

No, But Yes. Military Intervention in the New Era: Implications for the Canadian Armed Forces

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No, But Yes. Military Intervention in the New Era: Implications for the Canadian Armed Forces*

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▶ **Executive Summary**

The current complexity, ambiguity and chaos in the contemporary operating environment creates, for most national governments and their militaries, difficulty in adequately understanding, coping and responding to the myriad of security concerns. The challenge is normally one of scope and viable options. Canada is no different. Both the Government and the Canadian public are war-weary from over a decade of savage insurgency in Afghanistan. Further, the dire international economic situation has necessitated fiscal austerity measures that have had a significant impact on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). As a result, the Government is reluctant, if not downright opposed, to any form of military intervention that may lead to becoming embroiled in another long drawn-out conflict with ground forces that will create a drain on national blood and treasure. Therefore, there is a tendency to say “No” to military intervention. Yet, for the government to maintain its status and influence with Allies, friends and global partners, it cannot be so naïve. It must do its share of “heavy lifting” with regard to ensuring world stability and security. As such, this article examines the necessity for the CAF, which will find itself squeezed by the fiscal necessity of the times, to simultaneously deliver relevant, strategic expeditionary capabilities that can quickly deploy and that will allow the Canadian government to maintain its credibility as a reliable ally and global partner.

Non, ou plutôt oui. L'intervention militaire dans la nouvelle ère : répercussions pour les Forces armées canadiennes*

Bernd Horn, Ph. D.

► Sommaire

La complexité, l'ambiguïté et le chaos actuels dans l'environnement opérationnel contemporain soulèvent pour la plupart des gouvernements nationaux et leurs forces armées la difficulté de comprendre des enjeux de sécurité multiples, de les affronter et d'y répondre adéquatement. Le défi en est généralement un de compétence et d'options viables. Le Canada n'est pas différent. Le gouvernement et le public canadiens sont las de la guerre après plus d'une décennie de sauvages insurrections en Afghanistan. De plus, la désastreuse situation économique internationale a nécessité des mesures d'austérité budgétaire qui ont eu une incidence importante sur les Forces armées canadiennes (FAC). Le gouvernement est donc hésitant, sinon carrément opposé, à toute forme d'intervention militaire qui pourrait mener à s'empêtrer dans un autre conflit de longue durée contre des forces terrestres et qui entraînerait le sacrifice du sang et des richesses de la nation. C'est pourquoi on a tendance à dire « non » à toute intervention militaire. Pourtant, si le gouvernement veut préserver son statut et son influence dans les rangs de ses alliés, amis et partenaires mondiaux, il ne peut se montrer aussi naïf. Il doit faire sa part de la besogne pour ce qui est d'assurer la stabilité et la sécurité mondiales. C'est à ce titre qu'on examine dans le présent article la nécessité pour les FAC, qui subissent la pression de la nécessité budgétaire actuelle, de continuer à fournir des capacités expéditionnaires stratégiques pertinentes qui peuvent être déployées rapidement et qui permettront au gouvernement canadien de maintenir sa crédibilité en tant qu'allié et partenaire mondial fiable.

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To say we live in interesting times is arguably an understatement. The complexity, ambiguity and challenges of national governments and their militaries to adequately understand, cope and respond to the myriad of security concerns is, to say the least, extremely perplexing and difficult. The issue is one of scope and viable options. Currently, the security challenges are considerable and this trend will likely last well into the next decade. From global flashpoints to the dark side of globalization, to the intricacies and nuances of domestic and international politics, the path to success for governments and their militaries is more a complex maze, riddled with pitfalls, than a well paved straight-away with clearly defined entry and exit ramps. Additionally, governments and their publics are war-weary from over a decade of savage insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹ Western governments are leery to become involved in any other quagmires requiring national blood and treasure. Further, the dire international economic situation has created financial stress for many Western countries and as a consequence, has meant austerity measures being imposed on most, if not all, Western militaries. Not surprisingly then, most governments are reluctant, if not down-right opposed, to any form of military intervention that may lead to becoming embroiled in another long drawn-out conflict with ground forces.

Canada is no exception. The Afghanistan War cost Canadians approximately \$12 billion in treasure, 158 dead, and hundreds wounded with physical and/or mental scars.² Moreover, the government is in the process of balancing its budget in preparation for a 2015 election. Consequently, the Canadian government is rightfully hesitant to commit to military intervention that resembles the commitment of ground forces. The Government would much rather provide humanitarian assistance or a token military contribution that limits its commitment, avoids large outlays of treasure and particularly casualties, and does not risk escalating into another lengthy conflict. Therefore, there is a tendency to say “no” to military intervention.

Yet, for the government to maintain its status and influence with Allies, friends and global partners, it cannot be so naïve. It must do its share of “heavy lifting” in ensuring world stability and security. Humanitarian efforts and token military contributions normally do not pay the bills to maintain a seat at the international table where influence can be exerted. A domestic policy of “no” to limited military engagement will normally be in play, but at the same time the government will look to the military to provide a substantive impact that will allow the government to say “yes” to its allies and partners in order to maintain a seat at the table. With these strategies in mind, this paper argues that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) will find itself squeezed by the fiscal necessity of the times, yet simultaneously pulled to deliver relevant, strategic expeditionary capabilities that will allow the Canadian government to maintain its credibility as a reliable ally and global partner.

¹ The military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq cost the Americans approximately \$2 trillion in treasure. However, considering long term care of the injured, the costs are estimated to range between \$4-6 trillion. Ernesto Londono, “Study: Iraq, Afghan War costs to top \$4 Trillion,” *The Washington Post*, 28 March 2014.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/study-iraq-afghan-war-costs-to-top-4-trillion/2013/03/28/b82a5dce-97ed-11e2-814b-063623d80a60_story.html accessed 10 November 2014.

² The Canadian Press, “Canadian Military Involvement in Afghanistan Formally Ends,” *CBC News*, 12 March 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canadian-military-involvement-in-afghanistan-formally-ends-1.2569162> accessed 10 November 2014.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Canada certainly has its national interests. As a trading nation, global stability and security are important. Canada ranked 12th in the world as an exporter in 2013, racking up a total of \$455 billion in exports.³ In fact, merchandise trade accounts for approximately 51 per cent of the Canadian gross domestic product (GDP).⁴ How we engage in and with the world is directly related to prosperity, quality of life and security at home. Because of this, Canada has a substantial stake in assisting with maintaining stability in the world.

Equally significant, Canada must always remain conscious of its major ally, trading partner and neighbour. After all, approximately 79 per cent of Canadian exports go to the US.⁵ In fact, Canada trades more than \$2 billion in goods and services every day with its southern neighbour.⁶ Although it is important not to be a slave to the foreign policy of another country, it is also prudent to understand the consequences of being perceived as a poor friend and ally.⁷

Taking these factors into account, the Government of Canada (GoC) must balance a number of issues, many of which may be mutually competing. First, it must square the requirement to continue to push its export markets and maintain international relationships. Second, it must be seen as a responsible global citizen and contributor to peace and security if it wishes to maintain respect and credibility in international forums. To do so while maintaining influence in these world bodies, as well as within its alliances and coalitions means contributing in a substantive manner that is recognized by the international community and by close partners and allies. Third, to control national debt, achieve balanced budgets and minimize spending, discretionary costs, of which the military is the largest in the national budget, must be minimized. Not surprisingly, this budget squeezing places a great deal of stress on the CAF, which must cope with fiscal constraint yet still deliver on capability to achieve the substantive contributions that the government desires.⁸

³ "World Trade Organization, International Trade Statistics, 2013," Table 1.7. http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statistics_e/its2013_e/its13_world_trade_dev_e.pdf accessed 6 November 2014 (CIA World Fact book had Canada at 11th with \$459B).

⁴ "Merchandise Trade (% of GDP), World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TG.VAL.TOTL.GD.ZS> accessed 9 November 2014. Canada ranks 11th in GDP in the world. Chris MacDonald, "Canada doesn't need to be an economic superpower to lead the world," *Canadian Business*, 14 November 2014. <http://www.msn.com/en-ca/money/topstories/canada-doesn%e2%80%9t-need-to-be-an-economic-superpower-to-lead-the-world/ar-BBdylsl> accessed 15 November 2014.

⁵ "Canada Exports 1971-2014," <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/canada/exports> accessed 9 November 2014.

⁶ U.S. Government, "Canadian – US Economic Relations. Fact Sheet," <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/canada/303578/pdfs/us-canada-economic-relations-factsheet.pdf> accessed 9 November 2014.

⁷ A perfect example is the Canadian "failure," from an American perspective, to support the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The aftershock was telling. Indeed, relations between the US and Canadian governments, as well as their militaries, were strained during this period. Political and economic issues such as mad cow disease, softwood lumber, pacific salmon and border security, dominated the headlines as the Americans took a hardline stance. However, in 2005, once Canada committed ground troops to combat in southern Afghanistan, the contentious issues seemingly disappeared. This prompted a former commander of Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM) to comment "we went to Afghanistan to atone for our sins in Iraq" referring to American anger at the Canadian government's refusal to participate in its 2003 invasion of Iraq.

⁸ DND, as a result of overlapping deficit reduction programs, will have lost \$2.5 billion out of its nearly \$21 billion annual budget by 2014-2015. Murray Brewster, "DND Budget Cuts Delay Purchase Of New Equipment To 'Future Years,'" *Huffington Post*, 13 April 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/02/11/dnd-canada-budget-cuts-2014_n_4769538.html accessed 10 November 2014; and Murray Brewster, "Conservatives' twin budgets expected to carve \$2.5 billion out of DND: report," *National Post*, 30 September 2012, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/09/30/conservatives-twin-budgets-expected-to-carve-2-5-billion-out-of-dnd-report/> accessed 10 November 2014.

THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The challenge for the CAF becomes even greater when one ponders the future security environment of the next decade. Predictability and simplicity is a forlorn hope. The current chaos and complexity will only grow. New technologies and unprecedented globalization has allowed for levels of international connectedness that has proven to be a double-edged sword. Although full of potential for economic prosperity and increased interdependence, this new reality is also fraught with peril as it empowers smaller nations, as well as non-state actors, to develop enhanced capabilities for violence and destruction. In fact, the operational environment has become so enabled by the proliferation of cheap, accessible advanced technology (e.g. stealth and counter-stealth technology, automated and autonomous systems, robotics, encryption) that the technological over-match, so long an advantage of the Western major powers, is being eroded. Moreover, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) has further increased the level of destruction capable by rogue states and non-state actors.⁹

Globalization has also generated new power centres, and regional economic and political power blocs (e.g. China, ASEAN, EU, BRIC)¹⁰ that have changed the international dynamic, making it increasingly difficult for a single super power, or a single regional or political bloc, to control the international security environment. These new power relationships also create additional tensions and conflicts as competition for scarce resources, regional hegemony, political self-determination and/or territorial aspirations play out.

Concomitant with changes in the international system, “modern” warfare has evolved into an exponentially more ambiguous, complex and dangerous Hydra. Regardless of the term utilized (e.g. Political Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, Masked Warfare) adversaries employ a tailored mix of actions that combine informational and economic influences, conventional weapons and forces, asymmetry, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour simultaneously within an operational theatre in order to achieve desired objectives.

The Russian example in Ukraine is but one perfect example. In this case, the use of economic and financial manipulation to undermine a regime was coupled with subversive political actions. In addition, a sophisticated disinformation campaign was undertaken to ensure the situation was extremely ambiguous, thus making it difficult for domestic and/or external parties to make clear decisions on the options available to react or intervene. These actions were also done in synchronization with targeted cyber attacks, as well as in concert with the ambiguous employment of conventional forces close to international borders under the guise of being on exercise, and through the direct employment of special operations forces. All were taken in tandem with actions by civilian agitators and pro-Russian rebels. This panoply of activities, or in other words, the application of hybrid warfare, maximized the ability of Russia to achieve its objectives in the former Soviet republic with minimal outside interference.

⁹ For example, the terrorist organization Islamic State was reported to have used chemical weapons in Iraq in October 2014. It had also seized control of old chemical weapons production facilities in Iraq and was feared to have potentially captured chemical weapons from Syrian stockpiles. Alastair Jamieson, “Does ISIS have Access to Chemical Weapons in Iraq and Syria,” *NBC News*, 28 October 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/does-isis-have-access-chemical-weapons-iraq-syria-n234871> accessed 10 November 2014.

¹⁰ ASEAN – Association of South East Asian Nations; EU – European Union; and BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India, China.

Indeed, the contested battlespace of the next decade exists far from simply the land, sea and air domains. It also bleeds into space, as well as cyberspace.¹¹ Certainly, it will encompass all aspects of national power. Significantly, the rapid spread of information and use of the internet and social media will also transform the methods of waging conflict. Viral feeds will galvanize opposition, prompt recruitment of foreign fighters, create unrest and provide a catalyst for violence and outrage. Whether the metabolizing incident was factual or not will be largely irrelevant. As such, the international security environment will continue to grow more volatile and persistent conflict will continue to simmer and explode, leaving the world a dynamic, unpredictable powder keg. Vulnerable, fragile, failed and failing states will remain susceptible to violence, extremism and exploitation.

The net effect is a security environment that is intermeshed within every aspect of national society. Globalization is driving the connectivity of states, governments, non-state organizations, societies and individuals into deeper, inter-related relationships. Economic or political turmoil, conflict and/or environmental disasters in one region have, and will continue to have, significant direct and indirect effects around the world. The viral spread of information on the internet and social media will stress the ability of governments to control their populations and maintain civil order, as witnessed by the Arab Spring.¹²

As a result, despite the seemingly regionalized nature of many areas of conflict, the impact of apparently localized problems on global security has been, and will remain, considerable. In essence, local problems, if untreated, threaten to become global issues. Indeed, regional activities have consequently led to widespread acts of terrorism, insurgency, illicit economic exploitation, as well as the proliferation of weapons, the creation of terrorist training and/or staging bases, and criminal activity including trade in drugs, weapons and humans. Moreover, these illicit criminal activities have had the corollary consequences of population migration, and social and political instability. Clearly, even relatively minor conflicts, or what appears to be internal instability in distant obscure countries, underscore the need for international engagement and containment to ensure these regional conflagrations do not become breeding grounds for larger threats to global stability.

The recent chaos caused by the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria is a case in point. Left unchallenged by the West, which was shackled by fiscal constraints after a decade of costly

¹¹ As an example, even the Islamic State terrorist organization boasts of its cyber capability. They openly state of their plans to establish a "Cyber Caliphate" and warn that it is only a matter of time before they execute a highly disruptive attack on the American infrastructure or financial system. They have already invested much time and resources in developing their own encryption technology. See Jamie Dettmer, "Digital Jihad: ISIS, Al Qaeda seek a cyber caliphate to launch attacks on US," 11 September 2014. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/09/11/digital-jihad-isis-al-qaeda-seek-cyber-caliphate-to-launch-attacks-on-us/> accessed 15 November 2014.

¹² The term "Arab Spring" was coined from the Prague Spring, which was a short period of political liberalization and reform in Czechoslovakia during the Cold War, when the country was under Soviet domination. The brief era of reform began on 5 January 1968, and ended on 21 August 1968, when Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded and halted the reforms. The Arab Spring began on 17 December 2010, when Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vegetable seller set himself ablaze in the town of Sidi Bouzid, in Tunisia. His cart was confiscated by a policewoman, who also slapped him and spat in his face. The indignity and injustice apparently was too much for him to bear and Bouazizi burnt himself to death in an act of self-immolation in protest. The incident quickly fueled long-simmering frustrations over poverty and the gulf between, if not the greed of, the political elite and the general population, which subsequently spilled over into protests, which were, not surprisingly, brutally quashed by state security forces. However, the iron hand of the government was not enough to quell the unrest. And so, with Bouazizi's death, the Arab Spring was born. Protests also erupted in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Syria and Yemen. In Tunisia, by 14 January 2011, the situation was so untenable that the President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, fled the country. He was not the only despot to fall. Approximately a month later, on 11 February 2011, Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, was also forced to succumb to the pressure of the popular protests in his country and after a brutal attempt to put down the uprising, was forced from office after nearly 30 years in power.

conflict, fatigued of wars against Islamic extremists and conscious of the public's reluctance to get bogged down in another lengthy war, Western governments opted to allow events to run their course. However, the resultant catastrophe of genocide, other crimes against humanity and regional destabilization forced reason to prevail and the West to take action. Notably, these actions prompted IS to threaten retribution and mobilize its followers to specifically execute terrorism outside of its immediate area of operations in order to expand into the West.¹³ In fact, the events in Iraq and Syria very quickly came home to roost. An NBC poll indicated that as a result of the recent IS success in Iraq and Syria, and the spate of beheadings of Western hostages, "nearly half of Americans now believe their country is less safe today than before the 9/11 attacks."¹⁴ And yet, the IS had not launched a single attack in continental U.S.

The volatile state of the world and the complexity (i.e. the unknown and continually changing aspects) of operations in the future security environment dictate the requirement for all advanced industrial nations to share in the burden of global security and stability, despite fiscal constraints and political imperatives to minimize military interventions. Therefore, the GoC and the CAF must position themselves to be agile institutions that are highly adaptive and innovative in their approaches and methodologies of dealing with global crises. For the CAF, this situation requires the ability to deliver on substantive global contributions that are recognized as such by the GoC and its allies, yet, minimize crippling costs often associated with international military deployments.

MEETING THE NEED: THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF CAF

For the Canadian Armed Forces the challenge is not insignificant. Unquestionably, it must meet the requirements of its defence mission as assigned by the Government through its *Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS)*. Specifically, the CAF must "provide combat-capable, multi-purpose forces for employment both at home and abroad to protect Canada and Canadians, and to deliver strategic effect for Canada."¹⁵ Within this task, CAF has been assigned three key roles:

- a. Defend Canada;
- b. Defend North America; and
- c. Contribute to international peace and security.¹⁶

In accordance with the 2008 *CFDS*, the government also assigned national defence six core missions:

- a. Conduct daily domestic and continental operations, including in the Arctic and through NORAD [North American Aerospace Command];
- b. Support a major international event in Canada such as the G8, G20;

¹³ On 21 September 2014, IS, a threat that was largely regionally based in Syria and Iraq, fulfilled speculation and it expanded to a more global menace. IS issued a threat against western countries, including Canada, the U.S. and Europe. In a 42 minute audio recording distributed on social media, Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, an IS spokesman, called on Muslims everywhere to kill anyone whose country takes part in an attack on IS. Canadian Press, "ISIL puts Canadians on global hit list," 22 September 2014. <http://news.ca.msn.com/canada/isil-puts-canadians-on-global-hit-list> accessed 22 September 2014.

¹⁴ Luiza Ch. Savage, "The return of fear on the U.S.-Canada border," *Macleans*, 5 October 2014. <http://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/world/the-return-of-fear-on-the-us-canada-border/ar-BB7D7vU> accessed 5 October 2014.

¹⁵ Canada. *Report on Plans and Priorities 2011-2012 Part III - Estimates* (Ottawa: DND, 2011), 6.

¹⁶ Canada, *Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS)* (Ottawa: DND, 2008), 7.

- c. Respond to a major terrorist attack;
- d. Support civilian authorities during a crisis in Canada such as a natural disaster;
- e. Lead and/or conduct a major international operation for an extended period; and
- f. Deploy forces in response to crises elsewhere in the world for shorter periods.¹⁷

The theoretical requirements are immense, particularly in light of fiscal constraints and international realities. The bottom line is that the CAF must maintain a number of generic combat capabilities in order to ensure it can meet the required remits. Yet to maintain a sharp operational edge the CAF may need to shed some of its legacy “baggage” that represents sunk costs that have little strategic return. For instance, the existence of large fleets of ships, armoured vehicles, huge garrison footprints, etc., all mortgage readiness and deployability for quantity and generic capability.

The challenge for the CAF is to identify specific capabilities, functions or tasks that no longer respond to the actual threat environment and requirements demanded of the CAF. Rather than maintain the ability to potentially respond to every imaginable employment scenario, particularly those that resonate with an innate desire to maintain a traditional Cold War force posture, an emphasis should be placed on responsive, effects-based capabilities. The festering, smoldering landscape of the security environment, as we have seen, is explosive, where a “spark,” fuelled by globalization, can ignite a crisis that is totally unexpected, and one that can happen anywhere. Therefore, the requirement for a response is normally immediate.

However, the dilemma for the CAF is how to do it all? The risk of getting it wrong is also daunting and can have dire national consequences. Historian Sir Michael Howard captured it succinctly. In 2010, he wrote, “No matter how clearly one thinks, it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict. The key is to not be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed.”¹⁸

The allure of the emphasis on generic combat capability and avoiding a new approach, namely niche capabilities, is reassuring. However, does the traditional mind-frame serve the best interests of the Government and CAF? Clearly, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) must maintain a fleet of ships that are capable of ensuring sovereignty. They must be modern platforms that can operate in domestic waters, including the Arctic, as well as internationally. The RCN must be capable of working with other government departments (OGDs) such as Department of Fisheries and Oceans (i.e. enforce exclusion zones and anti-pollution regulations) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (i.e. counter narcotics) in order to protect territorial waters. It must also be capable of working with Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) by providing mothership and command and control (C2) platforms to empower CANSOF’s maritime special operations tasks. In addition, the RCN must also prove capable of undertaking international roles such as anti-piracy and maritime cordon and search operations. With these requirements, the CAF cannot escape the investment in modern, technologically advanced capable ships. The

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸ United Kingdom. *Strategic Trends Programme. Future Character of Conflict* (London: MoD, ND), 2.

art and science becomes knowing how many is just enough and exactly what support infrastructure is required to maintain them.

Similarly, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) also cannot escape the requirement to maintain a fleet of fighter aircraft responsible for ensuring the integrity of the nation's sovereign air space. NORAD or not, a nation that does not have its own capacity to regulate its air space can hardly claim to be an independent state. Adding to RCAF's cachet at the moment is the fact that the post-Afghanistan era has created conditions where air power is accepted as a substantive contribution to international military intervention. One can argue in the period preceding 9/11, it was "boots on the ground" that represented the acid test of commitment and anything less was seen as a token gesture. However, the air campaign in Libya and the current operations in Syria and Iraq have added to the argument for the necessity of modern, capable fighter aircraft. The RCAF has also proven to be a wily strategic contributor through its air-to-air refuelling and ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) platforms. The investment in these aircraft has allowed the RCAF to contribute a capability that is valued and of great importance to Canada's allies and coalition partners. These contributions have provided great strategic utility to the GoC and the CAF, but the same question must be asked; how much is enough?

It is the Canadian Army (CA) that is perhaps in the most dire need of reflection. Traditionally, firepower and manoeuvre has been the heart and soul of the Army. The notion of armoured all-arms combat teams and battle groups has never died. The cost of maintaining these large units with their heavy bill of equipment, infrastructure, personnel and training has come at the cost of training and readiness. For example, deployments to Afghanistan required a nine month "road to high readiness." But in the current era of fiscal constraint the CA has been left reeling, its ability to provide a substantive contribution in a timely manner is extremely difficult. Consequently, the Army, hampered by its anemic budget, will struggle to convince the Government of its strategic utility and salience, making it even more difficult to argue for more money. As a result, the CA must re-examine tasks, risks, realistic requirements and move towards a model that may niche some capabilities, shed others, and determine a definition of generic combat capability that meets the necessity of responding to domestic national disasters and manpower-intensive security operations, as well as international combat operations, but that does not default to a requirement to meet the worst case high intensity Cold War era understanding of conflict. What numbers, equipment and capabilities are realistically required to meet domestic requirement? What is it that Canada can provide internationally? Does it have to be armour heavy combat teams and battle groups? Many would argue no. Perhaps, light armoured vehicle (LAV) battalions with integral indirect fire support would suffice? For instance, a smaller, highly mobile, light infantry-based army with the requisite direct and indirect fire assets, not necessarily based on a traditional Canadian Cold War model, may provide a paradigm that meets both the domestic and international remit.

Although the CA must maintain the ability to deploy units on international missions that require a larger conventional force footprint over time, which understandably requires time for preparation, it must also focus on freeing up resources to allow it to maintain some capabilities on relatively high readiness to respond quickly. For instance, tasks such as vital point security/protection of Canadian assets overseas; non-combatant evacuation; military assistance and non-kinetic tasks such as supporting operations with its Influence Activities Task Force are all valuable functions that could allow the CA to be a substantive contributor on the world stage.

Currently, special operations forces (SOF) internationally, and arguably within Canada as well, have provided an excellent example of how responsiveness and adaptability have allowed SOF to play a seminal role in providing governments with the immediate, robust reaction to crises. The

reason is not hard to understand. SOF are capable of rapid deployment into any environment and they are proficient at deploying small, highly-capable teams that have a low signature and low-visibility. They can operate in a covert, clandestine, or discrete manner and they do not represent a major foreign policy engagement. In fact, apparently the media, press and military analysts have all accepted that “no boots on the ground” actually does not pertain to SOF. For example, Western governments have all declared that they will not deploy “boots on the ground” to Iraq in response to the IS crisis, yet almost, if not all, deployed SOF into theatre relatively swiftly.

Importantly, CANSOF can deploy quickly and early and provide situational awareness, or more precisely ground truth, which allows the government and CAF to make fully informed decisions on what actions to take. In addition, SOF serve as a catalyst to unify, extend the reach and maximize the effects of other instruments of national power, and they are capable of working with conventional and indigenous forces, as well as other government departments. As such, CANSOF provide the GoC with a wide spectrum of special operations options, lethal and non-lethal, to deter, disrupt, dislocate, and, when necessary, destroy those that would do harm to Canada, its allies and friends, or its national interests, in hostile, denied or politically sensitive areas.

Significantly, SOF are also seen as a valuable, credible contribution to any military intervention. For this reason, it has been noted that “Over the past decade, Australia’s special operations capability has been the Australian Government’s preferred instrument for contributing to the U.S. alliance in the form of a small but highly valued force element.”¹⁹ The Poles have done similarly, with the same effect. The Americans themselves have been no different in their reliance on SOF. Analysts concluded, “The United States faces a strategic environment of smaller defense budgets and declining political support at home and abroad for large foreign interventions requiring tens of thousands of troops. In this environment, special operations forces will remain one of America’s most important and effective military capabilities.”²⁰ CANSOF provides the same benefits for CAF and is worthy of special investment.

In the end, the Government will continue in its attempts to say no to costly military interventions but will, out of necessity, look for a limited, but substantive way to maintain its influence and “seat at the table.” CAF must focus on capability that is rapidly deployable and seen as a valued, relevant contribution to its friends, allies and partners. The future no longer allows for a long, drawn out commitment process. The *CFDS* underlines that “Globalization means that developments abroad can have a profound impact on the safety and interests of Canadians at home.”²¹ Therefore, the CAF, on behalf of the Government, must be ready to assist in shaping the security environment to prevent regional conflagrations from becoming international crises and thus must react quickly when required. Arguably, this necessity for rapid deployability, particularly within the reality of fiscal austerity, means the CAF will need to reassess how it sees the world and its place within it. Old paradigms, as comfortable as they are, may no longer apply.

¹⁹ Andrew Davies, Peter Jennings and Benjamin Schreer. *A versatile force. The future of Australia’s special operations capability* (Barton, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2014), 18.

²⁰ General David Barno and Travis Sharp, “SOF Power,” *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/sof_power accessed 19 July 2014.

²¹ *CFDS*, 6.

▶ **About the Author**

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