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Canada's return to UN Peace Operations *by Sylvain Pâquet and Walter Dorn*

In his election eve victory speech, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared something that stoked the imagination of idealists everywhere: "Canada is back." The old Canada, that impartial friend of the peace-loving population, was declared ready to help those in need around the world.

But where is Canada? It has not yet deployed new forces in UN-mandated peace operations ... Even now, more than one year after the election, Canada's involvement in UN operations remains at an all-time low. Canada currently provides only 28 military personnel among the 92,000 in UN service. And the military now has fewer teaching activities on peacekeeping than it did a decade ago, even though Canada was once the world leader in that sphere.

In August, the Canadian government pledged to provide on a continuing basis up to 600 troops and up to 150 police for UN peace operations. This illustrates a welcome willingness to assume more leadership on the international scene for security and the prevention of mass atrocities -- so far only in rhetoric. We are still waiting for initiatives to take shape.

In the meantime, the UN needs help. Peace operations are currently under-resourced and under-equipped. There is a huge logistical problem when it comes to organizing a peace operation: the Secretary-General needs to beg left and right to get troop commitments from member states. And by the time he gets what he needs -- and that is not always the case -- then it has already taken too much time.

As a result, the UN cannot fulfil its responsibility to protect or to keep the peace. In the absence of at-the-ready forces and resources, the UN cannot act quickly. And it cannot rebuild war-torn countries without the proper leadership from member states, at the Security Council and also the UN's Peacebuilding Commission. Some critics say that this problem has nothing to do with Canada. But it does. It is Canada's problem, as well as every other member of the world organization. Member states decide how much they wish to provide, when, and under which conditions. Canada certainly needs to do more to do its share.

Despite the limitations and setbacks, history shows that peace operations do work. They helped bring peace and stability to Central America, to over a dozen countries in Africa, to the former Yugoslavia, to newborn countries in Asia like Timor Leste. They have helped end several wars in the Middle East. Peace operations are no panacea, and some missions have failed, but even those failures have shown that peacekeepers provide valuable help. For instance, General Dallaire saved twenty to thirty thousand

lives during the Rwandan genocide with just 300 peacekeepers that remained in his mission.

It is in our interest to find ways to ease human suffering anywhere and everywhere. In our interdependent world, local conflicts are open wounds that hemorrhage problems to the entire world. They yield massive refugee flows, facilitate the spread of diseases, and create conditions for the rise of piracy and terrorism. The world's open wounds allow groups like Boko Haram and Daesh to rise from the ashes of past conflicts, and to light new fires of violence. And that can cost trillions of dollars and many innumerable lives if peaceful solutions are not found.

What can Canada do for peacekeeping? Prime Minister Trudeau has mandated the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence to lead “an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel.” And besides training, there are other areas where Canada can lead. This includes innovation in the use of new technology, leadership in diplomacy and command, and on-ground intervention. Unfortunately, over the past decade, the amount of military training for UN peace operations has declined to less than a quarter of what it was. Canada needs a centre where military, police, and civilians can be trained together. This former capacity died with the demise of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in 2013. Yet it is essential for these separate communities know about each other and learn to work together—not just training for Canadians but for people from other parts of the world training alongside Canadians. Our proposed Canadian International Peace Operations Centre would help civilians to train and prepare for deployments. This centre will require a “Whole of Government” effort to create a “Whole of World” centre, a world-class institution.

But most importantly, Canada needs to fulfil its commitment to deploy hundreds of uniformed and civilian personnel to UN peace operations.

If “Canada is back,” as Trudeau claims, then we need to show it on the ground. This means more leadership at all levels. Remember Lester B. Pearson! Remember the time when Canada was the number one contributor to peacekeeping (during the Cold War and the early 1990s)! We need to restore a meaningful contribution to UN peace operations, and in this way we will contribute to peace in our world.

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