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RELEVANCE: THE CANADIAN ARMY'S GREATEST RISK

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RELEVANCE: THE CANADIAN ARMY'S GREATEST RISK

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to outline why remaining relevant is the greatest challenge facing the Canadian Army's (CA) ability to apply land power over the next 10 years. In the context of this service paper, the term 'relevant' refers to the CA's ability to remain "valuable and useful"¹ to the Government of Canada (GoC) in achieving its political ambitions internationally. The focus will be on the structure and capabilities of the CA at the present time, along with planned capabilities outlined in Strong, Secured, Engaged (SSE).

BACKGROUND

2. Operation ATHENA in Afghanistan was the top of the crescendo for the CA. Following the end of the Cold War, the CA was an instrumental tool for the GoC in achieving its international objectives. From 1991 to 2006, the CA had troops deployed continuously on international operations under the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and as part of coalitions.² These deployments were often in large numbers of at least a Battle Group (BG) size and often involved multiple BGs deployed concurrently to different theatres. From Somalia to East Timor to the former Yugoslavia, the GoC used the CA heavily to

¹ Oxford, "Oxford Learner's Dictionary," accessed 26 January 2018, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/relevant>.

² National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Operations," accessed 26 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations.page>.

achieve its international objectives. Some of these deployments, although often under Chapter VI UN missions, saw the use of force and CA troops were put in dangerous situations in the name of furthering GoC objectives.³

3. Afghanistan presented a new challenge for the CA. For the first time in many years, the CA had a brigade-sized element deployed and had a brigade headquarters (HQ) as a tactical formation HQ.⁴ The counter insurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan saw the CA at the forefront of the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) public contribution to GoC policy and presented unique challenges to the CA. However, due to casualties and the duration of that deployment, the political will in many western nations, including Canada, has moved away from large deployments following Afghanistan.⁵ This presents a significant challenge for the CA, as it has grown accustomed to deploying large numbers on mission and designed itself as medium to heavy force requiring time and substantial support for deployments.

DISCUSSION

4. Since the end of the mission in Afghanistan, the GoC has been reluctant to deploy large numbers of ground forces internationally. This is partly due to domestic public opinion but also

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "ARCHIVED - Operation ATHENA," accessed 26 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/op-athena.page>.

⁵ Con Coughlin, "If the West will not commit ground troops in the war against Isis, then it cannot be sure of declaring victory," *The Telegraph*, 18 October 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/18/if-the-west-will-not-commit-ground-troops-in-the-war-against-isis/>.

due to the lack of the political will amongst Canada's allies.⁶ The GoC has demonstrated that it would prefer to deploy a high yield, low footprint force, which allows it to gain international recognition while not committing to a long-term deployment. This includes using naval and air assets, as well as Special Forces.

5. Unfortunately for the CA, its success in Afghanistan has also become its weakness. Afghanistan involved sending major equipment and troop numbers to operate in a dangerous environment, costing large sums of money and requiring the commitment to a long-term deployment. The CA, structured and equipped for major combat or counter insurgency, is based on a medium to heavy force structure that is difficult to deploy and heavily reliant on logistical support. As such, the CA is not particularly relevant to the GoC's current strategic international initiatives.

6. Even when the CA is chosen to take part in a mission, the current requirement is to deploy several hundred people at most; many times the contribution is specialty capabilities and leadership personnel in a training or headquarters capacity (e.g. Ukraine, Iraq). This relies heavily on leadership and does not necessarily involve many lower ranked personnel. This presents issues in maintaining morale and providing young soldiers with the experience required to succeed at higher ranks when the leadership is often away on deployments. The possible exception to this rule is the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia; however, even that

⁶ Mathieu Landriault, "Post-Afghanistan syndrome? Canadian public opinion on military intervention abroad after the Afghanistan mission," accessed 26 January 2018, http://pacscan.ca/wp-content/uploads/Landriault_CFRA-workshop.pdf.

deployment is relatively small, around 450 personnel, since the Canadian contribution is only a portion of a multinational BG.⁷ The CA's challenge over the next 10 years will be remaining relevant when missions are smaller and a more agile force is required.

7. SSE. SSE provides insight as to the future of the CA, including its mandate, future investments, and deployments. SSE is clear that the CA will continue to focus its training on “high-end war-fighting skills” with training up to the brigade group level.⁸ Although this is in line with the CA's core mandate, it does not necessarily line up with the deployment forecast.

- a. Deployments. SSE outlines the types of expeditionary deployments which the GoC will commit the CAF in the future. Although there are relatively large deployments forecasted, two 900 to 1500 people at a time, they are nowhere near the size of a brigade seen during Afghanistan. The plan also includes many short duration (six to nine months) deployments.⁹ This has been the trend since the end of the Afghanistan mission, where deployments such as Operation UNIFIER in Ukraine, Operation IMPACT in Iraq and Operation MOBILE in Libya have all been smaller operations, avoiding the use of mass ground forces.¹⁰ As will be discussed below, the CA is not currently set up for short duration missions because of its composition and structure.

⁷ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, “Operation REASSURANCE,” accessed 26 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad/nato-ee.page>.

⁸ National Defence, *Strong, Secured, Engaged – Canada's Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: National Defence, 2018), 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, “Operations...

b. Investment. SSE offers dedicated investment for the CA for the foreseeable future. Despite this, much of what SSE has committed to the CA is a replacement of existing equipment that has recently been retired (air defence) or will be aging over the next few years (CIED equipment, all terrain vehicles, new logistics vehicles).¹¹ In contrast to many of the investments that will replace existing capabilities, the one that stands out is the investment in light forces.

8. Light Forces. The light force initiative, outlined in SSE, will enable the CA to increase its relevance by providing the CA a capability with “increased strategic and operational responsiveness.”¹² The CA is currently structured, with LAVs and Tanks, as a medium to heavy force. Although quite versatile, with the upgrades to the LAV outlined in SSE and currently underway, the LAV fleet will become heavier and more difficult to deploy with strategic lift assets.¹³ The upgraded LAV, combined with the Leopard 2, will remain difficult to move quickly into a theatre, presenting a cost in terms of finances, resources, and time to deploy the CA.

9. A light force is by definition more rapidly deployable than a medium to heavy force and will present the GoC with a more versatile CA.¹⁴ However, this light force will not come quickly. The procurement process is slow and capability development will take time to ensure

¹¹ National Defence, *Strong, Secured, Engaged...*, 37.

¹² Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive – Light Forces*, (Ottawa: Director Land Force Development, 26 September 2017), 4.

¹³ Military Today, “LAV III Kodiak,” accessed 26 January 2018, <http://www.military-today.com/apc/kodiak.htm>; Military Today, “LAV 6.0,” accessed 26 January 2018, http://www.military-today.com/apc/lav_6_0.htm.

¹⁴ Department of National Defence, *Defence Terminology Bank*, (Ottawa: Assistant Deputy Minister (Information Management), 2018), Record # 34051 – Light Force.

the CA fields a truly professional light force. Although the plan is to have the light forces fully capable by 2025 to 2030,¹⁵ until the capability is fielded the CA will have difficulty remaining relevant when the GoC is looking to deploy forces with a smaller footprint.

10. Even with a more responsive CA light force, the culture and expectations within the CA may need to change to enable the rapid deployability the GoC will require. Although Afghanistan helped develop the mindset of the CA as a mission-focussed fighting force, it also saw the deployment of unprecedented resources to ensure the comfort and lifestyles of the troops. Everything from fresh rations to WiFi to Tim Horton's was deployed to Kandahar in support of the troops. The deployment of these resources may not be possible for the short-term missions outlined in SSE.

11. It is clear that the light forces initiative has the potential to make the CA more agile and therefore increase its relevance in the current environment; however, the change required will not come quickly, requiring the CA to work to remain relevant for the GoC over the next few years.

12. CA Structure. Another area where the CA could adapt to maintain its relevance to the GoC is in modifying its structure. The regular force portion of the CA is structured with three mechanised brigade groups. This structure has served the CA well over the years where large missions such as Afghanistan have required the force generation of a brigade-sized element for

¹⁵ Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive – Light Forces...*, 11.

one mission at a time. With smaller deployments on the horizon, this symmetrical structure becomes less relevant. For example, a deployment of 900 to 1500 people is one BG with the required national support attachments. This is a far cry from the more than 40,000 CAF personnel deployed over 12 years during the Afghan mission.¹⁶ In addition, SSE indicates that there will be several small concurrent missions. At first glance, the current structure looks to remain adequate for the future but when considered with the difficulty of quickly deploying the current force, one can see that perhaps the symmetrical system has its drawbacks.

13. An alternative to the symmetrical brigade group structure, which could be more relevant to the GoC, would be to follow the same model as the Australian Army. Australia has one heavy, one medium, and one light brigade.¹⁷ With smaller deployments on the horizon where the force generation can be managed internally to a brigade, each brigade could be allocated a theatre, or operation to force generate, which suits its abilities. For example, the heavy and medium brigades could force generate the enduring missions outlined in SSE while the light brigade would be available for short-term deployments. This ensures the brigade that is generating the forces for the next deployment gains expertise for a mission. This also increases the chances of mission success, particularly when compared to sharing all missions amongst all three brigades, because lessons learned are easily transmitted from one rotation to the next. This would also enable the GoC to use the CA for long term missions while maintaining a light force, which is easily deployable on short notice. As outlined above, light forces are easier to deploy and are therefore often better suited for shorter-term missions when compared to medium or heavy

¹⁶ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "The Canadian Armed Forces Legacy in Afghanistan," accessed 26 January 2018, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/cafla.page>.

¹⁷ Australian Army, "Units," accessed 26 January 2018, <https://www.army.gov.au/our-people/units>.

forces. The light brigade could also take over the responsibility for tasks such as Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO).

14. SSE makes it clear that the brigade group headquarters is the lowest Joint, Interagency, Multinational, and Public (JIMP) enabled headquarters.¹⁸ As such, for a mission to take full advantage of the advantages of JIMP, the brigade headquarters, or at least a portion of it, must be deployed. Having a light brigade ready for a short-term mission would provide the GoC with a light brigade headquarters to enable JIMP operations for these missions. Although some may argue that any brigade headquarters can deploy in support of these missions, others would make the point that a brigade that has trained in light operations is best suited to command light forces. It becomes a question of what is possible versus what is the best practice. At present, the CA plans to integrate light forces “within the construct of the Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group[s],”¹⁹ which for the reasons outlined above may not be the most efficient employment of the capability.

15. Wait it out. Although not necessarily ideal, the CA could continue in the same way it has for the past number of years in the hope that a large deployment requiring the current force structure comes again. As with all political trends, things will change and governments will likely be less hesitant to deploy land forces at some point in the future. As an example, after Somalia the US government was hesitant to deploy US forces to stop violence in the world

¹⁸ National Defence, *Strong, Secured, Engaged...*, 36.

¹⁹ Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive – Light Forces...*, 5.

(Rwanda and the early stages of Bosnia are prime examples) due to a lack of political will to put US soldiers in harm's way.²⁰ This eventually changed and the US deployed forces to Bosnia in 1995.²¹ This cycle is likely to occur again and nations, including Canada, will one day be inclined to deploy large land forces in support of their national objectives. The CA can simply stay its current course and piece together ad hoc task forces in support of missions over the next 10 years to support GoC initiatives until a large force is required again. Essentially, this approach accepts that the CA will be less relevant in the short term as it continues to focus on its core mission and strengths, recognising that the CA in its current form will be required and relevant again in the future. The greatest risks to this approach is decreased funding and attention during the time when the CA is less relevant, reducing the likelihood that it will be at full capacity when a larger deployment is required.

CONCLUSION

16. The CA has made great strides in the past 30 years through its continued use by the GoC on international operations. Due to changes in the collective political will within Canada and among its allies, governments are less willing to deploy large land components, to put soldiers at risk and to commit to a long term operation. As the CA is structured and equipped to deploy on long-term operations, it is not necessarily going to be the tool of choice for the GoC. This risks the CA becoming less relevant to the GoC in the coming years.

²⁰ Thomas Henriksen, *American Power after the Berlin Wall* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 67.

²¹ Chief of Military History, *CMH Pub 70-97-1 Bosnia-Herzegovina – The U.S. Army's Role in Peace Enforcement Operations 1995-2004*, (Washington: Department of Defence, 2005).

17. Initiatives such as the light force development will alleviate some of these concerns, but may take too long to ensure the CA's relevance over the next 10 years. Further initiatives are required to ensure the structure and culture in the CAF are in tune with the expectations of the GoC. If the GoC wants a rapidly deployable force, which is not committed for a long-term deployment, the CA, with its symmetrical brigades may not be structured to provide this. It behoves the CA to look internally to ensure that its capability and structure meet the current needs of the GoC while not sacrificing their core mission of "war-fighting."

RECOMMENDATION

18. The CA should expedite the development of the light forces to provide the GoC with a rapidly deployable force to meet the commitments outlined in SSE.

19. The CA should review its structure and readiness cycle to ensure it is still conducting best practices in light of the changing situation post-Afghanistan while ensuring it does not sacrifice its core "war-fighting" mandate.

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