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## **The Rebirth of Civil-Defence/Security to Confront Climate Change and Safeguard Canada's Security**

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**JCSP 48**

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**The Rebirth of Civil-Defence/Security to Confront  
Climate Change and Safeguard Canada's Security**

**Major Mark Norris**

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## **THE REBIRTH OF CIVIL-DEFENCE/SECURITY TO CONFRONT CLIMATE CHANGE AND SAFEGUARD CANADA'S SECURITY**

### **AIM**

1. Canada has experienced a dramatic increase in Provincial and Territorial governments requesting assistance from the Federal Government/Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in response to climate change and other emergencies.<sup>1</sup> This increase in demand is coincident with the CAF facing a significant human resources crisis caused by a combination of factors including demographics, retention, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Underlying these two issues is the reemergence of great power struggle and renewed defence and security challenges. This means that the CAF will be expected to meet its domestic support role as the force of last resort which will undermine its ability to reconstitute and respond to future defence and security challenges, such as the current crisis in Ukraine. This paper will discuss a novel solution to this problem space which will propose the re-birth of the CAF's civil -defence or emergency management role and create a separate service similarly administered to the Canadian Rangers. Canada Civil-Security/ Sécurité Civil du Canada can respond to Operation LENTUS (OP LENTUS) tasks giving the CAF the ability to reconstitute its forces. This interim service will initially reside within the CAF and provides all levels of government an opportunity to create a longer-term service modeled after countless examples including Germany, Australia, and Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> Chamandy, Aidan. "Military will likely need help for natural-disaster missions: DND" iPolitics August 6, 2021. Accessed January 5, 2022. <https://ipolitics.ca/2021/08/06/military-will-likely-need-help-for-natural-disaster-missions-dnd/>

## INTRODUCTION

2. In the past five years the CAF has seen a steady increase in domestic operations. OP LENTUS specifically has seen an increase from once or twice every two years to 5 or more deployments per year; 2021 set a new high mark with seven deployments.<sup>2</sup> Numerous government agencies have consistently confirmed that climate change is having dramatic effects on Canada, and we will continue to see an increase in climate-related emergencies.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of this new reality is that the CAF will continue to be the force of last resort when other jurisdictions need to respond to catastrophes climate-related or otherwise. The urgency of climate change has resulted in clear mandates to act across the federal government including Minister Anand, “as minister I expect you to seek opportunities within your portfolio to support our whole-of-government effort to...address the climate-related challenges communities are already facing.”(mandate letter). Moreover, *Strong, Secured, Engaged* (SSE) has clear direction that the CAF will act in this role and a core function and, “will develop and maintain a robust capacity to respond concurrently to multiple domestic emergencies.”<sup>4</sup> At this time no agency is developing or building a capability that would replace this new status quo and the continued growing demands for CAF domestic operations.

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<sup>2</sup> Berthiaume, Lee “Growing need for army during natural disasters could ‘affect readiness’: commander” The Canadian Press January 20, 2020. Accessed January 5, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6435390/canada-army-natural-disaster-response/>

<sup>3</sup> Lulham, N. and Warren, F. “Canada in a Changing Climate: National Issues Report.” (Ottawa: National Resources Canada, 2021) Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence. “Strong, Secured, Engaged, Canada’s Defence Policy.” Government of Canada, 2017. Accessed January 6, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/canada-defence-policy.html> p. 83

3. The Department of National Defence (DND) and CAF have an opportunity to address this new norm of climate emergencies with an old idea – civil-defence. For many Canadians this word is an anachronism from a bygone era when the possibility of nuclear war was a terrifying and real threat to Canada, Civil-Defence was the Government's emergency response plan for the horrors that nuclear war would unleash on Canada's population. This organization withered in the late 1990s from the loss of its primary purpose, and at the time the demand for emergency services commensurate to OP Lentus was infrequent. Historically the Canadian Militia also served to respond to local mayors in times of critical need. Unfortunately, emergency preparedness has evolved to a policy gray space in Canada, Provinces have invested heavily into emergency preparedness and significant improvements have been made, but the reality of the tasks the CAF completes domestically shows that a gap exists between demand and resources. In countries like Australia, their volunteer Civil-Defence apparatus evolved into state-level volunteer emergency services units designed and tasked to respond to natural disasters such as floods, tsunamis, storms, and earthquakes. In Canada's case, the large volunteer-based Civil Defence force of the 1950s and 1960s no longer exists. Consequently, the CAF has filled this role ever since. Just as Civil Defence was deemed necessary to respond to the threat of nuclear war, DND/CAF has an opportunity to create a civil defense/security service specifically tailored to respond to the increasing threat of climate change and emergencies on Canada's security. This modern-day service fits into the Minister's mandate and SSE by responding to climate emergencies affecting Canadian such as Operation LENTUS tasks.

4. The Geneva convention has specific articles which deal with Civil Defence, it has similar status as non-combatants or the Red Cross. The articles allow designation of both military and civilian personnel to act in the role of Civil Defence to conduct humanitarian aid, this is like

articles governing medical personal civilian or otherwise.<sup>5</sup> The creation of a para-military force to respond to disasters has benefits as does the more common model of civilian volunteer-based response organizations. This proposal would suggest that this organization can be replicated at any level of government and should be associated like many global systems do such as France or Spain which split their Civil Defence duties between volunteer civilian and military personnel. The economic and human costs of natural or human-made disasters are such that at this time the CAF is uniquely positioned to rapidly create and facilitate this reborn Civil Defence service, it will have to respond to these requests regardless of the outcome of this plan.

## **DISCUSSION**

5. Underpinning this continued demand is the cost of continued Operation LENTUS taskings. The CAF and its civilian leadership have committed to always being ready to help Canadians. There is a tangible cost to this commitment, the Canadian Army (CA) specifically has borne the brunt of Operation LENTUS tasks, there exists an inherent concurrency risk to CA and CAF operations. While a unit is assigned as an Immediate Response Unit (IRU) it may also be training for, or conducting other CAF operations, this cycle means that commanders must trade-off training or other generation activities at the expense of their member's work-life balance, in turn effecting retention but also impacting the CAF's greater ability in meeting security or defence commitments. In 2021, the Commander of 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group made a rare public statement pointing out this very challenge, the brigade's generation of

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<sup>5</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross. "Civil Defence in International and Humanitarian Law." June 2001. Accessed January 8, 2022. <https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/1039/civil-defence-in-ihl.pdf>

forces for 2022 NATO tasks was significantly impacted by OP Lentus tasks.<sup>6</sup> Given the current situation in Ukraine, the timing of these challenges is concerning with the uncertain future of possible Russian aggression in 2022.

6. As the uncertainty created by the global pandemic and the future continue, the CAF is faced with a new challenge, it must reconstitute itself under the backdrop of renewed great power conflict, human resources challenges, and continued real-world demand for its capabilities to defend Canada's security; domestic tasks included.<sup>7</sup> The CAF could be understrength by up to 10000 or more members, this is not a new challenge for the CAF as it tried to build to a force of 68, 000 by 2018 which the Office of the Auditor-General believed would not be met.<sup>8</sup> The CAF has had a continual challenge of rebuilding its human resources, this is of concern given the size of the currently growing gap, the CAF and DND should assume that future growth will be a challenge. CAF reconstitution is made even more difficult by achieving SSE mandated increase of force size of 71, 000. This creates a strange dichotomy with the idea of creating a service to respond to OP LENTUS tasks thus creating more space for the CAF to reconstitute and conduct operations, in the end, this is not a zero-sum equation it will cost precious human resources. This means the creation of another force is counter-intuitive, that is because the combined urgency and continued demand of Operation LENTUS tasks will remain constant and increase for the

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<sup>6</sup> Robb, Trevor. "Torrid operational tempo': Edmonton-based soldiers respond to disasters at home and abroad in 2021" Edmonton Journal December 29, 2021. Accessed January 5, 2022. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/national/torrid-operational-tempo-edmonton-based-soldiers-respond-to-disasters-at-home-and-abroad-in-2021>

<sup>7</sup> The Chief of the Defence Staff, "CDS Planning Directive for Canadian Armed Forces Reconstitution." (Department of National Defence: Ottawa, July 9, 2021)

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada. "Report 5: Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence." Government of Canada, 2015. Accessed January 12, 2022. [https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl\\_oag\\_201611\\_05\\_e\\_41834.html](https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/english/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html) p.3

foreseeable future, this paper proposes that the CAF fill this role in the short to medium term to allow all levels of government to create a long term and sustainable plan to respond to the future challenges that climate change may create. This plan would be tied directly to CAF reconstitution with the aim of either shedding the service from the CAF or fusing this service with a longer-term and civilian-based and funded program as dictated by policymakers and future governments. CAF reconstitution provides a convenient financial and cost mechanism for this scheme to succeed. It is assumed that given the CAF's historical challenges in reconstitution will last decades, this means that this interim placeholder organization can borrow positions and funding to support this program, it must be treated as a short-term endeavor and incorporated directly into CAF Reconstitution.

7. This proposal seeks to rapidly create a force with existing CAF human resources including calling up reservists, personnel awaiting training, and members on the basic training list. This pool includes new CAF members, junior officers, experienced members completing component transfers, and experienced reservists to fill key training and leadership roles. This organization would be in readiness for elementary OP Lentus tasks and commence the transition and standing up of the eventual primary reserve-based service. This new service would emulate the primary reserve employment models utilized for the Canadian Rangers which has mature training, administrative and operational practices providing a ready-to-use framework and model for this new organization. Put simply, the Canadian Civil Defence/Security Service would be a larger version of the Canadian Rangers, imagine the Ranger uniform esthetic but with a different colour sweater. This service would form a nationwide para-military force to assist the CAF in meeting its near- and medium-term domestic operational demand. Utilizing this framework also provides a ready-to-use system to protect and facilitate this organization, reserve service being



paid, and offering medical and long-term disability should members be injured during operations. Pro-scribing specific units, locations, and equipment are not in the scope of this paper. However, it is assumed that in the initial phases and longer-term this scheme can capitalize on current equipment stocks of civilian pattern Medium Support Vehicle System trucks and the basic tools and equipment required for support to flood, storm, forest fire fighting tasks, etc. Moreover, longer-term the CA primary reserve infrastructure and other DND/CAF installations provide a readymade footprint for national deployments and basing.

8. Although the Minister of National Defence (MND) has an overall task of assisting Canadian's it is important to address how the creation of this force will impact inter-governmental relations and affairs, this service could be a novel solution to the effects of climate change, but it is naïve to think that all levels of government will agree with this proposal. However as previously discussed, this proposal must be scaled to meet near-term demand and then seek a longer-term holistic solution. This would allow a larger discussion to occur about how Canada wishes to organize its response to dealing with the uncertain future of increasing climate-based disasters. Our allies offer some examples of what a fulsome pan-jurisdictional service could look like. Australia is organized at the State level with a civilian volunteer-based system, Germany is another country that has a mature civil defense system with 80,000 volunteers. Spain and France utilize a hybrid system of Civil-Defence being performed by both military and civilian organizations. These examples show that there is room to develop and shape this model or concept in the near and long term. The Spanish model is of note in that their system of civil-defence was strengthened when in 2007 the Government responded to public outrage because of the death of a number of civilian emergency responders and created a new military service specifically for domestic operations. All of these examples combined with the

clear language of the Geneva convention provide legitimacy to this approach of starting with a CAF-led organization until such time as a larger enterprise can be developed to meet Canada's needs.

9. There are several factors that demonstrate the credibility of this idea and the opportunities it could present to the CAF. As the CAF faces reconstitution this organization could offer tangible solutions to recurring problems affecting retention and recruitment. Modeling this program after the Canadian Rangers results in a low barrier to service. This means that participation is based on a five- to 10-day initial training and limited yearly participation to cover training and currency requirements. This overcomes the hesitancy of many people in entering a para-military culture. If urban centers are chosen for units or teams this will overcome continued challenges in recruiting and retaining Canadians who wish to serve closer to urban centers.<sup>9</sup> The low barrier to service also means that people who may wish to consider additional service in the Regular Force or CA Primary reserve can see what they think. This mirrors one of the RCAF's goals with the Aerospace Operations Support – Technician (AOS-T). It is meant to attract people with no experience, provide basic training over weekends, while supporting RCAF units with basic tasks like parking and starting aircraft, support to Search and Rescue training, etc. These experiences can translate into a further career in the RCAF. This program's recent success was an AOS-T supporting Search and Rescue Technicians with the evacuation of 300 stranded motorists in BC. Finally, the CAF and its members are among the most trusted individuals in Canada, although a slight drop was noted in the past year Canadian remain confident and trust

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<sup>9</sup> House of Commons, Canada. "Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Canadian Armed Forces: Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence." Government of Canada, June 2019. Accessed January 6 2022 <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/NDDN/Reports/RP10573700/nddnrp17/nddnrp17-e.pdf> P. 28

us.<sup>10</sup> This organization requires credibility in order for Canadians to trust them when they come to their communities in their time of need, by starting with what Canadians know and trust can help in the long term health and confidence in this organization as it transitions to its end state.

## **CONCLUSION**

10. The creation and exaction of this plan also offers altruistic and measurable benefits to the CAF. If this plan can be executed, it offers an opportunity to create a new team that incorporates lessons and best practices of our future culture. This can be done by fostering the positive cultural elements of diversity and inclusion among other GBA+ and LGBTQ+ considerations. This endeavor is a blank slate that can allow the CAF to prove it can adapt and respond to institutional problems with deliberate planning and execution. The opportunity to engage Canadians in this endeavor also resonates with one a 1950s slogan from the British Columbia Civil-Defence organization, “If we never need what we learn in civil defense we lose nothing, but if we never learn what we need, we may lose everything.”<sup>11</sup>

11. The demand for CAF resources to respond to Canadians in need will never abate, this concept accepts this and offers a solution to both allow the CAF to reconstitute and contribute to its core missions. The short-term creation of a domestic operations force will provide flexibility and relief to CAF Commanders and the countless organization the CAF support with OP Lentus tasks while ensuring the CAF can meet its reconstitution and operational goals. It must be reiterated that this is not a long-term solution but an interim capability to give governments

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<sup>10</sup>Ipsos, “Doctors are the Most Trusted Profession in Canada and Across the World” Accessed December 28, 2021, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/doctors-most-trusted-profession-in-canada>.

<sup>11</sup> MDM. “Civil Defence Training HQ on Granville Street.” Vancouver as it was, November 8 , 2020. Accessed January 15. 2002. <https://vanasitwas.wordpress.com/2020/11/08/civil-defence-training-hq-on-granville-street/>

across Canada the space to build a plan to respond to a future fraught with climate-based and other disasters. Finally, the desired end state does not see the CAF absolved of its unique role to assist Canadian's. This role will never cease as the CAF maintains capabilities and readiness that will always be in demand even with a mature Civil-Defence or emergency response capability.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, and Commander Joint Operations Command to study the feasibility of implementing this scheme.
- b. Minister of Public Safety, Minister of Climate Change, Minister of National Defence to study allied and like-minded nations' Civil-Defense capabilities; Germany, Australia, Spain, and France are noteworthy examples. This study should examine the scope of Canada's emergency management and response deficits especially vis a vis climate change and prepare a comprehensive plan for the implementation of this system while the DND/CAF maintains the capability to respond to its status quo and historical role as the "force of last resort".

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