

# Canada to expand military reach with new facilities across globe

TRISTIN HOPPER (feat. DAVID BERCUSON)

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The Canadian military is in talks to establish a permanent presence in up to seven foreign countries, the Minister of Defence confirmed on Thursday, marking the first time since the end of the Cold War that Canada has aimed to expand its military reach around the globe.

“As we look out into the future what we obviously try to do is anticipate where and when we will be needed,” Peter MacKay told reporters in Ottawa.

The plan, dubbed the Operation Support Hubs Network, involves establishing a permanent presence in up to seven countries including Senegal, South Korea, Kenya, Singapore and Kuwait.

In addition, Canadian officials have already signed agreements with Germany and Jamaica.

Rather than large, sprawling U.S.-style military bases, the Canadian facilities are more likely to be “small storage facilities” comprising an airfield, a warehouse and two or three soldiers, says David Bercuson, a senior research fellow with the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. “They will be what you would call ‘forward supply depots, strategically placed near parts of the world where Canadian Forces might be deployed in future,” he said. With the depots, the Canadian military will not have to “haul around” its gear everytime they deploy overseas.

In some cases, the Canadian presence would be nothing more than a “pre-negotiated agreement” or an “in-situ liaison officer” tied to a foreign military, said a senior military official. “We’re establishing a network of contacts and possible facilities ... to facilitate future deployments of the Canadian Forces in response to humanitarian disasters or other crises situations” he said.

“The focus of the planning, let’s be clear, is our capability for expeditionary participation in international missions,” said the Minister. Between relief efforts in Haiti and Canada’s current role in the air-war over Libya, Canada has become a “go-to” nation in international missions, he said.

While Canada has numerous personnel stationed overseas — including about 2,800 troops in Afghanistan — the Canadian Forces currently have no permanent overseas military bases.

During the Cold War, Canada maintained two full-fledged air and army bases in Germany. The bases were closed in the early 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

From 2001 to 2010, the military maintained Camp Mirage, a semi-secret logistics facility in the United Arab Emirates meant to support Canadian operations Afghanistan. U.A.E. officials shut down the facility after Canada refused to allow expanded Canadian landing rights to two U.A.E.-owned airlines. The cost of closing the facility was estimated at \$300-million.

“I notice that Kuwait is one of the choices, which is not too far from the United Arab Emirates,” says Liberal defence critic John McKay. Amid setup costs, security costs and maintenance costs of a network of military facilities in far-flung locations “we should all light candles for the Canadian taxpayer,” he said.

“We’re not the U.S. military, we don’t need that kind of expeditionary capability — so I think that this is an expense that shouldn’t be incurred by taxpayers,” says Steven Staples, president of the Rideau Institute.

He noted that, only four years ago, the Canadian government signed a \$3.4-billion deal to buy four C-17 Globemasters, one of the largest military transport aircraft in the world. "It seems to me that precludes the need to also have forward bases where we're stockpiling equipment."

Among NATO countries, Canada is best known for its expeditionary capabilities, said Mr. Bercuson. "We can send troops, ships, aircraft to pretty much any part of the world in a pretty short time, even though we're a pretty small military," he said. With the bases, rather than being "open to anything," the Canadian military would effectively be predicting parts of the world in which it will need to have a military presence. "We're announcing that we have an interest in a particular region and that we may deploy military forces to that region in the future," he said.

Those forces will not necessarily be used for offensive reasons, said Mr. Bercuson. In recent years Canadian forces have frequently been dispatched to the Gulf of Mexico to assist in relief operations such as after Hurricane Katrina or humanitarian airlifts into Haiti. A permanent Canadian presence in the Caribbean, for instance, is a "no brainer," he said.