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EMBASSY

CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEWSWEEKLY

OTTAWA, WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 2008 ISSUE 215 • \$3.00

Uganda in Favour of ICC Deferral Letter

■ But Lloyd Axworthy says the move opens the court up to Security Council interference.

By Michelle Collins

By most accounts it was a rare move on the part of the Canadians.

In the midst of the ongoing and delicate process of bringing war criminals to justice at the International Criminal Court, Canadian officials circulated a letter in April suggesting the UN Security Council make a deferral of long-standing indictments against Ugandan rebel leaders.

Four Lord's Resistance Army leaders, including notorious commander Joseph Kony, are wanted for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes, which include the kidnapping, murder and raping of the people of northern Uganda for more than 20 years.

For the last two years, in addition to providing \$8 million in support, Canada has played a leading role in the Juba Peace process, which looked close to fruition when the government made the unusual move.

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PHOTO: DARCY KNOLL

ON GUARD: A South Korean soldier stands only feet away from another world protected by a North Korean counterpart at the Panmunjeom Joint Security Area on the demilitarized zone.

Canadians Stand Guard on the Front Lines of a 55-Year-Old War

By Darcy Knoll

PANMUNJEOM, SOUTH KOREA—Snapping to attention, the North Korean soldiers boldly march and take their positions. Only metres away, South Korean soldiers wearing sunglasses stand rigid in a Taekwondo-style position with their arms outstretched and their fists clenched.

This is the daily display at the Panmunjeom Joint Security Area between North and South

Korea, and for a Canadian officer, it's all part of the "adventure" of working at the centre of the ongoing conflict.

Since September 2007, Lt.-Col. Gino Chrétien has been posted here as an international military affairs officer with the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission in Korea.

Although the fierce battles and bloodshed between North and South ended with the sign-

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Foreign Affairs, CIDA Changes Leave NGOs 'Jittery'

By Michelle Collins

While a change of government naturally results in a shifting focus and tweaking of priorities, actors within Canada's NGO community say that across the board, all are facing a much graver situation than in past years, and one from which it will take a long time to recover.

The culprits are strategic reviews of program funding at Foreign Affairs and CIDA, as well as an overhauling of their mandates and dramatic shifts in personnel, which has left organizations outside the government increasingly unsure of the government's changing priorities.

The changes have been particularly acute for NGOs and civil society groups that have long relied on support from the departments.

"There is a certain level of concern and a certain level of frustration at the lack of clarity," said Robert Fox, executive director

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CANADA IN WASHINGTON

Alberta's Oilsands Fight Highlights Big U.S. Problems

By Leslie Campbell

WASHINGTON—The Alberta government recently launched what has been dubbed a "full-court press" in Washington, D.C., to sell the positive attributes of the province's oilsands before the province's key resource becomes stigmatized in the U.S. capital.

The province has invited key members of Congress to visit and Alberta's Washington representative, Gary Mar, is seeking meetings with presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama and their advisors.

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'ON THE BRINK OF FAILURE'



PHOTO: UN/REGEL EL-KUBRI

While three Canadian peacekeepers have been left waiting for visas to join the UN in Darfur, civil society groups warn the overall mission is in crisis.

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Guarding the Demilitarized Zone 55 Years Later



PHOTOS: DARCY KNOLL

(clockwise from left) A South Korean soldier stands at attention near a memorial to Canadian soldiers in Gapyeong, South Korea. Lt.-Col. Gino Chrétien in the Joint Security Area in Panmunjeom, South Korea. Col. Stephen LaPlante in the Joint Security Area

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ing of an armistice on July 27, 1953, the war technically has not. For the past 55 years both sides of the conflict have maintained highly fortified defences along their sides of the four-kilometre-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which stretches across the middle of the country. It was in the region of Panmunjeom where the original armistice agreement was signed and, 55 years later, this is the only crossing point between the North and South for armistice-related events.

Tensions across the border have ebbed and flowed over the years and with the recent killing of a South Korean national near a Northern resort, American authorities say the DMZ is once again facing a period of high strain.

For Lt.-Col. Chrétien, such incidents add stress to the daily operations at Panmunjeom as UN authorities try to make sense of these developments and what they will mean for security.

"Being able to understand really the situation in South Korea and North Korea on a day-to-day basis is always a good challenge," he says. "Different situations make your work different than the week before and we need to adjust all the time."

The soldiers from both sides of the Joint Security Area operate within eyesight of one another and are ready to respond in the event of any incident. The American-South Korean force, for example, has a quick reaction team nearby that can be ready in 90 seconds.

"Of course with the [North Korean Army], we never know what they will do or what will happen after a meeting, or how they will react in certain circumstances," says Lt.-Col. Chrétien.

He points out that the North Koreans often try to provoke UN forces to see how they will react and record the outcome for propaganda purposes.

Lt.-Col. Chrétien's main task inside the DMZ is to ensure the security of those crossing through his assigned transportation corridor. This requires communication with North Korean and South Korean forces to ensure meetings and armistice investigations can be held safely.

However, he is not the only Canadian officer currently operating in Korea. For the past year, Col. Stephen LaPlante has served as the defence attaché for the Canadian embassy in Seoul. After working in Afghanistan from September 2005 to February 2006, the military engineer was offered the post. Beyond conducting the typical diplomatic functions, Col. LaPlante is in the unique position of serving in a country that has been sitting in a simmering conflict for half a century.

What makes this job distinct, says Col. LaPlante, is the fact that the original United Nations coalition for Korea still exists to this day.

"It has representation here by all those combatant nations, which Canada is one of 16," he says. "So the third pillar of my work here is to liaise with that organization."

As such, he has to remain aware of the situation on the ground with United Nations forces operating at the DMZ.

Unlike Lt.-Col. Chrétien, who can only deal with the North at Panmunjeom, Col. LaPlante actually had the opportunity to travel to Pyongyang to meet with North Korean officials as part of a Canadian delegation in June.

Canada has had diplomatic relations with North Korea since 2001, which started out being handled by the ambassador in Beijing, and then later the head of mission in Seoul. It was around 2002 that a Canadian Forces representative travelled to the North as part of an attaché tour. Not long after that, however, North Korea admitted to having resumed developing a nuclear weapon's program. The international community came down hard on the country, and Canada followed suit.

In the aftermath, Col. LaPlante says, it would have been hard to fathom Canada actually sending a military representative to the North, but "it was only within the last couple of months where Canada shifted or softened,

shall we say, in the wake of some successes in the Six Party talks and other engagements."

As such, the Canadian ambassador asked if Col. LaPlante could come along on a four-day excursion to the North in June. After receiving permission at the last minute, the delegation was also allowed to meet with a major-general from the North Korean army.

"[In the meeting] they were very critical of the fact that we continue to be part of the [UN Armistice Commission] and so on, but then when I had a chance to speak, I made the point that I was like him—not a diplomat or politician, but a soldier. And my reason for coming was to show again the face of a Canadian military officer with the view to, in time...find other common ground and we would perhaps be able to work together in some beneficial way.

"The meeting sort of opened up a little bit and we had a collegial chat amongst the group that was there. There was no policy issues, it was very light; but importantly, they suggested that I come back and visit them again some time. So that was about the best outcome in that regard."

Although the meeting did not result in any substantial gains in relations with the North, Col. LaPlante says it was a good starting point.

"I wouldn't want to make more of it than it is. It's unique...it speaks to Canada's reputation in that they would be willing to talk to an officer who at the same time is part of the organization on the other side of the line. So that was encouraging."

While Col. LaPlante is looking at his visit as a positive sign that international diplomacy has gained some traction once again, he isn't alone. This was highlighted last week when U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun—the first such direct high-level talks in four years.

Canada does not have a formal role in the Six Nation Talks, which are conducted by China, Russia, Japan, the U.S. and North and South Korea, but according to Foreign Affairs, the government "actively supports" these negotiations.

Col. LaPlante says that such discussions are more in the realm of diplomats and beyond his mandate. However, on the ground in Korea, he argues, the work of Canadians such as Lt.-Col. Chrétien at the border zone has given Canada a great deal of clout with the Americans.

"This is a very politically important, militarily sensitive piece of ground, and a Canadian officer runs it. Most people don't know that, but that's the fact," he says. "...It provides a level of profile that's unique. Typically it gives us, for that small investment, the return on that investment with respect to the airtime we get with the Americans—as the leadership here—is quite worth it."

Back in Panmenjom, a group of Canadian Korean War veterans have gathered to visit the Joint Security Area. After a brief speech from Lt.-Col. Chrétien, the vets honour him with a rousing round of applause. In touring the country, many of these veterans have been thrilled with the advancements South Korea has made since the war, but also the fact that Canadians are still represented in this conflict.

But for Lt.-Col. Chrétien, despite devoting two years for language training in Korean and graduating from the Republic of Korea Army Staff College, he will soon leave Asia and be posted to Yellowknife for a year.

"Before I was supposed to be here for two years, but to invest all that time...I was really, really happy to be able to stay another year here to at least be able to give back the investment that they gave me on the language side of the work," he says. "Right now the three years have been a great adventure so I'm ready to do something else."

Darcy Knoll is the senior writer for *Esprit de Corps* military magazine. He recently travelled to South Korea with a contingent of Korean War veterans to honour the 55th anniversary of the armistice.

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