

**“Canada First”: the ‘New Look’ in Ottawa?**

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**1. Introduction**

The “new look” in Canada’s Americas policy represents a convergence of three themes: a return to Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s sovereignty priority following the 1968-70 US challenge to Arctic waters (which fell into obscurity as the immediate crisis dissipated); the continuing and consuming post-September 11, 2001 preoccupation with North American security; and Stephen Harper’s revival of Brian Mulroney’s “Western Hemisphere Community of Nations” priority in the 1989 Latin America Strategy (which lapsed after 2001 during Jean Chrétien’s tenure to be replaced by an embryonic “emerging markets” approach under Paul Martin).

While Canada’s long-anticipated “Canada First” Defence Policy White Paper has yet to appear, individual policy statements and procurement decisions during the past two years provide indications of an emerging framework to guide long-range policy and investment.<sup>1</sup> “Military support to civilian agencies,” the proposed sub-theme of CDMA 2008 (Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas VIII Meeting 2-8 September

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<sup>1</sup> David Pugliese, “Does the Military Need the Canada First Defence Strategy?” OttawaCitizen.com 25 February 2008; Toronto Star, “\$25B spent, but no plan,” 2 March 2008. See also “The roles and missions supported by the Conservative party are first, sovereignty protection, domestic defence, and North American shared defence. Conservatives also support international peace and security missions as well as humanitarian assistance...The Conservative Party supports a multi-role, combat capable maritime, land and air force as the appropriate requirement to meet the goals of a ‘Canada First’ Defence Policy. Fundamental capability requirements are national surveillance and control, counter-terrorism, air and sea deployability, as well as logistics supportability.” *Conservative Party*, National Defence and Security Platform website <<http://www.conservative.ca>>

2008) appears fully compatible with this “new look” in strengthening defence and security collaboration in the Americas.

## 2. **Aid to the Civil Power/Authority in the Americas: Sub-Themes**

A strong foundation has been laid for Canadian-Latin American and Caribbean security collaboration in “support to civilian authorities” mission. By 1995, and certainly by the Quebec Summit in 2001, the official goal of full partnership in inter-American security had been largely accomplished under a “human security” agenda: PSO (peace support operations) in Central America and Haiti; SCBMs regime-building; strengthening civil-military relations; expanding the capacity of the OAS, summitry and other regional governance mechanisms in security-related areas; promoting inter-American drug and crime control; hurricane disaster relief - not to mention long-standing security cooperation with the Commonwealth Caribbean.

### a) **Assistance during Natural Disasters**

Disaster relief preparedness has advanced rapidly at the **sub-regional** (Canada-US-Mexican) level, accelerated by the increasing incidence of natural disasters in all three countries and the momentum of post-9/11 emergency planning.<sup>2</sup> NORTHCOM and CANADA COMMAND recently signed a Civil Assistance Plan, released on 15 February 2008, after on-going discussions on this subject since 2004, allowing either country to send troops across each other’s border upon request. A Canada-Mexico Security Working Group has also been established to enhance cooperation under the SPP (Security

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<sup>2</sup> In Canada, the three main events were two floods (Manitoba and Quebec) and an ice-storm in Eastern Canada.

and Prosperity Partnership) led by Public Safety Canada and CISEN (Centre for Research on National Security Mexico).<sup>3</sup> Hurricane *Katrina* offered a visible and important image of trilateral cooperation, combining Canada's Operation *Unison* with the more dramatic arrival of Mexican personnel in the US after 159 years complete with marines and supplies in an amphibious assault ship.<sup>4</sup> Already close, North American military collaboration in this area will continue to strengthen, although at different speeds.<sup>5</sup>

The notorious – almost yearly - incidence of natural disasters at the **regional** and **hemispheric** levels, particularly throughout the Caribbean Basin, and evidence that climate change is affecting both incidence and severity, has also accelerated official action.<sup>6</sup> The pioneering work of the CDMP (Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project) launched in 1993 recognized the humanitarian, development and conflict implications of natural disasters and integrated risk management into the economic development process to reduce vulnerability. Moreover, the OAS General Assembly has adopted a leadership role in emergency management and disaster response, led by IACNDR (Inter-American Committee for Natural Disaster Reduction), and guided by the Inter-American Strategy Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, and the OAS Committee on Hemispheric

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<sup>3</sup> Canada and Mexico: A Joint Action Plan for 2007-2008, Ottawa 21 August 2007. Border administration; emergency management, law enforcement and critical infrastructure protection were the main focus areas.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Widome, "Natural Selection: Mexican Assistance," The Watson Institute for International Affairs, Brown University 12 September 2005. Operation *Unison* followed the precedent-setting Operation *Tempest* after Hurricane *Andrew* and comprised a task force of 3 warships and the CCG *Sir William Alexander*, along with their helicopter fleets. Many other Canadian agencies were involved, coordinated by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of Canada and the US Federal Emergency Management Agency.

<sup>5</sup> Abelardo Rodriguez, "Mexico's challenges on Regional Security Cooperation with the US and Canada," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, 22 March 2006; Danielle Goldfarb, "The Canada-Mexico Conundrum: Finding Common Ground," Background, C.D. Howe Institute, Toronto July 2005; or Richard J. Kilroy, "Perimeter Defense and Regional Security Cooperation in North America; United States, Canada, and Mexico," Virginia Military Institute, 27 September 2007.

<sup>6</sup> There were 153 natural disasters between 1900-1989, with 16 between 1979-2001.

Security has promoted regime-building in SCBMs related to disaster relief and emergency measures.<sup>7</sup>

The literature on ‘lessons learned’ by the CF from their experience in disaster relief in the Americas, or internationally during the Asian tsunami crisis beginning 26 December 2004, underlines the main requirements: streamlined inter-departmental protocols and coordination given the many government departments involved; contingency funding immediately available in the (larger) ODA budget; effective early warning; and above all a “holistic” approach to emergency operations requiring cross-sectoral cooperation with a host of partners (military, civilian, NGO, private sector, foreign, etc).<sup>8</sup>

But such conventional advice is of limited value: each disaster is unique, even as machinery and manuals proliferate, and a “holistic approach” courts its own dilemma of paralysis: the CRHNet (Canadian Risk and Hazards Network) is over-burdened, comprising no fewer than 19 Government actors, 15 NGOs, 21 from the private sector, and 15 international partners (not to mention 19 educational institutions and 15 information Services.<sup>9</sup> The most complex challenges are - and will remain - essentially political, particularly the decision in Ottawa to commit, and the effectiveness of the overall coordinating authority in the host country. Something can always go wrong; the challenge of region-building is to reduce that risk.

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<sup>7</sup> OAS, Committee on Hemispheric Security, *Transparency and CSBMs* AG/Res. 2113 (XXXV-0/05) US Report on Implementation of CSBMs Operative Paragraph 3: Application of Confidence and Security Building measures, 27 November 2006.

<sup>8</sup> For Darfur DART operation see David Rudd, “Disaster assistance: How should Canada spell ‘relief’?”, CISS Commentary, January 2005. Also National Defence *Backgrounder*, Canadian Forces Disaster Response Team, Ottawa 10 January 2005.

<sup>9</sup> CRHNet <http://www.crhnet.ca/links.html>.

b) **Assistance during Major Nationally – or Regionally Hosted Events**

Both the CF and military scientists support law enforcement in the hosting of major international events such as summits, world cups or olympics. Spectrum Explorer and MiDAS (Military Digital Analysis System) manage Canada's radio spectrum and perform radio surveillance for such high security gatherings; interdepartmental protocols involve the military more or less heavily in ensuring security and defence preparedness. Following 11 September 2001, this task has become increasingly complex in North America, and while perceived threats to Latin and Caribbean countries may differ from Washington's, the security and intelligence requirements for holding large events in the Americas are likely to increase in complexity and cost. The CDMA may wish to examine individual country experiences and communications networks in this area – both domestic and inter-state - and determine whether existing protocols and conventions remain adequate for future needs.

c) **Peacekeeping**

The main question on the short-term facing the military side of Canadian peacekeeping in the Americas concerns the “commitment-capability” gap in which the NATO-related combat group in Afghanistan and other defense tasks have crowded out additional international missions in any region.<sup>10</sup> Currently Canada has fewer than 40 CF staff assigned to traditional UN or UN-led missions. On the other hand, Canada has vigorously supported a ‘Right to Protect’ doctrine in the UN and other international

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<sup>10</sup> In this scenario “human security” and “development” missions might have less official priority than Afghanistan, which also gobbles up development resources (\$1.3 billion pledged over 10 years). And the government has also pledged to double aid to Africa.

forums, while reorganizing its PSO implementation mechanism strategy within a START (Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force) formula. The result can be seen in Canada's participation in MINUSTAH relative to earlier UN missions in Haiti: normally a strong contingent of Canadian soldiers would be present along with police.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand the CF will almost certainly return to peacekeeping after the Afghanistan combat mission is terminated and new PSO requests are received. The current government has reiterated its political and development commitment to Haiti, second only to the US at \$555m over five years, including a revitalized police academy.<sup>12</sup> Much of course, depends on the outcome of the Afghanistan commitment, but the return to peacekeeping in the Americas would provide the clearest demonstration of the “new look” in Canadian foreign policy.

### 3. **CF Capabilities**

Canada's regional, international and NATO missions, particularly its combat group in Afghanistan, reversed a preoccupying CF capability build-down, with \$20b committed for military equipment, and defense spending set to rise from the current \$19b to \$30b by 2031. To varying, although significant, degrees this capability renewal serves potential “military support to civilian authorities” missions in the Americas. Along with the DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team) CF capabilities have been strengthened with C-17 Globe-master transporters for air-lift; a forthcoming fleet of Hercules (J); and the prospect of the Chinook fleet renewal. Three new joint support ships will enhance sea-lift, along with 6-8 multipurpose arctic and coastal patrol vessels available for

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<sup>11</sup> Canada has contributed 100 police officers; Brazil leads the military force of 7,800 soldiers.

<sup>12</sup> Toronto Star, “Bernier pledges long-term help for Haiti, Toronto, 22 February 2008.

secondary missions. New engineering assets such as heavy generators and vehicles will be available post-Afghanistan.

The CF DART (Disaster Assistance Relief Team) also requires decisions on capabilities: reconnaissance teams available for immediate assessments, for example, or a standing (versus dispersed) group of required specialists (often in short supply), along with agile and timely air and sea-lift. For its part, the foreign assistance budget will rise to \$5b in 2010, potentially freeing resources for the Americas strategy.

#### 4. **Public Support**

CF participation in the recent series of natural disaster relief missions within Canada was strongly endorsed by the Canadian public, and welcomed for its efficiency. This aid in support of the civil authority role will almost certainly grow with new challenges and as climate change opens Arctic waters and SAR (search and rescue) missions in remote areas expands.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however, that initial public reaction in Canada to the February 2008 Canada-US Civil Assistance Plan has reflected concern about militarizing bilateral emergency management.<sup>14</sup>

Canadians are fundamentally multicultural and strong constituencies expect Ottawa to respond to all international natural disasters – whether Hurricane *Mitch* or *Katrina*, the 2004 tsumani, etc. In this sense the Canadian public focus is fundamentally global, but support for Latin and Caribbean assistance can also be assumed. Moreover

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<sup>13</sup> SAR is a separate category of CF activity with a complicated blending of roles and responsibilities - a civil-military interface which tends to “falls through cracks”. While not a core defence function, it remains an important area of civilian use of the military. SARSAT (Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking) is a vehicle for enhanced cooperation and participation. In Latin America and the Caribbean the only participating members are Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru - along with Canada and US in North America.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Stuart Trew, “Where was our 72-hour preparation? Canada, US sign military cooperation agreement on the QT,” *Integrate This: Challenging the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America*, 21 February 2008. Note that the Canadian Coast Guard is not military-designated.

international peacekeeping retains a high level of public endorsement, and the Canadian Army may well need traditional UN missions – preferably in the Western Hemisphere, if needed - to refurbish its image should Afghanistan goes sour.

5. **Conclusion: Strengthening Security Cooperation in the Americas**

The CDMA main goal of consolidating a habit of dialogue and cooperation on defence in the Americas is well-served in the emerging agenda of its 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Banff, Canada. It focuses numerous substantive areas for policy and institution-building, outreach beyond the military, as well as opportunities for collaborative applied research on key topics identified above (including PSOs, disaster relief, and small-state security).

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