

Canada's New "Peace Operations" in Africa

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As part of his party's policy platform, Prime Minister Trudeau, during last year's federal election, promised to renew Canada's commitment and participation in United Nations peacekeeping. He stated that "... we will recommit to supporting international peace operations with the United Nations, and will make our 'specialized' capabilities – from mobile teams to engineering support to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel – available on a case-by-case basis...provide well-trained personnel that can quickly be deployed, including mission commanders, staff officers and headquarters units and lead an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations."¹

This declaration was then followed by a Mandate Letter from the Prime Minister to the Minister of National Defence, stating that he is "to work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peace operations". This included a) making Canada's specialized capabilities – from mobile medical teams, to engineering support, to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel – available on a case-by-case basis, b) working with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to help the United Nations respond more quickly to emerging and escalating conflicts and providing well-

¹ Martin Shadwick, "The Renaissance of Peacekeeping and Peace Operations," *Canadian Military Journal* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2016): p. 72.

trained personnel to international initiatives that can be quickly deployed, such as mission commanders, staff officers and headquarters units and c) leading an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations, while insisting that peacekeepers involved in misconduct be held accountable by their own country and the United Nations.²

Recently Defence Minister Sajjan toured a number of countries in East Africa to determine their respective conflict situations in attempting to decide where Canada's "peace operations" might be the most valuable. In operating in Africa, DND will have to determine what is meant by "specialized capabilities". It is clear that whatever country in Africa is selected by the government, "peace operations" equates to "combat operations". Peacekeeping operations have changed drastically from the days of the 1960s. In the 1990s, the United Nations had to cope with a number of significant "peacekeeping" failures such as Somalia, the Rwandan genocide, and the slaughter of Bosnian males in Srebrenica.³ As a result of these atrocities, most Western nations backed away from such operations around the world.

By 2016, however, the make-up of the UN force had changed drastically. More than 100,000 uniformed peacekeepers are deployed on 16 missions around the world, at a cost of US \$8 billion a year. Canada deploys around 100 peacekeepers abroad (including police), ranking 67th in the list of contributing nations. If, as promised, we sent 600 troops and 150 police to Africa, we would then move up to 36th on the list.⁴

Currently more than 30 percent of the deployed UN peacekeepers come from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, where such countries receive monies for each soldier on assignment. Due to a lack of adequate training for such missions, the track record for such missions in Africa has been less than stellar. In a major UN peacekeeping review in 2015, it was determined that "peacekeepers were deployed into combat where 'there was little or no peace to keep'," such as Darfur in western Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The panel found that in "mission after

² Ibid.

³ Richard Warnica, "The problem of peacekeeping; Missions can be bureaucratic, abusive and buck-passing. they can also be effective," *Calgary Herald*, September 3, 2016, p. NP2

⁴ Geoffrey York, "Amid threats, security efforts on the rise at African mining sites," *Globe and Mail*, August 27, 2016, p. A-3

mission, there was a widening gap between what is being asked of UN peace operations today and what they can actually deliver".⁵ Critics of such operations in Africa by the UN see it as a problem of scale and politics while others maintain it as a question of scope and structure within the UN itself.⁶

Within the past year, scandals have plagued peacekeeping operations in Africa. Peacekeepers have been criticised for failing to intervene in cases where civilians have been attacked by various factions within the country itself. There have been allegations of child sexual abuse by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. In South Sudan, there have been reports that peacekeepers failed to intervene in a number of sexual assaults by government soldiers against women this past summer, blaming Ethiopian, Chinese, and Nepali troops.⁷

In its 2015 peacekeeping review, the UN noted as well that there was "confusion with respect to command and control and the rules of engagement as well as a lack of co-ordination between the various peacekeeping units".⁸ In addition, several countries have included secret caveats within their operational mandates instructing their respective troops to avoid taking action in certain circumstances or requiring their commanders to phone back to their capitals asking for instructions, instead of answering to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York.⁹

The Canadian Minister of National Defence has commented publicly that he is not in favour of such caveats, and considers that peacekeepers must protect all civilians and wants to ensure that our troops feel safe with other foreign troops operating in concert with our peacekeepers.

Although to date Ottawa has made no final decision on the African country in which to deploy our troops, many pundits believe that the Republic of Mali in West Africa will likely be the country selected by the Trudeau government.

⁵ Warnica, "The problem of peacekeeping".

⁶ Warnica, "The problem of peacekeeping".

⁷ L. Berthiaume, "Senior military officer blasts onerous oversight, urges political direction," *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 2016.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Mali, a former French colony, became independent in 1960 and has over the years been strongly supported by Ottawa with significant foreign aid contributions. A number of Canadian mining companies also operate in Mali as well.

There is no question that Mali has a serious security problem, particularly in the northeast of the country. For decades, the Tuareg secessionists have been rising up against the government in the capital Bamako, seeking their own state. French troops clashed with fighters from Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the spring of 2013.¹⁰ Among the insurgents is the Macina Liberation Front (MLF) which targets U.N. and French troops and claims loyalty to AQIM.¹¹ ISIS has also been operating with Al-Qaida in this desert area, causing further instability by repeated attacks and ambushes against the Malian army. The French army is still operating with limited forces in an attempt to secure such centers as Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal from the Islamist terrorists.

The UN Security Council recently authorized another 2,500 troops for the Malian mission, authorizing the peacekeeping operation establishment to over 15,000 personnel and an annual budget of US\$1 Billion. However, since the deployment of the UN mission in Mali in 2013, more than 100 peacekeepers have been killed by ambushes, bombings, IED strikes, or in accidents.¹² Thirty-two peacekeepers have been killed in Mali in 2016, including five Dutch peacekeepers.¹³

Recently the insecurity in Mali has spread south and beyond the Sahel to the capital Bamako. The terrorists are better armed and have combat experience compared with the Malian army. The Institute for Security Studies, an African-based think tank reported “the number of armed groups in Mali has increased steadily since the 2012 crisis, and a large swath of the northern part of the country still remains beyond the control of the national authorities as defence forces or national security agencies don’t have the capacity to hold territory and defend local populations on a sustained basis.

¹⁰ Matthew Fisher, “Despite the Potential complications, All Signs Pointy to UN Mission in Africa,” *National Post*, August 30, 2016

¹¹ A useful review of such terrorist groups is found in J. Hammer, *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2016).

¹² York, “Amid threats”.

¹³ Cameron Clark, A Canadian Peacekeeping Mission in Mali could be most dangerous choice *Globe and Mail*, September 14, 2016. [Editors note: All Dutch fatalities have been declared training accidents, including the crash landing of an Apache helicopter, and have not all occurred during 2016.]

The terrorist threat, restricted to the north for a long time, has gradually spread through the rest of the country.”¹⁴

Anthony Banbury, a former UN official says that in Mali, “more than 80 percent of the UN Force’s resources are spent on logistics and self-protection. The United Nations in Mali is day by day marching deeper into its first quagmire,” Branbury warned in a recent article in the *New York Times*.¹⁵ Similar critics have maintained that Mali is the most dangerous UN mission in the world.

If Mali is selected to be the country of choice, the mission will be to hold off the various groups of Islamist militants which many European countries foresee as a possible threat in their own countries, who are now operating in the Sahel region of Africa.

The Dutch have had 400 troops in Mali for the past several years, but plan to leave soon so Canadian soldiers could be deployed to replace them.

In considering a deployment to a country such as Mali, the government should likely consider the following issues:

- The mission at the onset must qualify the rules of command and control between the UN bureaucracy in New York, Ottawa and the rules of engagement for the Canadian commander on the ground;
- Although the mission is led by the UN, could the African Union organization assist the Canadian mission?
- Will the US Africa Command, based in Stuttgart, Germany, assist the Canadian mission by providing intelligence and surveillance information?
- The working conditions for our troops would be extreme in hot desert conditions in the northeast of the country with little resources or infrastructure available. The territory in the northeast of the country is vast. The diseases of meningitis and malaria are prevalent in the country;
- Our troops require the latest firepower and equipment in operating under “combat conditions” to counter terrorists in Mali;

¹⁴ York, “Amid threats”.

¹⁵ Margaret Wentz, “Mr. Trudeau Goes to the UN,” *Globe and Mail*, September 20, 2016

- Naval and air support services must be determined, prior to the deployment;
- Based on prior history from other countries participating in peacekeeping operations in Mali for the past several years, it is likely there will be casualties and injuries from encounters as a result of the mission. It is important there be adequate medical services available close to our areas of operations;
- How effective will our soldiers integrate with the other thousands of troops operating under the UN mandate; many with limited training experience in such operations?
- How long will our troops be deployed on this mission and in the end how do we “measure success”? Will our troops make a difference in diminishing the terrorist threat in Mali?
- Must Parliament approve a UN mission to Mali, if recommended by the Prime Minister?
- What impact will such a mission have on DND’s budget?
- It should be recognized that such a peacekeeping mission is separate from France’s counterterrorism operations in the northeast of the country.¹⁶

¹⁶ Clark. “A Canadian Peacekeeping Mission in Mali”.