

PROFESSIONALISM UNDER SIEGE, 1968–2001

‘Ours is not a divine mission to mediate,’ the long-time diplomat and historian of Canadian foreign policy, John Holmes, wrote in 1984. ‘Our hand is strengthened by acknowledged success,’ he continued, ‘but it is weakened if planting the maple leaf becomes the priority.’¹



All too often, Canadian participation in peacekeeping under the United Nations or other bodies has been shaped by this idea of ‘planting the flag.’ Canada was in every single peacekeeping operation until 1989 – and any government that refused a chance to join in seemed certain to suffer attack from the public and the press. The simple fact that these UN operations often made little sense, that Canadian troops were in short supply, or that the available soldiers were manifestly unsuited for the particular role never seemed to matter. Had not Mike Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957? Surely some other foreign minister or prime minister could repeat his triumph.²

Throughout the Cold War, Canadians seldom asked ‘Why Canada?’ Why were the Canadian Forces seen as natural peacekeepers? By the 1990s, as manpower became scarce, as army units were overcommitted around the world, as troubles within the army mounted, a somewhat more realistic approach to long-term service abroad at last began to be followed.

These questions and many others came to the fore as the army struggled to