



UNITED NATIONS  
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# PARLIAMENTARY TESTIMONY:

# CANADA'S RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH UN PEACEKEEPING



The following is summarized and adapted testimony provided publicly to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence on 4 October 2018 by Adam Day and Richard Gowan concerning Canada's re-engagement in UN peacekeeping.



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# THE STRATEGIC EFFECT OF CURRENT UN PEACEKEEPING

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In a period when there is very little consensus within the Security Council, peace operations are a rare source of international unity, with the vast majority of UN members continuing to support Blue Helmet operations. The end of a series of largely successful UN state-building operations, in places such as Liberia, Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire, showed that the UN can help to stabilize very weak countries.

However, peace operations today are under a high degree of pressure. Three-quarters of UN peacekeepers are deployed in five big missions in Africa—in Mali, Central African Republic, the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan—where they face even greater challenges and the chances of an easy win are extremely low. UN forces in Lebanon and the Golan Heights also face heightened risks due to the insecure situation in the Middle East.

While UN peacekeeping often goes through periods of rapid change, as it did in the 1990s and again in the 2000s, in recent years the UN has taken on new operational challenges like never before, including the removal of chemical weapons from Syria and containing Ebola in West Africa.

UN peacekeeping operations do not always do these things perfectly. The UN has been honest about its failures in this regard, as seen in a series of UN reports, including from the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (HIPPO), which was straight-forward about the challenges that the Blue Helmets face. There is considerable space for improvement.

The UN operations are also not always the right tool for dealing with weak states, such as in Somalia. However, there is widespread recognition that when running big multi-dimensional missions, the UN can play an important role in managing them.

Peacekeeping operations have proven to be resilient and continue to prove their strategic worth in some settings. Even if they cannot deliver easy stability, peacekeeping operations can limit and contain violence in fragile states such as Mali, helping to ensure that jihadi groups and other non-state groups do not overthrow governments and create regional instability. They protect and facilitate vital humanitarian aid, saving many lives. Most importantly, they provide frameworks for long-term political peacemaking processes.

# TRENDS IN PEACEKEEPING

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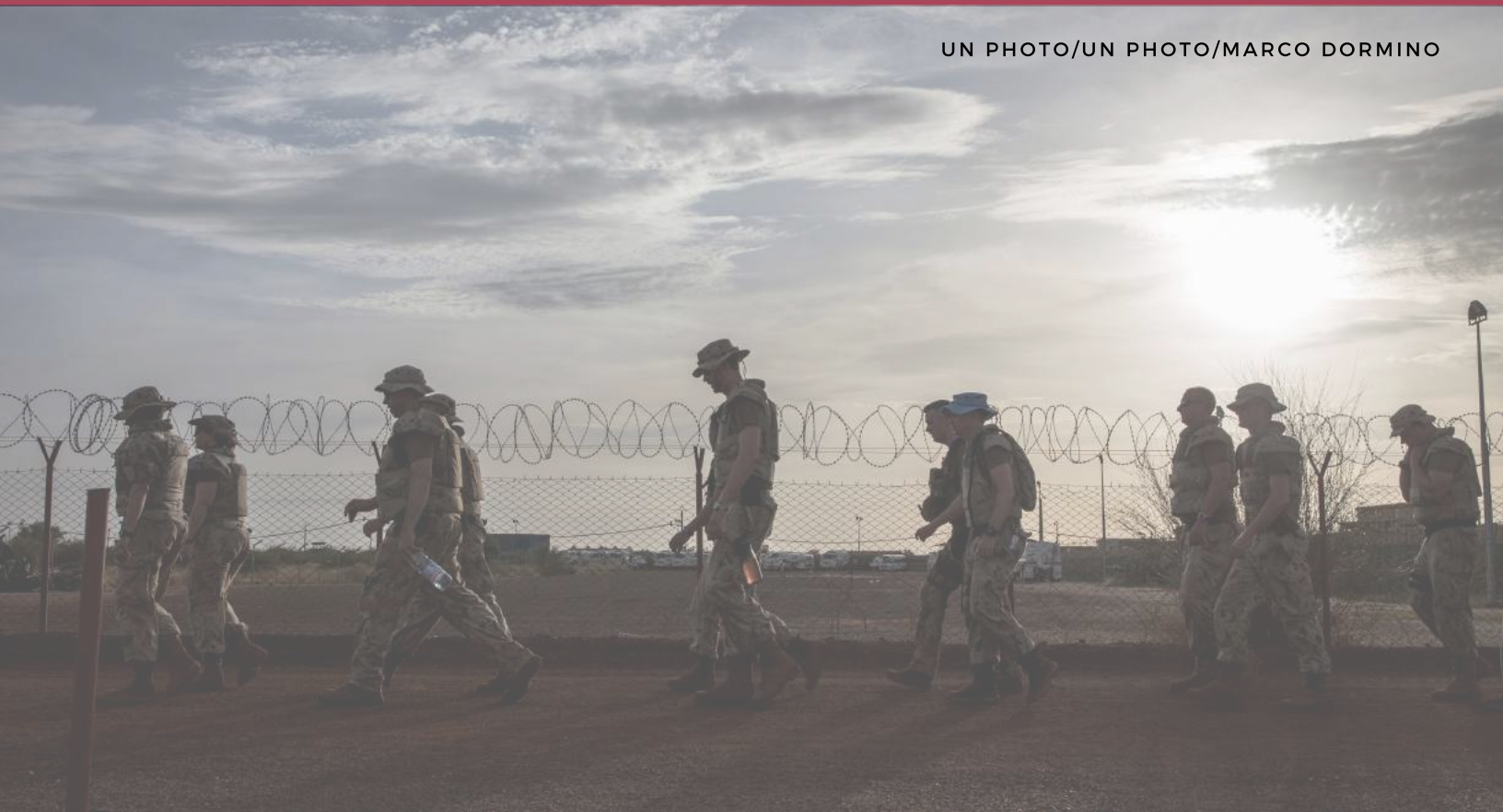
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There are a number of reasons why peacekeeping today is under increased pressure. In the past 15 years, conflicts have become more complex in three ways that have impacted peacekeeping:

1. There has been a rise in intra-state civil wars, where civilians are increasingly the target of violence;
2. There has been a trend of regional involvement in these internal wars – Mali is one example, but Congo, Syria and Yemen are others;
3. The rise in importance of so-called jihadi groups has complicated traditional peacekeeping in several ways.

Across all conflict settings, the risk to civilians has grown dramatically in recent years. Since the end of the Cold War, 2015 was the most dangerous year worldwide for civilians. Protection of civilians has become the overriding priority of many UN peacekeeping operations today.

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# DOWNWARD PRESSURE ON BUDGETS & PARTNERSHIP-BUILDING

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There is a downward pressure on budgets across the board. Peacekeeping was at a high watermark of \$8billion but is now under \$7billion.

Big missions like United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) have cut up to 20% of some resources. UNAMID in Darfur is closing down within the next year. United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) is phasing out. Key member states are looking for cost savings and reductions. These trends combine to create concrete needs for UN peacekeeping today and opportunities for member state engagement.

In MONUSCO, the reduction of the static footprint of the military component over the last few years has created a “protection through projection” concept, which requires greater airlift capacities and longer-range use of drones. This is an important innovation in peacekeeping, and one that creates a very tangible need for the mission in terms of mobility assets.

UN peacekeeping has increasingly entered into a range of partnerships with other actors and entities, such as bringing in neighbouring states, and partnering with the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and others. Other partnerships include the AU/UN United Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID); the use of the G5 Sahel force in Mali; the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM); and the Regional Protection Force in South Sudan. This creates new opportunities for troop-contributing countries to gain experience alongside other troops, but it can also create new challenges.

Importantly, the Action for Peacekeeping initiative was signed in September 2018. 149 nations and four regional organizations have endorsed the A4P initiative, showing that this is an area where the international community can still find common ground. It's also worth noting that all members of the P5, including China and Russia, have signed up for that initiative. Demonstrating strong tangible support to the key commitments of this initiative will be meaningful.

One of the important commitments concerns training, in order to ensure troops deploying are able to meet the challenges on the ground. While Member States should look more broadly to support peacekeeping, training support is one specific area requiring attention. The Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, which Canada launched at the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial, is another example where additional training would be valuable.



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# UN PEACEKEEPING INNOVATION

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Peace operations are a flexible tool that often evolved in response to crises. Peacekeeping has, in fact, demonstrated a high degree of innovation and emerging good practice on the ground. In many of the more complex environments, including Mali, increased use of peacekeeping intelligence has had a real impact. New capacities have been created in missions like MONUSCO to build this capacity. Supporting innovation, and drawing lessons back into the policy levels in New York has real value.

Developments in terms of artificial intelligence (AI) and cyberwarfare will create further complications, but also innovative responses. The UN and other multinational institutions do not have frameworks or architecture necessary to govern such technological developments. The Secretary-General António Guterres has seized precisely on these issues and has launched an initiative to grapple with the challenges of new technologies. The Centre for Policy Research at United Nations University has developed a dedicated AI expertise and capacity to be ready to support the UN system as it thinks through these issues at a strategic and policy level.

# PEACEKEEPING AND BROADER STRATEGIC GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Peacekeeping operations contribute to strategic relationships to the benefit of countries like Canada in three ways.

First, UN peacekeeping is part of the transatlantic burden-sharing. Analysts can sometimes draw a sharp dichotomy between NATO contributions and UN contributions. However, for many European governments, especially France and Mediterranean governments, the UN mission in Mali is a very important part of the regional security architecture, just as the missions in the Baltic run by NATO is an important part of European security. By contributing to UN peacekeeping in the Sahel, it contributes to the security of NATO allies, even if not under a NATO flag, and that is appreciated in Europe.

Second, there is a link between peacekeeping and trans-Pacific security relationships. There are a lot of Asia-Pacific countries investing more in peace operations. Most notably, China is investing in peacekeeping as part of its global footprint. In an era where there is growing strategic competition with China, peacekeeping remains an area of co-operation.

Although China still only has roughly 3,000 troops in UN missions, that number is likely to rise very dramatically in coming years. While there may be differing approaches on other issues, and at times low levels of trust between Western countries and China, peacekeeping can be a platform for co-operation with a number of Pacific partners.

Finally, peacekeeping can contribute to global counter-terror efforts. Peacekeeping operations should not become counterterrorism missions, and there are dangers where peacekeepers come into contact with jihadi groups. Nonetheless, in a case such as Mali, the presence of a UN force does help provide broad security and relief as well as a framework for political and economic work with communities recovering from jihadi rule. Peacekeeping can be an element, although only an element, in challenging terrorist organizations, especially in Africa.

# CANADA'S POTENTIAL RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH PEACEKEEPING?

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Canada is extremely well placed to provide high-impact contributions to UN peacekeeping. Some framing questions may help Canada determine how and where it wishes to re-engage.

The first question is: what kind of experience is Canada hoping to achieve through re-engagement? Is it to contribute directly to the robust protection activities of today's peacekeeping in places like Central African Republic, or is it more to gain important joint experience with European partners in the Sahel? Is Canada planning to contribute a long-term capacity to peacekeeping or a shorter one-off deployment, which can be seen from some contributing countries, in Mali and elsewhere? Is Canada interested in deploying only troops, or would it consider the deployment of something like formed police units, which might be more effective in some of the settings where there are also large-scale urban risks?

This relates to a second line of inquiry: How well do the commitments made last year in Vancouver match the needs of peacekeeping operations? Looking at Canada's commitment, there is a clear match between what was pledged and the needs of UN peacekeeping. The Canadian air task force in Mali is filling a crucial gap; strategic air lift in Entebbe would be a major asset to the missions in that area; a quick reaction force would almost certainly boost the protection capacities of the UN; and the offer of training, taken together, would provide a major boost to peacekeeping.





# CANADA'S UN PEACEKEEPING REENGAGEMENT

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There are concerns in Canada and elsewhere that the Security Council has thrown peacekeeping missions at crises without a completely clear strategy. The Security Council could certainly be more responsive and flexible in asking for peace operations, but it is also currently heavily overburdened running multiple missions. There is now also a strong recognition that the UN needs to invest more and get more help from friendly countries like Canada in terms of analysis and information about the countries it is going into. This would enable it to develop its political strategies more credibly and more rapidly.

If it does take this advice, Canada would be well advised to push for a Security Council mandating process that is driven from the ground and not driven from New York. Canada could advocate that council members send a small team to peacekeeping settings ahead of time to identify what the meaningful and realistic political objectives are in the short-term and medium-term to inform the mandate with that analysis. While this would essentially be a two-step mandating process, not only is this practical, but it provides a low-cost and relatively light touch way to write an effective mandate.

When putting peacekeepers on the ground, it is important that the bilateral policy fits with the multilateral policy. In the past, some countries have deployed peacekeepers but actually taken very little interest in the country to which the peacekeepers are deployed. In order to promote political processes and also perhaps promote trade down the line, diplomatic missions need to be clearly tasked with giving as much support as they can, not just through its helicopters and personnel, but across the spectrum of engagement.

Canada has long played an important role in guiding the evolution of peacekeeping. Canada essentially made up peacekeeping in the 1950s. The Elsie Initiative that Canada spearheaded is one example of Canada continuing to lead this evolution. Taking affirmative steps to ensure that women occupy leadership roles in peacekeeping, and also to increase the overall representation of women across missions, will help build more effective and credible missions going forward.

Canada can offer a combination of linguistic capabilities and excellence in military training that almost no other country in the world has today, and it is much needed in some of the bigger missions. Linguistic challenges are obviously there for current forces, especially in a lot of the francophone missions. Having more francophone staff officers would obviously be helpful. At a time when the bulk of today's peacekeeping requires both the ability to engage with the local population and the experience to develop complex strategic plans, true contributors like Canada are needed more than ever.



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