

Ann H. Medina

Peacekeeping: Getting Down to Basics

I congratulate the people who organized this series and chose the topic. Originally, when I received notification a little over a year ago, the topic proposed was somewhat different. I was also told that the organizers were flexible enough that they wanted to go with a topic that is so relevant in this day and age. It is relevant, obviously, to the world, and those of us who saw the editorial in the *Globe and Mail* this morning (14 Oct. 1993) were reminded that as of now there are—I'm quoting the *Globe and Mail* figures, not attesting to their accuracy—80,000 peacekeepers in some 17 hot spots around the world and the UN is spending some \$3.7 billion on peacekeeping. Very relevant to the world then. Obviously the whole notion of peacekeeping is especially relevant to those of us here in Canada who feel that there is a tradition we feel a pride about in terms of what the Canadians have done over the years.

But tonight what I would like to do, since this is election time and the words "reality check" have come up a number of times, is to talk in terms of a reality check on peacekeeping. You may have heard last week, and you will hear again from General MacKenzie—I don't want to say in the old days—what earlier peacekeeping was, in the sense of Cyprus or perhaps the Golan Heights. You maybe had some kind of a war and the peacekeepers, after the peace negotiations had been concluded, would come in and act as a sort of go-between the two sides. Things were not easy, but they were perhaps easier than they are now in at least being more clear cut. Today we have the Bosnians, the Somalias, the Haitis, and

you don't have to be a very learned general to know that there is a difference. Now, I have not been to Bosnia. I have not been to Haiti. I have been to Lebanon and I suspect that there is a bit of relevance in some of my experiences. Not just in Lebanon but in some of my other coverage in foreign areas.

I want to paint a picture for you. I'm like you, picking up the paper in the morning, and this was in late '82. I see a headline:

**US ASST. SECRETARY
OF STATE ON
PEACE MISSION**

**William Murphy
flies to
Lebanon**

What does this mean? Does it mean that he sits down with a whole bunch of leaders and starts talking to them all? Does he even know who they all are, what kind of backing they may have from whatever constituents they claim to represent? But what if he does do that, sits down—supposedly he's got some kind of intelligence being fed to him—and talks to all the various leaders. Is that enough? Is that what peacekeeping is? How long do you peacekeep in places like Lebanon?

What does this word really mean? And not now in "diplomatese." Not now in military jargon even. But what is it? Is it sort of mediating between people who are grabbing for money or power or democracy, or what is it about?

Now the first question that I think anyone wants to know the answer to when you come to a place to "peacekeep," perhaps you want to know the answer to the question, what is going on there? What is taking place? What is happening? So back to Lebanon and to this Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State, what was he facing?

I was a reporter then and I wanted to know what was going on. I went to two villages. One, a village called Al-ey, which was a Druze village. And one a village called Sukh-el-gar, which was a Christian village. The Israelis were going to be soon withdrawing. Everybody knew there was going to be a war. A war that was going to be quite vicious and perhaps

no prisoners taken. I met two men. I met a man named Oscar and that was all we knew of his name. Oscar was in charge of the Christian army. And a man named Akram, who was in charge of the Druze. It's the kind of situation where you had roads cut off to each village. Everybody—old, young, children, strong men, whomever—in order to get to their village, had to go about three miles up a very steep mountain just to get in and out because of all the roads having been cut. The stores were all sandbagged. If people sat having a cup of coffee in either village, there would be gunshots ringing out, there would be shellings. This was the atmosphere. These were two villages where kidnappings would take place, where one side would kidnap someone from another village. There was one incident where a mother's son's hand was left on her doorstep. There was a history of hate, and they were building up the arms. I remember sitting on a balcony, we had gone to this hotel—nobody was staying there, it was completely deserted. We were given a Kalishnikov because it was that kind of place any kind of night—we did decline it, by the way. But you are talking about two armed camps of hatred. In terms of victims, probably everyone is a victim. Or you could say only the smallest children are victims because the mothers and the grandmothers and the wives, they are also part of this hatred. It is not that there is someone who can stand back in either of these two villages and say, "I'm not a part of this." Whether they wanted to or not they were all involved.

So the question is, how does a man named Murphy, how does anyone, come and try and keep peace? I've been to these villages, we did a report. Now I understood what it meant, what kind of challenge anybody coming to that area would face. I understood a little bit about what was going on. And I wondered whether Murphy did too.

Months later I went back, after there had been a war, when the Israelis had withdrawn. There were massacres, there was ethnic cleansing, though those words had not been used at that point. At one point, I drove on the Shouf Mountains and you would see village after village where half of it would be burned. Ah, yes, this is the Druze village where the Christian part was burned. Ah, this is the Christian village where the Druze part had burned down.

Now, I don't know what Murphy did. I don't know how anyone could keep peace. But what he did do later, what the US did do later, as many of you may recall, was shoot off the big guns of the USS New Jersey—

when it looked like Sukh-el-gar was going to fall, and Al-ey, the Druze side, was going to win. And what happened after the US shot off the big guns from the New Jersey, shortly after that, a very big bomb went off and some 400 and more Marines were killed. Perhaps Murphy didn't know what Oscar and Akram could do. Perhaps he didn't know the power of the militants who were not at that particular table when he was talking to people. But this kind of knowing what's going on is, it seems to me, the very foundation, the place where you have to begin before you can understand whom you are keeping peace between.

A different kind of example: I was sent to Uganda and I had never been there and this was when a man named Museveni was about to take over. At that time though we had gone to the British Embassy and talked also. We had a meeting with the Canadian Ambassador and they were telling us, "Well, this man named Museveni, he hasn't got a chance. The government we are told, and we have fairly good reasons to believe those reports, is holding firm. It's holding it's ground and defeating Museveni. Museveni only has this rag tag group of soldiers."

A sound man was with us, who had also never been to this part of the country—we were leaving Kampala to go look for ourselves at what was happening, to see who was winning, perhaps, and what the army of Museveni was really like. And after the first day, the sound man came back and said: "I want to go home. I'm scared. But it's more than being scared. It's . . . I can't understand people in this part of the country. I can't understand what they're doing. I can't connect with them. I can't deal with it, I have to leave." And he left.

I don't know what the three of us who remained thought or what we felt. But when we went past a check point and there would be some fairly nasty looking people, we would smile and say "Hello" and "How are you?" we would get to talking and pretty soon they would offer us a cup of tea or maybe some kind of a soft drink or juice or some little thing and we would get to talk some more and pretty soon, I don't know, we started beginning to learn things. And what we learned was, as you could imagine, that the diplomats and the people that we'd talked to and the British Embassy and the Canadian Embassy and even some military people, they were wrong. Museveni, not only was he doing well that very minute, he was in control of a city that the government had denied that he had taken over.

It's so important to understand, before we get to the idea of peacekeeping, to understand what is going on. Part of this we do because we're journalists; it's our job. But part of it is that our lives depend upon it. Now you will be hearing next week from General MacKenzie. And you will be hearing about what it was like to be in Bosnia and the kinds of things that he was doing and the bravery that so many of the peacekeepers there showed. But keep in mind, in the background, what do any of us know about was is happening on the ground. As journalists, we are out there alone. We do not have a backup medical system. We do not have communications for the most part. We do not have anything but ourselves and our driver to keep us alive. So what happens? You talk to everybody. The moment you get out of a chair, out of a car and you see anyone around, you go up to them, say who you are, very simple. "We're from Canada. We're going to be taking some pictures." Pretty soon, a little exchange has happened. More times than one if trouble does erupt, if shellings do begin, if a sniper is around, these people, from whatever side they're on, they've made a connection and they'll take care of you. They'll try and keep you safe. We have to know when we go down a road whether it's mined or not. So any car we're driving, we have to stop. And what begins to happen is you begin to talk to an awful lot of people who are very much involved, in a very real way, and you begin to get a sense of what's happening.

I have told this story before in various versions and forms. I am a bit of a nut, and not just a bit of a nut because I went to all these places. But a bit of a nut because I love birds. And wherever I would go, I would purchase a bird. And I would have that bird in the hotel room or the little room wherever I might be, to give me a feeling about home. I was a little bit lonely, so this silly bird would keep me company. And I can't tell how many times, silly things like birds, silly things like eating a meal together, silly things like smoking, sharing cigarettes when there's only one cigarette between about five of you. All of those things created the kinds of bonds where people would start giving information.

I remember one time, I was in China. How do you find out what's going on? What's happening in China? This was just before Tiananmen Square, about a year before. There had been some student demonstrations, and we had arrived in the interior, very cold. I don't know if any of you have travelled to China but what happens is you are met by a wall of

people, all in a row and this is the official representative of the province. This is the official representative of the company. This is the official representative of the local Communist Party, etc. etc. etc. And I, of course, am the official representative from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. When we got off the plane with our little woman, who is travelling with us from Beijing who was the government escort wherever we went, and it was chilly and she said to this group, "Please, we must get Miss Medina into some place warm fairly fast." Well, you can imagine, you know they're saying, "Who's this wimp Medina that has to get warm?" They take us into this little warm room and all of a sudden she says, "Miss Medina has a bird." And I opened my purse and I kept this little bird in a little metal cage. Don't worry, it would fly around at night and, you know, this was just for travel, it was quite happy. But the moment I took it out, all these people, "Oh, you must feed it this kind of worm." "Oh no, no, no, you must feed it this kind of seed." "No, no, no, no." Nobody was an official representative of anything after that. All of a sudden people started talking. We were human beings. We were relating to one another and they were telling me, yes, about some of their wishes for political reform. And they were talking about, yes, some of the dangers. These are official representatives.

So often, to understand what is happening one has to either be on the ground or break through this facade. All of us,—those of us sitting here in the audience, standing up on the stage, in Uganda, in China,—all of us have some kind of facade that we have to get behind, get beyond.

Now, I used to call it dumb questions, that so often when we go, really wanting to find out what's happening, you ask a dumb question and you begin perhaps to learn. And I almost forgot this tonight, but this is my favorite quote of all. You know you sit on an airplane, and they have the Air Canada or the Canadian, depending on which side you're on, travel things. Well I was on a plane and this is just from a travel magazine and it was an article on "When in Rome. . . ." And to me, it summed up so much. The approach to finding out what is going on: "The true role of the traveller is always that of a fool." If you know all about the place you are visiting, you are not a true traveller. Now think of that in terms of diplomats, reporters, you, any of us trying to find out, trying to discover. And if we're not open to seeing whatever it is that people are

going to tell us, we're not going to not only not be a true traveller, we probably won't be able to discover what happens.

To go back to China and another example, where I did not ask the dumb questions, where I did not play the true fool and I almost missed what was going on in that country. I was interviewing a student—as I said, this was just after some of the student demonstrations but before the whole Tiananmen build-up, and we had been given this student to interview. She was a member of the Communist Party. Her parents were members of the Communist Party, which was very unusual. We had our government person sitting right there and I said to myself, "I know what she's going to answer. I know what she's going to say. This is all a set up, but I'll play along." And I asked her, "What did you feel about the student demonstrations?"

"Oh, I was opposed to them," she said.

And I said to myself, "Of course, I knew that." It fitted into all the little, you know, cubicles, a neat little picture that I painted to myself. I knew, but for some reason, and I don't know why, about a half an hour later I asked her again, I said, "Tell me again why you opposed what they were demonstrating for?" And she said, "I didn't oppose what they were demonstrating for. We need political reform. We need even more economic reform. What I was against was that they were demonstrating about it."

Oooo, I almost missed, I had hubris, if you will. I thought I knew. I thought I understood. I didn't play the fool and really be the fool. And too often, too often we do that. So we miss what is really happening because we're afraid to ask the dumb questions, that may in fact reveal something that we would never have imagined. Diplomats, military generals, they're afraid of asking, sometimes, the dumb questions. They're afraid, sometimes, of playing the fool or being the fool. And quite often I feel they're therefore not plugged in to what's going on.

To give you a completely different kind of example. From Canada, 1976. I'm American and I came up in '75. This is the Progressive Conservative convention. I don't know anything about Canadian politics. I've just figured out it's the NDP and not the NPD and still I'm not sure what it all stands for. Well, there was this one guy who was sort of a—not a real candidate—and they said, "Look Ann, you go cover this candidate during the convention."

"Well," I said, "who is going to win, you know, who do you think is going to win?" And we're talking about Canadian experts, right? We are talking about people who know, who are plugged in. "Well, this guy, Hellyer?" "No, he's changed parties." "Well Flora?" "Well she's . . . Flora MacDonald's a woman." "Well this guy Mulroney?" "Well, he's got this slick US P.R. stuff behind him." And blah, blah, blah, blah!

I said, "What about this guy, Joe Clark. It sounds like he could win." "Medina, look, you just go cover your little candidate." You know, leave it all to us who know, without saying as much. It wasn't that I was smart. It wasn't that I was brilliant. It was that I was from the outside. I was the fool. I wasn't playing it. I didn't have everything put away in its neat little boxes and logic so that I knew the answers. I was going to a place where I didn't know what I would find and I didn't have baggage, as they call it.

If we can go to places, whether its the Bosnias or the Lebanons or the Ugandas, if we could go to these places and truly be from the outside, looking at things with a fresh eye, pushing away the preconceptions that we may have, and learning on the ground, in terms of talking to people and listening and trying to understand, maybe, just maybe we could begin to know what's going on. I start saying to myself, is it any wonder that we didn't understand when the Berlin Wall fell? Is it any wonder that we didn't understand that the whole Soviet Union was going to break apart, A, and then B, the whole coup attempt, not this one but the other one in addition to this one. And you know the list as well as I. Tiananmen Square. How many things have happened in the world where we just had no idea? They didn't fit with our expectations.

So, what happens when we get back to the notion of peacekeepers? How do you proceed as peacekeepers? You may be in a country, like Germany, where you don't know the walls are about to come down. Or you may be in the Soviet Union and you don't know what's about to take place. Do all of a sudden people understand the experts? Do they understand the Bosnias and the Somalias and the Haitis in ways that they never did understand those other countries?

How do you peacekeep? Well, let me give you a couple of little points. I'm not sure you can in a lot of situations, where there is money involved or power involved. Unless you somehow take away that, someone is going to come out ahead with money or power.

I remember a silly little situation, again, in Lebanon, 1985, and the TWA hostages had just been released. Ah, there's going to be some kind of peace, some kind of stability because the factions supposedly weren't fighting one another. And the day after the hostages were released, all hell broke loose. And everyone said, "Whoa, what was that?" Well, supposedly, and this is just a rumor but it had a lot of foundation, the Druze thought that the Shiites had been paid a lot of money by the US and other governments to apply pressure to those who were the hostage takers to release the hostages.

So what this was was the Druze saying, "Hey fellahs, we were part of those little negotiations too. We want our share of the money. We want our share of the power." And nothing other than someone shelling out more money could have stopped that particular three or four days of hell. That particular three or four days, when how many people died? How many other people's businesses were ruined? How many other families were completely and forever destroyed? But flip that over, and there's money involved and power, that can be a kind of peacekeeping force.

There was a period of time in Lebanon, from let's say '77 until about late May of '82, when there was a relative, and I think we have to understand that word more and more, relative peace in Lebanon. And everyone scratches their head and says, "Why? Why was there some peace there, in this chaos?" It was a chaos of a country but there was a funny kind of order to it also. The order was, somebody had a bridge, somebody had a port, somebody had a key road to Damascus, somebody else had the area around the airport. And for any one of those factions to do their business, to make money to buy arms, whatever they needed, they bargained. "Look, you can use my road if I can use your bridge." "You can use my airport if I can use your road to Damascus." There was a very definite ordering because of economic necessity. How do you know that? You talk to people and they would say to you, "As long as that road is open, we will not fight with them. As long as we have access to that port. . . ." Sometimes we think of the big things of peacekeeping, of US clout, or US/Soviet, when there was a Soviet Union, clout. Sometimes things can be very fragile and very dependent upon very basic things.

Another peacekeeper is exhaustion. Exhaustion, when finally people have had enough. When they don't want to go out the door every day not

knowing what's going to happen. And I tell the story of this woman in Lebanon—I'll never forget her. We had lunch one day at somebody's house. She wore slacks and she carried a fairly big purse, a satchel. And I said, "Do you mind my asking, do you always carry that?" In that satchel, she said she had some jewellery, some US cash,—real money, you know,—passport, a few clothes, some photos. She said that in the last couple of years, she had left her home five times, going to the dentist, meeting a friend, taking a child to school. Five times she had left her home and five times she'd had no home to come back to. So every day, she says she's ready for what's going to, maybe, come in one hour, the next day, one week, she doesn't know. There comes a point when people are tired, and when enough people are tired somehow, not peace, but a relative pause comes. And sometimes people are surprised when that pause starts being extended out and there is a bit more peace.

The biggest peacekeeper though probably can be us. Us Canadians. As long as, and if, we can remain the outside eye that is not one of the major players in the great world politic. That is, not one of those like the US or whoever it is might come into play. Whether it's going to be China, whether it's going to be Russia, whether it's going to be Japan. If we can stay on the outside to be that fresh look, to be that fresh eye. Like me, who didn't know that much, but being able to be the fresh eye on Joe Clark or be that fresh eye in being able to go in and not have the kind of pride baggage that so many of the US experts have. Where we can go into a particular place and really begin to understand what's happening. If we look at events in terms of what is happening and not in terms of what books have told is happening, or the *New York Times* has told is happening, or our experts have told is happening or what we may believe is happening. Because whatever we believe is happening, keep in mind, could change the next day, the next week, the next month.

If we as Canadians, wherever the General MacKenzies of Canada go to keep peace, if they're not afraid to ask the dumb questions, if they're not afraid to play and to be the fool, to discover things that, no, they didn't know beforehand, if we're ready for everything that we know to change, as happened with the Berlin Wall, as has happened in Europe now, as happens in Russia, as happens wherever, if we're ready to accept that things could change so quickly and we can be clear enough in our minds to see that change, rather than to hold on to a past way that no

longer exists, if we can see that the world, hey, it ain't just good and evil—it isn't all black and white, the world is made up of greys, the world is made up of in-betweens, of pauses for peace rather than peace versus war,—if we can do all that, you know, maybe, just maybe, we may be able to play a fairly important role in terms of understanding what's happening. And so therefore, in helping countries bring about just a little bit of peace.

And, my friends, you all understand that that was just a wonderful introduction to next week's speaker, who will be General MacKenzie, who will be talking about peacekeeping in the grey zone. I think you will find that this is a man—I've met him—a man who knows how important it is to understand what's going on, on the ground, what is happening, how fast things can change and that things are not black and white. I wish I were going to be here to hear him. I envy you, and I thank you very much.