

THE UNITED NATIONS AND CANADA

WHAT CANADA COULD AND SHOULD DO AT THE UNITED NATIONS 2018: A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

Peacekeeping Promises: Kept or Broken?

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Upon election in 2015, Justin Trudeau promised that Canada would re-engage in UN peacekeeping, after it has reached historically lowest levels of participation under the government of Stephen Harper. The new Prime Minister gave explicit instructions to Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan in the minister's [Mandate letter](#) to provide the UN with *specialized* personnel and capabilities, to help the United Nations respond more *quickly*, and to *lead* an international effort in training.

The government then made specific [pledges](#) at the Peacekeeping Ministerial in London, UK, in September 2016 for “up to” 750 uniformed personnel (600 military and 150 police). Then, while hosting the [Peacekeeping Ministerial](#) in Vancouver in November 2017, the Prime Minister elaborated on the London pledge of 600 military, which was to take the form of Tactical Airlift Support, an Aviation Task Force, and a Quick Reaction Force. In Vancouver, Canada's new pledge was not for additional personnel but the promotion of women's participation in peacekeeping (the “Elsie initiative”) and a pledge to help with UN training.

Have these sizeable and impressive promises been fulfilled? As the Trudeau government enters the last quarter of its current term of office, has Canada really “re-engaged” in UN peacekeeping?

To answer, we have to look at each type of pledge: personnel, capabilities, women, and training. For the personnel pledge, the number deployed provides one countable way to check on the promises. Until the mission in Mali finally got off the ground in July 2018, the deployment numbers did not increase at all, but actually fall to the lowest number of uniformed personnel since 1956. In May 2018 the [figure](#) was a mere 19 military deployed! This is less than half of what the Harper government had provided. With the Mali task force being approximately 250, the total military contribution will be under 300. Thus, Canada is at less than half of the number of military personnel it suggested at the London ministerial.

For police, the figures are even worse. The number deployed has dropped significantly under the Trudeau government. The Conservative government, before it left office, had 89 police [deployed](#). The Liberals have brought that number down to 22 (31 July 2018), mostly due to the end of the Haiti peacekeeping mission. So the police component is far from being at the pledged 150; it is only 15% of that. And, even more startling, this

is *less than a quarter* of the police officers that the Conservative government had deployed. The Trudeau government pledged in Vancouver that “new police missions [were] being examined” but no announcement has been made.

Canada sought to be a champion of the participation of women in UN peacekeeping. But Canada has not reached the UN’s target of 15%. As of 31 July 2018, military women were only 8% (12 of 156 military personnel). For police, the picture was better: 32% (7 of only 22 police). But Canada’s support, done through the “Elsie Initiative”, to help other nation’s deployment of women into UN operations has been minimal. Canada has yet to provide any of the promised funds (\$15 million) or turn its rhetoric into action.

In his mandate letter to the defence minister, the Prime Minister requested that Canada provide “mission commanders” for UN operations. The Trudeau government has not yet done so. Canada lost the opportunity to provide the Force Commander for the Mali (MINUSMA) mission in January 2017 when it dithered and delayed in offering a force package for the mission. Canada had provided seven mission commanders in the 1990s, but none since.

Canada made its first “smart pledge” in Vancouver: Tactical Airlift Support. A C-130 was to be based in Entebbe, Uganda, to serve multiple missions. But this seemingly innovative plan is in limbo after discussions with the UN in New York showed that this pledge might not be so “smart” after all, with UN needs being elsewhere.

The other pledges in Vancouver were for an Aviation Task Force, the one pledge that Canada has fulfilled. The Task Force in Mali includes an important aeromedical unit, three heavy transport Chinook Helicopters with five Griffon helicopter for escort duty, proving very useful. However, the Quick Reaction Force, also pledged, is nowhere to be seen. If and when it does eventually materialize, it will have been an exceedingly slow deployment of a Quick Reaction Force to a mission.

The Vancouver pledge included “Innovative Training” but Canada has still not significantly improved its own training for peace operations. It carries out less than one quarter of the [training activities](#) that it did before the Harper government came to power in 2006. Furthermore, the envisioned “Canadian Training and Advisory Teams” to train foreign military forces have yet to materialize.

So the government’s [declaration](#) that its renewal of peacekeeping commitments is “Underway – on track,” is inaccurate at best, or outright false at worst. The Canadian government has yet to match its words with deeds. In 2018, the defence minister [exhorted](#) the UN Security Council with good advice: “The time for change is now and we must be bold.” If only the Canadian government could practice what it preaches. All the promises on peacekeeping, except one, remain broken promises. And time is running out to make good on them.