



# ***The Canadian Defence Policy Review***

*Briefing papers by Ernie Regehr, O.C., Senior Fellow in Defence Policy and Arctic Security*

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## **Canadian Defence Policy and Armed Intervention**

***The UN Security Council has found little to agree on when it comes to Syria,<sup>1</sup> but a year ago the Council did come to the unanimous conclusion that “...there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict.”<sup>2</sup> The obvious truth of that confession also applies in the 25-plus other wars currently underway – wars in search of military solutions through attacks on political opponents. There have been some 100 such wars since the end of the Cold War, and almost all of them proved that in the end there was no military solution. Armed interventions by powerful military coalitions in search of military solutions faced the same reality – a reality that should inform a new Canadian defence policy.***

It has become impossible to win wars so that “winning” actually means something – namely, a military victory that resolves the conflict that spawned the fighting. So the international community faces anew the deeply challenging question of when and how it should intervene in local and regional political conflicts that have turned or are threatening to turn violent and that are leaving vulnerable people in desperate peril.<sup>3</sup>

The predictable failure of contemporary wars to actually settle or over-ride entrenched political conflicts is still a contested narrative: a *New York Times* analysis<sup>4</sup> claiming that “most civil wars end when one side loses,” so that’s what will be needed in Syria; an academic’s claim that “most civil wars end in decisive military victories, not negotiated settlements;”<sup>5</sup> President Obama’s recognition that there is no military solution available in Syria<sup>6</sup> while insisting, in the context of the 2014 draw down of American forces in Afghanistan, that “wars end in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not through signing ceremonies, but through decisive blows against our adversaries.”<sup>7</sup>

But no military victory is imminent in Syria, and there are zero prospects for the Taliban being dealt a “decisive blow”<sup>8</sup> in Afghanistan. So, what is to be made of these conflicting claims – that civil wars rarely end in battlefield wins, or that they usually end through decisive wins? The discrepancy is linked to the time period being measured.<sup>9</sup> Surveys of all wars since 1945 do indeed conclude that most wars end through victory and defeat on the battle field, but when wars after the end of the Cold War are accounted for separately, a “dramatic change” in the pattern is revealed. Simon Fraser University’s Human Security Report Project<sup>10</sup> documents the shift, based on the Armed Conflict Dataset maintained by Uppsala University.<sup>11</sup> It finds that in the 1950s two-thirds of wars ended with victories by one side or the other; in the 1960s and 1970s that dropped to 50 percent; in the 1980s victories were down to 36 percent, in the 1990s it was below 20 percent, and in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it was down to just over 10 percent.

The Project Ploughshares record of wars of the first post-Cold War quarter century (1989 to 2014), identifies 64 civil wars that ended during that period. Of those, only nine, or 14%, ended decisively on the battle field.<sup>12</sup> Thirty-two, 50%, ended through negotiations, while 23, or 36%, dissolved or gradually wound down without a formal ceasefire or peace agreement. So, only one in six wars now ends through a clear military victory – and half of those wins go to the insurgents. And, by the way, while Cold War assumptions, supported by research, held that conflicts ended by decisive wins on the battlefield tended to produce a more durable peace than those that ended through negotiations, the post-Cold War experience has been that negotiated settlements have proven to be the more durable.

### **When wars can't be won**

The inescapable lesson (repeatedly taught but hard to learn) is that superior military force rarely prevails when entrenched political conflicts turn violent. In spite of that, the dominant political narrative still rests heavily on the story of victory in war. It is entrenched in the accounts and remembrances of the great wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is the story understandably drawn on when presidents and prime ministers send troops into battle or welcome them home.

Ironically, that same narrative of force as the final arbiter is perpetuated in calls for force to be used only as a last resort. The just war doctrine holds that war can be justified only when all other avenues have been exhausted – but with that formulation comes the implication that when all else has failed, when no other resolution to entrenched conflict is seemingly available, then the resort to force can be relied on to finally resolve and thus end a conflict. But the real post-Cold War story is of wars fought, not to victories that end a conflict, but to deeply hurting stalemates that cry out for other solutions.

Military force is not self-determining – it is constrained by its political context. If political, social, and economic conditions are not conducive to stability, decisive military blows stand little chance of imposing stability. That is a reality that applies as much to international military coalitions trying to impose political stability as to national governments trying to militarily suppress political dissent and to defeat violent resistance. When the deadly dust of war finally settles, the same grievances and conflicts that spawned war in the first place all remain. What's different is that at war's end the efforts to build conditions for durable peace are all the more daunting – undertaken, as they then are, in the context of radically depleted national resources and a deeply scarred national psyche.

Of course, the absence of a military solution doesn't mean that military operations don't have major impacts and consequences on the ground. ISIS<sup>13</sup> is being pushed back from territory it had gained, and thus from its grandiose ideas of a caliphate. The regime of Bashar Hafez al-Assad has been given new life by Russia's military action – leading the Americans to now acquiesce, slowly and grudgingly, to the idea of the regime's ongoing presence. Kurdish prospects for political autonomy, if not outright independence, have been dramatically advanced in both Iraq and Syria by military action.

So military force is not without utility. If the mission is the destruction of an adversary, shock and awe works. If the mission is to render a jurisdiction ungovernable, even poorly armed guerilla forces can be successful for extended periods. But making a jurisdiction *governable* is another kind of challenge, and it can't be accomplished by force. ISIS can be militarily degraded, but, as the sociologist Amitai Etzioni notes,<sup>14</sup> that doesn't destroy either the ideology or the social conditions out of which ISIS emerged.

### **From political to armed conflict**

Wars, even on the rare occasions when they end decisively on the battlefield, obviously leave enduring legacies of physical, political, and psychological destruction that discredit the very idea of "winning." What wars require is prevention, and that in turn requires some understanding of how they start. For they start from something. It's not a matter of spontaneous eruption. Extremism and violence on a societal scale clearly do not simply spring out of contexts of political and social stability. But neither are wars driven by an unseen hand of political/military determinism – as if certain conditions of poverty and marginalization inevitably produce violence and war while more positive conditions always produce peace and mutual regard.

There is in fact no obvious formula to anticipate how and when wars start. To be sure, deliberate interventions across borders start when politicians decide to start them, but civil wars are not the products of conscious decision-making. Governments of states embroiled in escalating violence to the point of civil war typically have not gone through careful processes for weighing options in advance of making deliberate decisions. Instead, they find themselves inexorably drawn, sometimes imperceptibly, into cycles of growing violence that ultimately reach levels of warfare.

Nevertheless, if governments and the international community collectively, are to develop effective policies and practices for war prevention, they will need some reasonably confident understandings of the social/political/economic environments that are conducive to stability and peace, and, conversely, of the conditions that are more likely to produce instability and violence. A war prevention focus is not on drivers of political conflict, those are myriad, but on the drivers of armed conflict – on the conditions under which political conflict is most likely to morph into armed combat. Why in 2011, for example, did some Arab Spring conflicts descend quickly into war, while others did not?

Researchers do identify key factors linked to conflict turning violent, and these can be distilled into four basic conditions – and those conditions, taken together, in turn offer a useful framework for looking at the transition from political to violent conflict.

#### *Grievance*

The foundational condition is certainly the presence of heightened political, economic, and social grievances. The point is that armed conflict has political roots – and it's not a surprise to find that advanced political conflict is linked especially to political and economic marginalization. The UK peace researcher and conflict analyst Paul Rogers recently told CBC's Sunday Morning<sup>15</sup> that the roots of conflict and terrorism are substantially linked to both economic inequality, or

marginalization, and the repression of dissent (which is really a form of extreme political marginalization). When an economic system is experienced as grossly unfair, and when the political responses to that inequity are rendered entirely ineffective or actively suppressed, it can reasonably be expected to produce what Rogers called a revolution of rising frustrations. Repression works, for a time, but ultimately it becomes unsustainable. Prosperity, or the lack of it, is thus one remarkably reliable indicator of armed conflict, with countries in the bottom half of the Human Development Index much more likely to experience violent conflict than those in the top half. All of which points to addressing economic grievance and persistent poverty as key elements of any war prevention strategy.

### *Identity*

When grievances are overtly linked to regional, ethnic, or religious identities, the likelihood of discontent turning to violence is dramatically heightened. If political and economic marginalization are credibly thought to be a direct consequence of discrimination against one's race or ethnic community or religion, the grievances cease to be individual – they become communal and more clearly a case of widely shared perceptions of injustice. And when ethnic or religious groups feel threatened as a group, they are inclined to respond as a group, with authorities in turn inclined to see them as more threatening. As an escalating action/reaction cycle takes hold, repression becomes more intense, and more violent. The aggrieved, emboldened not only by a sense of injustice, but also by a sense that the community and the identity of a people are in peril, are increasingly motivated to muster the collective means to resist. Grievances that are politicized along communal and geographic lines are especially prone to prolonged violence due in part to the emotional, political, and financial resources that can be mobilized in such communities.

### *Capacity*

Even then, with tensions escalating, the path to open armed conflict is still a daunting one. It's not easy to mount a war – governments need to retain credibility for the fight, and aggrieved communities need solidarity. Neither is automatic. A conducive political culture becomes an important factor in opting for violent responses – the willingness or predilection of a government to wage violent repression, and the openness of a community to pursue violent rebellion. But that means that reshaping political culture to resist, to be wary of, violent repression and resistance should be a key element of war prevention.

On top of that, parties to a conflict obviously need reliable access to armaments if they are to transform political conflict into a sustainable armed conflict. For governments, access to the necessary arms is generally not a problem, of course. Guns, and the means to manufacture or import them, are readily available. When repressive governments, that are thus armed and dangerous to their populations, face disaffected communities that have also gained reliable access to small arms, political conflict predictably turns more readily to violence. In regions of long-term conflict, especially, small arms and ammunition are ubiquitous and controls are scarce and ineffective. Economic marginalization, political exclusion, and readily available small arms make a deadly combination.

It is a special scandal that governmental cultures of violent repression are routinely abetted and reinforced by arms supplying states. States that claim to be champions of human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflict seem nevertheless to feel free, in the name of jobs and business, to ship arms to states with demonstrated predilections for repression and attacks on civilians. Canadian sales to Saudi Arabia<sup>16</sup> have been ongoing since the late 1970s, and it should be clear that long-term support for repressive regimes incurs even longer-term costs. A case in point is the DRC where the international community's extended and extraordinarily difficult engagement in peace support efforts is dealing with the legacy of decades of support by Western democracies for the brutal kleptocracy of Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, until he was deposed in 1997. In those days the excuse wasn't jobs, it was the pursuit of strategic advantage over the Soviet Union and China in Africa. There is no basis for thinking it will be any easier to deal with the legacy of arms supplies to Saudi Arabia. When the Saudi royals fall and that society actively enters the struggle to establish some semblance of accountable governance, recalcitrance in the context of rising turmoil and violence is the most likely scenario. Canadian armored vehicles aren't part of the solution in Saudi Arabia today, and they won't be then.

### *Absence of Alternatives*

Another key factor in political conflict turning violent is the absence of any credible political avenues for processing conflict. When alternatives are all cut off, when groups perceive themselves as systematically excluded from the political process, or when institutions and mechanisms for political engagement are deeply mistrusted, violence becomes the more credible option. Given that the main objective of violent opposition to governments is not so much to defeat or depose those governments as it is to get a seat at the table, the international community has an important responsibility to find other means of winning access to that table.

### **War Prevention**

Given the social, political, and economic roots of war, the termination of war and war prevention strategies cannot be built on military prowess. Prevention requires measures that effectively address the four basic conditions that increase the likelihood of political conflict morphing into armed conflict (grievance, identity, capacity for violence, and lack of alternatives). The international community's capacity to intervene militarily is obviously relevant, but if we really do want the resort to military action to be the last resort, then we'll have to pay a lot more attention to first, second, third, and fourth resorts.

### *Development*

The first resort to managing conflict and preventing war obviously has to be a heavy emphasis on development and peacebuilding in conflicted and failing states. However, if addressing basic economic and social grievances and weaknesses, and building conditions conducive to durable peace and stability, are to be a serious security imperative, they need to be seriously resourced. Some governments have actually gone a long way in that direction. Three Nordic states – we're accustomed to them leading on such matters – now collectively spend as much on official development assistance (ODA, a spending envelope with a broad range of security-relevant applications) as on defence. Sweden actually spends more on ODA (in other words, it sensibly spends

more on prior resorts to conflict resolution and war prevention than it does on the last resort of force). In 2015 its international development assistance spending amounted to 125 percent of its military spending. For Norway and Denmark, ODA was equivalent to 70 percent of military spending (in Canada it was just over 25 percent). All three of those Nordic countries have more than met the .7 percent of GDP target for ODA, as has the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom is right at the target level. Germany has reached an ODA level of .52 percent of GDP, and that amounts to the equivalent of 50 percent of its military spending.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that countries which understand development and peacebuilding as vital to international peace and security actually make an effort to better balance their security spending, bringing non-military security spending even to, or at least much closer to, military spending levels.

Some years back, in the context of UN reform discussions, the Secretary-General's high level panel on threats and challenges suggested that states seeking permanent membership in the Security Council should meet the .7 percent of ODA goal – perhaps the same commitment should be made by countries from the global north that are campaigning for a two-year term on the Council.

### *Democracy*

Another resort to be pursued before considering the “last resort” of military force ought obviously to be the development of credible political processes for addressing grievances and promoting good governance and accountability in conflicted states. It's not as if it is not already clear that political inclusion, respect for human rights, and fostering public institutions that earn the trust and loyalty of people are key to durable political stability and the orderly and peaceful mediation of the political conflict that is endemic to all societies. The loss of confidence in public institutions is a key factor in precipitating violence. In fact, because credible and trusted governance is key to stability, it also becomes the best defence against foreign military invasion. It turns out that effective defence relies less on a powerful military than on a strong political and social order.

Consider the countries that have in one way or another been invaded since the end of the Cold War: there were multilateral interventions in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Serbia (re Kosovo), and Syria; there were unilateral interventions by the US in Panama and Somalia, by Russia in Georgia and Ukraine, by Ethiopia in Somalia, by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, and by Iraq in Kuwait. Common to all of the invaded states (with the exception of Kuwait), were conditions of advanced internal division and crisis.

The point obviously is not that internal crises justify invasions – this is not a matter of blaming the victims and justifying the exploits of major powers. Politically chaotic states are still sovereign, and invading any state outside of self-defence or without explicit United Nations Security Council approval, as the Chilcot report reminds us, is still a violation of international law. What made these states vulnerable to invasion were unstable internal political conditions, not a lack of military defence. Politically stable states, with national institutions that enjoy the legitimacy that comes from broad public trust and support, are largely immune to military attacks and intervention, regardless of their size or military strength or lack of it.

It is a reality that NATO ignores in the Baltic States, where Canada is to send a battle group (to Latvia) to help deter Russia. The Baltics are all former Soviet Republics, and they grew understandably nervous after Russia's annexation of Crimea and its ongoing interference in Ukraine. They fear Moscow could use the same tactic on them – that is, cite Russia's concern for ethnic Russians living in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania to justify various levels of political and potentially military interference. So it's not surprising that those states seek NATO's protection; but it's not NATO that will protect them, it is their own internal political strength. Reliable surveillance of frontiers is the responsibility of every state, and the Baltics are no exception, but it is their own inclusive political institutions and processes that best protect them from any Moscow efforts to destabilize them. The great folly in the prevailing European/Russian security discourse is the assumption that without demonstrations and threats of NATO military action the Baltics are defenseless. The opposite is true. NATO's deployments on the borders of Russia exacerbate tensions and ignore the hard fact that the Baltic States have ready access to the most effective and proven defence against military invasion – namely, strong and respected governance, citizen engagement through trusted institutions, and a buoyant national consensus in support of the prevailing order. The security of those states, and indeed any states, depends on the nurture and maintenance of that kind of governance – the pursuit of social justice, participatory politics, and the exercise of responsible citizenship.

As already noted, deliberate interventions across borders and wars between states, unlike civil wars, are the products of conscious decision-making, and Michael Klare<sup>18</sup> has recently written about a resurgent assumption among US military/security elites that major wars with Russia or China are now regarded as plausible possibilities. In turn, there are obviously those who repeat and promote such “big-war threats” in order to support their calls for, as Klare puts it, “lavish spending on the super-sophisticated weapons needed to defeat a high-end enemy.” He quotes US Defense Secretary Ash Carter: “We have to do this [spend lavishly on the military] to stay ahead of future threats in a changing world, as other nations try to catch on to the advantages that we have enjoyed for decades, in areas like precision-guided munitions, stealth, cyber and space.” While Carter emphasizes “staying ahead of future threats,” Zbigniew Brzezinski's realism allows him to acknowledge that the era of American global dominance is in fact ending.<sup>19</sup> A former presidential security advisor, he still looks to American leadership in shaping the inevitable realignment of the world order, but acknowledges that the US can exercise leadership only through significant cooperation with Russia and China. The alternative to developing a shared approach for a new geopolitical framework will be “the quest for a one-sided militarily and ideologically imposed outcome, [which] can only result in prolonged and self-destructive futility,” he says. Klare notes that assumptions about growing “big-war” possibilities – in other words, the quest for one-sided militarily imposed outcomes – are shared by Russian and Chinese security elites as well. So this resurgent militarism is less an east-vs-the-west problem than it is their “shared assumption that a full-scale war between the major powers is entirely possible and requires urgent military preparations.”

The likely consequences of full-scale war involving the extraordinarily destructive forces available to these three major powers is genuinely beyond imagining. As a group of American Generals recently told the UK's *Independent* newspaper, “any future war with Russia or China would be ‘extremely lethal and fast’ [and the US would] not own the stopwatch.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, escalation to unconscionable levels of destruction would be rapid, there would be no way to guarantee that it

would not go nuclear, and there would be no guarantee of an early termination. There is truly no foreign policy of security objective that could warrant the level of destruction risked in direct military confrontation between heavily armed states. The task of repudiating such plans and preparations for total war falls to civil society and foreign policy communities, and especially to governments and their diplomats – including those of middle and smaller powers whose populations would suffer the extraordinary consequences.

### *Disarmament*

A third resort before the last resort, as already noted, is serious attention to the control of access to the weapons of war and armed violence. The peaceful resolution of conflict is incompatible with easy access to the means of violence. Conventional arms control is about preventing excessive and destabilizing accumulations of arms by states and preventing access to military-style arms by non-state groups (reserving for states the monopoly on the resort to force). Most especially, preventing the trade in repression technology to the detriment of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is key to promoting the legitimacy of peaceful dissent. The Arms Trade Treaty is a new instrument available to the international community to control arms. It is as far from perfection as are most treaties and agreements that go through long and contentious multilateral negotiations toward compromised consensus, but it is nevertheless a critically important advance and the fact that it will finally become Canadian law is welcome and overdue – the next step will be military export policies that actually honor its intent.

### *Diplomacy*

Diplomacy is of course key to averting the last resort. The chief imperative of conflict diplomacy is to remedy the absence of alternatives where violence threatens. And if, when prevention fails, peace negotiations in armed conflicts can be effective only when conflicts are “ripe” for negotiations, then finding alternative routes to ripeness is a key war termination and prevention imperative. A conflict “ripe” for negotiation is a euphemism for a conflict that has produced such extraordinary levels of human suffering that all parties have finally arrived at a desperately hurting stalemate and the conclusion that negotiated compromises at a conference table are the only way out. The challenge for diplomats is to find alternative, more humane, means to reaching the shared conclusion that comprehensive peace processes involving all stakeholders are the better option. That means creating the table that insurgents battle, sometimes for decades, to gain access to, by other means.

Conflict diplomacy can mean crisis intervention (of the kind the African Union tried in Libya at the time of the NATO intervention, or that the Geneva process still pursues for Syria), but it also involves longer term engagement in reconciliation efforts – all the way from community levels to multilateral efforts in support of the peaceful management of political conflict. In Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria, to pick a long list of some of the toughest cases, there are deep communal divides in need of long-term bridging diplomacy and reconciliation strategies.

It’s important to add that such reconciliation and negotiation processes are in serious need of gender equity. The current Inter Pares Bulletin focuses on peace initiatives undertaken by women in places like Colombia, Burma, and Mali. But as the article points out, the voices of women are especially “absent in formal settings when armed actors come together to negotiate peace.” In a study of 31 peace process over two decades, nine out of 10 negotiators and signatories were men.<sup>21</sup>



There is no panacea in the resorts before the resort to force that, it is widely agreed, should only be the last resort. Building economic and social conditions for sustainable peace, promoting good governance and building trusted and inclusive political institutions and processes, restraining arms flows, and exercising diplomacy that builds bridges, resolves conflict, and creates alternatives to violence, are all essential. But they take a long time and they also involve much failure. By the time political conflict threatens to morph into armed conflict it has become complex and intractable, and reversing that is just as complex and difficult.

### **The Responsible Resort to Force**

But the post-Cold War record of armed conflict is a vivid reminder that when states try to forcibly suppress dissent, and when coalitions of the willing invade conflict zones ostensibly to bring order, it turns out that the last resort is also no panacea. That doesn't mean that unstable states never need the support of external resources to protect vulnerable people, to buttress the rule of law, or to help build confidence in emerging political processes and institutions.

But when the international community is truly faced with the "last resort," it is still essential that it to draw the very real and operationally relevant distinction between war-fighting and peace support interventions. The main point, simply put, is that in war-fighting, the objective is to over-ride political process. When governments turn to the forceful repression of dissent, or when international military coalitions are bent on regime change, or defeating challengers to favored regimes, the military action is intended to set politics and diplomacy aside or to over-rule them in a kind of short cut effort to directly impose a desired political outcome by dint of force. In peacekeeping or peace support operations the objective is to provide security support for the political processes through which negotiated and sustainable political outcomes are reached.

A feature of current commentary on Canada's coming peace support mission or missions is that it is delusional to talk about peacekeeping, that missions in places like Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are dangerous and put intervening troops in harm's way – with the implication that the Government for all practical purposes is planning to send Canadians to war. But the distinction remains real – even though peace support operations are indeed dangerous and need to be approached and prepared for with great care. Peace support operations frequently fail, but there is also a record of success. The final report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations<sup>22</sup> concludes that "UN peace operations have proven to be effective and cost-efficient tools when accompanied by a political commitment to peace." Among the successes it counts operations in Nepal, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Liberia. But the panel doesn't avoid reference to the failures or the extraordinary challenges of some current operations, as in Mali, the DRC, Darfur, and South Sudan – most of which are on the list of possible Canadian deployments.

The clear link between success in military peace support operations and active political/diplomatic engagement to resolve underlying conflicts points to five key conditions and initiatives that should be part of every military deployment in a peace support role: 1) the pursuit of political consensus (to establish a context of strategic consent for the intervention); 2) the presence of legitimate

institutions that the intervenors are seen to be supporting; 3) the restrained and lawful use of force; 4) assurances of regional co-operation and support; and 5) energetic peacebuilding. In situations of entrenched conflict, each of these will by definition be a work in progress, but the absence of discernable efforts towards those ends puts a military intervention back into the war-fighting model – back to trying to determine political outcomes by military means, and thus relying on a record of success that is not exactly promising.

### *Political settlement*

The first requirement, the active pursuit of political consensus to create a context of strategic consent for the intervening forces, receives significant attention in the UK's Chilcot Report<sup>23</sup> on the disastrous intervention in Iraq in 2003 and following. The report castigates the Iraq coalition for its spectacular failure to win the support and ultimate consent of the people of Iraq. The reasons for that include the coalition's utter failure to improve the lives of Iraqis through restored security, the provision of basic services, and the facilitation of economic recovery, but the primary problem was the coalition's failure to recognize that what it faced after the Hussein regime had been defeated was first and foremost a political challenge rather than a military challenge. That blindness to the essential political character of the post invasion crisis was then reflected in the failure to see the urgency of developing political consensus. And as the Canadian historian and defence analyst J.L. Granatstein warns with regard to coming Canadian peace support deployments, if the conflicting parties do not accept the UN-mandated forces, "we must understand we will be fighting against one (or more) sides in the dispute."<sup>24</sup> The High-Level Panel also concluded that "when peacekeeping operations are deployed absent a viable peace process [which is increasingly the case], the Security Council, Secretariat, regional actors and all Member States should work proactively to advance a political process...."

### *Legitimacy*

The legitimacy of any intervention force, including UN-mandated peace support operations, depends substantially on the vigor with which non-military efforts are pursued in support of evolving inclusive political institutions that can be credibly understood as representing the interest of the local population. When the Americans invaded Iraq in 2003 they had persuaded themselves that they would be welcomed as liberators – instead, they were experienced by Iraqis as invaders who showed little respect for the institutions and traditions that should have formed the foundation of post-invasion society.

### *Military restraint*

Then, as the post-invasion security situation unraveled, more aggressive military actions were launched to try to gain support and strategic consent by dint of force – leading them to violate the third condition for peace support operations, namely the restrained use of force. It was never likely that post-shock-and-awe invasion operations would be characterized by military restraint, and the inevitable consequence was a post-invasion spike in civilian deaths. Trying to force consent is trying to win a war, and it ignores the post-Cold War reality that wars are rarely won, no matter how powerful the military forces of one side may be. And in Iraq, as civilian deaths escalated, and as public order disintegrated, the notion that the intervention forces might gain the respect and support of the people – that they might become legitimized – evaporated. In Afghanistan, for

another example, nothing drained support for the International Security Assistance Force as quickly as did the perception that coalition forces attacked without restraint and without due regard for the safety of civilians.

### *Regional cooperation*

Regional cooperation, the fourth of the five conditions essential to effective intervention, is key to war prevention, and its absence is key to the persistence of many civil wars. In the Horn of Africa, as in Iraq and Syria, regional competition frequently manifests itself in mutual destabilization tactics by neighboring states in pursuit of their own interests, and the lack of cooperation from other governments in the region inserts a host of political complications that frustrate peace efforts even when local actors might be ready to consider cessations in hostilities.

### *Peacebuilding*

The Chilcot report also highlights the need for energetic peacebuilding to be a part of any peace-support intervention. Others make the same point,<sup>25</sup> some noting that in the coming battles to drive ISIS out of Mosul in Iraq, the efforts to force ISIS out of the city may prove to not be as difficult or contested as anticipated. Instead, the most significant challenge in Mosul is likely to be to ensure post-conflict security, reconstruction and, above all, governance that is representative of and responsive to people. Measurable improvements in the day-to-day lives of people caught in intervention zones is an obvious and key factor in demonstrating a commitment to the welfare of people as distinct from the strategic interests of the states sponsoring the intervening forces.

The post-Cold War quarter century displayed plenty of the hubris that sees in military might alone the means by which the powerful can shape the world to their liking or according to their objectives.<sup>26</sup> The results actually achieved by military intervention suggest, however, that a lot more self-reflective humility would be in order. And that reflection ought to lead to a clearer understanding of the conditions under which multilateral military deployments can be effective peace support operations, and when they can't. Calls to action and intervention will continue, but as Andrew Bacevitch says, "the effectiveness of [the responses] will turn on whether the people making the decisions are able to distinguish what the...military can do, what it cannot do, and what it should not do."

The key lesson to be heeded is that military forces, even clearly superior military forces, cannot overcome the political contexts in which they operate – in other words, superior military forces don't have the capacity to impose their political will. And when force is failing, that failure is not reversed by simply adding more military capacity.

### **Priorities for Canada**

The wars of the past quarter century are a warning that neither individual states nor multilateral coalitions can go into war expecting to win – the odds are overwhelmingly against them. It is genuinely hard these days to win a war so that winning means something – namely that the political conflicts that spawned it are solved. Military force is repeatedly proven to be incapable of imposing predictable political outcomes in deeply conflicted states. Military force can destroy and defeat

regimes, guerilla forces can render territory ungovernable, but force is not a reliable foundation for the good governance that leads to stability and security – that requires basic economic well-being, civil rights, civic responsibility, political inclusion, control over the instruments of violence, and measures to foster reconciliation and build bridges across political, ethnic, and religious divides. In the right circumstances military forces can support peaceful processes that can be mobilized towards those ends, but they can't impose peace.

It means we have to understand the limits to force. Mikhail Gorbachev, towards the end of the Cold war in the late 1980s, set out a bold platform of what he called new thinking. In the face of the reality of nuclear weapons and the extraordinary destructiveness of modern conventional weapons, he concluded that the role of modern armed forces must be to prevent wars, not win them.

That speaks to the question of what roles should be assigned to contemporary Canadian military forces. It's clear that military forces are essential for patrolling and policing national frontiers – and in Canada that is not a matter of keeping military challengers at bay but of aiding civil authorities in law enforcement, especially by monitoring air and sea approaches to Canadian territory. Canada, by national consensus, faces no military threats,<sup>27</sup> so the issues at Canadian frontiers are all about civilian border patrols, including the identification and interception of unauthorized airborne intrusions, a role that NORAD takes on in support of civilian authorities, and controlling seaborne intrusions, also with assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces. The Canadian Forces should also be available to aid civil authorities in responding to isolated threats to public order. The considerable assets and skills of the Armed Forces are also available to civilian authorities, as demonstrated in the recent "Operation Nanook," an exercise that included a Yukon earthquake scenario designed to test and practice a whole-of-government response to a natural disaster. While the Canadian Armed Forces were heavily involved in Operation Nanook, civilian agencies took the lead. These roles of patrolling frontiers, supporting civilian authorities, and assisting in disaster response operations, are long-time roles for the Canadian Armed Forces.

More contentious is the role of Canadian Armed Forces in operations beyond Canada's borders. The record of multilateral war-fighting operations in the post-Cold War quarter century points to international peace support operations as the most likely way of making positive contributions to international peace and security – through peace support operations that work in concert with diplomats and peacebuilders to promote and try to restore stability where it is threatened. Such operations should be guided by distinctions between war-fighting and peace-support operations, recognizing the strikingly low success rate of the former and respecting established deployment criteria for the latter – namely, Security Council authorization that is linked to strategic consent for the intervention, legitimate governing institutions and processes that the intervening forces are mandated to protect from spoilers, the restrained and lawful use of force, cooperation and support from other states in the region, and active peacebuilding support to the state hosting the peace support forces.

Peace support, or peacekeeping, operations by definition take place in contexts of unusual political and social instability and where the rule of law is fragile – stable states in which the rule of law prevails don't need peace support operations. Peace support missions are deployed when political

accord is tentative and fragile – when it needs to be bolstered and supported. But the key to successful peacekeeping – and there have been important successes just as there have been important failures – is the presence of a clear political process to resolve the conflict. Peace support operations are themselves not the point, they are a means to the main point, that being conflict resolution which brings belligerents into sustainable political reconciliation and builds institutions of ongoing peaceful mediation of the political conflicts that all societies face.

These are points made by the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*,<sup>28</sup> who argue that “the failures we’ve seen in UN missions are usually quite predictable, and have tended to follow occasions when we’ve deployed missions in the absence of a clear political strategy.” Canada is rightly planning for a “whole-of-government” approach to the peacekeeping missions it is now considering. Indeed, military operations in peace support operations should be understood as a lot like Canadian domestic operations – not in levels of danger and instability faced, but in the sense that both in domestic operations and overseas peace support operations, military forces act fundamentally in support of civilian authorities. The military roles in peace support operations are notably to support and restore civilian governance, to aid in law enforcement, and to help create a security climate in which peacebuilding and economic development can take place.

Canada’s re-engagement with peacekeeping is important, in part because UN peace support operations are the international community’s preferred model for responding to complex political/military conflicts. Peace support operations in a variety of forms, from unarmed observation teams to full-fledged combat operations, have endured for 70 years and are today in more demand than ever. As of September 1, 2016 there were 16 UN operations involving 85,000 uniformed military personnel, 12,000 police, and some 18,000 civilians. The UN also supported large deployments through regional organizations like the African Union.<sup>29</sup> Canada’s support, and that of other wealthy middle powers, is especially important for what it can bring to these collective global efforts – besides a capacity to contribute well-equipped and trained troops, police, and civilian field personnel to specific operations, Canada also has the means to bring training at the global level and support research into what does and doesn’t work in peace operations. If we but choose to employ them, Canada also has the resources to buttress the diplomatic, humanitarian, and peacebuilding initiatives that are essential to integrated peace operations. Part of the Canadian peacekeeping agenda should be the re-establishment of a peacekeeping training centre<sup>30</sup> and the provision of leadership towards a standing UN capacity for emergency response, preventive deployments, and the protection of vulnerable civilians,<sup>31</sup> as well as diplomacy toward the durable resolution of violent conflict.

As peacekeeping leaders readily admit,<sup>32</sup> peace operations offer no guarantee of success, not least because they typically face the world’s worst trouble spots – indeed, as the Oxford handbook on peacekeeping puts it, the history of post-World War II peacekeeping writ large is also the history of the world’s most intractable violent conflicts.<sup>33</sup> UN peace operations are increasingly called into remote regions where the prospects for political consensus are just as remote, and where there is virtually no infrastructure and even the most basic supply lines are fragile and vulnerable to disruption.<sup>34</sup> Even so, the chroniclers of peacekeeping history find that “peacekeeping is much more

successful than we all assume or talk about in current debates,<sup>35</sup> and those successes come despite chronic and drastic under funding. The current annual budget for UN peace operations is (US)\$7.87 billion<sup>36</sup> – compare that to the \$3.5 billion that the US spent each month in Afghanistan at the height of its failed operations there.

The world's persistent armed conflicts, and especially the extraordinary suffering of the innocents caught in the crossfire, mean that armed intervention across borders in an attempt to mitigate suffering and end conflict will also persist as a durable feature of the international community. Post-Cold War interventions by major powers with vastly superior military capabilities continue to prove one unavoidable reality, that there are no military solutions to deeply entrenched political conflicts. In the meantime, and in part as a consequence, the demand for UN peace operations is growing. But those two realities – the spectacular failures of military might and the growing demand for multi-dimensional peace operations – have not affected the gross imbalance of global security funding. As Paul D. Williams, a foremost authority on peacekeeping and one of the editors of the Oxford handbook, sums it up: “We spend a pittance on giving peace a chance, and huge sums on preparing for war.”<sup>37</sup> It will take more than Canada's promise to re-engage with UN peace operations to correct that imbalance, but it is an essential and over-due step in the right direction.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Writing in 2015, Simon Adams of the Global Centre for R2P, notes that “Russia and China have on four separate occasions employed their vetoes to block action in response to mass atrocity crimes in Syria, including...a May 2014 draft resolution that would have referred the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court.”

<sup>2</sup> “The Security Council welcomes the Secretary-General's statement of 29 July 2015 that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict” and “stresses that the only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.” Statement by the President of the Security Council, 17 August 2015. UN Document S/PRST/2015/15.

<sup>3</sup> That's the central thesis of: Ernie Regehr, *Disarming Conflict: Why peace cannot be won on the battlefield* (Between the Lines, 2015), 217 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Max Fisher, “Syria's Paradox: Why the War Only Ever Seems to get Worse,” New York Times, 26 August 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara F. Walter, “The Four Things We Know About How Civil Wars End (and What This Tells Us About Syria), Political Violence @ a Glance, 18 October 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Karthick Arvinth, “Obama: No military solution to Syria conflict,” *International Business Times*, 24 April 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/obama-no-military-solution-syria-conflict-1556443>

<sup>7</sup> Statement by President Obama on Afghanistan, 27 May 2014

<sup>8</sup> Paul Rogers, “Afghanistan, dynamic of war,” OpenDemocracy, 26 August 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, *Securing the Peace: The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*, Princeton University Press, 2010 (Chapter 1: Civil War Termination in Historical and Theoretical Context”).

<sup>10</sup> Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2012* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University), [www.hsrgroup.org](http://www.hsrgroup.org)

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<sup>11</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program, *Armed Conflict Dataset* (Uppsala, Sweden/Oslo, Norway: Uppsala University Centre for the Study of Civi War/International Peace Research Institute). [www.pcr.uu.se](http://www.pcr.uu.se)

<sup>12</sup> In four (6%) cases (Angola, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Iraq-Shia) governments defeated insurgencies. In five (7.5%) of cases, insurgents defeated Governments (Ethiopia-Mengistu, Rwanda, East Timor, Kosovo, Panama).

<sup>13</sup> Or the Islamic State, or Daesh.

<sup>14</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "A Semi-Permanent State of Quasi-War?" *Huffington Post*, 15 July 2016.

<sup>15</sup> 18 September 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Project Ploughshares Blog and Conventional Arms section. <http://ploughshares.ca/programs/>

<sup>17</sup> ODA figures come from OECD ([oecd.org/dac/stats/oda-2015-complete-data-tables.pdf](http://oecd.org/dac/stats/oda-2015-complete-data-tables.pdf)), and military expenditure figures are from the World Bank ([data.worldbank.org/indicator/ms.mil.xpnd.gd.zs](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ms.mil.xpnd.gd.zs)).

<sup>18</sup> Michael T. Klare, *Le Monde Diplomatic*, September 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Toward a Global Realignment," *The American Interest*, April 17, 2016. Volume 11, Number 6.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Osborne, "Future war with Russia or China would be 'extremely lethal and fast', US generals warn," *The Independent*, 06 October 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk>

<sup>21</sup> "No True Peace Without the Voices of Women," *Inter Pares Bulletin*, September 2016, Vol. 38 No. 3. [www.interpares.ca](http://www.interpares.ca)

<sup>22</sup> "United our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People," Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations," presented to the UN Secretary-General 16 June 2015.

<sup>23</sup> "The Report of the Iraq Inquiry," Report of a Committee of the UK Privy Counsellors, chaired by Sir John Chilcot. July 2016. [www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/](http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/)

<sup>24</sup> J.L. Granatstein, "Think carefully before deciding to deploy peacekeepers," *Globe and Mail*, 03 October 2016.

<sup>25</sup> David Petraeus, "The Challenge in Mosul won't be to defeat the Islamic state. It will be what comes after." *Washington Post*, 12 August 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, "Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Ernie Regehr, "Defence in the Absence of Military Threats," The Simons Foundation, 11 May 2016. <http://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/projects/canadian-defence-policy-review-briefing-papers>

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Novosseloff, "Oxford Handbook Tells the History of UN Peacekeeping's Successes and Failures," interviews with Handbook editors Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams. <http://peaceoperationsreview.org>

<sup>29</sup> UN Peacekeeping Fact Sheet, 31 August 2016. [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping)

<sup>30</sup> Walter Dorn and Joshua Libben, Unprepared for Peace? The Decline of Canadian Peacekeeping Training (and What to Do About It)," the Rideau Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, February 2016. <http://www.rideauinstitute.ca/2016/02/02/canada-must-step-up-on-peacekeeping-training/>

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<sup>31</sup> The Canadian researcher and analyst Peter Langille has been key to developing proposals for a UN Emergency Peace Service. See: H. Peter Langille, “How the UN could develop an Emergency Peace Service – and why it should,” *Open Democracy*, 28 September 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/>; and his latest book, “Developing a United Nations Emergency Peace Service: Meeting our Responsibilities to Prevent and Protect” (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> “United our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People,” Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations,” presented to the UN Secretary-General 16 June 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Novosseloff, “Oxford Handbook Tells the History of UN Peacekeeping’s Successes and Failures,” interviews with Handbook editors Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams. <http://peaceoperationsreview.org>

<sup>34</sup> “United our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People,” Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations,” presented to the UN Secretary-General 16 June 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Novosseloff, “Oxford Handbook Tells the History of UN Peacekeeping’s Successes and Failures,” interviews with Handbook editors Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams. <http://peaceoperationsreview.org>

<sup>36</sup> UN Peacekeeping Fact Sheet, 31 August 2016. [www.un.org/en/peacekeeping](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping)

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Novosseloff, “Oxford Handbook Tells the History of UN Peacekeeping’s Successes and Failures,” interviews with Handbook editors Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams. <http://peaceoperationsreview.org>