In recent years, the United Nations has deployed more peacekeepers to world hot spots than at any time in the organization’s history. With more than 112,000 military, police and civilian personnel now serving in 16 UN peacekeeping missions, the UN currently deploys and supports more troops in field operations than any actor in the world, including the U.S. government and more than the UK, France, China and Russia put together.

While demand for UN peacekeepers has never been higher, Canadian contributions of personnel have been at an all-time low level, with only 30 military personnel (as of June 30, 2017), moving Canada from its former number 1 spot to 71st in rank (Chart 1).

UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND FOR PEACEKEEPERS

Since 1999, the number and size of UN missions has grown dramatically (Chart 2). UN missions are now more robust, more multi-faceted and more complex. The rise in demand for peacekeeping has been most notable in Africa, where more than 90,000 uniformed peacekeepers are now deployed in places like South Sudan, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Central African Republic and Mali.

The need for peacekeeping, especially UN operations, is expected to rise, not fall, in the coming years. Funding reductions by the United States under President Trump are a source of concern for the future.
DECLINE IN CANADIAN PERSONNEL CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions from countries with advanced military and logistics capabilities like Canada are much needed to increase operational effectiveness. However, in recent years Canada has maintained only a small and diminishing presence in a handful of UN peace operations around the world (Chart 3).

While Canada’s treaty-mandated cash contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget have grown in parallel with the growth in peacekeeping (Chart 4), Canada’s contribution of military and police personnel has collapsed (Chart 5).

Canada has fallen from being the single largest contributor to UN peacekeepers, a position it often held before 1992, to 71st position today (Chart 1).

Once the supplier of nearly 3,300 peacekeeping soldiers, Canada now contributes just 30 troops and military experts. Since 2006, Canada’s police contribution has outnumbered its military contribution, and it now stands at 58 men and women.

COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE RE-ENGAGING IN UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING

The world’s leading uniformed personnel contributors (as of June 2017) are Ethiopia (8,221), India (7,676), Pakistan (7,123) and Bangladesh (7,013). Some western governments have notably re-engaged in UN Peacekeeping. Countries like Italy (1,083), France (804), Germany (804), and the United Kingdom (700) are now contributing greater numbers of personnel and advanced military capabilities.

As a middle power with no significant external threat to its borders, a nation dependent on international trade and therefore with an interest in a stable international order, Canada should be also re-engaging. Until 1995, Canada had participated in every UN peacekeeping mission. Despite the current Liberal government’s stated goal of re-engaging in UN peacekeeping, Canada’s contribution to UN peace operations remains minimal and future commitments remain uncertain. Even as it plans a Defence Ministerial on peacekeeping commitments, Canada has yet to realize its own pledge of up to 600 troops and 150 police. It’s time to show that its pledges are meaningful!