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RECALIBRATING THE CANADIAN ARMY'S FORCE GENERATION MODEL

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Maj Andrew Dillon

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RECALIBRATING THE CANADIAN ARMY'S FORCE GENERATION MODEL

AIM

1. This service paper aims to propose an alternative to the Canadian Army's (CA's) force generation (FG) of high-readiness (HR) Brigade Groups and large Battle Groups (BGs). It will argue that the current model puts too much emphasis on fielding large formations for combat operations, when a more sustainable and efficient approach would see the CA organized to generate small BGs or smaller Land Task Forces (LTFs), optimized for pre- and post-conflict engagement and limited conflict intervention.¹ The recommendation proposed herein should be considered for further study as part of the CA's overall force development process, in terms of force structure, equipment capabilities, individual and collective training, and managed readiness planning.

INTRODUCTION

2. Background. The current FG model aims to maintain a Brigade Group headquarters, a large BG and several enabling elements at high readiness to deploy in the event of a major contingency.² The CA also orients its doctrine and institutional training towards the deployment of general-purpose combat forces of up to Brigade Group strength. Although this approach was validated during Operation ATHENA, it is not reflective of the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF's) more recent operational commitments, nor is it sustainable within the new Defence

¹2 CMBG deployed approximately 3,000 soldiers during Exercise MAPLE RESOLVE 17. A typical BG comprises 800-1200 soldiers, while smaller LTFs have deployed with 200-350 soldiers.

²Steve Graham, "Canadian Army Managed Readiness Plan" (informal lecture, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, 11 December 2017), with permission. Other smaller elements tailored for non-combatant evacuation and disaster response are also maintained at high readiness.

Policy mandate for concurrent operations. Since Operation ATHENA, the CA has generated several smaller LTFs for operations in Eastern Europe, comprising a Company Group or an understrength BG. Additional commitments of similar size and scope are anticipated as part of engagement and peace support missions in Africa and the Middle East. The CA's continued focus on generating large, combat-capable forces is also inefficient and it fails to generate rapidly deployable capability, making the deployment of special operations forces and other component elements a more attractive option for the Government of Canada.³ Shifting the CA's focus to small BGs and smaller LTFs could generate efficiency and better align FG outputs with operational demands.

3. Scope. This service paper will first assess the utility of the CA's current model from the perspective of recent and current CAF operations, and then examine it in the context of the new Defence Policy (*Strong, Secure, Engaged* or *SSE*). The paper will argue that there is increasing relevance for the operational and tactical employment of smaller land force groupings, with more integration of arms and services at the BG level and below. It will address the risks of shifting focus away from maintaining large, combat-capable forces at high readiness, and it will conclude with a recommendation aimed at recalibrating the CA's FG approach to focus on smaller LTFs.

³This sentiment has been discussed amongst senior CA leaders in the post-Afghanistan period.

DISCUSSION

4. Legacy Demands. The CA has long been organized around several Brigade Groups, developing institutional competence at that level with 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4 CMBG) stationed alongside other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Germany during the Cold War.⁴ Deploying large BGs to the Balkans during the 1990s and generating the bulk of Task Force Afghanistan during Operation ATHENA validated the CA's focus on Brigade Group and BG-level combat operations.⁵ Notwithstanding the strategic benefits of large, high profile contributions to UN and NATO-led coalition operations, these missions came at the expense of the CA's institutional capability and its ability to respond to other major contingencies with a robust LTF held at high readiness. It also limited the CA's ability to generate land forces in support of other HR tasks and deliberate operations.

5. Current Context. The ongoing rotation of three CMBGs through a cycle of reconstitution and support, training, and deployed operations or HR lends itself well to committing to a single mission, or the ability to deploy a CMBG Headquarters and a large BG on a contingency operation, but not both.⁶ Current CA contributions to CAF operations involve task-organized sub-units, understrength Battalion Groups, composite teams of enablers, and piece-meal contributions to Joint Task Force (JTF) Headquarters and Support Components. Each HR

⁴J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 375.

⁵*Ibid.*, 402-403. Reference cites contributions to peace support operations in the Balkans.

⁶Steve Graham, "Canadian Army Managed Readiness Plan".... The CA's post-Afghanistan contribution to CAF readiness involved a Brigade Headquarters, a mechanized BG of approximately 1000 soldiers, and additional enablers trained for major contingencies and held at high readiness. It has been widely acknowledged that the CA would struggle to deploy such a task force while also committing to other operations and maintaining a domestic response capability.

CMBG now sees its forces (and much of its senior leadership) deployed on two rotations of up to three smaller missions, with little residual capacity to maintain a substantial LTF at high readiness for a year.⁷ CA planners have been forced to adjust the FG model to accommodate a multitude of tasks and optimize forces for operations, on the basis of language and equipment capability for example.⁸

6. Road to High Readiness (RTHR) Training. The ability to operate at the Brigade Group level is entrenched in the CA's RTHR training program. Each CMBG (Level 7) Headquarters on the RTHR is certified ready through a series of computer-aided exercises, known as Exercise UNIFIED RESOLVE (Ex UR). Its BGs and supporting units (Level 6) are certified to conduct full-spectrum operations in a Brigade Group context during Exercise MAPLE RESOLVE (Ex MR), a lengthy, complex field training exercise (FTX) in Wainwright, Alberta. Live fire training is conducted only up to Combat Team level (Level 5). The certification of CMBG Headquarters during Ex UR remains a useful endeavour, but deploying the bulk of a CMBG to Wainwright each year for a lengthy FTX is inefficient. It is unnecessarily expensive and it incurs significant time away from home for personnel who are set to deploy on operations during the following year. Training for full-spectrum operations at Brigade Group and BG levels does not necessarily align well with the more realistic employment of smaller LTFs conducting pre- and post-conflict engagement operations, and there is little residual capacity left in the CMBG to deploy a

⁷For example, 2 CMBG has seen the headquarters and senior leadership of all four of its manoeuvre units committed to operations in the HR year, leaving none available to lead a contingency operation.

⁸Steve Graham, "Canadian Army Managed Readiness Plan"....

significant LTF that would undertake the sorts of operations practiced during Ex MR.⁹ Because of this misalignment, those officers and soldiers set to deploy overseas must undertake several more weeks (or months) of TF integration and theatre and mission specific training (TMST).¹⁰ The training gap is exacerbated by a heavy turnover of personnel immediately following Ex MR, and those units slated for deployment later in the HR year must repeat much of their training to overcome experience gaps and skill fade before deploying.¹¹

7. Institutional Training and Doctrine. The focus on large formations and combat operations is further reinforced by the CA's doctrine and institutional training. *Land Operations* and lower-level doctrine publications articulate how the CA will operate as an independent CMBG or BG within a multinational Corps, Division or Brigade.¹² The CA Command and Staff College is established as a centre of excellence for formation-level operations and students on the Army Operations Course spend the majority of their time in residence exercising as a CMBG Headquarters.¹³ There are merits to inculcating CA officers and senior non-commissioned officers with the knowledge and skill necessary to conduct combat operations at the formation level; however, it comes at the cost of time spent preparing for more contemporary operations like security force capacity building and peace support, typically conducted by smaller land force groupings.

⁹The issue of over-training is amplified when considered in the context of a deterrence mission like Operation REASSURANCE in Latvia. Not only is there significant TMST that must be conducted after Ex MR, but the bulk of the deployment is spent training for the sort of operation that the mission aims to deter.

¹⁰Elements of TF Ukraine, for example, set to deploy on Operation UNIFIER in September 2017, stood up as a TF two weeks after returning from Ex MR and spent the majority of the next three months conducting integration activity and TMST.

¹¹1 RCR, for example, has had to conduct substantial TMST ahead of its deployment to Latvia in February 2018, including the Level 5 live fire ranges that it had already completely during the RTHR in Spring 2017.

¹²Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-001/FP-001, *Land Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2008), 1-6.

¹³Based on author's personal experience attending the Army Operations Course.

8. Defence Policy Implications. FG demands on the CA are unlikely to change under the new Defence Policy. *SSE* mandates that the CA maintain its ability to generate and deploy a Brigade Group, and to operate with all-arms integration at that level; however, this mandate is irreconcilable with the level of ambition for undertaking concurrent operations.¹⁴ It is unrealistic that the CA will be able to generate up to nine LTFs with a total of at least 2000 troops committed concurrently, while it also maintains a significant HR capability for domestic operations. Moreover, a large LTF of the size and aspired to in the current FG model would itself exceed the total joint force strength outlined in any one of the operations outlined in *SSE*.¹⁵ It is also apparent from the current Government's approach, and *SSE*'s emphasis on pre- and post-conflict engagement, that the CAF will aim to achieve national strategic objectives by working with and through multilateral coalitions and partner nations, with a focus on deterrence, security force capacity building and peace support. There appears to be little political appetite to commit to major land combat operations or counter-insurgency campaigns of the scale undertaken during Operation ATHENA, with a preference for lower-profile missions and limited intervention instead.¹⁶ Barring a major contingency that threatens Canadian or allied national security directly, it is unlikely that the CA will be required to field a Brigade Group or even a large BG at short notice.

¹⁴Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 36.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 81. The figure 2000 is a rough estimate of the CA contribution to the total joint force strength provided in *SSE*.

¹⁶This political climate and the preference for operations conduct by, with and through partners, was evident in the Government's recent announcement to contribute training teams in support other UN troop contribution nations in Africa.

9. Force Employment Considerations. There are several trends in contemporary land operations and future land warfare concepts globally that promote the employment of smaller land force groupings:

- a. Responsiveness. Smaller land force groupings can be more strategically responsive and have greater operational mobility once in theatre, owing to the reduction in lift requirements and time required for preparation in theatre. For example, United States (US) defence analysis of French Army operations in Mali in 2014 recommended that the US Army adopt the French approach to expeditionary operations, with the ability to respond to emerging crises quickly by generating smaller all-arms tactical groupings.¹⁷
- b. Agility. Recent land combat experiences have encouraged the adoption of smaller tactical groupings and all-arms integration at increasingly lower levels. Small groupings are seen to be more agile, more easily dispersed and more manoeuvrable in complex terrain. Russian Ground Forces, for example, have employed all-arms Battalion Tactical Groups effectively in Eastern Ukraine, instead of fighting at the formation level.¹⁸ Looking to the near future, a British Army developmental concept sees the traditional BG of 1000 or more soldiers replaced by an all-arms combat team comprising 400-500 soldiers, its smaller size offset by unmanned or autonomous sensors and weapons. Brigades and units would remain relevant in providing a basis for FG activity and arms-specific

¹⁷Michael Shurkin, "What It Means to Be Expeditionary: A Look at the French Army in Africa," *Joint Force Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (October 2016): 84-85, http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-82/jfq-82_76-85_Shurkin.pdf.

¹⁸Nic Fiore, "Defeating the Battalion Tactical Group," *ARMOR* 128, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 10-11, <http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2017/Spring/ARMOR%20Spring%202017%20edition.pdf>.

training, but smaller, integrated combat teams would become the baseline grouping on operations.¹⁹ Even recent CA experience during Operation ATHENA supports the adoption of smaller land force groupings. Sub- and sub-sub-units routinely formed the basis for all-arms integration, often operating independently for extended periods, and the utility of dispersing and re-aggregating forces has been captured in the CA's "Adaptive Dispersed Operations" concept.²⁰

- c. Economy of Effort. Parallel to Canada's shift in operational commitments since 2011, most of Canada's allies have also seen large-scale commitments of land forces to one or two major campaigns give way to a plethora of smaller engagement, peace support and capacity building missions. Amidst shrinking budgets, reductions in personnel, and waning political support for combat operations, the numbers of soldiers deployed on each mission has decreased accordingly. Deploying smaller LTFs allows nations to meet multiple, concurrent demands for military engagement, it helps to maintain a lower profile in partner nations and domestic political support, and it preserves the capacity to maintain HR forces.²¹ The British and Australian Armies also maintain elements of one of three combat-capable Brigades at high readiness, but they too have only deployed smaller LTFs (to conduct deterrence operations in the Baltics and training

¹⁹"Cove Webinar – UK Conceptual Force (Land) 2035 – Colonel James Cook," YouTube video, 25:46, posted by "The Cove," 8 November 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPui8zC1YU8>.

²⁰Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021 Adaptive Dispersed Operations: The Force Employment Concept for the Army of Tomorrow* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 17-18.

²¹Peter J. Schoomaker, "Special Operations Forces in Peacetime: A Powerful Tool in Shaping the Security Environment," *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 4, no. 3 (December 1999): 12.

missions in the Middle East and Africa).²² Even the US has shifted to the employment of smaller engagement TFs.²³

10. Risk. Focusing on smaller LTFs and reducing the CA's preparedness for major combat operations will incur risk. By limiting FG to lower organizational levels and focusing more on TMST, there could be a degradation of the CA's institutional warfighting competence, creating a significant readiness gap in the event of a major conflict. Putting the CA in a position where it cannot deploy large, combat-capable forces quickly limits Government of Canada options, and it may undermine Canada's political and military strategic capital with its allies. These risks are already present though. Live fire training—the crucible for land force combat preparedness—is limited to Level 5 (Combat Team). Beyond that level, training is focused on preparing senior leaders to orchestrate tactical-level activities in a complex operating environment, which could be accomplished to a large degree without troops in the field. As it is, Ex MR lacks the TMST that CA forces deploying to a major conflict would need anyway, and in the current rotational period of one year, the experience may not be recent enough to adequately prepare a large combat force for deployment.²⁴ Adopting a more efficient approach to FG and training smaller LTFs ahead of deployment might actually improve the CA's ability to deploy combat-capable and tactically relevant land forces at short notice.

²²British Army, "Operations and Deployments," accessed 30 January 2018, <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/>; Australian Government Department of Defence, "Global Operations," accessed 30 January 2018, <http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/>.

²³Sean Kimmons, "Isolated From US Military, Small Army Post Looks to Rid Terrorism in Africa," *US Army Africa*, 7 December 2017, <http://www.usaraf.army.mil/media-room/article/28488/isolated-from-us-military-small-army-post-looks-to-rid-terrorism-in-africa>. This article provides an example of a US Army-led operation in Cameroon with a uniquely small footprint in the traditional US Army context.

²⁴See earlier comments about the 1 RCR BG slated for deployment to Latvia.

CONCLUSION

11. The CA's ongoing focus on fielding Brigade Groups and large BGs on operations is inefficient and unsustainable in the context of ongoing and foreseeable operational demands. Despite its orientation toward large, combat-capable formations, the CA currently generates several smaller LTFs concurrently and it is likely to continue to do so under the current Defence Policy. These LTFs are employed in broad coalitions and will be focused increasingly on training and engagement with partner forces to build their capacity. Time and resources would be better spent preparing CA forces for this scope of employment instead of maintaining a Brigade Group or large BG at high readiness for major combat operations. The focus on large tactical formations also risks irrelevance amidst trends that favour smaller land force groupings that are more agile, integrated and strategically and operationally responsive. The CA should focus instead on generating small BGs or smaller LTFs. Capabilities and training should be optimized for all-arms integration at sub-unit level and below, high strategic and operational mobility, and the conduct of operations with and through coalitions and partner forces.

RECOMMENDATION

12. The CA should institutionalize the FG of smaller LTFs. Each CMBG would adopt a FG role, vice a tactical one, with residual capability to deploy the headquarters in the latter role after being validated during an iteration of Ex UR. Manoeuvre unit headquarters would form the basis of smaller LTFs, and enabling units would maintain arms-specific skills and generate task-tailored capability sets. LTFs would be formed around a core sub-unit group, a Combat Team or task-tailored training teams, with the ability to integrate allied and partner forces. Each CMBG

could continue to rotate through periods of reconstitution, training, and HR or deployment; or each CMBG could adopt a regional focus, and cycle four LTFs through periods of reconstitution, training, HR, and deployment. In either case, the rotation period would be reduced to six to nine months, and the CA would sustain the deployment of a minimum of three unit-led LTFs on named operations, and maintain at least one LTF at HR for contingency operations.²⁵ The RTHR training period would be reduced in scope to include live fire training up to Level 5, a Level 6 CAX, and TMST; and Ex MR would be replaced by a series of mission rehearsal exercises. Institutional training and doctrine would be refocused on land operations at BG-level and below, with residual familiarization of land operations at formation level.

²⁵There may be circumstances in which it would be appropriate to deploy a small LTF led by a sub-unit commander; for example, on a small, one-time DART or NEO deployment. Forming LTFs at this level provides a greater number of possible LTFs generated within a single Brigade at a given time.

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