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CHAPTER 9

Canada and UN Peace Operations: Re-engaging Slowly but Not so Surely

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INTRODUCTION

Canada has an illustrious past in UN peacekeeping. Even before Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson proposed the first peacekeeping force, Canada played key leadership roles in the UN's early (unarmed) observer missions, including in Kashmir and the Middle East. Then in 1956, to find a way out of the Suez Crisis, Pearson convinced the UN membership and the UN Secretary-General to create the first armed peacekeeping force. During the rest of the Cold War, Canada was the top contributor; a record extended even to the successful missions of the early 1990s, which were in Central America, Namibia, Cambodia, and Mozambique. However, Canada lost enthusiasm after the disastrous missions in Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. It stopped rotating armed units into UN peacekeeping. It also lost its intellectual and political leadership in peacekeeping, except for the brief Axworthian period when it was on the UN

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Security Council (1999–2000). On his election in 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau declared that “Canada is back” and that the country would once again provide significant contributions and leadership for UN peace operations. But the reality was very different. By May 2018, Canada had fallen to its lowest level of personnel contributions since 1956. It took more than two years of government deliberations before the Trudeau government finally committed to a new mission: an aviation contribution to the UN’s Mali mission starting in July 2018. But this contribution was declared non-renewable, and limited to one year, a much shorter term than Canada’s German and Dutch predecessors. There are prospects of new but small contributions. However, the underlying expertise has not yet been developed to make Canada, once again, a prolific peacekeeper. Why has Canada become such a reluctant peacekeeper? What is required to regain the capacity to lead and, realistically, what are the prospects for it? Looking at the historical record gives valuable clues, and provides important benchmarks and context.

THE PROLIFIC PEACEKEEPER (1947–1996)

At the end of World War II, after witnessing the horrors of unbridled nationalism, Canada committed itself to uphold an international order based on the rule of law, centred upon the United Nations. Louis St. Laurent, then Secretary of State for External Affairs and soon to be Prime Minister, boldly stated that “[t]he UN’s vocation is Canada’s vocation.” Canada provided military personnel to serve in the UN’s early peacekeeping missions, which were of the unarmed observer type.

In 1947, Canada deployed military personnel to the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), which helped oversee elections and the creation of the Republic of Korea. When North Korea invaded in 1950, Canada sent over 27,000 military personnel to serve under the UN Command (US-led) that repelled the aggression. Though the Korean war lasted three years, it was the world’s first enforcement action under an international organization—a major achievement for collective security. It was not a peacekeeping operation, but it signaled Canada’s firm commitment to the United Nations: 516 Canadian soldiers died in that war (Veterans Affairs 2019).

To lead the military observer mission that oversaw the ceasefire in Kashmir, Canada provided the first Chief Military Observer. Tragically,

Brigadier-General Harry Angle died in a plane crash in the Himalayas, and he remains the highest-ranking Canadian soldier to make the ultimate sacrifice while serving in a UN peace operation.

In 1954, to help deal with the Israeli-Arab conflict, the United Nations asked a Canadian soldier, Major-General E.L.M. “Tommy” Burns, to head the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). He was well placed when in 1956 Canada offered a solution to the Suez Crisis. Foreign Minister Lester B. Pearson proposed a new UN “peace and police force” to replace the occupying Israeli, French, and British forces that had invaded Egypt following Egypt’s nationalization of the canal. The UN force facilitated the withdrawal of foreign forces, keeping them separate from Egyptian forces so that small incidents could not turn into renewed fighting and war. General Burns was the first Force Commander of this first UN peacekeeping force (Burns 1962). This was also the first time that nations placed armed units, mostly battalions, under UN operational control for peacekeeping. General Burns (and Canada) played a pioneering role in developing new policies and operational procedures for peacekeeping. The timely Suez initiative won Pearson the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize.

Canada cemented its reputation as a reliable and prolific peacekeeper by contributing to every UN peacekeeping operation of the Cold War, the only nation to do so. It provided military observers in Kashmir, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, West New Guinea, India-Pakistan, Dominican Republic, Iran-Iraq, and Afghanistan (1988–1990). It also provided armed military units for tough UN missions in the Congo (1960–1964), Cyprus (1964–), and the Golan Heights (1974–). By the time the Nobel Peace Prize was given to UN peacekeepers in 1988, Canada had provided 80,000 of the 800,000 UN personnel deployed up to then, a full 10%—an impressive feat from the world’s 50th largest army (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2018, 43). The Canadian soldiers who were co-recipients of the Prize shared in the glory, though not in the financial reward; the United Nations used those funds for the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal, given to the families of the fallen in peacekeeping (sometimes referred to as “the medal no one wants to receive”).

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, peacekeeping expanded quickly, and Canada played a key role in the major growth in both numbers and responsibilities. To help oversee elections in occupied Namibia, Canada contributed military logistics, personnel, election monitors, and experts on computerized election processes to the UN Transition Assistance

Group (UNTAG). This was also the first peacekeeping mission to which Canada provided police, mostly from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The success of Namibian independence, with the UN acting as mid-wife, was a stepping stone for South Africa to renounce its Apartheid regime and allow for free elections, which the United Nations monitored and Nelson Mandela won.

Canadian contributions were also important for the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA, 1989–92) and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL, 1991–94), which helped struggling nations begin anew after paralyzing civil wars. Canadian sailors helped patrol the Gulf of Fonseca, which borders El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, to interdict weapons shipments to rebel groups.

The UN's largest mission up to 1992 was in Cambodia, where the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1992–93) helped secure peace in the country. It managed to sideline the vicious Khmer Rouge which had committed genocide against millions of Cambodians. Elections were successfully held, despite threats of sabotage from the Khmer Rouge forces who now were hiding in the jungle. Canada contributed personnel to meet the mission's expansive mandate, which included the protection of human rights, military security, civil administration, maintenance of law and order, refugee resettlement, mine clearing, rehabilitation of infrastructure, and economic reconstruction and development.

In the early post-Cold War era, the success of peacekeeping was undeniable, as long-and painful wars ended in many locations. New UN missions were created at a record rate after 1989. In the first four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 16 new missions were created, equaling the number created during the four-decade Cold War (United Nations 2017). To further establish peacekeeping in the Canadian consciousness, the National Peacekeeping Monument (named "Reconciliation") was erected in 1993 next to the National Art Gallery in Ottawa. Important peacekeeping award ceremonies have been held at the monument ever since.

In 1993, at the peak of Canada's contribution, over 3,300 Canadian uniformed personnel were on UN duty, the largest contribution of any nation at the time. For over four decades, Canada had provided over 1,000 military personnel to UN peacekeeping at any given time.

When Canada's contributions peaked in 1993, the national enthusiasm for peacekeeping also peaked. Soon thereafter, however, a series of tragedies and bad news came from Canada's peacekeeping missions. Canadian soldiers from the airborne regiment were found to have tortured and killed a Somali youth. A report of the Somalia inquiry (1997), titled "Dishonoured Legacy," found many flaws in the preparation, readiness, and training of Canadian forces prior to that deployment, and peacekeeping missions more generally.

Meanwhile, Canadian forces in Bosnia felt helpless to stop the ethnic cleansing around them. In addition, they were frequently exposed to gunfire and landmines. Some were even held hostage and used as human shields against NATO strikes. In June-July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overran several UN protected areas, ignoring and intimidating the understrength United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) units. In Srebrenica, after Canadians had turned over responsibility to Dutch peacekeepers in 1994, the Serb forces massacred some 7,000 Muslim men and youths. It was only after a UN-approved air campaign by NATO against the Bosnian Serb forces that the peace process was finalized with the December 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. The agreement was enforced by a 50,000 strong NATO-led operation called the Implementation Force (IFOR), which was replaced a year later by the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR), to which Canada contributed over 1,000 soldiers, with several rotations.

While Canadian and world attention focused on Bosnia in 1993, another UN operation had begun in a remote and beleaguered country in central Africa. To lead the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), the United Nations turned to Canada to provide the force commander. It was deemed to be a comparatively easy mission, but nothing could prepare Brigadier-General Roméo Dallaire for the atrocities he was about to witness. Starting on 6 April 1994, about 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered in a hundred days—one of the most intense genocides since World War II. At the start, Dallaire could not even convince UN officials that genocide was occurring. His urgent requests for reinforcements were rejected under American, British, French, and Belgian pressure. Only Canada responded to the appeals of its general; it was the only nation to send additional troops to UNAMIR during the 100-day genocide, though the numbers were still inadequately low (less than 100). However, with less than 300 peacekeepers, General Dallaire managed to save the lives of over 20,000 people who had sought refuge

at UN-monitored sites. But he was left feeling so distraught and impotent in the face of the Rwandan slaughter that he later attempted suicide back in Canada. Dallaire (2004) ultimately recovered, served in the Canadian Senate, and now heads the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security.

The Steep Decline

In the second half of the 1990s, UN peacekeeping shrunk markedly. By 1998, only 15,000 UN peacekeepers remained deployed, with the peace operations in Bosnia (and later Kosovo) being led by NATO. The decline in UN peacekeeping was in part due to a brief pause in new conflicts after the post-Cold War frenzy. Canada reduced its contributions accordingly but had an additional reason to contribute less. The nation's mounting national debt caused a pressing need to reduce and then eliminate the annual deficits, which led to massive defence cuts.

By the end of 1997, only 254 Canadian uniformed personnel (mostly in the Golan Heights) still wore the blue beret, though Canada's numbers were higher in NATO's peace operation in Bosnia. The few new UN operations established in the late 1990s were relatively small and limited in scope, yet a UN rebound was in motion and would become phenomenal in the twenty-first century. However, when the United Nations experienced this peacekeeping surge, Canada (along with most Western nations) did not follow suit.

After NATO bombing to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in 1999, the Security Council established the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to rebuild and administer the province. But NATO, not the UN, was given the responsibility for the "peace support operation" (to use NATO terminology for peacekeeping), creating the Kosovo Force (KFOR), operating under UNMIK. Canada contributed 1,450 troops to NATO's KFOR, as well as advanced equipment like the Coyote armoured reconnaissance (recce) vehicle (Dorn 2011, 147–149).

While Canada provided few troops to the United Nations in the second half of the 1990s, the United Nations still offered Canada key military positions: the force commanders of the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH) in 1997 and of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in 1999–2000 on the Golan Heights, where Canada still provided some 200 logisticians. In total, in the 1990s, Canada provided military leaders for seven UN missions.¹

By contrast, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Canada provided no UN force commanders at all.

The rise and fall in Canadian contributions can be seen in Fig. 9.1. After four decades of contributing over 1,000 troops, peaking in 1993–95 at 3,300, there followed a large decline in the second half of the 1990s and Canada never regained anywhere near the same level of contributions or influence. Apart from the regular rotation of logistics units in UNDOF (about 200 personnel at a given time), Canada deployed units in only two instances in the twenty-first century. The first was for the

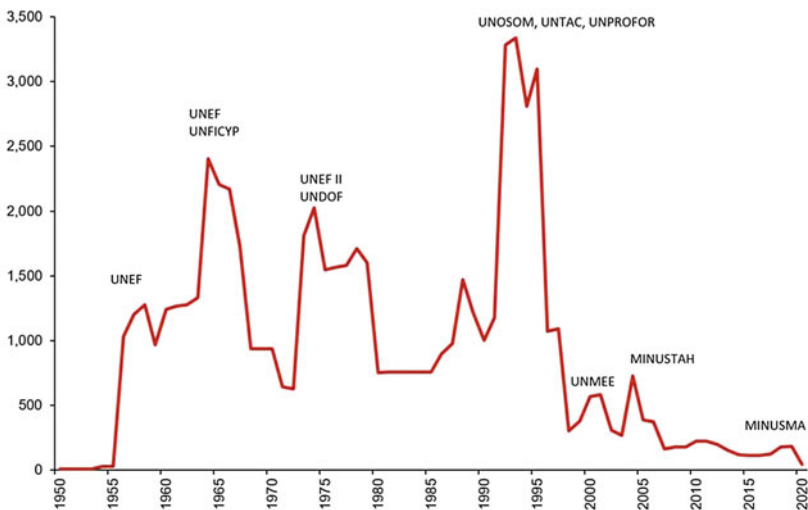


Fig. 9.1 Canadian contributions of uniformed personnel (military and police) since 1950, showing the peak number for each year and the main missions giving rise to the peaks. *Mission acronyms* (chronological): UNEF (UN Emergency Force, Sinai); ONUC (UN Operation in the Congo); UNFICYP (UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus); UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Force, Golan Heights); UNPROFOR (UN Protection Force); UNOSOM (UN Operation in Somalia); UNTAC (UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia); UNMEE (UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea); MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti); MINUSMA UN (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) (*Sources* Gaffen 1987; Canada 2019b; Canadian Armed Forces 2019; Canadiansoldiers.com 2019; United Nations 2019) (Updated monthly at World Federalist Movement—Canada, 2021)

United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), to which 450 troops were deployed along with some key enablers (*e.g.* Coyote reconnaissance vehicle to monitor movements across the UN-controlled Temporary Security Zone). The other brief surge (peak in Fig. 9.1) was in Haiti after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced from office in 2004. Canadian soldiers deployed alongside US forces and then were re-hatted as UN peacekeepers before being withdrawn. A brief augmentation (60 troops) was sent to join a Brazilian battalion in 2013. In none of these cases did Canada rotate troops. They were one-off deployments of typically 6–8 months.

In the new century, the Liberal governments of Prime Ministers Jean Chretien and Paul Martin looked favorably upon peacekeeping, but the military was less than enthusiastic. Stung by the experiences of UN peacekeeping in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, many senior officers much preferred to serve under NATO. Then, after the 9/11 attacks on the US, Canada began its decade-long engagement in Afghanistan, giving National Defence Headquarters a ready excuse not to deploy with the United Nations. After Canada's substantial deployment into Kandahar in 2006, Afghanistan became the main preoccupation of the Canadian Armed Forces, which became virtually a single-mission military. Canada's modest peacekeeping contribution suffered even more.

This shift to a counter-insurgency/counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan suited well the newly elected Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006–2015). It did not share the Liberal Party's sense of ownership of "Pearsonian" peacekeeping. Instead, it strongly identified with the Canadian combat mission in southern Afghanistan, at least in the first few years. Two months after coming into power in January 2006, the Conservatives withdrew the 200 or so Canadian logisticians serving in the Golan Heights (UNDOF). This brought Canada to a new low in its UN contribution: only about 60 Canadian troops. At the same time, the Canadian contributions to the US- and NATO-led missions in Afghanistan surged to over 2,500. The contribution in Afghanistan stayed at this level or higher throughout the Kandahar deployment (2006–2011).

With no military units deployed in peacekeeping, and with the strong need for police in the UN's Haiti mission, Canada found itself in the unusual position of providing more police than soldiers to UN missions. The United Nations offered Canada the role of providing a series of senior police officers to serve as "Police Commissioner" in the United

Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH, 2004–2017). This important job carried the responsibility to oversee the 2,000 UN police in MINUSTAH and the opportunity to exert strong influence over thousands of officers in the Haitian National Police.

Even with the police contribution, the number of uniformed Canadians in peacekeeping remained small during the Harper government. Canada dropped in rank to 70th out of about 120 countries, far down from its former number one spot. Canada did not participate as United Nations gave its peacekeeping forces more robust mandates and greater resources. The number of uniformed personnel surpassed 100,000, and the United Nations became the largest deployer of forces on operations of an organization (or government) in the world. Canada, which had previously supplied 10% of UN deployed forces, was now providing less than 0.1% (Dorn 2019).

While the number of Canadian personnel in peacekeeping was tiny and Canada dropped in rank from 1st to 81st by May 2018, Canada did continue as the 8th largest financial contributor to peacekeeping. This was not an act of benevolence but a requirement under the UN system of national assessments, which are roughly proportional to the country's proportion of the world's gross income (about 3% for Canada). The country could boast that it consistently paid its dues "in full, on time and without conditions," unlike its neighbor to the south. Canada also maintained its position as the Chair of the Working Group of the UN's Special Committee on Peacekeeping.

But in the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) at UN headquarters, the Canadian military presence fell off the radar, even though a Canadian general (Maurice Baril) had once headed OMA. By 2007, there was not a single Canadian officer in OMA, although over 70 other countries had seconded one or more officers to OMA. The situation was only slightly corrected in 2010 when a Canadian colonel, Col. Dave Barr, took the leadership of the Military Planning Service at UN headquarters, but another Canadian was not sent to OMA when he retired in 2014.

Despite government apathy in peacekeeping, the Canadian public continued to view peacekeeping as Canada's most important contribution to the world. Polls show that peacekeeping continued to be exceedingly popular, with approval ratings above 75% (Paris 2014). The Conservative government was neither in step with public opinion, nor with the perception of Canada in the international community.

THE TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S PROMISES AND REALITY

While the 2015 election campaign was in full swing in Canada, US President Barack Obama co-chaired a peacekeeping summit on 25 September 2015 at the UN Headquarters where many nations pledged additional forces and capabilities. By contrast, the Harper government made no pledges and, that evening, in a leaders' debate on foreign policy, Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau complained: "The fact that Canada has nothing to contribute to that conversation today is disappointing because this is something that a Canadian Prime Minister started, and right now there is a need to revitalize and refocus and support peacekeeping operations" (Trudeau 2015a).

After his election victory on 19 October, Trudeau famously declared that "Canada is back" (Trudeau 2015b). He issued a mandate letter to his new Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, to "work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peace operations." Specifically, Canada was to provide specialized capabilities (including mobile medical teams, engineering support, and transport aircraft); provide well-trained personnel, including mission commanders; help speed up UN responses to conflicts; and lead an international effort for military and civilian training in peace operations (Trudeau 2015c).

The new Foreign Minister, Stephane Dion, heading a department now renamed Global Affairs Canada, was similarly mandated "to increase Canada's support for United Nations peace operations" (Trudeau 2015d). In both mandate letters, Trudeau wrote: "I expect Canadians to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments Over the course of our four-year mandate, I expect us to deliver on all of our commitments" (Trudeau 2015c, d).

But the evidence shows that these commitments and promises were not fulfilled, especially when measured up to the more detailed and specific pledges that Canada made to the international community. When a follow-up to the Obama-led Summit was held in London, UK, in September 2016, Canada scrambled to put some detail to its promised re-engagement: it pledged "up to" 600 military personnel and "up to" 150 police (United Kingdom 2016, 10), where the term "up to" was a fudge factor that other governments avoided and made UN planning more difficult. This 750 maximum was even less than one quarter of what Canada

had contributed at its peak. Still, 750 was a reasonable pledge and Canada additionally offered to host the next defence ministerial in Vancouver.

In November 2017, in Vancouver, Prime Minister Trudeau did not announce any additional forces but chose instead to give more specificity to the previous pledge: a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) of some 200 personnel; Tactical Airlift Support; and an Aviation Task Force. Canada would also examine “new Police missions,” presumably to deploy the “up to” 150 police promised a year earlier. Canada announced its “Elsie Initiative” to increase the number and roles of women in peacekeeping operations and some newly pledged training activities (Canada 2017, 2).

While the government’s political leadership sought to celebrate Canada’s return to peacekeeping, the reality on the ground was drastically different. At the time of the Vancouver defence ministerial, Canada’s personnel contribution had reached an all-time low: just 23 military personnel and 39 police, for a total of 62 uniformed personnel (United Nations 2017). Not since before the 1956 deployment had the total number been lower (see Fig. 9.1). In the months following the Vancouver Ministerial, the figures fell even lower, to just 40 uniformed personnel: 19 military and 21 police (United Nations 2018, May figures).

For over two years, Canada deliberated and delayed on deploying a unit to peacekeeping, sending numerous Canadian delegations to Africa and the UN headquarters in New York. Busy UN officials soon became annoyed by the constant interruptions and questioning without tangible results. During all the dithering and delay, Canada missed a crucial opportunity to provide a force commander in Mali. In fact, the United Nations left the position of force commander open for two months to allow Canada to nominate a general to fill the post. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) had even selected a general for the post. But in December 2016, the Trudeau Cabinet lacked the resolve to go ahead with the nomination. When Stephane Dion was replaced by Chrystia Freeland as Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 2017, the government lost a proponent of peacekeeping. Freeland was not an active supporter of the United Nations or its peacekeeping missions, but was much more focused on Russia and feminism (Coulon 2018). She then became preoccupied with the crises of the day. In the face of the US rule-breaking actions under the Trump Presidency, Saudi Arabia, and other governments, she frequently referenced the need to support a rules-based international order. However, she failed to give much needed support to the centre of such an order, the United Nations. Even as her department sought

to continue a campaign for a Security Council seat, launched by her predecessor, Canada's peacekeeping contribution fell to an all-time low.

With nothing to show for its peacekeeping promises from two pledging conferences, one of which Canada sponsored, the Trudeau government finally announced in May 2018 that it would provide an Air Task Force, including an aeromedical unit, to the UN mission in Mali. Even then, the mobilization was not fast enough to meet the UN's need for a quick replacement of the outgoing German unit, and so the United Nations had to find a costly bridging mechanism. Similarly, with Canada firmly declaring that the Mali deployment would be for one year only (less than the predecessor Dutch and German deployments), the world organization was obliged to bridge the gap between Canada's departure and the arrival of the next contingent (Romania). This was not the kind of "smart pledging" for which the United Nations had hoped. Smart pledging meant that nations coordinated among themselves and showed maximum flexibility in order to avoid leaving the UN with major gaps. Instead, Canada's contribution is not so smart ("dumb," perhaps) because of its inflexibility.

Still, the Canadian contribution did make a difference in Mali, transporting vast amounts of materiel and rescuing peacekeepers after firefights and detonations of improvised explosive devices (IED) (Berthiaume 2019).

Minister Freeland was keen to push peacekeeping forward in one area: promoting women's role as part of the government's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Canada urged the United Nations to include more women in peace operations. But Canada itself was not setting an example. Figures from Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in 2019 (PRMNY, as of 1 Feb 2019) show Canadian women deployed as Staff Officers (SOs) and Military Observers (MILOBs) to be 3 of 30 Canadians (10%). This is less than the 15% target the UN has set. The number of Canadian women deployed as UN and National Support Element on Op PRESENCE (Mali) was 34 of 250 positions—almost 14%, though the UN does not hold contingents to the 15% target. There has been slow progress on the other pledges on women, peace and security (WPS):

- Elsie Initiative: two countries have been designated to serve in a pilot project, Ghana and Zambia (Freeland 2018), but actual training and mentoring activities did not commence for over three years after the initiative was announced.

– A pledge of CAD \$21 million was made in Vancouver for WPS in UN peace operations. This includes contributions to the UN’s trust fund for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).²

Leading an international peacekeeping training effort was also part of the Defence Minister’s mandate and was part of Canada’s Vancouver pledges. But no Canadian leadership in peacekeeping training has been shown.

The United Nations was counting on Canada to provide trainers for its courses at the Regional Services Centre Entebbe (RSCE) in October 2018, but Canada did not send the promised trainers. Also, Canadian assistance to the Women’s Outreach Course of the UN Signals Academy (UNSA), located at RSCE, did not materialize, even though the Elsie Initiative seemed to be an ideal source of funds, given the Initiative’s goal of increasing women’s participation in peacekeeping.

To top it all off, Canada in the early 2020s is much less well equipped to lead in training for UN peacekeeping since so few military personnel have deployed in such operations since 1995. The training and education within the Canadian Armed Forces on UN peacekeeping also declined, with the number of activities declining in a decade to less than a quarter of what they were in 2005 (Dorn and Libben 2018). The closure of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre (PPC) in 2013 left Canada without a place to train military, police, and civilians together. The centre ran for almost two decades and was a flagship for peacekeeping training, both domestically and internationally.

It would be natural to re-open the PPC, perhaps under a different name and structure, if peacekeeping training were a priority. The Senate Report on Peacekeeping recommended the creation of a “Peace Operations Training Centre to assist in training military, police and civilian personnel from troop contributing countries pre and post deployment” (Canada 2016, 4). But no such centre has been established or announced.

So, the promised leadership in training has not materialized. Nor is Canada taking the steps to equip itself for such a leadership role, since it is not gaining the necessary experience in UN operations.

CONCLUSION

The Trudeau government made self-evaluations of its promises based on the goals set out in the mandate letters (Canada 2019a). In October 2018, it listed the peacekeeping commitments as “Underway – on track”

(defined as “progress toward completing this commitment is unfolding as expected”). In January 2019, this was downgraded to “Actions taken, progress made.” This was more accurate, since the government’s earlier “on track” self-evaluation was inaccurate, if not outright false. The government’s 2019 to present evaluation only partly indicates how far reality is from the promises. Only one short mission has been added since 2015: the Mali mission, where 145 military personnel were deployed, according to the UN numbers (31 January 2019)—250 if the National Support Element is included.

The non-Mali military contribution remains very small (22). And Canada’s contribution of police is even smaller: only 15 police officers, just 10% of its 150-police pledge. The police contribution is near the lowest point since 1992 (15 personnel, reached in November 2018).

Ironically, the same month that Canada hosted a peacekeeping pledging conference (Vancouver, November 2017), the number of Canadian uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping was lower than at any other point since the creation of the first peacekeeping force in 1956 and decreased even further afterwards. Even with the increase (from July 2018) in Mali, the average Trudeau government contribution since 2015 is less than that of the previous government.³ The Trudeau government did not bring Canada “back” and was not on track to meet its promises, even with the almost 200 deployed in Mali for one year (see Fig. 9.1). Furthermore, for a country that seeks to champion women in peacekeeping, it is not leading by example, with so few uniformed women in peacekeeping: less than 20.

The Mali deployment did not signal a “re-engagement” in UN peace operations. And the total number of deployed military personnel so far is much less than Canada’s pledged contribution (up to 600 personnel). Furthermore, the promised Quick Reaction Force is not deploying quickly, taking many years since it was pledged, with no deployment date in sight. Similarly, a new mission for Canadian police contributions has not yet been announced. Although a creative idea, the promised deployment of tactical airlift (C-130 Hercules) aircraft to Entebbe to serve multiple missions was only reluctantly accepted by the United Nations before being abandoned by the world organization in 2021.

Canada is not on track and has not re-engaged, though some progress has been made with the one mission in Mali. The rhetoric remains lofty on paper and in speeches, but the Canadian government has yet to match its

words with deeds. Canada is not leading by example or implementing the advice of Minister Sajjan (2018) when he told the UN Security Council: “The time for change is now, and we must be bold.” Canada was a proud and strong contributor for a half century, but it can no longer be called a prolific or committed peacekeeper.

No doubt, the lack of leadership or even substantive contribution to peacekeeping was one of the reasons why Canada failed in its bid for a Security Council seat 2021–22.

Canada still has much to offer UN peacekeeping, both at UN Headquarters and in the field. The country has an envious position in the world and real strengths at home, giving it a competitive advantage in the deployment of Canadians abroad: a multicultural mosaic, a bilingual civil service and military, minority rights protection, the rule of law, and long-standing service to UN causes (though diminished in the last two decades). Canada’s peacekeeping reputation still persists in the international community, long after Lester Pearson proposed the first peacekeeping force. It is also a country free from colonial baggage that the Great Powers still bear in many conflict-ridden countries. Canada has a modern military that, with new training and updating, can provide excellent peacekeepers. Canadian peacekeepers can be of particular help in Francophone countries like Mali, Haiti, D.R. Congo, and the Central African Republic.

Canada is also a technologically-advanced country, whose military has valuable enablers. The United Nations is now keen to improve its technological capability. After lagging in technology for decades, the United Nations has made much progress with technological innovation over the past few years.

But there is still so much more needed from contributing states in order to explore, expand, and mainstream the technological enablers required for better peacekeeping planning and performance (Axworthy and Dorn 2016). Pledges are needed for both new and existing technologies. Canada could advance the technological capacity in UN peacekeeping and join several nations that already serve as “Technology Contributing Countries” (TechCCs).

Canada can lead in peacekeeping, as it once did, but by any objective assessment, it is no longer a leader. After two decades of minimal contributions, it is relevant to answer the question that Lester B. Pearson

(1957) asked in his Nobel Lecture following the creation of the first peacekeeping proposal:

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?

The Trudeau government seems to lack the political will to overcome the resistance within the Canadian Armed Forces leadership. Will Canada ever return?

NOTES

1. The missions that the Canadian generals led in the 1990s were: UNFICYP (1988–1992), ONUCA (1990–91), MINURSO (1991–92), UNAMIR (1994–96), MNF-Zaire (1996), UNTMIH (1997), UNDOF (1998).
2. Canada joined the United Kingdom and Bangladesh to launch the WPS Chiefs of Defence Network, with the goal of sharing best practices among national militaries and to “compare progress in addressing barriers and challenges to integrating WPS in national militaries.” The Canadian CDS, General Jon Vance, succeed the UK chief as Network chair in 2019. But the initiative was not focused on women in peacekeeping. Soon after retirement in 2021, General Vance was found to have disgraced his declared cause of women’s dignity in CAF and his signature achievement Operation Honour was ended.
3. According to monthly statistics compiled by the author from UN sources (United Nations 2020), the Trudeau government has, on average, fielded 95 uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping (2015–2020), while the Harper government’s average (2006–2015) was on average 157, i.e., over 50% higher.

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