



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

Canada's Military Operations on NATO's Eastern Flank: Why They Matter

by Andrew Rasiulis
July, 2017

NATO SERIES

CANADA'S MILITARY OPERATIONS ON NATO'S EASTERN FLANK: WHY THEY MATTER

by Andrew Rasiulis

CGAI Fellow

July, 2017



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

Prepared for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8
www.cgai.ca

©2017 Canadian Global Affairs Institute
ISBN: 978-1-988493-47-3



The Canadian Armed Forces today are actively engaged with two operations supporting NATO missions along its eastern flank. First, Canada has taken a lead role in the establishment of a battalion-sized battle group in Latvia (Operation REASSURANCE), as part of NATO's enhanced forward presence to deter Russian use of force against NATO territory (Article 5 commitment). Operation REASSURANCE also includes an air force commitment of six fighter jets ("Six Pack") to provide air protection along NATO's eastern and southern flanks, as well as a naval frigate committed to tasks in the Mediterranean and Black seas. Canada is one of four NATO allies to take such a prominent role. The other three battalion groups in this deterrence initiative are led by the U.K. in Estonia, Germany in Lithuania, and the U.S. in Poland. This has placed Canada's commitment squarely on the politico-military map.

Canada's second operation is a NATO out-of-area training and capacity-building mission in Ukraine. While not a member of NATO and therefore not subject to Article 5 provisions of deterrence and defence, Ukraine is a long-standing NATO partner under the auspices of the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Within the mandate of Operation UNIFIER, the Canadian Armed Forces' mission is to assist in modernizing and reforming the Ukrainian military. This operation is keyed to the larger NATO and EU aim of assisting Ukraine with its declared policy of reform and battle against the Russian-supported rebel uprising in the eastern Donbass.

With such a substantive military commitment on Canada's part to NATO, it is appropriate to reflect on why NATO is important to Canadian foreign and defence interests, i.e., why NATO and why it matters.

ORIGINS OF NATO AND CANADA'S COMMITMENT

According to NATO's first secretary general, Lord Ismay, NATO was formed in 1949 to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". Remarkably, by the end of the Cold War in 1991, the Soviet Union version of the "Russians" ceased to be a threat, the Americans had fully stayed the course of defence engagement of the North Atlantic area, and Germany reunified as a leading and fully integrated member of NATO and the EU. This successful outcome did not, however, obviate the requirement for the alliance, nor of Canada's commitment. Rather, a transitional period followed the Cold War which involved the expansion of the alliance through co-operation with former members of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union. At the same time, Russia as the successor state to the Soviet Union felt that its interests in the post-Cold War period had been betrayed and resumed a more aggressive use of military force to reinforce its foreign and domestic interests.

Canadian diplomats were keenly active in the formation of NATO in 1949. A key tenet of Canadian defence policy since Confederation had been that Canadian interests were best served as part of a



coalition. Originally as part of the British Empire, Canadian expeditionary forces served in the Nile Expedition, the Boer War and the First World War. In the Second World War, they were part of the British Commonwealth. With the emergence of the Cold War, Canadian interests were served by promoting a North Atlantic coalition which, importantly, mitigated the historical American predilection for isolationism.

Canadian interests, however, went further than provisions for military defence within a North Atlantic coalition. Rather, Canadian diplomats pushed aggressively for Article Two of the Washington Treaty that established NATO. Known as the “Canadian Article”, its purpose was to define NATO as more than a defence alliance by including a reference to economic co-operation. While Article Two did not lead to much in and of itself, Canadian interests of economic association and integration within the North Atlantic area were echoed in then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau’s Third Option in the 1970s, and finally, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in 2016 under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY COMMITMENT: VARIATION ON A THEME

Canadian military forces initially deployed to Europe as part of Canada’s NATO commitment at the outbreak of the Korean War. Simultaneously, Canadian forces fought with the UN coalition in Korea and deployed to Europe as part of NATO’S deterrent. The European commitment remained generally steadfast throughout the Cold War. Adjustments and reductions were made under Pierre Trudeau, who was skeptical of the need to sustain a Canadian military presence in West Germany. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt leveraged an appeal to Trudeau to keep the Canadian presence, playing on Trudeau’s economic Third Option. With the famous quip “no tanks, no trade”, Canadian troops remained.

As the Cold War ended, Canadian military deployments became focused on coalition peacekeeping and then peace support missions. Other than a small logistical component remaining in Germany, the Canadian Forces consolidated around their permanent bases in Canada.

Canadian policy interests dictated that the Canadian Armed Forces remain engaged in the reform and transformation of post-Cold War Eastern and Southeastern Europe. NATO established the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 with the former members of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Canada’s contribution to this mission was made under the auspices of DND’s Military Training Assistance Program (MTAP), subsequently renamed the Military Training Co-operation Program (MTCP).

Under the auspices of the MTCP, the Canadian Armed Forces worked alongside NATO allies to promote defence reform and governance with the partner countries. Canadian values were built into these training co-operation and capacity-building efforts. The partner countries differed on the speed and intensity of their transformation and reform. Some chose the path of integration



with NATO, while others remained as partners. For example, the Baltic States, including Latvia, eventually became NATO members, whereas others such as Ukraine remained active partners of the alliance.

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

The dramatic events of 2014 in Ukraine over the issue of greater integration with the EU and NATO led to active military confrontation with eastern Ukrainian rebels, supported by Russia, as well as the Russian seizure and annexation of Crimea. NATO's military response was twofold: strengthen and reaffirm its Article 5 commitment to defend NATO allies through a posture of enhanced deterrence, while keeping open the option of dialogue with Russia; and second, to significantly increase NATO training, reform and capacity-building efforts with the Ukrainian armed forces.

The Canadian response was in keeping with its traditional foreign and defence interests and effective participation as a firm NATO ally. Both the Harper and Justin Trudeau governments built on the precedence of previous commitments. The Canadian Armed Forces have therefore returned to Europe under Operation REASSURANCE and deployed to Latvia with 450 personnel where they are the lead nation for the battle group forming a key part of NATO's enhanced deterrence effort. In Ukraine, the MTCP's capacity-building efforts have been dramatically increased with the deployment of 200 personnel under Operation UNIFIER.

The Canadian Armed Forces' active participation and leading role on NATO's eastern flank continue to serve and promote Canada's interests in achieving greater security in Europe. The efforts in Latvia and Ukraine should be matched by active diplomacy to achieve an eventual understanding with Russia and return to future co-operation, rather than confrontation.

► About the Author

Andrew P. Rasiulis completed his undergraduate study in Political Science/History at the University of Toronto in 1978 and received his Master of Arts from the Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, in Strategic Studies in 1979. In 1979 Mr. Rasiulis was appointed a commissioned officer in the Canadian Forces Primary Reserve (Governor General's Foot Guards).

He joined the Department of National Defence in 1979 as an analyst with the Directorate of Strategic Analysis, specializing in strategic politico-military issues pertaining to conventional forces. These issues included emerging concepts of conventional defence strategies for Western Europe, as well as the Canadian Government's efforts in the area of conventional arms control. In 1987, Mr. Rasiulis was promoted to Section Head, within the Directorate of Nuclear and Arms Control Policy, responsible for conventional arms control policy. He was also the Department of National Defence representative on NATO's High Level Task Force for conventional arms control from its inception in 1986 to 1989.

In June 1989 Mr. Rasiulis was posted as a Defence Advisor to the Canadian Delegation for Conventional Arms Control Talks in Vienna. Upon completion of his tour Mr. Rasiulis returned to National Defence Headquarters in April 1992 as Section Head responsible for policy on Central and Eastern Europe, including the Department's Military Training and Assistance Program (MTAP) with Central and Eastern Europe. In May 1996, Mr. Rasiulis was also assigned the responsibility of Programme Manager for the entire MTAP. He was subsequently designated as Director, Military Training Assistance Programme (and Eastern European Policy) in 1998.

Reflecting the growth of responsibility within the area of defence diplomacy, Mr. Rasiulis was re-designated Director Military Training and Cooperation in 2009. His responsibilities included the development of the policy for defence training cooperation with developing countries world wide, as well as overseeing its operational implementation.

*Mr. Rasiulis' MA thesis, *On the Utility of War in the Nuclear Age*, developed a theory on limited conventional war. It was subsequently published as a Wellesley Paper in 1981 by the Canadian Institute for International Affairs and the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies. He has also published numerous articles on conventional strategy, arms control and international military training cooperation.*

Mr Rasiulis is retired from the Public Service and is now a freelance consultant with Andrew Rasiulis Associates Inc.

► **Canadian Global Affairs Institute**

The Canadian Global Affairs Institute focuses on the entire range of Canada's international relations in all its forms including (in partnership with the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy), trade investment and international capacity building. Successor to the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (CDFAI, which was established in 2001), the Institute works to inform Canadians about the importance of having a respected and influential voice in those parts of the globe where Canada has significant interests due to trade and investment, origins of Canada's population, geographic security (and especially security of North America in conjunction with the United States), social development, or the peace and freedom of allied nations. The Institute aims to demonstrate to Canadians the importance of comprehensive foreign, defence and trade policies which both express our values and represent our interests.

The Institute was created to bridge the gap between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically Canadians have tended to look abroad out of a search for markets because Canada depends heavily on foreign trade. In the modern post-Cold War world, however, global security and stability have become the bedrocks of global commerce and the free movement of people, goods and ideas across international boundaries. Canada has striven to open the world since the 1930s and was a driving factor behind the adoption of the main structures which underpin globalization such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and emerging free trade networks connecting dozens of international economies. The Canadian Global Affairs Institute recognizes Canada's contribution to a globalized world and aims to inform Canadians about Canada's role in that process and the connection between globalization and security.

In all its activities the Institute is a charitable, non-partisan, non-advocacy organization that provides a platform for a variety of viewpoints. It is supported financially by the contributions of individuals, foundations, and corporations. Conclusions or opinions expressed in Institute publications and programs are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Institute staff, fellows, directors, advisors or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to the Institute.