canadian citizens and civil society organizations should be actively encouraged and welcomed into government policy making processes on international peace and security and Canada's response to these crises. Further, Canada should actively promote the voices of women and other marginalized communities in these debates, recognizing that there will not necessarily be a singular or monolithic point of view.

Recommendation 11

Canada should recognize and support the important potential of local civil society organizations at home and abroad in seeking non-violent resolution to socio-economic and political conflicts that can give rise to war.

VIII. WAS THE WAR AVOIDABLE? Could it have been stopped sooner?

Conclusion

Whether WW1 was avoidable, and if it could have been stopped earlier, is still the subject of historical debate. The war did not stop earlier because neither side could achieve their real goals outright and neither could stand down despite the horrific and continually mounting costs. They could not admit that the terrible losses were for nothing. In effect both sides kept pressing for continuing combat. Participation in military alliances also greatly impeded the ability of individual nations to withdraw. War by way of accident acknowledges a complex human crisis of historical proportions with no actor able to stop the momentum to mobilization until it is too late. The world stumbled into WW1.

The characteristics of contemporary wars reinforce the need to analyze conflicts critically before intervening to determine causes of the violence and the ambiguous or vague goals of non-state actors in primarily intra-state conflicts. For example, some actors initiate conflicts, not for military victory, but to gain a seat at negotiations.

Recommendation 12

The decision to engage in military intervention by Canada should be made only after exhausting diplomatic avenues and alternatives. (See also the appended recommendation on the “Basis for and terms of Foreign Military Intervention” from the 2012 Group of 78 conference.)

Recommendation 13

At the conclusion of hostilities effective reconstruction and reconciliation for all of the states party to the conflict should not be dismissed or abandoned but generously provided with assistance to rebuild as part of a broader strategy of reconciliation to prevent future wars.

IX. INNOVATIONS OF WAR – New Military Technologies and Disarmament

Conclusion

It was generally held at the beginning of WW1 that it would be a decisive and fast war because of the lethality of the weaponry, but stand offs at sea and dug in positions on land prolonged the war. WW1 marked the introduction of industrial war with bigger destroyers at sea and guns on land. It became a challenge of sustaining weapons production, paying for them largely through borrowed funds, and keeping troops and citizens fed. It was not the huge battleships

that decided the war at sea, but the British blockade. It became a war in part of economic attrition.

Post-war there were some advances in arms control, for example to restrict production of new battleships because of mutual need to slow military spending, but restrictions on submarines never took hold because of their low cost and the advantages they gave to smaller powers.

The chemical weapons regime required a century of diplomatic negotiation, beginning in the 19th Century, to ban chemical weapons and yet the regime today is not perfect or universally observed. The effort must be constant with resources for verification and the isolation of spoilers who do not observe their commitments. Still, it has made the world safer even in its imperfect state. (The marks of success of a disarmament treaty are: universality, comprehensive coverage, clarity, resiliency, verification, and accountability.)

The ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) 2011 resolution on the humanitarian implications of the possession and use of nuclear weapons has sparked subsequent international consultations in Norway, Mexico, and in December 2014 in Vienna to advance steps to make nuclear weapons illegal and create an instrument such as a nuclear weapons convention to eliminate them. This may initially require moving forward without the participation or agreement of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and the other four nuclear weapons states, and developing reinforcing and complementary mechanisms outside the stale-mated Conference on Disarmament and the crucially important but stalled Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty process.

Recommendation 14

Canada should constructively engage in international arms control and disarmament efforts through: sustained commitment to the successful completion of negotiations for agreements or treaties, contributing the necessary resources and expertise to the implementation and ratification processes of agreements, and building sustainability by drawing on representatives from science, academia and civil society organizations. Further, the international community, including Canada, should take deliberate precautions to ensure that the introduction of new military technologies do not lead to new arms races and increased insecurity. In particular Canada should make nuclear disarmament a high priority.

Recommendation 15

Canada should apply the lessons of recent successful international arms control and disarmament processes, including land mines, cluster munitions, and the Arms Trade Treaty, to outlaw and eliminate all nuclear weapons.

APPENDIX

From the 2012 Group of 78 Conference Report: Armed Intervention - Lessons from Afghanistan

The coercive use of force, in the absence of a credible political framework to build peace, is far more likely to fuel conflict and the extremism underpinning it, than to defeat it.

Canada's foreign policy must remain firmly grounded in our steadfast support of the UN Charter and of international law in general, of diplomatic peacemaking and of negotiated compromises embedded within comprehensive, ethically defensible and sustainable peace settlements. Canada's political and military decision makers must keep foremost in their minds the acute limitations of, and risks inherent in, foreign military intervention. Military intervention, outside a clearly defined peacekeeping context, must be invoked only as a last resort, when Canada's national security is directly threatened.

Canada should establish a clear policy guiding decisions on whether to participate with military forces in international security assistance operations (variously called peacekeeping, peace support, stabilization and security assistance operations). This policy should include:

1. an international legal framework for intervention based on a UN mandate;
2. a UN-led and broadly agreed political framework for the intervention, ideally in the form of a comprehensive peace agreement or, at a minimum, an agreed negotiating framework to this end;
3. clear Canadian objectives, benchmarks and timelines for Canadian participation; and
4. timely public and parliamentary debate and full transparency in regards to the policy and its application in a specific case, in all phases of the intervention – that is, before it is begun, during the engagement and after its termination.

Canadian participation must also be based to the maximum extent possible on a comprehensive understanding of the situation, including not only the geo-political and security dimensions, but also the socio-economic and cultural aspects and the root as well as proximate causes of the conflict. Deep respect for local culture, customs and codes of conduct must also guide Canadian participation, within the overarching framework of respect for international law.

Recommendations

Accordingly, we call on the Canadian government to advocate at the UN, within NATO, in the capitals of non-NATO participants in ISAF and generally within the international community, to encourage the immediate establishment of a UN-facilitated comprehensive peace process.

Afghanistan Civil Society, including women's groups, has a vital consultative role to play in designing the negotiating framework and the range of issues it will address as well as building support for this process among Afghans in general. We call on the government of Canada to assist Afghan Civil Society in contributing to such a comprehensive peace process.