

Comment

Peacekeeping mission on Ukraine's terms won't fly

There is no way that the pro-Russian rebels in the breakaway Donbas region of Ukraine are simply going to surrender their hard-fought territory to a Canadian soldier in a blue helmet.



Scott Taylor

Inside Defence

OTTAWA—Last week there were all sorts of rumblings in Ottawa that Canada is considering a proposal to put in place a peacekeeping force in Ukraine.

First, there was a statement from Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland stating that the Liberal government “has been at the heart of international efforts to support Ukraine, and we are working hard to ensure any peacekeeping effort guarantees Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Then it was the turn of Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer, who declared that, if he were prime minister, he would support the peacekeeping proposal from Ukraine’s government. “This mission would allow Ukraine to restore control over its eastern border with Russia, ensuring the Russian military stays within its own country, and out of Ukraine,” stated Scheer.

It is clear from Freeland’s and Scheer’s statements that either they know nothing about peacekeeping or they know nothing about the current conflict in Ukraine.

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan only added to the collective ignorance when he confirmed Canada is considering a peacekeeping proposal from Kyiv that would “respect Ukraine’s original borders.”

There is no way that the pro-Russian rebels in the breakaway Donbas region of Ukraine are simply going to surrender their hard-fought territory to a Canadian soldier in a blue

helmet. Since Canada recognizes Crimea to be sovereign Ukrainian territory, it would then also mean somehow forcibly expelling the Russian troops that annexed the region in 2014.

Defeating rebels in a civil war and starting a territorial war with Russia is not peacekeeping. Russia’s counterproposal—to have international peacekeeping troops patrol the current ceasefire lines between the rebels and Ukrainian government forces in advance of demilitarizing the area and conducting negotiations—seems to fit the traditional model of peacekeeping. Sajjan, however, has rejected this offer for the reason that it would “freeze” the conflict along the current lines.

Unless I missed something, I thought the idea of freezing the bloodshed was the rationale behind peacekeeping.

The whole premise is moot as long as Russia has a veto at the United Nations Security Council.

This discussion was happening on the eve of a UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial conference in Vancouver on Nov. 14 and 15.

Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government has not kept its 2015 election campaign promise to make Canada a great peacekeeper again, despite an August 2016

announcement of an imminent UN mission or missions, possibly to somewhere in Africa.

As that deployment of 600 troops never materialized, Canada’s current paltry commitment of just a few dozen peacekeepers on UN duty does not meet the minimum entry requirement for the upcoming defence ministers’ meeting.

That’s right, folks: if we were not the host nation, we would not be allowed to attend the gathering in Vancouver. This is what makes this bluster about a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine so interesting.

Canada can claim it wants to participate in a robust mission to bring peace to Ukraine, but adding the proviso that this means restoring all sovereign territory to Kyiv’s control ensures a Russian veto. This of course would allow Canada to unleash a new wave of anti-Russian rhetoric while breathing a sigh of relief that Canada would not have to actually deploy troops.

The Canadian delegation can strut around at the Vancouver conference and look like we are fire-breathing peace activists prepared to put Putin in his place—if only he wouldn’t use his UN veto to thwart our plan.

For the approximately 1.2 million Ukrainian-Canadians, the Liberal government’s restated pledge to respect and recognize Ukraine’s original borders will be music to their ears.

For the long-suffering people of Ukraine, however, Canada’s blank-cheque approach to supporting the regime of President Petro Poroshenko must be greeted with incredulity. Under Poroshen-



Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, dressed in Ukrainian garb, attends Ukrainian Day on Parliament Hill on Oct. 31 at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

ko’s corrupt leadership, Ukraine’s economy has failed to recover, and the president’s personal approval rating is very low.

Like Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, Poroshenko is a billionaire, and both countries rank 131st out of 176 in terms of corruption, by country. That is where the similarity ends, as Putin has an 81 per cent personal popularity rating and Russia’s economy—despite the international sanctions—continues to grow.

If Canada truly wanted to assist the Ukrainian people and not the despised regime that runs it, we would focus more on eradicating the rampant corruption in Kyiv before trying to force more Ukrainians in a breakaway territory to submit to it.

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Canada must re-engage, stand with allies in Afghanistan

Trump has committed about 4,000 more U.S. combat troops, while Canada refused to boost military forces.



Sakhi Naimpoor

Defence

The Trump administration’s recent decision to re-engage in Afghanistan militarily is a symbolic move that underscores the importance of a multi-pronged approach to the ongoing war

in the country. After prolonged consultations with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, United States President Donald Trump has reportedly committed about 4,000 combat troops to Afghanistan to be deployed immediately.

The decision to militarily break the stalemate in the 15-year war against Taliban insurgents and to turn the tide against extremism, hopelessness, and insecurity to bolster the weak Afghan government is a calculated judgment. The mass withdrawal of NATO-led troops in 2014, including Canadian forces, provided the resilient Taliban insurgency with much-needed morale to regroup and reclaim lost territory by waging a well-organized campaign to undermine the legitimacy of President Ashraf Ghani’s government in Afghanistan.

By diplomatically engaging the Taliban, the international community has yielded trivial results other than the establishment of the group’s political and propaganda office in Qatar.

According to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, civilian casualties, and desertion and casualty rates among Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have skyrocketed since the withdrawal of the NATO-led combat troops from Afghanistan.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reports that major bombings in recent weeks—which rocked urban centres including but not limited to Helmand, Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar—killed as many as 800 Afghan security forces along with hundreds of civilians in September alone. The issues often cited with these major bombings have been a lack of intelligence and counterterrorism expertise, security-sector coordination, and persistence of low morale among security forces.

While the United States along with several other key NATO members including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany are re-evaluating their military recommitment to Afghanistan, Justin Trudeau’s government has outright

rejected committing to another combat mission in Afghanistan. While the government has pledged about \$155-million in annual aid, there seems to be little political appetite for recommitting Canadian combat forces to Afghanistan.

Earlier this year, allegations of massive fraud, corruption, and a lack of accountability surfaced in the education ministry in Afghanistan, to which Canada contributes significant financial taxpayer-funded aid through the World Bank under the umbrella of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.

The Canadian Embassy in Afghanistan only made a brief announcement, citing a pending investigation into the allegations without any tangible active measures.

Allocating money to humanitarian aid does not solve political and military problems in Afghanistan, nor does it lead to desired results in the public sector with a lack of oversight. Thus, the importance of a multi-pronged approach to Afghanistan, which combines military and humanitarian dimensions, cannot be overstated.

The war against the perpetual insurgency in Afghanistan cannot be won by Canada. But it can be won with Canada, along with its international partners, if we choose to empower Afghans themselves. Although the Afghan National Defense and

Security Forces have reached the 352,000-person recruitment benchmark set by the international community after the conclusion of NATO’s combat mission in 2014, they continue to be a largely inefficient and an incapable professional force.

The focal point of the post-2014 NATO-led Resolute Support Mission partners, which must include Canada moving forward, needs to be on training Afghan security forces to be an offensive security apparatus rather than a force that only maintains a defensive posture in the face of sophisticated and violent attacks by insurgent groups.

Canada’s current approach to Afghanistan needs to be reconsidered. We must support the U.S.-led initiative to militarily re-engage in Afghanistan, from an advisory viewpoint. Canada can do its part by assigning military experts and advisers to key Afghan security ministries to help coordinate the war against insurgents and to lift the morale of our Afghan partners, if Canada is genuinely serious about its commitment to Afghanistan.

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