Is Canada Really Back? Commitment, Credibility, and the Changing Face of Peacekeeping

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This paper examines Canada's much-heralded—but now considerably delayed—recommitment to UN peace support operations. It explores both the changing environment of contemporary peacekeeping as well as the evolving nature of the Canadian debate around the place of peacekeeping within Canadian foreign policy. The paper's central argument is that Canada's deferred – and increasingly lukewarm—re-engagement with peacekeeping is indicative of a broader and deepening crisis of confidence, within Western states in particular, in the liberal interventionist paradigm that has governed international engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states since the end of the cold war.

INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, Justin Trudeau's Liberals took power in Ottawa with a bold promise to restore Canada's reputation as a constructive force for international peace and security. The centerpiece of this "Canada is back" strategy was a renewed commitment to UN peace operations; in mid-2016, the government announced that up to 600 troops and 150 police officers would be made available for deployment. By early 2018, however, amidst considerable speculation about when and where Canadian peacekeepers would be deployed, and in the aftermath of Canada's hosting of the 2017 United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial Conference—Canada remained where it has been for the better part of the past two decades: on the peacekeeping sidelines. Finally, in March 2018, the Prime Minister

ended what Maclean's columnist Paul Wells termed "this awesome extended display of dithering"[1] by announcing that Canada would deploy an aviation task force, consisting of eight helicopters and up to 250 military personnel, in support of the UN's Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).[2]

In the lead-up to the March announcement, and in response to rumblings of disappointment from New York and growing criticism that Canada's deferral on the peacekeeping file represented a broken promise that undermines Canada's international reputation,[3] government spokes-persons, especially Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, had advanced various rationales for the lengthening gap between commitment and delivery. The most consistent of these rationales was that the government was taking the time to get it right, and to find the right mission and the right role where Canadian contributions could have the biggest impact.[4] A variation on this theme was offered at the Defence Ministerial in Vancouver, where the Prime Minister shifted the focus to so-called "smart pledges" and niche capacities that Canada could offer to help fill existing capabilities gaps within UN operations, with the ongoing caveat that it could take up to two more years for such pledges to be delivered. Given this context, the Mali announce-ment, when it finally came, reinforced in the minds of many observers the growing perception that the government's early enthusiasm for peacekeeping had largely evaporated. In the words of Matthew Fisher, Canada's decidedly "niche" contribution to MINUSMA has underlined that "the Trudeau gov-ernment, moving in slow motion, intends to do as close to nothing in Africa as possible without actually doing nothing."[5] At the very least, the evidence of the past several years suggests that Canada is not about to re-assert itself as one of the world's pre-eminent peacekeeping nations. Canada may be here to help, as the prime minister is fond of saying, but all indications suggest that on the peacekeeping front, this help will be measured out in cautious, conservative doses.

My intention in this paper is to explore both the roots and the im-plications of Canada's lukewarm re-engagement with multilateral peace support operations. I begin by assessing changes and continuities in the broader global ecosystem within which UN peace operations operate, before proceeding to an analysis of recent Canadian developments. I conclude with some broader reflections about what Canada's re-consideration of its role in UN-led operations says about the future of peacekeeping more gener-ally. More precisely, I argue that Canada's stuttering peacekeeping reboot is

indicative of a broader and deepening crisis of confidence—within Western states in particular—in the liberal interventionist paradigm that has governed international engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states since the end of the cold war. The multilateral infrastructure underpinning peace support operations is, depending on one's perspective, either in transition or in disarray, and it remains far from clear, particularly in Africa, that even robust peacekeeping is up to the challenge of stabilizing the continent's most troubled states. Similarly, the strategic logic linking peacekeeping with longer-term processes of peacebuilding and conflict resolution remains tenuous at best, and may be becoming more so over time. These broader international trends have interacted with growing uncertainty, at a domestic level, Canada's role in and contributions to the promotion of international peace and security. While the Liberal re-commitment to peacekeeping made for good electoral politics, it was—and remains—disconnected from any coherent strategic vision underpinning renewed Canadian engagement. Absent any significant public clamour to see Canadian blue helmets back in action in the service of peace, the government has—notwithstanding the Mali engagement—largely maintained the course set by its predecessor.[6] This is particularly so with regard to non-UN engagements in Ukraine and Iraq, the goals of which—countering Russian aggression, fighting the Islamic State (IS), and being a good North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally—are more easily defended with reference to conventional understandings of the national interest. Ultimately, Canada's struggles to make good on its peacekeeping promises point to a government that is having an increasingly difficult time overcoming the notion that the messy, dangerous work of contemporary peacekeeping might in fact be best left to others.

THE BROADER INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In important ways, the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities facing peacekeeping and peacekeepers in 2018 bear a strong resemblance to the turbulent days of the early 1990s. In both eras, the institution of peacekeeping demonstrated its relevance as the go-to multilateral instrument for addressing the challenges of fragile and conflict-affected states, and peacekeepers were, and are once again, among the most visible and prominent actors within the UN system. In the words of the recent report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO), the UN's entire reputation "hinges on its ability to help end wars and sustain peace."[7] At the

same time, however, as in the early 1990s, UN missions are struggling under both ambitious mandates and high expectations to contain conflict, protect civilians, and lay the foundations for durable peace. While a few vestigial first-generation peacekeeping missions remain—where the core mandate involves, as in Cyprus, separating opposing factions and patrolling ceasefire lines—from the early post-cold war period onwards the core business of "multi-dimensional" peacekeeping missions has included not only stabilization, but also peace consolidation. Peacekeepers, in the words of the UN's own capstone doctrine, comprise "one part of a much broader international effort to help countries emerging from conflict to make a transition to a sustainable peace."[8]

Paradoxically, like their counterparts in the immediate post-cold war period, contemporary peacekeepers are also increasingly asked to operate in contexts where there is precious little peace to keep, let alone consolidate. After nearly 20 years of peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, the current UN mission is in serious danger of being overwhelmed by renewed conflict. In a recent open letter to the UN Secretary-General, the International Crisis Group warned that "the whole country faces security threats reminiscent of the 1990s, territorial administration is in chaos, social services are collapsing and state institutions violently contested."[9] Across other high-profile UN Missions – in Mali, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic – the limits of peacekeeping as a conflict management tool are also being tested, in much the same way as they were in Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia in an earlier era.

One key difference between then and now, however, concerns the willingness of peacekeeping missions and the UN Security Council that empowers them to contemplate the use of force in the name of peace. This shift towards "robust" or "enforcement" peacekeeping can be traced directly back to the way in which failures of assertiveness implicated UN peacekeepers in genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica. In the contemporary era, in parallel with the growing tendency to treat non-state armed actors not as parties to the conflict, but rather as illegal or illegitimate armed groups (or as simply terrorists), the Security Council has been increasingly open to authorizing offensive military action on the part of peacekeepers against specific actors. The most prominent example of this was the creation of the so-called Force Intervention Brigade in the context of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), which was mandated to "neutralize

and disarm" all armed groups, including the Tutsi-dominated M23 militia that had taken up arms against the Congolese government.[10] This slide from peacekeeping to war-fighting can also be seen in the context of other UN missions, most notably MINUSMA in Mali, where UN peacekeepers have engaged in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations either on their own or alongside French special forces.

Debates around the ethics and utility of using force in the name of peace are long-standing, and the UN in particular has struggled with these dilemmas since the end of the Cold War, when rigid adherence to the three bedrock principles of UN peacekeeping—impartiality, consent of the parties, and minimal use of force—became increasingly untenable. Indeed, over the intervening years, and especially after the Rwandan tragedy, the UN has arguably been inching closer towards embracing a fourth peacekeeping principle—the protection of civilians—on the eminently-compelling argument that the organization "could not stand idly by while atrocities were committed."[11] While civilian protection mandates have become increasingly common in contemporary peace support missions, this principle continues to sit awkwardly alongside the original three and has proven to be exceedingly difficult to operationalize. As Bellamy and Williams have noted, "it is now widely expected that peace operations should be in the business of protecting civilians, but there is no consensus about what protection entails, how civilians are best protected, or who is primarily responsible for protection."[12]

Beyond the challenge of translating mandates into practice, there also are growing concerns that adding civilian protection and counter-terrorism to the standard repertoire of UN peace support mandates is leading the UN into unknown and dangerous territory. The most immediate danger is that by cutting corners on the principles of impartiality and consent in favour of siding with a specific party (usually the government), UN personnel and, indeed, all members of the international community are increasingly seen as fair game by factions targeted by UN enforcement actions. MINUSMA has, for example, quickly emerged as the UN's most dangerous mission, with some 172 peacekeepers killed over the past five years.[13] Similarly, Mateja Peter has warned that by blurring the lines between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the UN appears to be "going down the path not only of enforcing military solutions through offensive action, but also of presuming and precluding particular political solutions by siding with (often contested)

governments."[14] In other words, unless enforcement actions are carefully tailored to a broader political strategy for long-term conflict resolution—one of four 'essential shifts' recommended in the HIPPO report—they risk excluding those very actors, who may have significant domestic support even as they are deemed illegitimate by outsiders, whose inclusion may be required for any sustainable peace process to take hold. While the dilemma is now familiar—the international community has yet, for example, to find the right strategic formula to simultaneously degrade and engage the Taliban in Afghanistan—it has become no less intractable over time. Similarly, the ability of external military forces to decisively alter the balance of power on the ground in ways that open space for the expansion and extension of legitimate state authority remains limited (Iraq being an emphatic case in point). The HIPPO report underlined both the lack of clear answers and the ongoing discomfort among UN member states surrounding these issues in its suggestion that "extreme caution must guide any call for a UN peacekeeping operation to undertake enforcement tasks and that any such mandate-task should be a time-limited, exceptional measure."[15]

Unresolved debates about harnessing multilateral military force for the cause of peace also point to the ongoing challenge of effectively integrating the imperatives of peacekeeping and stabilization with the comparatively longer-term requirements of peacebuilding. While intervening parties—the UN included—no longer appear fixated on short-term exit strategies, and while the language of "peace support operations" is being increasingly embraced in recognition of the need to marry peacekeeping and peacebuilding at an operational level, in practice the international track record of shepherding conflict-affected states from ceasefire to stabilization to sustainable peace remains uneven at best. If the DRC provides one cautionary tale along these lines, the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina is even more sobering. As a comparatively small country on the periphery of Europe, Bosnia has been the focus of a well-resourced and often-intrusive peacebuilding effort since armed hostilities ended there in 1995. While defenders of the international effort can point to more than two decades of relative (if negative) peace, Bosnia remains deeply-divided, politically-dysfunctional, and economically-stagnant, and has careened in recent years from one crisis to the next to such a degree that the prospect of renewed warfare can no longer be fully discounted.[16] If peace cannot be made self-sustaining in Bosnia, it is hard to be optimistic about its prospects in the constellation of African states where UN missions

currently operate. Thus, as a range of Western nations—Canada among them—contemplate renewed engagement with UN peace operations, the prospect of being drawn into open-ended peacekeeping quagmires has curbed enthusiasm considerably.

Ultimately, the future of peacekeeping remains inextricably tied to the future of peacebuilding, and peacebuilding—at least its liberal variant, which has dominated throughout the post-cold war period—is in crisis.[17] Beyond the dilemmas of dealing with recalcitrant parties who may prefer the relative predictability of ongoing conflict to the uncertainty of a peace process, ambitious efforts to re-shape war-torn states into functioning liberal democracies have (with few exceptions) fallen so far short of the mark as to throw both the viability and appropriateness of the foundational assumptions upon which such efforts are based into serious question. To borrow a phrase from John Ruggie, the peacebuilding policy community is currently "wandering in the void,"[18] caught between an increasingly untenable set of assumptions about the building blocks of peaceful societies and how to assemble them on the one hand, and on the other a more critically-inspired push to base future peacebuilding policy on an alternate, bottom-up set of assumptions—still empirically untested—around inclusivity, national ownership, and "grounded legitimacy." In other words, after fully a quarter-century of peacebuilding practice, the international community is still searching for appropriate sets of policy levers through which fragile and conflict-affected states can be sustainably guided towards less fragile and more peaceful futures.

Given that UN-led peace support operations have long been recognized as imperfect, yet indispensable, and governed by a flawed, fractious, and far-from-benevolent Security Council, the project of fixing them is almost as old as peacekeeping itself. While the 2000 Brahimi report remains a standard reference for this reform agenda, the past several years have seen a series of fresh studies and reports on strengthening the principles and practices underpinning the UN's peace support efforts. In addition to the aforementioned HIPPO report, the year 2015 alone witnessed the publication of the Report of the Secretary-General's Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, as well as a landmark study on the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda, published on the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.[19] Over the same time period, the successor to the UN's Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), were also being articulated, with much attention devoted to Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Beyond obvious differences in theme and scope, what all these studies share is a commitment to thinking more expansively about the challenge of sustaining peace in fragile and conflict-affected states, starting with a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention, which the new Secretary-General has made the centerpiece of his mandate. Similarly, the HIPPO report's insistence on "the primacy of politics" in peace operations speaks to the commonsense—if oft-neglected—wisdom that the solutions to deep-rooted and intractable conflicts are almost always political and almost never military.[20] In other words, despite the ongoing preoccupation with boots on the ground, the core role of armed peacekeepers continues to be, as it was during peacekeeping's earliest days, to generate and sustain the necessary space within which diplomacy and political dialogue aimed at durable solutions can unfold. Related to this is a common refrain about the importance of taking the principle of inclusivity seriously in peace processes. The AGE report, for example, identifies "inclusive national ownership" as a crucial determinant of sustaining peace,[21] while Goal 16 of the SDGs is framed around the twin pillars of inclusive societies and inclusive institutions. While inclusivity remains a somewhat amorphous concept, the growing consensus on its importance in the context of war-to-peace transitions speaks to the weak track record of so-called "pacted transitions" (those signed by, and addressing the needs of, a narrow set of armed "parties to the conflict"). Inclusivity, conversely, implies the incorporation a much broader range of societal voices in both the making and implementation of peace agreements, including not only all relevant armed factions, but also representatives from civil society, including women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. Finally, and more procedurally, all of the reports issue renewed calls for greater coordination and coherence throughout the UN system across all phases of the conflict spectrum. Avoiding excessive fragmentation and duplication, in other words, necessitates viewing peace as a "whole of UN project" including, crucially, the individual contributions of member states.

Ultimately, while there is no shortage of suggestions for how to improve the UN's capacity to perform its core mandate of maintaining international peace and security, weak links remain in the broader peace support chain. There is a decided lack of clarity around both the wisdom and utility of deploying force in the name of peace, and deep uncertainty around how

to shepherd conflict-affected societies from negative peace (that patrolled by blue helmets) to positive peace, which is self-sustaining and marked by a modicum of "decent governance."[22] To these long-standing dilemmas have been added, more recently, the dangers of violent extremism, which have exposed the UN's unpreparedness to engage in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, and strained the deeply-held belief that all conflicts are amenable to political solutions through the vehicles of negotiation and me-diation. Finally, the persistence of a "reform gap" between prescription and implementation has reinforced suspicions that the UN itself suffers from institutional sclerosis—"a Remington typewriter in a smartphone world,"[23] in the words of one former Assistant Secretary-General—incapable of meet-ing the challenge of shepherding societies from conflict to peace or of being reformed to make it so.

On the face of it, for a government looking to differentiate itself from its predecessor and carve out a distinctive (and constructive) place for itself on the global stage, peacekeeping is far from the easiest of arenas in which to do so. There are few appealing missions out there, at least when measured in terms of manageable risks and reasonable prospects of success, and it is not clear that a modest addition of Canadian resources will make a marked difference to any ongoing UN operation. Similarly, the long-standing belief that foreign policy should be a vehicle for the promotion of Canadian norms and values—a key domestic justification for getting involved in other people's wars—no longer appears as self-evident as it once was, given the mounting empirical evidence that not even the most intrusive and sustained efforts of peacekeepers and peacebuilders can transform conflict-affected states into stable liberal democracies. Indeed, while other Western states are also contemplating a measured return to peacekeeping (in an era when the front-lines of peacekeeping are staffed overwhelmingly by troops from the Global South), it may be the case that the era of "big peacebuilding" is coming to an end.[24] In other words, sobered by the experiences of post-cold war peacebuilding, Western states in particular may be increasingly disinclined to make long-term investments of troops and treasure in messy, uncertain peace support operations. Understanding this broader global context is crucial to understanding Canada's rather tentative re-entry into the peacekeeping game.

CANADA AND PEACE OPERATIONS: IN SEARCH OF A STRATEGY
As Canada prepared to host the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial
Conference, the question of Canada's unfulfilled peacekeeping commit-
ments re-emerged as an awkward counter-point to the government's claim
that Canada is "doing its part to make the world a more peaceful and pros-
perous place for everyone."[25] The optics of hosting a pledging conference
without having fulfilled its own pledges were not lost on the government,
and the Prime Minister himself came to Vancouver to unveil Canada's up-
dated peacekeeping plans. These included a marked shift to "smart pledges,"
including limited tactical airlift support and a rapid reaction force of some
200 troops,[26] some modest contributions in the area of peacekeeper train-
ing, as well as a renewed commitment to tackle the problem of child soldiers
in conflict contexts. While ultimately overshadowed by the Mali commit-
ment that came a few months later, the focal point of Canada's Vancouver
announcement was the so-called Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Opera-
tions, to which Canada committed some $21 million.

The Vancouver Summit signaled a discernible shift in the government's
thinking about Canada's role in peace operations. Prior to Vancouver, at-
tention had been focused on the prospects for getting a critical mass of
Canadian "boots on the ground" in a high-profile mission, as both a dra-
matic gesture of Canadian commitment and as an opening salvo in Canada's
campaign for a seat on the Security Council. After Vancouver, as Tonda
MacCharles and Bruce Campion-Smith observed in the Toronto Star, it has
become increasingly clear that "Canada is not looking to send its military
and police men and women into violent conflict zones where their lives
are at risk in endless missions where there is no peace to keep."[27] Some,
including the Star's editorial board, applauded this shift as both reflecting
a realistic appraisal of Canada's limited capacity to make a difference in
specific theatres and opening possibilities for more innovative approaches
to peacekeeping reform.[28] Others were less generous in their assessment,
viewing Trudeau's announcement as a significant dilution of Canada's earlier
commitment to make a meaningful contribution to international peace and
security.[29] David Kraydon, for example, described the announcement as
"both an admission that there are no viable peacekeeping operations to join
in this world today, and an acknowledgement that Trudeau has no plans to
reboot Canada's peacekeeping operations after they have fallen to historic
lows since the Liberals formed government."[30] The March 2018 decision to

deploy a Canadian aviation task force to Mali for a fixed 12-month period, went some ways towards answering criticisms that Canada had dropped the ball on the peacekeeping file, but largely confirmed the shift in direction towards more focused, niche Canadian contributions.

Recent developments have also underlined that what has been missing from the broader debate about when and where Canada would re-engage with UN peacekeeping is any overarching strategy both underpinning and justifying such re-engagement. Early in the current government's mandate, there was talk of developing a whole-of-government "peace operations strategy"[31] that would articulate a coherent vision for how, what, and where Canada could contribute (as well as why). Yet as the government entered the second half of its mandate, it remained difficult—at least from the outside looking in—to discern from official statements and publicly-available documents even the outlines of such a strategy. Prior to the Vancouver summit, the clearest statement on Canada's contemporary international security policy was the 2017 Defence Policy Review, which acknowledged peace support operations as one of eight "core missions" of the Canadian Forces.[32] However, beyond nods to the increased importance of civilian protection mandates and gender-sensitive peacekeeping, it is decidedly thin on the specific contributions military force (and Canadian military force in particular) can make along the complex continuum from conflict prevention to post-conflict peacebuilding. The absence of such strategic analysis is also reflected in the now-common lament that there are no "good missions" out there in search of Canadian leadership; such sentiments reflect both a rather nostalgic longing for the simpler, safer days of first-generation peacekeeping, as well as a somewhat unrealistic assessment that the benefits of being a peacekeeping player (including a non-permanent seat on the Security Council) can be obtained without any of the downside risks.

Similarly, despite considerable (if imperfect) experimentation during the Afghan mission with the so-called 3D approach—the integration of defence, diplomatic, and development assets in support of a coherent strategy for conflict management/transformation—the current government has yet to demonstrate much allegiance to this approach vis-à-vis peace support operations. As one example, the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (PSOPS), which replaced the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) in 2016 with a budget of $450 million over three years, has begun distributing Canadian funding across a range of thematic and geographical

initiatives. Regardless of the value or merit of individual projects (one recent funding announcement promised support for, among other projects, mediation efforts in Syria, dialogue promotion in Eastern Ukraine and in Cyprus, and peacebuilding capacity development among key stakeholders in Colombia and Venezuela),[33] PSOPS funding appears, at least to date, to be more disintegrated than integrated, with tenuous connections at best to existing development or defence commitments. Moreover, PSOPS has already come under criticism for being more focused on getting money out the door and into the field, and less focused on measuring impact on the ground.[34]

The relative lack of movement on the articulation of a coherent peace operations strategy—as well as on the Defence Minister's stated desire to ensure that Canadians are educated about the realities of contemporary peacekeeping—is also indicative of a relative paucity of peacekeeping champions across various levels of the federal government. Interviews conducted both within and outside of government over the past 18 months paint a picture of a Cabinet that likes peacekeeping in principle, but has little appetite for putting Canadian soldiers in harm's way à la Afghanistan, as well as of a military hierarchy that remains ambivalent about both the value and appropriateness of peacekeeping as a central function of the Canadian military. Such tendencies have been exacerbated by a certain inertia within the ranks of Canada's foreign service, reinforced by a senior leadership that, in the words of one insider, is disinclined to "deliver an activist foreign policy agenda or ... creative, imaginative policy leadership."[35] Ultimately, the fraught environments in which contemporary peacekeepers operate and the uncertainty over whether Canada's national interests are best served by closer association with a peacekeeping enterprise increasingly concentrated on the African continent, have both combined to diminish the government's initial enthusiasm for re-engagement.

The current moment stands in relatively sharp contrast both with previous eras of Canadian foreign policy leadership and with the experience of other middle-power states that have found ways to punch above their weight at the international level, in large part through consistent and coherent engagement with (and occasionally around) the UN's multilateral security architecture. It is not long ago, of course, that Canada played a strong, even decisive, role on the international stage as a norm entrepreneur through its leadership on key initiatives such as the Responsibility to Protect,

the International Criminal Court, and the Landmines Treaty. While none has had quite the transformative impact their architects hoped for, each has demonstrated in different ways that strategic initiatives on the part of middle powers—even when opposed by the world's great powers—can make a difference in terms of "altering the normative architecture of peace and security."[36]

Along similar lines, Sweden has, in recent years, oriented much of its own foreign policy agenda around the promotion of conflict prevention, which has both provided a sense of strategic direction for Swedish development and security assistance and enhanced Sweden's stature in multilateral fora. While the conflict prevention norm has proven to be a harder sell within the UN system in general, and within the Security Council in particular (despite ongoing efforts to prioritize prevention in operational terms), Sweden has had more success at the level of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, where the prevention norm has been progressively institutionalized.[37] Canada's ongoing hesitation on the question of re-engaging with UN peace operations also stands in marked contrast to Portugal which, as Maria do Ceu Pinto has pointed out, has leveraged its considerable contributions to UN peace operations to increase its prestige in the international sphere and its influence in international organizations.[38] Portugal, of course, was the country that beat out Canada for a rotating Security Council seat in 2010, while former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres now serves as UN Secretary-General.

Portugal's experience in particular is a reminder that for states outside the Security Council, the exercise of influence in multilateral security policy—one half of the solidarity/self-interest dyad that leads states to contemplate peacekeeping commitments in the first place—is very much a matter of pay-to-play. In other words, influence flows from credibility and credibility requires commitment. As a recent blog post by the McLeod Group framed the issue, "for Canada to have influence, to lead missions and provide force commanders and civilian heads of mission, we need to be a serious political, development, and military player; to be strategic; and to invest in understanding the bases of conflict. This is particularly true for Africa, where almost two-thirds of UN missions are concentrated."[39]

Viewed along this commitment-credibility-influence continuum, if Canada seeks to be a serious player in the context of multilateral peace support operations, the recalibrated vision of Canadian engagement unveiled

in Vancouver and currently unfolding in Mali is likely to fall considerably short. Indeed, in lieu of a coherent peace operations strategy backed by strategic and sustained resource contributions, what Canada is now offering the world is a modest, piecemeal suite of contributions—both material and normative—backed by what may amount to some wishful thinking about Canada's ability to lead from behind. This can be seen through a closer examination of both the turn towards smart pledges and the launch of the Elsie Initiative on women in peacekeeping.

SMART PLEDGES

Given Canada's demonstrated reluctance to commit front-line peacekeepers to some of the world's most dangerous peacekeeping environments, the government's pivot towards the smart pledge model of contributions enabled it to avoid having to choose between putting troops squarely, and perhaps irresponsibly, in harm's way and leaving them at home.[40] While the blue-helmeted, lightly-armed, and demonstrably low-tech foot soldier patrolling a zone of separation likely remains, in the minds of most Canadians, the dominant image of what peacekeeping is all about, the realities of contemporary conflict environments increasingly demand technological and logistical sophistication on the part of UN field missions. From strategic and tactical air support to mobile medical facilities to surveillance drones, such assets are in chronically short supply within peacekeeping missions, in large part because such assets are also in short supply among the UN's major troop-contributing nations. In this sense, Canada's shift to the selective provision of logistical support—notably airplanes and helicopters—represents a direct response to the UN Secretary-General's call for member states to propose and provide critical assets in support of urgent field requirements.[41]

Such contributions may, in fact, represent the future of how the developed countries of the West support peace support operations. Indeed, a division of labour is gradually emerging in which developing countries provide the bulk of peacekeeping's front-line troops, while developed countries fill more specialized niche roles (in addition to continuing to cover the bulk of the peacekeeping budget). Elements of this have already been seen in Mali, for example, where several European states took the lead in the development of the All Source Information Fusion Unit, which made MINUSMA the first UN mission to have a dedicated intelligence cell.[42]

For Canada, the embrace of the smart pledges approach to peacekeeping

both fits the current government's "here to help" narrative and provides useful political cover for a government that has struggled to articulate a coherent re-engagement strategy. Indeed, it may even render the search for such a strategy superfluous, since Canada can now simply select from a UN-provided menu of "critical asset deficits" in making its determinations for where, how, and for how long to engage, and subsequently defend such judgments on the basis of narrow technical criteria rather than degree of "fit" within a broader strategic framework. Peacekeeping via smart pledges not only enables Canada to make a more convincing case that it is pulling its weight by helping the UN fill important gaps at the operational level, but it may also allow Canada to better manage the risks of Canadian casualties while also leveraging opportunities to collaborate with traditional (and especially European) allies.

Questions remain, however, as to the kinds of leverage or influence Canadian smart pledges will generate. The commitments made in Vancouver—most notably air assets and a small rapid reaction force—appeared tentative at best, while UN officials expressed concerns in the aftermath of the MINUSMA announcement that Canada's contribution would not be "sufficiently robust" for Mali's harsh security and climatic conditions (prompting a subsequent Canadian announcement that it would add two "spare" helicopters to its original commitment).[43] Thus, to the extent that future Canadian contributions are seen to be driven by either minimalism or an excessive concern with risk reduction, they may also limit Canada's capacity to gain a seat (literally or metaphorically) at the venues where key debates on the future of peacekeeping will play out.

If Canada hopes to lead, on what basis do we expect others to follow? Such considerations are particularly salient, given that the government appears to want to offset its relatively modest field commitment by playing a greater role on the frontlines of peacekeeping policy reform. Indeed, in the wider context of the Vancouver summit, government spokespersons have been explicit in seeking to de-couple the relationship between resource (and especially personnel) commitments and the exercise of influence. Prime Minister Trudeau, for example, spoke specifically of shifting the focus from "discrete offerings and one-off commitments" towards delivering true, transformative change.[44] Retired general and former senator Romeo Dallaire, similarly, has argued that by shifting attention from one-mission deployments towards bigger-picture reform imperatives in areas such as gender

and child soldiers, "Canada's peacekeeping contribution will change the way peacekeeping is done."[45]

GENDER AND PEACEKEEPING

Such aspirations are reflected clearly in the Elsie Initiative, which was accompanied by a $21 million Canadian commitment, the bulk of which will provide seed funding for a new global fund to support the deployment of women peacekeepers. The initiative—consistent both with Canada's new feminist international assistance policy as well as the broader Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda—seeks to encourage significant troop-contributing countries to take gender considerations seriously when configuring national peacekeeping contributions. Currently, women comprise some 3 percent of military personnel and 10 percent of police personnel in UN peace support missions,[46] and the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations has recently set a target of recruiting 15 percent of women as military observers and staff officers and ensuring that 20 percent of deployed UN police are female by 2020.[47]

With the Elsie Initiative, the Canadian government has clearly sought to stake its claim as a norm-advancer on questions of gender and peacekeeping, and to align itself with Secretary-General Guterres' renewed push for gender parity at the system-wide level. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which moral and financial persuasion on the part of Canada, a country whose current peacekeeping commitments are likely to be viewed as tokenistic by major troop-contributing states, can influence state-level determinations on troop deployments. To take but one example, Pakistan, which currently has 6,099 peacekeepers in the field to Canada's 178 (itself a jump from a mere 43 earlier in 2018), counts a mere 4,000 women in its armed forces out of an active-duty force of more than 600,000, and has not, to date, put a high premium on placing women in peacekeeping positions.[48] The point is not to single out the security forces of Muslim-majority countries as being uniquely unsupportive of women; indeed, Bangladesh made headlines by deploying an all-female peacekeeping unit to Haiti in 2015, the same year that former Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps reported on the Canadian military's own ongoing struggle with misogyny within its ranks.[49] It is, rather, to suggest that the role of women in the military in any given country reflects broader and often deeply-ingrained patterns of gender relations that condition not only how women view the military (and

vice versa), but also the kinds of opportunities and prospects for advancement available to female recruits. Thus, while the financial resources behind the Elsie Initiative may help incentivize some troop-contributing nations to place more female peacekeepers, it is less likely to be a game-changer in terms of shifting the normative debate on gender and peacekeeping, let alone the broader culture of peacekeeping itself. This is particularly so given the "add women and stir" assumptions underpinning the initiative, which ignores the reality that "the mere presence of women does not necessary change gender hierarchies."[50] More generally, as the relatively disappointing results of nearly two decades of effort to implement the key provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 indicate, the relevant bureaucratic cultures, both domestically and internationally, have proven to be remarkably resistant to change. Thus, there may be more than a hint of hubris in Canada's claim to be able to initiate "transformational change" not only at the system level, but also among fellow troop-contributors.

Despite the structural and cultural challenges involved in shifting the gender balance within UN peace operations this issue might, from a broader perspective, still be considered to be one of the low-hanging fruits within the wider WPS Agenda. As noted above, civilian protection has now moved to the forefront of the peacekeeping debate, with 95 percent of current UN peacekeepers serving in missions explicitly mandated to protect civilians. Given the extent to which contemporary conflicts are also wars on women—the hundreds of thousands of rape victims in the DRC, which is regularly described as "the world capital of rape,"[51] being only the most egregious case in point—the development of more effective strategies to protect civilian populations caught up on conflict would arguably do far more to help women in conflict-affected contexts than an incremental increase in women peacekeepers.

While the protection of civilians was indeed a key theme of the Vancouver Peacekeeping Ministerial, and while Canada has signed onto the so-called Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, Canada has not been especially outspoken in the ongoing debate around civilian protection, despite its obvious urgency. This is perhaps one area where a strategy of leading from behind leaves Canada vulnerable to charges of failing to put its money where its mouth is. If Canada is increasingly unwilling to deploy its military and police personnel onto the front lines of peacekeeping, where the dangerous work of civilian protection plays out on a daily basis, it is also

awkwardly positioned to advocate too forcefully for more assertive protection strategies that inevitably carry greater risks for the peacekeeping forces charged with carrying them out

CONCLUSION

Nearly three years after Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs was tasked by the Prime Minister with "restor[ing] constructive Canadian leadership in the world," in part through re-engaging with UN peace operations, Canada's actions on the peacekeeping file would suggest a significant scaling back of ambition.[52] In lieu of taking on a leadership role in a prominent mission, the Trudeau government has opted for more discrete, niche contributions, both in terms of operational assets and in terms of advancing the peacekeeping reform agenda.

From a public policy perspective, there are of course good reasons for Canada to give up on the notion of a grand re-entry onto the peacekeeping stage. The UN's most prominent peace support missions—including those in the DRC and South Sudan—are now squarely focused on averting disaster, rather than on progressively putting in place the building blocks of sustainable peace; such missions, as Chris Roberts has suggested, "are the duct tape of international security efforts."[53] Venturing a significant presence in any one of these contexts, therefore, not only runs the very real risk of Canadian casualties, but also risks associating Canada with missions where the avoidance of ignominious withdrawal may represent the most optimistic medium-term yardstick for success. Moreover, Africa has never been central to Canada's national interests vis-à-vis international security, while scarce resources committed to open-ended peace support missions on that continent are resources that are unavailable for responding to emerging crises elsewhere. If keeping the peace is seen as a global collective action problem, then, the temptation to free-ride on the part of countries such as Canada, which has the luxury of distance from most contemporary conflict zones, remains difficult to resist.

Canada is, of course, not alone in reaching such conclusions, and just as the nature of contemporary conflict has changed so too have the realities of contemporary peace operations. Personnel contributions to UN missions on the part of the liberal democracies of the West have been in decline for some time, and currently comprise less than 7 percent of uniformed personnel.[54] While the West, broadly speaking, continues to pay the lion's

share of the costs of peace operations through assessed contributions and continues to direct missions and shape their mandates through its collective weight on the Security Council, the sharp end of peacekeeping is increasingly the domain of countries from the Global South. While there is some merit to the argument that, for example, African conflicts should be managed by African peacekeepers, the contemporary division of labour in peace operations has raised a separate set of concerns (emanating primarily from the West, it should be noted), mostly surrounding the impartiality of troop-contributing nations, the professionalism of those they deploy, and the effectiveness of peace operations thus comprised. Others, Philip Cunliffe most prominently, have pitched contemporary troop-contributing dynamics in darker terms—evidence that Western states have used their domination of international institutions to enlist the armed forces of the global South in a wider project of policing instability in the periphery.[55] At the very least, Canada's hesitation on the peacekeeping front may reflect a broader set of trends that have increasingly led Western states—including serious contributors such as Portugal, which now contributes less than 200 uniformed personnel—to keep the messy realities of peacekeeping at arms-length.

More broadly still, the "distancing" strategies on the part of Western governments such as Canada vis-à-vis contemporary peacekeeping also appear to be a symptom of a deepening crisis of confidence, not only in the efficacy of peace operations, but also in the entire edifice of liberal interventionism that has provided the template for international engagements in fragile and conflict-affected states for the past several decades. Increasingly, as David Chandler has recently observed, the problems of conflict and fragility "are no longer conceived as amenable to political solutions in terms of instrumental governing interventions on the basis of cause-and-effect understandings."[56] The crisis of liberal peacebuilding, on this reading, is the outcome of a long journey from liberal hubris (outsiders can fix all of problems of conflict-affected states) to liberal humility (we can fix none of them). Rather than re-doubling their efforts in search of more effective intervention strategies that support just and sustainable resolutions to conflict, key international actors may instead be embracing the language of inclusivity, national ownership, and "localism" as a means of putting further distance between themselves and a peacekeeping/peacebuilding enterprise that has proven increasingly difficult to justify in cost-benefit terms. While

Canada has now put just enough skin in the game to close what had become an awkward gap between its words and its deeds on the peacekeeping file, its actions (or inactions) over the past several years also suggest that it may have reached similar conclusions about the questionable utility of making peace operations more than a niche element of Canadian foreign policy.

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