

The Future of Peacekeeping

Jalil Benish, Katelyn Forsyth, Abdi Issa and Samuel Vargas

Issue

This policy brief explores Canada's involvement in United Nations peacekeeping. As Canada continues to campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, we outline several avenues through which Canada can demonstrate leadership to strengthen peacekeeping and help make it “fit for the future.”

Background

The vitality of the rules-based international order continues to be a pressing and consistent foreign policy concern for Canada, and for good reason. The liberal order that has governed the post-World War II system has been strained by innumerable conflicts, protracted intra-state instability, and declining trust and goodwill among states. This multi-pronged assault on the rules-based international order has forced the United Nations to think pragmatically about the future of peacekeeping, one area that has been affected by the aforementioned developments. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, introduced in 2017, outlines three broad areas for reform: development system reform; peace and security architecture reform; and management reform aimed at making peacekeeping “fit for the future” (UN 2017c). Although it is too early to predict what the cumulative outcome of Guterres' reform agenda will be, it is clear that UN peacekeeping is at a critical juncture.

Given these developments, it is vitally important that supporters of peacekeeping, such as Canada, recognize the challenges that peacekeeping faces and step up to defend, re-shape and strengthen the capacity of UN peace

operations. As such, this policy brief explores what these developments mean for Canada's foreign policy objectives and, more importantly, how Canada can position itself as a key contributor to the peacekeeping reform agenda. This policy brief begins with a brief contextual overview of Canada's historical engagement with peacekeeping, followed by an examination of recent changes to peacekeeping — both domestically and internationally — and, finally, a review of Canada's key peacekeeping support initiatives. This policy brief concludes with four policy recommendations, grouped around three thematic areas: training, protection of civilians (POC) and gender. Instead of advocating for additional “boots on the ground,” we suggest that Canada should consider a number of discrete, impactful initiatives that will provide added value to existing UN peacekeeping operations.

Strategic involvement in UN peacekeeping is in Canada's long-term national interest, and Canada's current campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council provides a unique opportunity to defend a key pillar of the multilateral security order. Contemporary conflict threatens international stability, and today's crises — whether the migrant crisis gripping the Mediterranean and Middle East, or the protracted conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa — all require multilateral solutions. Peacekeeping is a hallmark institution of the multilateral, rules-based international order, and has ensured a degree of peace and security in the past and is needed now and in the future. Peacekeeping has been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of renewed conflict (Fortna 2008) and, when properly equipped and mandated, peacekeeping missions can help to avert humanitarian disasters and prevent violence against civilians (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2013; Hultman 2010). As peacekeeping

represents a more cost-effective means of mitigating international conflicts than bilateral intervention (Goldstein 2011), it is therefore in Canada's national interest to ensure that these missions are sufficiently capacitated to address contemporary conflicts.

Making Peacekeeping “Fit for the Future”

Today, the future of UN peacekeeping is threatened by budgetary shortfalls as well as declining political will from troop-contributing countries and Security Council members. Despite a recent surge in conflict around the globe, the United Nation's capacity to respond to and manage conflict is undergoing a period of contraction. Current peacekeeping missions are highly complex, involving a broad range of actors and objectives in unstable contexts where there is often no peace to keep. Successful peace operations require the incorporation of political, diplomatic and developmental components that bridge the gap between conflict prevention, mediation and long-term peacebuilding. Secretary-General Guterres' A4P agenda has focused on developing institutional reforms to bolster the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. By reducing fragmentation across the UN system, Guterres hoped to promote “a more joined up, whole-of-pillar approach to the delivery of mandates and stronger cross-pillar cooperation” (UN 2017b). These institutional reforms are vital to ensuring that peacekeeping operations are focused, supported by clear decision-making structures and that they possess the budgetary and field support required to be successful.

Canada and Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping has historically been one of the defining features of Canada's national identity. In fact, when then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien proclaimed that “We are always there, like the Boy Scouts,” (cited in Carroll 2016, 167) he was tapping into a long-held belief by Canadians that we are a peacekeeping nation. Although innumerable works have questioned the truth behind this claim (see Carroll 2016; Martin-Brule and von Hlatky 2017), there is certainly no denying that Canada has made important contributions to peacekeeping. In recent years, Canada's contributions to peacekeeping have shifted, and are increasingly shaped by an interest in providing high-end capabilities and specialized training (Prime Minister's Office 2017). Canada has also championed peacekeeping in high-level fora and hosted the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference in

Vancouver, BC, promoting the “Smart Pledge” approach aimed at providing the UN “with the predictability it needs to more effectively plan its operations and training” (ibid.). Canada's commitment to smart pledging “encourages better coordination of contributions to peacekeeping missions from partner countries, helping to eliminate critical gaps and ensuring that contributions can be deployed on a rotating basis” (ibid.). Finally, Canada supported the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali with specialized contingents of Canadian Armed Forces, offering vital mission air support (Government of Canada 2019).

As a country that is dependent on a stable, rules-based international order for its economic well-being, Canada should support UN peacekeeping by continuing to champion current reform efforts and by making strategic contributions in key areas where Canada has both expertise and long-standing interest. Canada's past and ongoing involvement in the areas of peacekeeper training, protection of civilians and the gendered dimensions of conflict and development provides a natural base from which to develop new initiatives, approaches and strategies that add value to peacekeeping operations. These three themes have been critical to Canada's foreign policy approach and initiatives. Canada has a strong tradition of peacekeeper training, grounded both in Canada's professional and highly regarded military and in its experience with the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Canada has also been a long-standing champion of human rights and humanitarianism, embodied both in Canadian leadership in the development of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and its early leadership in introducing POC mandates into UN peace operations. Finally, gender has been a centrepiece of Canada's feminist foreign and international assistance policy, and the current government remains strongly committed to the promotion of gender equality on a global level. These three themes demonstrate areas where Canada has shown consistent leadership and committed support, representing natural areas for further Canadian action.

What Canada is Doing on Training, POC and Gender

Training is vital to the success of peacekeeping missions. In fact, Secretary-General Guterres' A4P reform agenda emphasizes the need for member states to assist in capacity building for mission contingents, particularly the need to implement a light coordination mechanism and language

training, as well as cultural competence around local customs and traditions (UN n.d.). Canada continues to invest in modernizing and enhancing peace operations by training peacekeepers in contexts where training is needed, and in thematic areas in which Canada has established expertise. In the past, Canada has met the call for action in supporting peacekeeping training, routinely leveraging the expertise of its military to support peacekeepers. Today, peacekeeping missions are often faced with a lack of capacity to engage in conflict management, in part because they lack comprehensive training on how to engage local communities, address child soldiers, identify gender-based violence or ensure the protection of civilians. Additionally, another critical problem is an ongoing deficit of specialized French-language peacekeeper training, which is particularly problematic given that many ongoing peace operations are situated in francophone countries. Canada can provide modules for peacekeeping training in both English and French, ensuring that all peacekeepers are able to address and effectively engage with policing, gender, child soldiers and the POC mandates. Due to the dynamic of peacekeeping missions today, peacekeepers are engaging with unconventional threats and conflict situations; one urgent example of this is the issue of child soldiers (UN 2017a). Peacekeepers often do not have the capacity to engage with child soldiers effectively and, as such, peacekeeping training ought to be focused on building that capacity. Canada has the knowledge and capacity to assist in the development of specialized training modules, specifically around engaging with child soldiers — building on expertise developed through The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative — and the POC agenda.

On the POC agenda, Canada has championed this mandate as imperative to the success of peacekeeping. During the establishment of the UN mission in Sierra Leone in 1999, Canada was a strong supporter of the first mandate to explicitly authorize UN forces to protect civilians under threat of imminent violence. POC mandates have appeared in nearly all UN peacekeeping missions since 1999 (Sebastian 2015). As Canada campaigns for a seat on the Security Council, it is imperative that Canada continues to speak up loudly about the importance of protecting civilians in conflict zones, and it should continue to push for adequate funding to support the effective operationalization of POC mandates. The POC agenda gives Canada an opportunity to clearly articulate what its priorities are on

the international security agenda. Similarly, Canada has been a consistent contributor of police to peacekeeping operations. In fact, Canada has provided more than 4,000 police officers to various peacekeeping missions through the Canadian Police Arrangement, an initiative under Canada's International Police Peacekeeping and Peace Operations contributions (Government of Canada 2019). Canada's secondment of police officers provides critical mission support to peacekeeping operations and is essential to ensuring that missions are able to achieve their mandates by providing security to local communities affected by violence. Building on the success of Canada's policing contributions requires finding ways to galvanize support from member states to continue to engage in policing-centred peacekeeping.

On gender, Canada's commitment to the Elsie Initiative demonstrates Canada's ability to offer international leadership on the fair treatment of women in conflict-affected contexts. Consistent with Canada's commitment to Gender-Based Analysis Plus policy making, Canada has encouraged a whole-of-government approach that looks at empowering women in conflict environments. The Elsie Initiative aims to incentivize member states — through the provision of financial support — to remove barriers of entry to women's participation in peacekeeping operations. However, as noted in the International Peace Institute's *Not Just a Numbers Game* report, many of the world's leading peacekeeping contributing nations have deeply embedded barriers of entry for women which can make it difficult for member states to integrate more women into peacekeeping missions (Dharmapuri 2013). Tackling these barriers is a long-term project, and it is estimated that it will not be until 2028 that 25 percent of all peacekeepers are women (Sherman 2018). In the meantime, millions of women and girls in conflict zones urgently require assistance, and finding way to reduce their insecurity remains a key challenge for UN peacekeeping.

Recommendations

1. **Training:** Canada should position itself as a world-leader in specialized peacekeeper training, and in particular develop training modules on POC, on engaging with child soldiers and on gender-inclusive peacekeeping. Additionally, Canada should leverage the competitive advantage of a bilingual military to consolidate its expertise in the provision of thematic training for francophone peacekeepers. Canada should

capitalize on this opportunity to systematize its peacekeeping training initiatives by harnessing these niche capacities.

2. **Championing the POC agenda on the international stage:** Given the pressure that peacekeeping is under at the moment to be leaner, and possibly meaner, Canada should take every opportunity to speak out against budget cuts that would negatively impact the ability of missions to protect civilians. This includes speaking loudly and clearly — using the platform provided by Canada’s campaign for a Security Council seat — against cuts to gender advisers, POC advisers, civil affairs officers or community-liaison assistants.
3. **Policing:** Given the importance of policing to both contemporary peacekeeping and POC, Canada should initiate a blue-ribbon panel to examine how to strengthen the role of policing in contemporary peacekeeping. Following the successful model of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, such a high-level policy discussion would focus broad international attention on both the challenges of police peacekeeping and on the development of innovative strategies that place policing at the heart of the POC agenda. Leadership on such an initiative would leverage existing Canadian expertise in this area and promote greater understanding of the added value of police to peacekeeping missions.
4. **Gender — Elsie II:** Canada should build on the progress it made in promoting more uniformed women in peacekeeping operations through the Elsie Initiative by initiating a second Elsie Initiative. Elsie II should focus on promoting gender-inclusive and gender-balanced security provision among the police services of conflict-affected states. Utilizing resources available through Global Affairs Canada’s Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Elsie II should provide specific support for reform initiatives that both incentivize increased representation of women in police forces in conflict-affected countries and encourage both gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive policing, in part through the provision of specialized training.

About the Authors

Katelyn Forsyth is a student in the University of Waterloo’s Master of Arts in Global Governance to program based at the BSIA.

Abdiasis Issa is a Ph.D. student in the joint-Wilfrid Laurier University/University of Waterloo Global Governance program based at the BSIA.

Samuel Vargas is a student in Wilfrid Laurier University’s Master of International Public Policy program based at the Balsillie School of International Affairs.

Abdul Jalil Benish is a student in Wilfrid Laurier University’s Master of International Public Policy program based at the BSIA.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to sincerely thank Dr. Timothy Donais and Eric Tanguay for their guidance and support throughout this process. A special thank you to the BSIA and GAC for providing this opportunity and for the knowledgeable feedback in completing this policy brief.

Works Cited

- Carroll, Michael. 2016. Peacekeeping: Canada's past, but not its present and future?. *International Journal*, 71(1), 167-176.
- Dharmapuri, Sahana. 2013. "Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping." *Providing for Peacekeeping* No. 4, New York: International Peace Institute. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_epub_not_just_a_numbers_game.pdf.
- Fortna, Virginia P. 2008. *Does Peacekeeping Work?: Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- GAC. 2018. "Canada Continues to Invest in Modernizing and Enhancing Peace Operations." *Global Affairs Backgrounder*, May 29. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2018/05/canada-continues-to-invest-in-modernizing-and-enhancing-peace-operations.html>.
- Goldstein, Joshua S. 2011. *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Government of Canada. 2019. "Operation PRESENCE — Mali." <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/op-presence.html>.
- Hultman, Lisa. 2010. "Keeping Peace or Spurring Violence? Unintended Effects of Peace Operations on Violence Against Civilians." *Civil Wars* 12 (1-2): 29-46.
- Hultman, Lisa, Jacob Kathman and Megan Shannon. 2013. "United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (4): 875-91.
- Martin- Brûlé, Sarah-Myriam and Stefanie von Hlatky. 2017. *Standing on Guard for Peace: Canada's Future Role in UN Operations*. Kingston: Center for International and Defence Policy. https://www.queensu.ca/sps/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.spswww/files/files/Canada%20150/PolicyBrief1_CIDP_Feb2017.pdf.
- Prime Minister's Office. 2017. "Canada Bolsters Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection Measures." *Backgrounder*, November 15. <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/11/15/canadian-contributions-united-nations-peace-support-operations>.
- Sebastian, Sofia. 2015. "The Role of Police in UN Peace Operations: Filling the Gap in the Protection of Civilians from Physical Violence." *Civilians in Conflict Policy Brief* No. 3. Stimson Center. https://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/CIC-Policy-Brief_3_Sept-2015-Web-REVISED_Jan2016_0.pdf.
- Sherman, Jake. 2018. *Action for Peacekeeping: Will Political Consensus Lead to Change in Practice?* New York: International Peace Institute. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Action-for-Peacekeeping.pdf
- UN. n.d. "Action for Peacekeeping." <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>.
- . 2017a. "Child recruitment and Use." <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>.
- . 2017b. *Restructuring of the United Nations Peace and Security Pillar. Report of the Secretary-General. A/72/525*. October 13. <https://undocs.org/A/72/525>.
- . 2017c. "UN Secretary General's Town-hall Meeting: Notes from the UN Staff Union." *Coordinating Committee of International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System Press Release*. August 14. <http://www.ccisua.org/2017/08/14/un-secretary-generals-town-hall-meeting-notes-from-the-un-staff-union/>.
- . 2019. "Action for Peacekeeping: Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028." <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2028-summary.pdf>.