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Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, speaks at a media event at UN Headquarters in New York, 16 March 2016.

The Renaissance of Peacekeeping and Peace Operations

by Martin Shadwick

In the Federal election campaign of 2015, the Liberal Party of Canada argued that Canada's "influence and presence on the world stage" had "steadily diminished" during the almost decade-long tenure of Prime Minister Stephen Harper: "Instead of working with other countries constructively at the United Nations, the Harper Conservatives…turned their backs on the UN and other multilateral institutions, while also weakening Canada's military, our diplomatic service, and our development programs." Whether "confronting climate change, terrorism and radicalization, or international conflicts, the need for effective Canadian diplomacy has never been greater than it is today. Our plan will restore Canada as a leader in the world. Not only to provide greater security and economic growth for Canadians, but because Canada can make a real and valuable contribution to a more peaceful and prosperous world."

In partial fulfillment of that pledge, the Liberal platform stated that, "…we will recommit to supporting international peace operations with the United Nations, and will make our *specialized* [emphasis added] capabilities—from mobile medical teams to engineering support to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel—available on a case-by-case basis," "…provide well-trained personnel that can be quickly deployed, including mission commanders, staff officers, and headquarters units," and "lead an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations." Intriguingly, in his March 2015 'Open Letter on Foreign Policy to the 2015 Federal Election Winner," Professor Roland Paris, now the Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister on Global Affairs and Defence, had offered a somewhat more expansive inventory of "specialized capabilities" by including "engineering companies, mobile medical facilities, in-theatre airlift"—thereby conjuring up images of UN-liveried *Otters*, *Caribous, Twin Otters* and *Buffaloes*—and "surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities."

The focus on providing specialized capabilities in support of UN peace operations also surfaced in Prime Minister Trudeau's subsequent Mandate Letter to defence minister Harjit Sajjan. The Mandate Letter directed the minister to "…work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peace operations." This included: (a) "making

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Unloading a Canadian *Otter* aircraft, which has just brought in a supply of fresh vegetables for the Yugoslav contingent manning a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) outpost at Ras el Nagb, 1 May 1959.

Canada's specialized capabilities—from mobile medical teams, to engineering support, to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel—available on a case-by-case basis;" (b) "working with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to help the United Nations respond more quickly to emerging and escalating conflicts and providing well-trained personnel to international initiatives that can be quickly deployed, such as mission commanders, staff officers, and headquarters units;" and (c) "leading an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations, while insisting that any peacekeepers involved in misconduct be held accountable by their own country and the United Nations." On the other hand, specific contributions to UN peace operations were not enumerated in the December 2015 Speech from the Throne—a relatively compact document that contented itself with a reaffirmation that the Trudeau government would "…renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations"—or in the April 2016 Public Consultation Document that formed part of Ottawa's relatively fast-paced Defence Policy Review. The latter once again reaffirmed the government's commitment to "renewing Canada's contribution to peace operations"—and invited public input on how the Canadian Armed Forces should "…help increase Canada's contribution to peace operations"—but studiously avoided any reference to specialized, or other, contributions.

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The United Nations flag.

The Trudeau government's pledge to reinvigorate Canada's extremely modest commitment to United Nations peace operations—the scaling back of which pre-dated the Harper government, but most certainly reached its nadir under the Conservatives—is unlikely to generate any substantial push-back. As David McDonough of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute noted in *Embassy*, "…by itself, it is hard to argue that renewing Canada's role in UN peace operations is a bad thing." Peacekeeping and peace operations remain deeply embedded in the Canadian national psyche and continue to enjoy extremely high levels of public support across virtually all regions, ages, and

DND photo IS01-2016-0001-004 by Sergeant Yannick Bédard

Minister of National Defence Harjit S. Sajjan meets Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, at NATO Headquarters in Brussels during the Defence Ministerial Meeting, 10 February 2016.

ethno-cultural affiliations. Indeed, they have been mythologized and romanticized to such an extent that there is some risk of fuelling unrealistic expectations. Although the utility of United Nations (and other) peacekeeping and peace operations remains a matter for global debate, it is apparent that UN operations blessed with international political and diplomatic will, realistic mandates, and appropriate human and materiel resources—arguably an infrequent combination—can make demonstrably useful contributions to international peace and security.

It is nevertheless apparent that the Trudeau government's palpable enthusiasm for a renewed Canadian commitment to peace operations will pose a number of challenges and dilemmas. Some relate to broader Canadian defence policy and to the relationship and balance between United Nations peace operations and other defence priorities and commitments. Others relate to Canada's military capabilities, force structure and equipment holdings. Still others will focus on the amount and types of training required to operationalize an expanded Canadian peace operations role.

On the policy front, David McDonough urges caution as the Trudeau government moves forward with the renewal of Canada's commitment to peace operations. His reservations "…do not mean that Canada should eschew UN peace missions. But the Canadian government needs to take into account competing priorities and the possible dangers that could arise from such missions. Above all, strategic-level thinking on the benefits, value, and possible costs and trade-offs of undertaking these missions need to be carefully and diligently assessed." In other words, "…if Canada chooses to undertake a significant UN mission, it needs to first ensure that this does not come at the expense of its non-discretionary missions. Then it needs to assess its capacity to undertake such a mission in addition to its current operational tempo and, if that proves impossible, weigh the relative merits of a UN mission compared to other missions abroad, such as its role in NATO reassurance measures or as part of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL." What "needs to be avoided at all costs," posits McDonough, "is a fixation on UN peace operations that overshadows and supplants other priorities. This could endanger the non-discretionary missions crucial for Canadian security and defence, as well as damage our relations with allies and long-standing alliances like NORAD and NATO."

The pursuit of peace operations, he suggests, "could also have serious consequences to the future force structure of the Canadian Armed Forces. In light of budgetary shortfalls and recapitalization challenges, the government may be tempted to achieve cost savings by opting for an unbalanced force structure—one that is

Photo #142100 United Nations Photo

A Canadian armoured car, a *Ferret*, out on patrol from the Sinai desert outpost manned by No. 58 Canadian Reconnaissance Squadron, Royal Canadian Armoured Corps, 1 July 1957.

lightly armed, constabulary focused, and specializing in peace operations rather than combat-capable, multi-purpose, and joint." Such a force "would be ill-suited for the range of missions (from constabulary to combat, and including robust peace operations) facing today's CAF."

The Trudeau government's declared interest in "specialized capabilities" is most intriguing on other fronts, in part because it harkens back to Canada's default contributions to UN peacekeeping from the end of the 1940s to the end of the Cold War. With some exceptions—most notably the infantry battalions that served in Cyprus over multiple decades and the light armoured (later unarmoured) reconnaissance squadrons that served with UNEF I from 1957 to 1966—the peacekeeping legacy of which Canadians are so inordinately proud was originally forged not by frontline combat units but by commanders, staff officers, headquarters personnel, military observers, signallers, engineers, transport platoons, workshop units, logisticians, base units, medical personnel and in-theatre air transport units (which in some cases also performed surveillance tasks). Somewhat less clear is why the "specialized capabilities" model—which largely disappeared in the post-Cold War era, succeeded by infantry- and to a lesser extent armour-heavy contributions to such UN operations as UNPROFOR in the former-Yugoslavia—should draw the new government's apparent favour. Since tradition alone seems a most unlikely explanation, some observers have pointed to the lower risks to life and limb associated with "specialized capabilities"—although in the modern era robust force protection is crucial even for "specialized" contributions—or to perceived political concerns over the increased financial costs associated, directly or indirectly, with infantry and armoured contributions to peace operations. The perceived preference for "specialized capabilities" may also reflect a straightforward conviction that Canada has real strengths in these areas, as underscored by the army's ISR and other capabilities, the excellent overland ISR capabilities of the modernized *Aurora*, and the prowess of Canada's expensively-acquired but extremely well-equipped CH-147F *Chinooks*. It is conceivable, as well, that Ottawa subscribes to the view—by no means uniquely Canadian—that in the future western countries will increasingly leave infantry-heavy contributions to the armies of such countries as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The apparent preference for the "specialized capabilities" model nevertheless poses a number of challenges. Some of the capabilities identified as "specialized," such as in-theatre airlift, could prove to be at least partial 'non-starters,' given the UN's increased use of private contractors. By the same token, Canada can utilize its utility tactical transport (i.e., the *Griffon*) and medium transport helicopters (i.e., the *Chinook*) and its CC-130J *Hercules* for in-theatre airlift, but the unmodernized *Griffon* suffers limitations in hot and high operating environments, and the *Hercules* fleet is not particularly large, given the prospect of a sustained UN commitment. Nor does Canada any longer possess the sort

Photo #122039 United Nations Photo/John Isaac

A Canadian soldier showing Under-Secretary-General Marrack Goulding (third from right) and Lieutenant-General Satish Nambiar (second from left), Force Commander of UNPROFOR, land mines that have been found in the surrounding area of Daruvar, eastern Croatia, 2 September 1992.

DND photo TN09-2015-0302-0011 by Corporal Dan Strohan

A Canadian CC-177*Globemaster III* strategic transport.

DND photo EN2016-0060-28 by Master Corporal VanPutten

A CH-147F *Chinook* helicopter lands at Leismer Aerodrome in Conklin, Alberta, 6 May 2016, as part of CAF support to the Province of Alberta's response to wildfires in Fort McMurray. This is the first time a CH-147F *Chinook* has been used in a domestic humanitarian operation.

DND photo LE2015-0056-06 by Master Corporal Mélanie Ferguson

A company of the Immediate Response Unit (West) leaves Prince Albert in Light Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) 6.0 in a convoy to a fire affected zone of Saskatchewan during Operation *Lentus 15-2*, 13 July 2015.

of twin-engined fixed-wing transport aircraft that have so often proved useful for UN operations. In that regard, could a case be made for purchasing a few transport-configured aircraft over and above the requirements of fixed-wing search and rescue and/or for acquiring some new-production *Twin Otters*?

Much more fundamental is the degree to which a focus on "specialized capabilities" will be viewed as an adequate reaffirmation and renewal of Canada's long-standing—but currently very modest—contribution to UN peace operations. As a number of respected commentators on Canada and peace operations have observed, a "specialized capabilities" niche may not suggest to the global community that Canada is adequately vested in the overall enhancement and revitalization of UN peace operations. Better, they suggest, would be a flexible approach that draws, as appropriate, upon Canada's stock of "specialized capabilities," other military capabilities (i.e., mechanized or light infantry), or some combination of the two.

This approach acknowledges that there are limitations to what Canada can provide, and takes note of the need to selectively modernize existing capabilities, and, where appropriate, to acquire new capabilities in support of peace operations. The navy's ability to provide sealift and support to joint forces ashore, for example, is at a very low ebb with the disposal of both *Protecteur* and *Preserver*, the on-going conversion of a container ship into an interim Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment ship, and the even longer wait until the arrival of the new-build *Queenston*-class joint support ships. Even then, the RCN will still lack the roll-on/roll-off and other capabilities relevant to peace operations that would have been provided by the Joint Support Ship program as originally envisaged. The other services have their own limitations and deficiencies. That said, Canada's post-Afghanistan military does possess a variety of capabilities and resources relevant to providing both "specialized" and other capabilities for UN peace operations. These include but are not confined to the army's modernized LAV 6.0 light armoured vehicle and forthcoming Tactical Armoured Patrol Vehicle and Medium Support Vehicle, and the RCAF's CC-177A *Globemaster* (long-opposed by some Liberals but an invaluable asset for all manner of peace operations), and the aforementioned CH-147F *Chinook*.

No less a concern is appropriate training for peace operations. In a February 2016 study published by the Rideau Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (*Unprepared for Peace? The Decline of Canadian Peacekeeping Training (and What to Do About It*), Walter Dorn and Joshua Libben argue that the Canadian military "needs to increase the level of preparedness and training for peace operations if it is to be ready to serve in peace operations." Their report therefore recommends "the reinstatement and updating of the many training programmes and exercises that have been cut [over the previous decade], as well as the introduction of new training activities to reflect the increasing complexity of modern peace operations. Only through such a significant increase in training can Canadian personnel be truly prepared for peace." Although elements of the report have been criticized by such commentators as George Petrolekas on the grounds that, "Canada's military has never been more ready to undertake peace-related operations," both perspectives are in a sense accurate.

Although the Defence Policy Review's Public Consultation Document did not, understandably, express a preference for particular types of contributions to peace operations, it is to be commended for striking a cautionary note about contemporary peacekeeping and peace operations: "UN peace operations have evolved in response to the changing nature of threats to international peace and security. Peace support missions are increasingly deployed to hostile environments where violence is systemic and there is a desperate need to end violations of human rights. Unlike 'traditional' peacekeeping missions of the past, most current missions operate where there is no clear peace accord to be monitored, the contested terrain is ever-changing, and the combatants rarely represent formal armies of recognized states. Contemporary mission mandates are heavily focused on protection of civilians, including support for the international agenda on women, peace, and security. They are complex and multidimensional in nature, and they are most often authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, thereby allowing use of force." Canadians who mistakenly believe that today's "peacekeeping" is virtually identical to that of Suez circa 1958 or to Cyprus circa 1988 would do well to heed such realities.

Martin Shadwick *has taught Canadian defence policy at York University in Toronto for many years. He is a former editor of* Canadian Defence Quarterly*, and he is the resident Defence Commentator for the* Canadian Military Journal.

Photo #311093 United Nations Photo/Yutaka Nagata

AN M-113 armoured personnel carrier from the Canadian Contingent of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is seen at OP BRAVO ONE shortly after the cease-fire was restored, 16 August 1974.