

From

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Canada: rapid deployment or routine delays?

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We made at least a beginning then. If on that foundation we do not build something more permanent and stronger, we will once again have ignored realities, rejected opportunities and betrayed our trust. Will we never learn?

Lester Bowles Pearson, "The Four Faces of Peace",
Nobel Lecture, Oslo, December 11, 1957

As we mark the 60th anniversary of Lester Pearson's Nobel Prize lecture, Canadians have heard that we're "back" within the UN club, including a commitment of 600 Canadian Forces troops, 150 police personnel, along with \$450 million in support of United Nations peace operations. Within the UN, hopes were high. Canada, once a leader in UN peacekeeping, is urgently needed, whether to avert a wider war in South Sudan, to fill gaps in the Central African Republic, to support in stabilizing Mali or for help in other UN operations.

It wasn't so much that the promise of 600 CF troops was all that impressive. By UN standards, that's modest. The enthusiasm for Canada was based, firstly on the likelihood that we might also bring much-needed assets (what the UN calls critical enablers) in strategic and tactical airlift, military engineering, a mobile field hospital, even helicopter fleets. And secondly, Canada was once highly regarded for innovative reforms in UN peacekeeping, for its ideas and expertise, particularly in the related areas of operational planning, training, peacebuilding and rapid deployment.

Rapid deployment matters, especially if the UN is to improve on conflict prevention and protection of civilians. In the absence of a prompt response, conflicts tend to escalate and spread, then result in the current phenomena of later, larger, longer operations at far higher costs, setting back the prospects for disarmament and development.

If the Government of Canada plans to be "back" in UN peace operations, with a credible focus on rapid deployment and conflict prevention, two key questions are 'how now' and, 'what would be needed'?

The following steps merit consideration:

1. UN peacekeeping has to be elevated to a national defence priority, as a number of Canadian civil society organizations have recommended.

2. An independent team is needed to supervise and direct a whole of government approach to UN peace operations.
3. DND's Directorate of Peacekeeping Policy should be elevated to a CF Command, headed by a supportive Major-General.
4. An independent research capacity is needed, to develop serious analysis, ideas and, policy-relevant plans and proposals. The former Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, initiated by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, remains a model worth emulating.
5. A 'Peace Operations Forum' could also be restored as it proved to be a cost-effective means of coordinating and informing both civil society and government officials of recent developments in this field.
6. Canada could begin to address the UN's 2005 call for the transformation of advanced military's Cold War capacity to UN peace operations with the following:
 - Assign two CF combat engineer regiments, an engineer support regiment and a construction regiment to stand at high readiness for UN peace operations;
 - Designate three of the five CF CC-177 Globemaster III planes to support UN strategic lift and eight of the sixteen CF CC 130J planes to support tactical lift;
 - Prepare a mobile field hospital to specialize in providing rapid humanitarian relief in operations abroad, and;
 - On a rotational basis, one of the CF's three brigade groups could be designated and prepared as a high-readiness stand-by formation for UN peace operations.
7. Canada must develop a dedicated peace operations training centre.

Finally, it is widely apparent that the official preference for pragmatic, incremental reforms does not deliver a reliable capacity for UN rapid deployment. Governments remain reluctant to deploy personnel and resources to operations that entail risks. Thus, prevention and protection are laudable "Responsibility to Protect" priorities, but unmanageable objectives in the absence of appropriate UN capacity.

8. The current Trudeau government could lead in support of the Canadian proposal for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS). This idea stemmed from the former Liberal Government study for the UN General Assembly, Towards A Rapid Reaction Capability For The United Nations. With this one development – effectively a

standing 'UN 911 first responder' for complex emergencies – the UN would finally have a rapid, reliable capacity to help fulfill four of its toughest assigned tasks – i.e. to help prevent armed conflict and mass atrocity crimes, to protect civilians at extreme risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations, and to address human needs where others either can't or won't.

9. A fundamental review of security approaches and priorities is overdue. The umbrella concept of “sustainable common security” merits consideration. It encourages the deeper international cooperation required to address current and future global challenges.

“Will we never learn?”