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It's Canada That Could Use More NATO: Exploring Unconventional Contribution Paradigm to Transatlantic Alliance

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JCSP 46 DL

Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 46 DL – PCEMI 46 AD
2019 – 2021

SOLO FLIGHT

**It's Canada That Could Use More NATO:
Exploring Unconventional Contribution Paradigm to Transatlantic Alliance**

By Major Pawel Dudek

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It's Canada That Could Use More NATO: Exploring Unconventional Contribution Paradigm to Transatlantic Alliance

Explore your strong capabilities and focus on these. This is how you can play with the big boys, even if you are small.

- Ms. Kristin Krohn Devold, former Norway Minister of Defence

Introduction

Canada has a history of supporting its allies beyond direct contribution of own troops and war materiel. Capitalizing on its secure location, developed infrastructure base and availability of suitable terrain, the country has often contributed to its allies' readiness efforts in the military realm. In turn, this benefited Canada with experiential, diplomatic, economic and technological benefits which served to develop the country as a whole and beyond the strictly military realm. However, the progressive degradation of Canadian diplomatic and military instruments of power left the country's world position middling rather than in the middle of the power spectrum,¹ whereas tangible contributions to the Alliance have been remaining limited in scope and size despite declarations to the contrary.² Drawing upon past historical experiences, current practices, contributing factors and selected growth potential areas, this paper will argue that Canada can provide a creative, significant and tangible contribution to NATO beyond its current direct commitments and in enhancement of both Alliance partners' military readiness and its own burden sharing obligations for maintaining a common defence. That said, the scope of this analysis will be exclusive of the USA's training support to NATO except where

¹ Eugene Lang. "Searching for a Middle-Power Role in a New World Order." Policy Perspective - Canadian Global Affairs Institute. Calgary, AB: CGAI, 2019. P. 2.

² NATO. *The Wales Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond*. Press Release (2014) 122: NATO, 2014. Para 4 & 5.

relevant to the Canadian context, as well as to the conventional and overt aspects of training cooperation.

Historical Perspective – A Story of Enabling

Starting as early as 1914, Canadian government was petitioned by the Polish immigrant lobby in North America to setup a training camp for a force of war volunteers with Polish ancestry. Rebuffed at first,³ this effort eventually caught interest of Canadian government officials⁴ as the war progressed. A permission was secured from British high command to establish training facilities at Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON, which became a training centre for the Polish volunteers. Equipped and paid by France - given supplementary efforts of Polish lobbyists - eventually over 20,000 “Blue Army” soldiers trained in Canada under the scheme.⁵ In due course, this Polish force deployed to the European front lines, where it fought alongside the Entente - while continuing to recruit - before ending its journey in newly re-established Poland in 1919 with strength of 68,500 soldiers. For Canada, a historical precedence was set: the Dominion learned that it can also meaningfully support a coalition war effort by providing a military training and infrastructure base. For Europe, the tertiary effects of fielding the “Blue Army” manifested itself in its key role in blunting the Bolsheviks’ offensive to conquer Europe in 1920.⁶

³ Skrzyszewski 2014, P. 3.

⁴ In particular, Sam Huhges – contemporary Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence.

⁵ Ruskoski, 2006.

⁶ Given its professional training, combat experience and relatively modern French equipment as deployed in the Polish-Soviet War 1919 – 1920.

Training lessons from WW1 were replicated during WW2. Once again, the relative security and territorial access in Canada proved advantageous to conducting training of Allied cadres away from enemy's reach. In particular, the training of aircrews between 1940 and 1945 under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) in a variety of specialties contributed to the Allied war effort, while concurrently injecting war economy dollars into many Canadian communities. Moreover, conducting the program in Canada was a factor in developing an expanded and modern Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), in line with the impact of WW2 on military operations and technology in the air domain. Finally, the training legacy of qualifying of over 131,000 air force personnel under BCATP⁷ provided a catalyst for a successful – if short-lived - post-war Canadian aviation industry.

Canada's remoteness from the potential battlefields in Europe proved to be advantageous yet again with the advent of the Cold War. Early example of that was the NATO Air Training Plan (NATP) - ran from 1950–1958, authorized by NATO, implemented by the RCAF, and delivering an aircrew training. Similar in scope to BCATP, this initiative trained pilots and navigators from NATO signatory countries with the purpose of improving NATO's airpower in response to the perceived military threat in Europe from Soviet bloc countries.⁸ Concluded due to eventual development of domestic facilities by its subscribers, the NATP leveraged both the Canada's inherent

⁷ Canada. Department of National Defence. "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939 – 1945 – An Historical Sketch and Record of the Ceremony at RCAF Trenton." RCAF, Ottawa: 1949. P.8.

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "NATO Air Training Plan," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Web Archive. Retrieved 15 May 2021.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=NATO_Air_Training_Plan&oldid=961045873

territorial advantages and the country's contemporary aviation expertise and experience, while filling a capability gap with Canada's new European allies at the time of great perceived threat from the common adversary. The effects of this Canada-implemented program were exponential in scope and credibility impacts, compared to fielding another Canadian mechanized brigade in Europe.

In land domain, a significant undertaking was enabling Germany's Bundeswehr mechanized battle group training at CFB Shilo starting in 1974. Although other NATO forces trained and conducted land trails in Canada before that, the deal with the Bundeswehr was unprecedented in terms of length, scope, and economic impacts.⁹ Content with access to requisite yet domestically unattainable training grounds, the West German government also agreed to bear the full cost of this training - including the cost of any Canadian administrative personnel - and involving around 700 German personnel for three-week periods between May and November every year.¹⁰ The German Army Training Establishment Shilo (GATES) operated until 2000, when it was officially closed due to German defence budget cuts. However, this was following a decision by the Canadian government to introduce a "user pay" model with its ally, thus increasing annual German costs by \$5 million.¹¹ With the closure of GATES, Shilo region alone lost

⁹ The Free Library. S.v. "Auf wiedersehen Shilo! A brief history of the German Defence Forces at CFB Shilo." Web archive. Retrieved 20 May 2021 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Auf+wiedersehen+Shilo!+A+brief+history+of+the+German+Defence+Forces...-a030085363>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

approximately \$100 million in annual direct and indirect economic benefits.¹²¹³

Strategically, by allowing for the GATES' closure the Canadian government jeopardised relations with one of its largest European allies, significant military training revenue was lost, and seeds of doubt were sowed with other NATO allies – with exception of the UK – as to the viability of establishing a large-scale Canada-based military training base.

Finally, CFB Goose Bay was utilized starting in 1980's by several of Canada's NATO allies¹⁴ to take advantage of its 130,00 square km training area to practice their air forces in jet aircraft low-level flying operations.¹⁵ Although unique in terms of training space and with little flying restrictions, this training ceased by 2005 following allied switch to simulator-based flying practice.¹⁶

Active Major Foreign Military Training Programs in Canada

As of 2021, two large scale foreign military training operations involving NATO partners continue to endure in Canada: British Army Training Units Suffield (BATUS) and NATO Flying Training in Canada (NFTC).

BATUS has been active since 1971. Similar to GATES, its scope provides for training facilities and grounds at CFB Suffield to train a mechanized battle group from the British Army, including in force-on-force environment. What is virtually an ex-

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ CBC. "Germans Retreat from CFB Shilo." CBC News: 11 Dec 1999. Retrieved 20 May 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/germans-retreat-from-cfb-shilo-1.170645>

¹⁴ United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany and Italy

¹⁵ Canada. RCAF. "History of 5 Wing Goose Bay." Web page. Retrieved 16 May 21. <https://www.rcfarc.forces.gc.ca/en/5-wing/history.page>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

territorial British military facility in training approximately 1400 soldiers in four rotations between May to October period each year, complete with British equipment, materiel and training staff. Given access to seven times more territory than the largest military training area on the UK soil,¹⁷ BATUS takes advantage of the Canadian prairie environment to train and confirm combat effectiveness of its large tactical level formations. It also injects substantial economic benefits to the local economy, while concurrently providing for opportunity to enable a key historical Canadian ally and a potential venue for closer cooperation with the CAF.

The NFTC is a Canadian government-owned and contractor-delivered aircrew training program with the support from the RCAF, similar in scope to NATP. Located in CFB Moose Jaw and CFB Cold Lake, it provides flight Canada-based progressive flight training at to NATO and allied forces. The NFTC primarily qualifies pilot candidates and currently lists participation from Denmark, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Italy and Hungary.¹⁸

Expressing Defence ODA - Military Training and Cooperation Programme (MTCP)

Contrastingly, large scale Canada-based military training support has not been typically offered to non-NATO nations on enduring basis. As early as in 1950's, the many requests for Canadian military assistance from outside of the alliance were routinely turned down by the Defence Department, citing security concerns, lack of organizational

¹⁷ <https://www.forces.net/news/army/eye-sky-army-air-corps-personnel-keeping-soldiers-safe-canada>

¹⁸ <https://www.cae.com/defence-security/how-we-deliver-training/training-centres/nato-flying-training-in-canada-nftc>

compatibility, and resource limitations.¹⁹ Whatever assistance was rendered, it was following recommendations by the Canadian government's Interdepartmental Military Assistance Committee (IMAC)²⁰ and then coordinated through DND's MTCP. Effectively, MTCP has been forming the Defence aspect of the 3D²¹ approach to Official Developmental Aid (ODA).

In general, the MTCP consists of mostly school-based training, such as individual staff training, training design and language courses.²² Continuing today, its participating criteria are primarily aimed at the developing countries given its membership criteria.²³ Although MTCP has positive security and often enduring consequences - such as with Ghana, Tanzania²⁴ and Jamaica²⁵ - these are mostly limited to aspirational goals and are localized and external in nature, hence of limited utility to Canadian military establishment. This is particularly apparent in the area of new capabilities development and operations in space and cyber domains. Moreover, current nature of MTCP's activities provides little direct contribution to Canadian economy, given its sponsored nature and limited recipients hosted in various locations. In summary, MTCP in its

¹⁹ Mike Jeffery "The Future of Foreign Military Training." Strategic Studies Working Group Papers. Calgary: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute and Canadian International Council, 2013, P. 5.

²⁰ Currently referred to as the Military Assistance Steering Committee (MASC).

²¹ Defence, Diplomacy and Development.

²² Jeffery, *The Future of* . . . P. 6.

²³ MTCP Governance: Membership Criteria. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/military-training-cooperation-program/governance.html>

²⁴ Jeffery, *The Future of* . . . P. 6.

²⁵ Canada- Jamaica Defence Relations – Backgrounder. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2018/03/canada-jamaica-defence-relations.html>

current form is not designed nor utilized for comprehensive engagement with NATO military partner nations.

Cooperation Welcomed - Security Force Capacity Building (SFCB)

A peculiar aspect of military assistance are SFCB missions. Similar to limitations of MTCP, these provide more utility and experiential benefits to the CAF as the primary Canadian provider. The efforts of Canadian military - such as those in Afghanistan under the umbrella of Operation *Attention* and in Ukraine under Operation *Unifier* - while nominally coming under MTCP, in reality are managed and funded separately. SFCB often involve cooperation with other NATO nations while delivering on SFCB content. Yet again, though, Canada has been predominantly the provider rather than recipient of the training benefits in SFCB missions, and it was mostly utilizing existing - rather than developing new – national military capabilities, often at a significant institutional expense to particular force-generating component command.

Example of Potential for Integrating Canadian National Interest in NATO Training

The gradual opening of the Arctic pressures Canada for developing substance²⁶ to capability of protecting the North-West passage. There are NATO countries with likely means but little to no capability in that realm, and NATO Centre of Excellence for Cold Weather Operations in Norway is limited by its territory, resources²⁷ and proximity of the Russian border. The CAF Arctic Training Centre in Resolute Bay offers a Canada-based

²⁶ Robertson, *Positioning Canada* . . . P. 19.

²⁷ It has 22 dedicated staff according to its Annual Report.

alternative,²⁸ which could be utilized to generate and maintain increased NATO operational capacity for the Arctic regions. Moreover, CAF facilities such as Goose Bay and Cold Lake can be expanded to include land domain component and thus further facilitate winter training. This is because of the impact on global situation given contending interests in utilizing the Arctic and its resources by allies and potential adversaries alike.

Creating Conditions for Success

Positioning Canada in this changing environment will take skill, strategy and investments in security and diplomacy, and that in turn will need require investment in both dollars and relationships.²⁹ It also requests creative ways of supporting Canada's allies, and creating an environment conducive and welcoming to its close allies should form a part of Canadian re-investment strategy.

In addition to component specific training development organizations, the CAF utilizes MTCP in support of developmental aid. However, MTCP is currently neither resourced nor mandated to manage coordination of either a large scale or NATO-focused military training assistance. That said, it is likely that it can be adapted in its mandate to include expanded foreign military training coordination in compatibility with Canadian policy goals, and MTCP's OGD oversight can synchronize implementation effects across the national instruments of power. Such consolidation of focus would also assist in

²⁸ <https://www.army.gc.ca/en/doctrine-training/index.page#CAFATC>

²⁹ Colin Robertson. *"Positioning Canada in a Messy World"* Policy Perspective - Canadian Global Affairs Institute. Calgary, AB: CGAI, 2019. P. 1.

eliminating public friction among Canadian contributors, such as the dissonance between the GAC and the CAF following cancellation of the PLA's winter training in 2019.³⁰

Moreover, Canada can pursue its “Vimy effect” in leveraging in-country allied military training schemes based on processes such as Foreign Military Sales (FMS) - developed in the USA and administered by Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).³¹ Providing for a Whole-of Government coordination platform, it is a process that the CAF currently has to utilize through its force components for most of the military training and engagement at the US facilities. Having similar set of principle rules to those of the largest training provider in the Alliance could provide for familiarity and attraction in competing for allied external training resources.

The dynamic nature of relationship with Canada's strategic ally cannot be overemphasized. The era of Trump has sharply exposed the pitfalls of Canadian reliance on the USA as the key guarantor of its security³². While America will always be Canada's key continental ally, Canada can benefit from improving its multilateral engagement in support of its defence and security policies on the world stage. This would reflect some of the NATO' European partner-nations concurrent engagement in EU-centric defence structures, as demonstrated through installing EU military attachés such

³⁰ Robert Fife and Steven Chase. “Global Affairs objected to Canadian military decision to cancel training with China's People's Liberation Army.” Published by *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 9 Dec 2020. Web Archive. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-global-affairs-objected-to-canadian-military-decision-to-cancel/>

³¹ <https://www.dsca.mil/foreign-military-sales-faq>

³² Robertson, *Positioning Canada*. . . P. 3 - 4.

as one appointed to the USA and Canada in 2020.³³ Canada could leverage such dynamic for its national purposes, since it is perceived as an experienced actor credited with long experience in peacekeeping and military capability building. For example, Canada remains capable of fielding a French-speaking force that could support common security objectives for African deployments of European partners' forces³⁴. This can provide for a concurrent relationship beyond NATO ties but within known paradigms, while directly engaging Canada in a coalition that is counterbalancing China's influence in Africa. Furthermore, such multilateral approach can provide for a level of mitigation of the USA foreign policy moves, should it drastically reduce or withdraw its forces from Europe to focus its priorities on the Asia-Pacific region. And, there could be economic benefits, too: EU military envoys declare financial and materiel resources available for third allied nations such as Canada in funding initiatives compatible with common security objectives.³⁵

What Other Allies Do?

Benefitting from enabling allied capabilities can be beneficial. One can take a look at the approach taken by Poland as the junior member of NATO, to note the benefits in offering its training capacities to NATO organization and its members. As the largest former Warsaw Pact member to join the alliance after the conclusion of the Cold War, Poland leveraged the advantage of its existing military infrastructure to the benefit of the

³³ David Perry interview with Brigadier-General Fritz Urbach, the first Defence Attaché of the E.U. to Canada and the U.S. 7 Aug 2020
https://www.cgai.ca/transatlantic_ties_a_discussion_with_eus_defence_attache_to_canada_and_the_us

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Alliance, as well as to its own in lieu of vast financial resources to reform its forces quickly. Eager to contribute and learn, Poland leveraged what it had to fill identified gaps in NATO's training needs, and that included opening up its comparatively vast³⁶ training areas to the new allies while fostering a climate for further NATO investment. As a result, NATO members conducted a significant portion of their field training to Poland³⁷ and deployed permanent training detachments to the third largest training area in Europe at Drawsko Pomorskie, recognized for its easy access, facilities, terrain and similarity to potential conflict environment on the Alliance's Eastern flank. Moreover, Poland set conditions and provided initial infrastructure for the installation of NATO's nodes, such as Multi-National Corps North-East Headquarters in Szczecin and Joint Forces Training Centre in Bydgoszcz - "NATO's capital of Europe"³⁸ - taking advantage of the Alliance's declared needs and leveraging country's ability to sustain it with infrastructure and administration. In doing so, Poland has earned credibility, enabled reforms in its own military forces and also derived a training dollars revenue. Furthermore, NATO footprint in country provided for addressing some of Polish national security objectives, given enduring and contesting threat from Russia. Poland's approach provides an example of blending pragmatic needs with security objectives.

Whereas Canada's geography puts it in regional separation from NATO's European heartland, this can also provide advantages that Europe-based partners cannot find on their continent, as noted earlier in quoted historical examples. Canada can leverage its

³⁶ In the context of relative size and availability of training areas across the European NATO members.

³⁷ Such as during Exercise DEFENDER-EUROPE 20.

³⁸ <https://shape.nato.int/poland>

geography and infrastructure to assist in maintenance of NATO's combat readiness, testing and experimentation objectives. Locating such activities in Canada can provide for a unique (such as multi-domain or Arctic) and relatively unrestricted training environment, can also offer a politically viable option for many European NATO partners, whose domestic audiences could be potentially critical of pursuing similar initiatives with the USA given its strategic direction and global engagements. Moreover, by creating conditions for becoming NATO's field training base - such as through preferential treatment and domestic investments in grounds and infrastructure - Canada can reap the benefits of enduring relationships going beyond direct transfer

Space Domain – A Future Cooperation Opportunity?

Improved adaptation of multilateralism in defence and security can be leveraged to enable Canada's potential supplementary effort in providing infrastructure base for European space exploration. As 19 out of 25 European Space Agency (ESA) members³⁹ are also members of NATO, and as Canada already takes part in some ESA's projects under a cooperation agreement while pursuing its own national space exploration program⁴⁰, there exists a potential for a closer space related cooperation. Whereas the USA provide the lead in the Alliance on utilization of space given its experience and resources, Canada could investigate providing for a supplementary effort in that realm in consideration with NATO's defence and security needs. This could allow the country to act as one of the parties in the group of equals and effectively have a greater influence for

³⁹ European Space Agency. "ESA Facts." Web page. Retrieved 18 May 2021
https://www.esa.int/About_Us/Corporate_news/ESA_facts

⁴⁰ According to the Canada's Space Policy Framework, 2014.

pursuing state-centric space interests rather than becoming a permanent junior partner in the current collaboration paradigm with the American partners. This could manifest itself in complimenting ESA's launch platforms in French Guiana with new ones in Canada, backed by more expedient access to R&D and support base of the local industry. Once again, Canada - with its 'lots of geography' and relative political stability – could provide for the secure investment in localizing space access infrastructure, thus providing an attractive option to European partners and NATO allies alike. The aim is not to compete with the American ally, but rather compliment their efforts, share lesson learned and allow for greater role in national space exploration interests, while also collectively enabling NATO participants with both the venue and servicing advantage compared to other global competitors with pursuing similar capabilities. Space exploration opportunities would also provide for an additional attraction element to NATO-friendly emerging regional powers, thus realizing a key element of soft power approach which Canada has been historically utilizing.

Conclusion

Canada's continued complacency about our country's ability to advance its security and prosperity is a luxury it can no longer afford.⁴¹ Similarly, NATO seems to appreciate that it cannot possess every capability for all situations, and as such embrace the role of global enabler or relations with transnational partners such as the EU.⁴² Providing venues for improving and training NATO members' military capabilities is one

⁴¹ Canada. Global Affairs Canada. "Reframing Canada's Global Engagement: Ten Strategic Choices for Decision-Makers." GAC. Ottawa, ON: 2020. P. 11.

⁴² Ellen Hallams, Luca Ratti and Benjamin Zyla. "NATO Beyond 9/11 – The Transformation of the Atlantic Alliance". Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. Ch. 8.

of the ways of supporting our historical and relatable allies facing similar challenges in the dynamic world, as well as another way of sharing a burden of “common defence”.

Canada has a successful history of providing non-expeditionary military training assistance. Examples such as BATUS indicate that this remains a viable proposition to Canada’s allies. Although internal investment into capabilities remains a key enabling requirement, contributing training facilities can provide a number of pragmatic diplomacies, economy and defence benefits. Given globalization and proliferation of threats, as well as opening and increasing relevance and weaponization of regions such as the Arctic and domains such as space and cyber, Canada can no longer afford to consider itself as living in the “fireproof house”.⁴³ Thus, continued support to NATO as an alliance concentrating powers acting within the Rules Based International Order is not only morally compatible, it also serves to diversify and supplement position of the USA as the key guarantor of upholding such order in a global context.

The burden of this potential NATO-focused initiative cannot be carried by the Canadian Defence component alone – it must be a joint effort of all instruments of national power, coordinated by successive governments through enduring national actions. The objective is simple: that in order to enable and expand its multilateral global relevance and influence in increasingly competitive world, Canada could use more NATO in its backyard.

⁴³ Holloway, Steven Kendall. “Defining the National Interest.” In *Canadian Foreign Policy: Defining the National Interest*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006. P. 18.

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