



Domestic Operations: Is It Time For a Change?

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JCSP 49 DL

Exercise Solo Flight

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DOMESTIC OPERATIONS: IS IT TIME FOR A CHANGE?

INTRODUCTION

The primary role of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is the defence of Canada from foreign military threat.¹ The CAF also serves as an instrument of Canada's national power, for which the government mandates the CAF to be prepared to deploy large numbers across long-distances, in a short amount of time.² This makes the CAF ideal for assisting with short-notice emergencies in Canada such as public security, welfare emergencies, and assistance to other federal and provincial government departments.³ The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has stated many times that the CAF remains a force of last resort when it comes to responding to domestic emergencies.⁴ The main mission for the CAF is to defend Canada against external threats, and as a result of ongoing recruiting challenges, the CAF will have to reprioritize and minimize involvement in certain types of operations.⁵ Due to climate change increasing the amount of domestic emergencies, the CAF has gone from a force of last resort, to a first responder being deployed early and often.⁶

Canada's Defence Policy, Strong Secured Engaged (SSE), states eight core missions that the CAF is responsible for, one of those being, aiding civil authorities in responding to domestic disasters.⁷ The latest Defence Policy Update, Our North, Strong and Free (ONSF): A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence also supports these obligations.⁸ This policy assumes the CAF has a full complement of personnel; however, the CAF is facing a shortage of approximately 16,000 members.⁹ This leads to the question of whether it is sustainable for the CAF to meet all its obligations, deploy personnel on up to seven different missions, and still be able to respond to domestic emergencies.

Looking specifically at Operation LENTUS, from 2010 to 2016, the CAF responded on average to 1.7 domestic emergencies per year. From 2017 to 2023, that number increased to an average of 4.7 domestic emergencies per year, see figure 1 for the yearly amounts.

¹ Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-302/FP-001, *CFJP 3-2 Domestic Operations* (Ottawa: Canada Command, 2012), 1-1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Department of National Defence, *Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces 2020-21 Departmental Plan*, (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2020), 11.

⁵ Adam P. MacDonald, "The Future of Domestic Operations: Rethinking the role of the CAF in Emergency Response," *On Track* 31 (November 2023): 3.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 17.

⁸ Department of National Defence, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*, (Ottawa, DND Canada, 2024), 1.

⁹ CTV News Ottawa, "Canadian Armed Forces facing member shortage 'crisis'," last accessed 3 April 2024, <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/canadian-armed-forces-facing-member-shortage-crisis-1.6344761>.

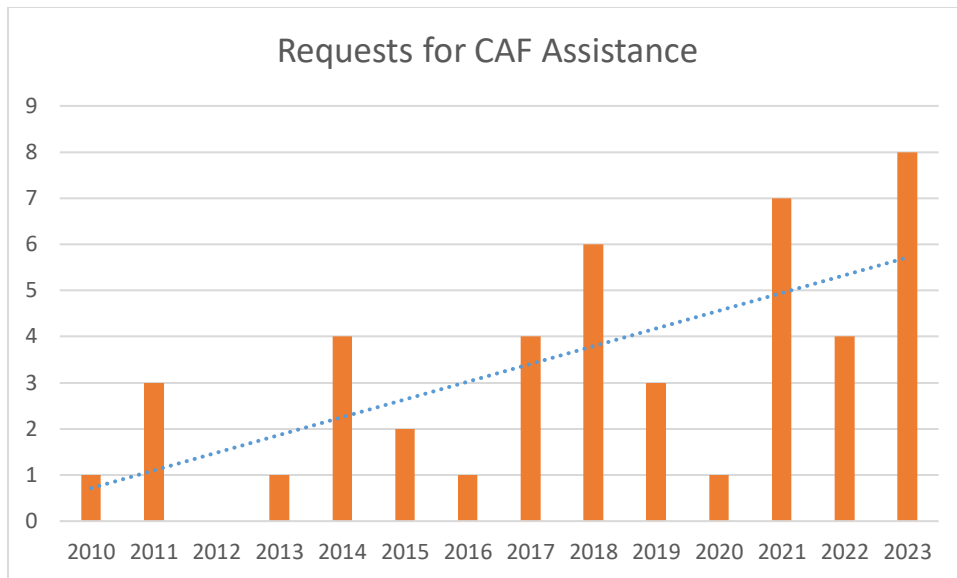


Figure 1 – Requests for CAF Assistance to Domestic emergencies

Source: Government of Canada, “Operation LENTUS” last accessed 5 April 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-lentus.html>

This essay will argue that the CAF can no longer respond to domestic emergencies under the current process and structure while concurrently meeting all other objectives in SSE and ONSF. This essay will review the history of Domestic Operations (DOMOPS) in Canada, how DOMOPS are conducted in allied and partner countries, provide an analysis of DOMOPS in Canada, and finally provide recommendations for adapting DOMOPS in Canada in the face of a changing climate. The intent of this essay is not to infer that the CAF should not conduct DOMOPS but that the expectations for CAF assistance needs to be altered, and the process under which communities, provinces, and Canada responds to domestic emergencies needs to be changed.

HISTORY

The early years of Canada saw DOMOPS mainly consisting of aid to civil power, which was conducted by local militias to assist with local disturbances and disputes.¹⁰ Events such as the Red River Rebellion in 1870, the Northwest Rebellion in 1885, and the Yukon Field Force assisting with the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898 are examples of the use of the Militia in the early years of Canada.¹¹ It was not until the 1940s when the Militia started to be used to assist with disaster assistance operations such as the Fraser River floods in British Columbia or the Red

¹⁰ The Canadian Encyclopedia, “History of the Armed Forces in Canada,” last accessed 6 April 2024, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/history-of-the-armed-forces-in-canada>.

¹¹ Ibid.

River Floods in Manitoba.¹² The Militia's discipline and military-type training made them valuable in providing aid to civil authorities.¹³

The CAF was again utilized for aid to civil power in 1970 through assistance to law enforcement agencies which placed military members into physical confrontations with Canadian civilians.¹⁴ As a result of the kidnapping of a diplomat and a public official, the CAF was required to assist with the security of public officials in Ottawa and Montreal.¹⁵ The government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau would invoke the War Measures Act and deploy more than 10,000 troops to Quebec and Ontario to quell the Front de Liberation du Quebec crisis.¹⁶ The CAF would later be called on to assist with the Olympic Summer Games held in Montreal in 1976. This would be the first time the CAF would be utilized for security at a large public event, with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) being the lead agency. This expansion in scope of DOMOPS in Canada would continue to be a responsibility for the CAF going forward for any high-profile public events held.¹⁷

In 1998, the CAF would assist with a new type of disaster assistance, an ice storm affecting Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes, requiring the deployment of 20,000 CAF members.¹⁸ In 2003, the CAF would be called to assist with its first forest fires in British Columbia. From 2010 onward, all the CAF's DOMOPS would be substantially related to disaster assistance.

ALLIES AND PARTNERS

To properly analyze DOMOPS in Canada, a comparison to our allied countries is needed to identify similarities and differences, so that areas for improvement can be identified for Canada. A comparison will be conducted on DOMOPS conducted in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and Australia.

United States of America

The USA is faced equally with natural disasters that require assistance from their military. Like Canada, in the event of a large-scale disaster, the Department of Defense (DOD) will provide assistance via National Guard forces operating under the authority of the state governor.¹⁹ The Governor in each state has the authority to deploy National Guard forces in response to domestic emergencies. Similar to Canada, military forces remain under military command and control at all times, under the direction of civilian authorities.²⁰ In addition to

¹² George Kitching, *Mud and Green Fields: The memoirs of General George Kitching* (Langley, BC: Battleline Books, 1985), 294.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "History of the . . ."

¹⁵ Jack Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 365.

¹⁶ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "History of the . . ."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William A. Denny, "Senior Military Leadership in Domestic Operations: An Exploratory Study" *Homeland Security Affairs* 17, no. 2 (April 2021): 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

domestic emergencies, the military can also be requested domestically for National special security events, community support activities, sensitive support operations, support to USA Secret Service, civilian critical infrastructure protection, search and rescue, and explosive ordnance disposal.²¹ However, like Canada, before military assistance can be requested, local state, and federal civilian resources must be exhausted.²²

United Kingdom

All requests for Military assistance require Minister of Defence (MOD) approval, however in the event of a major incident where there is an urgent need to save lives, ease distress, or protect important property, a local commander can lawfully conduct civilian tasks to ameliorate the situation without prior approval from the MOD or their own chain of command.²³ Military involvement in DOMOPS is purely in a supportive capacity with the focus being on a whole of government approach in support of national objectives.²⁴ Military assistance may only be provided when all other options, including mutual aid, commercial alternatives, and community organizations, have been exhausted. The UK has also noted the increasing trend of the armed forces being called upon regularly, for tasks that would be expected to be completed by others.²⁵

Australia

The role of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) during domestic emergency response has always been a positive experience, as the Commonwealth, and the states and territories all benefit from the provision of the military during a national emergency.²⁶ As the ADF has been highly successful at responding to domestic emergencies, they have become the go-to organization in times of need.²⁷ It is anticipated that requests for ADF assistance will continue to increase in the coming future, with frequency, intensity, and severity of these natural disasters to rise as well.²⁸ The Auditor-General conducted a Performance Audit for 2013-2014 and noted an increase in the amount of requests for the ADF. The increase in requests was related to several factors, including, the frequency, duration, and intensity of natural disasters; growth in vulnerable population centers; a reduction in emergency service personnel and volunteers; and increased political and public expectations regarding the assistance of the ADF for relief and recovery efforts.²⁹ Some advocates recommend that large numbers in the military surpass those

²¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities*, JP 3. Vol. 28. (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), XV.

²² *Ibid.*, I-7.

²³ Ministry of Defence, *UK Operations: The Defence Contribution to Resilience*, JDP 02 (Bristol, UK: Ministry of Defence, 2021) 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵ House of Commons Library, *Deploying the armed forces in the UK* (London, UK: House of Commons Library, 2022) 6.

²⁶ Zoe Lippis, "The Defence Act 1903 (CTH): A Guide For Responding To Australia's Large-Scale Domestic Emergencies," *Melbourne University Law Review* 45, no. 2 (2022): 599.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 617

of emergency service agencies, highlighting the need for a dedicated domestic response command.³⁰

ANALYSIS

A review of the processes involved in the utilization of the military for DOMOPS highlights that Canada and its allies are structured similarly, although with some slight differences in legislation and policy. Here we will analyze the current structure of DOMOPS in Canada to determine if and where there is a need for change.

Strengths

The CAF brings several strengths to DOMOPS within Canada which include rapid response capability, specialized training, equipment and resources, command and control structure, and legal framework and accountability. The CAF maintains a rapid response capability, allowing the ability to deploy quickly to assist in domestic emergencies such as natural disasters or security threats. CAF personnel undergo specialized training in various areas, including search and rescue, disaster response, and security operations, indicating the ability to handle diverse domestic scenarios. The CAF also possesses specialized equipment and resources, such as aircraft, vehicles, and personnel, which can be mobilized quickly to provide critical support during DOMOPS. One of the greatest strengths attributed to the CAF is a well-established command and control structure, which allows for efficient coordination of resources and personnel during domestic operations, particularly when collaborating with civilian agencies.³¹ Finally, the CAF operates within a clear legal framework when conducting DOMOPS, ensuring accountability and adherence to laws and regulations.

Weaknesses

While the CAF has many strengths in conducting DOMOPS, there are also associated weaknesses, which include resource allocation, lack of specialization, and interagency coordination. Extensive involvement in DOMOPS strains CAF resources and personnel, impacting readiness and preparedness for international operations. The Commander Canadian Army, and now Chief of Defence Staff, General Eyre, in 2020 indicated that calling on the military more and more could hurt their ability to train for war. He further went on to point out that it was dangerous for Canadians to look to the military as its means for disaster-response.³² There is also an argument that the CAF's primary focus should be on external defence and international peacekeeping, leading to concerns about the level of specialization and effectiveness in DOMOPS.³³ Finally, despite efforts to improve interagency coordination, there may still be challenges in effectively collaborating with civilian agencies during DOMOPS, potentially leading to inefficiencies or gaps in response efforts. Addressing these weaknesses requires careful consideration of the balance between military involvement in domestic affairs

³⁰ Ibid., 620

³¹ Adam P. MacDonald, "The Future Of Domestic Operations . . .," 11.

³² Canadian Press, "Growing natural-disaster response risks dulling Army's fighting edge: Commander," last accessed 6 May 2024. <https://rdnewsnow.com/2020/01/20/growing-natural-disaster-response-risksdulling-armys-fighting-edge-commander/>.

³³ Eva Cohen, "Beyond Catching Up – A Radical Shift in Disaster Response," *On Track* 31, (November 2023): 48.

and civilian control, as well as ongoing efforts to enhance training, coordination, and public communication.

Opportunities

Opportunities for the CAF conducting DOMOPS in Canada are interagency collaboration, innovation and technology integration, and public engagement. Collaborating with civilian agencies during domestic operations allows the CAF to strengthen interagency relationships, share expertise, and develop more effective response strategies.³⁴ Active involvement in DOMOPS can foster public engagement and support for the CAF, as Canadians appreciate their assistance during times of need, contributing to a positive perception of the military.³⁵ It also provides an opportunity for the CAF to personally engage with local communities, build trust, and demonstrate their commitment to serving the Canadian population. The CAF is also able to leverage DOMOPS to test and integrate innovative technologies and solutions, improving capabilities for both domestic and international operations.

Threats

Threats to the CAF conducting DOMOPS in Canada are civil liberties concerns, mission creep, and public perception. There is a risk that extensive military involvement in domestic affairs could lead to concerns about civil liberties, including issues related to privacy, freedom of movement, and the use of force against civilians.³⁶ Additionally, there is a risk of mission creep, where the scope of the military involvement in domestic affairs gradually expands beyond its intended purpose, potentially encroaching on civilian jurisdictions and functions.³⁷ There is also the threat that a CAF response has on development of community disaster response plans. Specifically, communities will not seek to increase their volunteers or engage in specialized training for response teams as they will become more reliant on the CAF to fulfill those response efforts. This leads to communities becoming easily overwhelmed, further increasing the pressure on the CAF to respond to domestic emergencies.³⁸ Finally, increased involvement by the CAF in DOMOPS could affect the public's perception of the CAF, particularly if there are instances of misuse of authority or negative interactions with civilians.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Utilizing the analysis of how our allies and partners conduct DOMOPS along with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the CAF conducting DOMOPS, key deductions can be made to provide recommendations for future policy development.

³⁴ Josh Bowen, "Improving Operational Effectiveness Across Canada's EM Ecosystem," *On Track* 31 (November 2023): 30.

³⁵ Johanu Botha, *Boots on the Ground: Disaster Response in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁸ Lisa Paul, "Disrupting a Culture to Improve Canada's Resilience," *On Track* 31 (November 2023): 40.

Reserve Response

The CAF currently utilizes its Immediate Response Units (IRU) in each region to respond to requests for assistance from provinces.³⁹ IRUs are based out of regular force bases throughout Canada where the primary focus is the defence of Canada and support to operations outside of Canada. Requiring these IRUs to respond to domestic emergencies takes away from training for their primary mission, allowing time for leave, and family commitments. This in turn can affect morale and retention which are key priorities for the CAF, along with preparedness for their upcoming missions. A potential solution to this would be to have a specific-purpose force which would fall under the responsibility of the reserve force.⁴⁰ This would ensure that resources are not taken from units that are supporting or preparing for other operations. Additionally, reserve units are strategically located throughout each province, allowing them to have a stronger sense of geographical familiarity as well as established relationships with their communities and provincial governments. This process would be like the National Guard in the USA which responds to their domestic emergencies. If the reserves become overwhelmed in response to an emergency, then an IRU could supplement the response. The actual force structure and organization is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the intention of this recommendation would be to have a specific reserve force that is trained and capable of responding to domestic emergencies in each province.

Investment in Community-Led Response

There is no strategy at the national level to encourage communities to promote training and capabilities for responding to emergencies, which results in a lack of resilience at the community level.⁴¹ Investing in building a program to support these responses at the community level leverages an entire community to provide the resources for a response effort. If a community is better trained and has the proper resources, they are more capable and confident to respond to a disaster, which would decrease the number of federal resources to be assigned, like the CAF.⁴² Lisa Paul, Director Community Programs with St. John Ambulance Canada provided her observations from her participation in the 2018 flood season. She described a road to the affected community as being lined with various vehicles and equipment, ready to assist, and she stated “we’re not even on the ground, and the tank carrying the last resort [military] is four vehicles in front of my ambulance”.⁴³ She alluded to the point of whether the community and province was truly overwhelmed, requiring CAF assistance, or whether it was just habit to have the CAF deployed.⁴⁴

There are many volunteers within each community that possess the desire to help their community out in the event of a natural disaster, however there is a lack of oversight on how to manage these volunteers, therefore it is often left to non-governmental organizations (NGO) or government organizations to respond. There is capacity to build resiliency within communities if

³⁹ Bill F. Seymour, “The Canadian Armed Forces in Canada’s Domestic Emergency Management System: Masking Gaps in Civil Capacity,” *On Track* 31 (November 2023): 17.

⁴⁰ Adam P. MacDonald, “The Future Of Domestic Operations . . .,” 7.

⁴¹ Johanu Botha, *Boots on the Ground* . . ., 125.

⁴² Lisa Paul, “Disrupting a Culture . . .,” 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

a concerted effort is made to develop and put in place the structures necessary to manage volunteers from the community. There are many occasions where the CAF was called in to fill sandbags, shovel snow, and remove tree debris, all examples of activities that do not require CAF specific skills. If communities can become better trained, and utilized more often in an emergency response, then there would be less reliance placed on the CAF to fill the gaps.

CONCLUSION

DOMOPS began early on in Canada's history, mainly in its function of aid to civil power. The military was very successful in responding to civil disturbances as they were noted to be able to organize themselves in large numbers quickly with strong discipline. These qualities led to them being utilized for disaster response in the form of flood relief. The CAF would be used to assist with providing security for the Olympic games and other high-profile events, with the RCMP being the lead agency. Between 1990 and 2010, the CAF supported only six DOMOPS, however from 2010 to 2020, the CAF responded to more than 30, highlighting the increased demand for already strained CAF resources.⁴⁵

Through a review of DOMOPS in our allied and partner countries, we see many commonalities regarding the structure and process for requesting military assistance. We also see some of the same concerns, mainly an increasing number of requests for assistance in an environment with more frequent natural disasters because of climate change. The USA stands apart in terms of having a National Guard which falls under the Governor of the affected State to control. The National Guard's mission is to serve both their community and country with one of their main responsibilities being response to domestic emergencies.⁴⁶ This allows the forces that are preparing for war and overseas deployments to concentrate on those preparations as opposed to regularly shifting focus to domestic emergencies.

An analysis highlights how the CAF's involvement in DOMOPS emphasizes their ability to deploy quickly in large numbers with specialized skills that are necessary in an emergency. However, we also see that there are effects of having the CAF called upon so frequently, mainly being its ability to train for war. There is a perception that is created that the public comes to understand, which is that for any domestic emergency, the CAF is expected to be onsite. This perception does not create the image of a force of last resort, but a force that is to be requested, purely based on habit and for political purposes. Opportunities exist in the CAF conducting DOMOPS to build a strong relationship with the public which aides in achieving widespread support for the military. There are also opportunities to utilize new technologies and processes in DOMOPS which can also be used on international missions. Like some opportunities, there are offsetting threats such as negative publicity in the CAF either through an unfortunate incident or through the CAF being required to restrict the freedom of movement of civilians. Additionally, mission creep can also occur, where the CAF continues to take on more and more

⁴⁵ Department of National Defence, "Canadian Armed Forces Operations and Activities – Transition Binder 2020: March 2020 – Operation LENTUS," last accessed 8 May 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reportspublications/transition-materials/caf-operations-activities/2020/03/caf-ops-activities/op-lentus.html>.

⁴⁶ Army National Guard, "Our History," last accessed 12 May 2024, <https://www.nationalguard.com/guard-history>.

responsibilities, to the point where it is diminishing the authority of the civilian organizations responsible for domestic responses.

This essay has argued that the policies dictating how the CAF responds to domestic emergencies is not sustainable in the face of a shortage of personnel along with an increasing rate of natural disasters because of climate change. This essay does not suggest that the CAF should not conduct DOMOPS, but that policy changes are required to ensure that international operations can be conducted uninterrupted, while also promoting more resilience within community organizations. Reserve units are strategically located throughout Canada and have well developed relationships with the communities in which it serves. Utilizing the reserve force for primary response to domestic emergencies will ensure that forces and resources are not pulled from already strained operational commitments.⁴⁷ Additionally, developing a more robust response and preparedness for natural disasters at the community level, will also assist in communities not being overwhelmed as easily. Many elements of the emergency management system have been underutilized which affects their ability to adapt effectively to an environment of increasing natural disasters.⁴⁸ A combination of increased resilience in communities to respond to domestic emergencies along with a change in the organizational structure for how the CAF responds to these disasters would ensure a more sustainable approach to DOMOPS for the CAF without sacrificing the capabilities at the community level.

⁴⁷ Macdonald-Laurier Institute, “The moral hazard of using the Canadian military as provincial first responders,” last accessed 13 May 2024, <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/moral-hazard-canadian-armed-forces/>

⁴⁸ Adam P. MacDonald, “The Future of Domestic Operations . . .,” 11

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