

VIMY PAPER

**COVID-19 & THE
CANADIAN ARMED
FORCES: OVERVIEW,
ANALYSIS, AND NEXT
STEPS**

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COVID-19 & THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES: OVERVIEW, ANALYSIS, AND NEXT STEPS



BY ADAM P. MACDONALD & CARTER VANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like governments and public institutions across Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have enacted a series of drastic measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two primary, inter-linked but distinct objectives underpinning these moves. First, to protect its personnel and assets to *preserve capability* to fulfill defence duties during the pandemic. Second, and relatedly, to *carve out capacity* to support governments in their efforts to combat the pandemic if requested.

As unprecedented as the COVID-19 pandemic is, it represents the continuation of a larger trend in terms of ever-increasing demand for CAF support to domestic emergencies. Answering these requests is perfectly reasonable, as providing assistance to civil authorities during domestic disasters or major emergencies is one of eight core missions of the CAF as outlined in the current defence policy. Furthermore, a recent poll by Ipsos, commissioned by the CDA Institute, indicates 9 out of 10 Canadians across the entire country are supportive of the CAF being called upon to assist governments in their fight against COVID-19. But such domestic demands question the organization's ability to meet these requests alongside others defence duties.

Once the current conditions of the pandemic have passed, a Royal Commission or other high-level review should be initiated to look at Canada's COVID-19 response from a whole-of-government perspective. Such a review will touch on many aspects, including but not limited to public health, federal-provincial responsibilities in terms of emergency management, and the effectiveness of social programmes in responding to the economic fallout. The issues outlined in this paper make it clear that such a review must also include a separate report about the CAF's domestic role and the distribution of duties, mandates, and resources for the organizations in Canada's security communities.

The CAF will always be ready to defend Canada and help Canadians through a crisis, but are they properly mandated and should they be tasked with the increasing domestic duties they have been asked to take on? Is a more dedicated force, either functionally tasked to do so within the military, or a new civilian agency a better fit to meet the growing demand from domestic emergencies? These are questions that do not have easy answers. Further, they are not exclusively or even primarily questions of logistics, funding or technical capabilities. Above all, they are questions that must be answered by policymakers and the public at a more overarching political level and rest on fundamental beliefs about what their military is *for*.

INTRODUCTION

Like governments and public institutions across Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have enacted a series of drastic measures, many unprecedented in the history of the organization, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two primary, inter-linked but distinct objectives underpinning these moves. First, to protect its personnel and assets to *preserve capability* in order to fulfill defence duties

during the pandemic. Second, to *carve out capacity* to support governments in their efforts to combat the pandemic if requested.

Balancing between these priorities is no easy task. However, as recently stated by a Department of Defence (DND) spokesperson: “The Canadian Armed Forces does not see any greater threat to ourselves or Canadians than what has been described by health authorities.”¹ The priority is and should remain on determining the best ways for the CAF to protect its personnel, ensure core (non-pandemic) defence duties are maintained, and prepare options which best leverage the organizations’ resources and competencies towards any requests made by governments.

The COVID-19 pandemic, represents the continuation of a larger trend in terms of ever-increasing demand for CAF support to domestic emergencies, questioning the organizations’ ability to meet these requests alongside others defence duties. Such matters are not simply technological, capability and/or budgetary in nature. These are political questions about what Canadians’ think the military’s role should be to confront and operate within an ever-evolving security environment with a growing impact on the domestic front. The military’s mandates, roles and responsibilities should be reassessed and thoroughly reviewed when this pandemic is over, as part of a re-evaluation of the resources and relationships between all of Canadian’s national security agencies.

This paper will start by examining the rationales, goals and details of the measures undertaken by the CAF to date due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second section will outline the possible ways in which the CAF could assist governments and civil society within the current context. The third section provides an overview of the publicly available requests made thus far to better ascertain the nature and extent of the demand for direct COVID-19 support which is and could be placed on the military. The longer-term trends and challenges due to the pandemic to the CAF comprises the fourth section. The final section will emphasize the need for a post-pandemic review and highlight certain issue areas which should be taken into consideration.

THE CAF’S TWO PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

The two primary, inter-linked but distinct objectives underpinning the CAF’s actions and planning during the COVID-19 pandemic are to preserve its personnel assets to conduct core defence duties and carve out capacity to support governments’ responses if and when such requests are made. These objectives stem directly from Operation Laser, the CAF’s standing multi-phase operation to



respond to a worldwide pandemic, constituting ‘three lines of effort’: preserve and protect CAF personnel; assess CAF activities at home and abroad; and support other Government departments if requested. On March 13th, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Jonathan Vance, activated Phase III - Pandemic Response - defined by

Chief of Defence Staff Jonathan Vance sits in chairs to ensure proper spacing between speakers during a news conference in Ottawa, Monday, March 30, 2020. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Adrian Wylde

“widespread and continuous transmission of the virus in the general population and the imminent risk or existence of significant absentee rates.”²

PRESERVING CAPABILITY

The COVID 19 pandemic is the greatest security threat Canada faces currently, motivating the scaling back of other CAF missions and priorities to preserve and conserve forces should they be needed to support the country’s ongoing battle with the virus. However, during this pandemic - with some estimates it may last upwards of two years³ - other core defence duties must also be maintained.

Despite a United Nations (UN) Secretary-General’s initiative to have all member-states commit to a global cease-fire during the pandemic, the vast majority, including many major powers such as the United States, China, India and Russia, have refused to do so.⁴ The lack of global solidarity around this proposal speaks to the overall inability of the international community, specifically its leading powers, to work together in developing a global, multilateral response. It also highlights the risk that some may attempt to further their military and strategic interests with many states in the West focusing internally on public health and economic issues, scaling back overseas military commitments and the cancellation of exercises in order to re-deploy their forces domestically.⁵

China continues to conduct provocative naval and coast guard patrols against many of its neighbors throughout huge swaths of contested waters in East Asia, a region the CAF, specifically the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), is increasingly deploying to and operating within.⁶ Provocative military actions could serve to distract one’s own public about the seriousness of COVID-19 and create unity around an external threat. This may help explain North Korea’s recent testing of a number of missiles off their coast, another region the RCN regularly operates in.⁷ Russia, which has publicly downplayed the severity of the virus domestically despite obvious signs indicating otherwise⁸, continues to conduct regular military activities. This includes a recent military aircraft patrol towards the Alaskan coastline, which was intercepted by Canadian and American fighters under the purview of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).⁹ These incidents demonstrate the necessity for the CAF, even in a more limited capacity, to preserve critical capabilities and non-COVID-19 defence duties overseas, including supporting standing missions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), over North America in conjunction with the US via NORAD, and ultimately within Canada.

A number of personnel protective measures have been enacted including restricting all out-of-country vacation travel for CAF members, delaying the annual posting season (a time in which hundreds of military members move to new jobs all throughout the country), and work-from-home orders for all but essential personnel. This entails upwards of 85% of the CAF currently working from home.¹⁰ Although the exact effect is difficult to determine, these measures will lead to disruptions in training, recruitment, and some administrative functions.

Another important announcement was that the CAF will no longer publicly report the number of COVID-19 cases in its ranks. While acknowledging the challenges posed by the pandemic to the integrity of its forces, keeping confidential the operational health of the CAF is seen as necessary to ensure adversaries and rivals do not try to take advantage of such information.¹¹ There are a number of foreign examples of COVID-19 impacting the military integrity of entire units¹², most notably the American

aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt* coming off deployment and being tied up in Guam with a skeletal crew and evacuating the rest given the hundreds of suspected COVID-19 cases onboard.¹³

A downsizing of overseas missions is underway to bring forces back home should they need to be re-deployed to respond to COVID-19. Naval deployments to Africa and the Caribbean were cut short with these ships returning to Canada.¹⁴ Originally scheduled to deploy to Asia in support of OP NEON (maritime monitoring of UN sanctions on North Korea), HMCS *Calgary* is now currently on standby off the West Coast to provide COVID-19 support domestically if needed.¹⁵ There has been a sizable reduction of the Canadian Army's (CA) mission in Ukraine as well as Canada's training mission in Iraq.¹⁶ Not all missions have experienced a reduction of their operational footprint. Canada's battlegroup in Latvia, part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, remains intact, as do naval contributions to OP REASSURANCE in the waters around Europe. At home, the CAF's largest annual military exercise was cancelled in order to ensure these forces were on standby to be deployed for COVID-19 support.¹⁷

The RCN has dispatched several ships off the East and West Coasts to protect the crews from infection, ensure training continues, and operationally be ready if called upon.¹⁸ The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) is taking measures to protect its flight crews, specifically for transport and combat aircraft, and watch teams for NORAD - which include Canadian military personnel - have been relocated to the Cheyenne Mountain Complex, a secured underground facility, to isolate them away from the public.¹⁹

CARVING OUT CAPACITY

In terms of support so far, the RCAF established a quarantine site at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Trenton and helped repatriate a number of Canadians from various parts of the world earlier this year.²⁰ Local Canadian Ranger Patrols have been tasked to support isolated communities, specifically in helping set up medical facilities in Northern Quebec which have instituted full lockdowns.²¹ Furthermore,



the Minister of National Defence (MND) announced the establishment of a 24,000 person response force, including ten 'Immediate Response Units' (IRUs) in the CA, which are ready to support governments' COVID-19 response efforts with duties such as humanitarian support, wellness checks, and natural disaster response.²² Three-quarters of this force will be from the Regular Force, with the remaining one-quarter the Reserve Force, where thousands of soldiers are being offered full-time contracts until the end of summer.²³ Such call-ups pertain not just to OP LASER, but also OP LENTUS, the CAF's standing mission to provide support for forest fires, floods, and natural disasters in Canada if requested.²⁴

Fifty Canadian Ranger patrols have been elevated to full-time employment to be prepared to assist in Canada's Arctic and northern communities and the RCN has been tasked to prepare to support coastal communities.²⁵ The 1st Canadian Division Headquarters, based in Kingston, is Joint-Task Force (JTF)-LASER, responsible for the coordination and command of all domestic operations related to Operation LASER. Concentration of military vehicles and personnel at CFB Borden, as well, is an indication the CAF is pre-deploying assets throughout the country, creating staging areas and headquarters from which to carry out any OP LASER related duties and tasks.²⁶

POSSIBLE ROLES AND DUTIES

There are two primary ways the CAF could be employed by assisting governments: as an aid to civil power, and in the provision of services. It is extremely unlikely that the CAF would be used as an aid to civil power as happened during the October Crisis in 1970 (note that the War Measures Act had been enacted at that time). There would most likely have to be massive social unrest and civil disobedience of a degree police forces could not manage. A possible hypothetical would be widespread disregard to public health directives as people attempt to travel and socialize as the weather warms could lead the military deployed to monitor key transit is not equipped to conduct martial law duties as a government, and the CAF itself that the military some European countries where military gendar principle that the CAF does not police Canadian citizens was clearly demonstrated recently when the federal government rejected outright any use of the CAF to remove demonstrators at railway blockades throughout the country this past February, despite calls for this action from some political sectors.²⁷

More likely, military assistance would be supporting provision of services if health and other public institutions are overwhelmed. This is a real possibility as frontline workers are at higher risk of COVID-19 given their direct interaction with members of the public, particularly those in health care dealing with those already infected. It is not, therefore, solely the total number of virus cases which stresses these services, but also attrition among skilled frontline workers leading to decreased capacity overall. We are beginning to see such attrition. One in ten identified COVID-19 cases in Ontario are health-care workers²⁸ while five Toronto police officers have the virus and another 500 are in self-isolation.²⁹ Support may not just be needed in those urban areas in Canada with a high density of cases, but also in remote communities, specifically in Canada's Arctic and northern regions dealing with many existing challenges with limited public services.

There are many possible types of assistance the CAF could provide to support governments and public services. Unlike the United States military³⁰, the CAF does not possess a large health-care capacity and thus could not be called in to replace or augment health systems in any sizable way. Furthermore, most of the CAF's healthcare capacity is designed to provide services to its own personnel, large portions of which have been mobilized to provide support OP LASER (and OP LENTUS). The Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) - a team of medical professionals, engineers, logisticians and security personnel - deployed to international natural disasters missions could be employed domestically to provide assistance to small communities, specifically those with limited resources and public services.³¹



Military vehicles enters Canadian Forces Base Borden on Apr. 6, 2020 as personnel assemble in preparation for Operation Laser, the Canadian Armed Forces mission to help combat COVID-19. -

Avr LeVasseur , Aviator Dustin LeVasseur Pearce

As well, the CAF's logistics and transportation capabilities could be used to help isolated communities, including the RCN's supply ship, *MV Asterisk*, which can carry supplies in sea containers.

The CAF could offer its bases and sites to build additional medical stations. This could be particularly applicable for Reserve Unit buildings which are by and large located in urban centres where the demand for extra-medical facilities may be greatest. While not properly trained or mandated to fill in for frontline workers in healthcare and the police, the IRUs provide a steady general labour pool which could be employed with general, non-technical jobs like transporting essential goods, doing community outreach and desk duties, if we were faced with a decreasing pool of trained civilian personnel. But in more likelihood, the source of requests for support will likely be with respect to small, isolated communities with limited capacity even during normal times, with the possible exception of urban centres where the pandemic has been hit so badly that public services are becoming severely depleted from attrition and exhaustion.

The CAF in general has small pockets of technical expertise, specifically with respect to medical and engineering, and a larger but not vast pool of general labour which can be employed to assist governments in their COVID-19 responses. The challenge remains prioritizing requests which are only expected to increase moving forward, not only based on their severity but as well on the available capabilities and capacity of the CAF in order to utilize them in places and ways which maximize their effectiveness.

THE DEMAND FOR CAF SUPPORT THUS FAR

Regardless of the precise level of preparedness and expertise that the CAF have had for this pandemic, requests for support from specific communities are already coming quickly, and in a variety of forms. The character of these requests reveals both what can be expected as far as military operations to address COVID-19 moving forward and some potential concerns with these operations.

The first such formal request for CAF aid was reported on March 27th when Kashechewan First Nation in Northern Ontario requested that the federal government send military engineers to help prepare defenses against, and accommodations during, the annual flooding of the Albany River.³² The community is normally relocated for a temporary period during the flooding to a Northern Ontario city such as Timmins or Thunder Bay but these municipalities have rejected that possibility in the current pandemic, citing already stretched local health care capacity.³³

Following this, several other communities have reached out to the federal government with a variety of requests for aid from the CAF or RCMP. Pimicikamak (Cross Lake) First Nation and Norway House Cree Nation have requested setting up a field hospital in anticipation of potential COVID-19 cases overwhelming existing medical infrastructure³⁴, as has the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation.³⁵ Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. has requested military or police assistance to support mandatory check-block set up by its member communities in Northern Manitoba.³⁶ Long Point First Nation, in Quebec, has made a similar request for CAF assistance with road checkpoints and enforcement of public health curfew orders.³⁷

As of yet, none of these requests have been responded to from either the Department of National Defense or Indigenous Services Canada with a firm commitment to action. However, spokespersons for the involved federal ministries have indicated that requests are under study and talks ongoing about the most effective way for the CAF to be involved in the response.

It bears noting that these formal requests for CAF assistance have come from First Nations communities first and foremost. This creates two potential complications: one logistical and the other political. The first is that, unlike provincial governments, First Nations governmental bodies (be they band councils or self-governing entities) do not have the ability to invoke legal provisions in relation to requesting CAF assistance, unlike provinces. The implications in terms of governance and the building of nation-to-nation relationships of how these requests are handled are deserving of a paper all their own. It will suffice, for the current purposes, simply to note that there are no formal mechanisms for how these requests ought to be treated from a perspective of intergovernmental relations.

The second complication relates to the understandable political sensitivities that come with government security agencies operating within Indigenous communities, even at the request of local leadership. Since the Oka Crisis, there has been a deep reluctance on the part of both political and armed forces leadership to insert the CAF into civil disputes or protests involving Indigenous communities. Though the requests in terms of setting up field hospitals and assisting with civil engineering tasks would not seem to have the potential of evoking this history, enlisting CAF members in a law enforcement role on reserve certainly would. Any actions of that nature would contradict recent comments from CAF leadership that its role in fighting COVID-19 would be to support capacity, not to suppress disorder or enforcement quarantine measures.³⁸ That said, despite the fraught history between Canada's security agencies and Indigenous communities, community leadership may nevertheless see CAF assistance as the best available option given a lack of existing resources. In order to effectively deliver this assistance the CAF will need to partner closely with local leadership, existing military resources in the community (specifically the Canadian Rangers³⁹) and federal Indigenous Services policymakers.

Depending on how long social distancing measures and cross-border traffic restriction remain in place, pressure and narrowing on existing private sector supply chains could create issues for communities not fully connected to them. In remote, Northern, and Indigenous communities which struggle with food security and healthcare access under normal conditions, supply shortages and panic buying may move the availability of key supplies from precarious to catastrophic. It is under these circumstances that it could be anticipated that military support may be needed from a logistical standpoint in order to ferry medical supplies and other goods across large distances. The number of such requests will likely continue to grow as COVID-19 cases increase in indigenous communities.⁴⁰

As of this writing, military deployments specifically to address the effects of COVID-19 have consisted of the assignment of Canadian Rangers units in Northern Quebec. These units, which are local to the communities in which they are operating and thus do not risk themselves introducing COVID-19 to an isolated population, were activated at the request of the Nunavik-Regional Emergency Preparedness Advisory Committee. Their duties are currently said to consist of the setting up of medical equipment and other logistical support with emergency management duties, but their role is fluid and could evolve over time⁴¹. Officials with several Dene First Nations in the Northwest Territories have also made statements indicating a potential need for Rangers assistance, though they have not yet made formal requests⁴²

As the above-outlined existing appeals for CAF support highlight, there is a nexus between the military's preparations for, and response to, the current pandemic and its other domestic operations. In particular, given the seasonal timing of COVID-19's arrival in Canada, the CAF response under Operation LASER will both impact and be impacted by the longstanding Operation LENTUS. In the current environment, the CAF is likely to be asked to respond both to COVID-19 at a national and a localized emergency at the same time and using the same limited domestic capacity.⁴³ Given that the frequency of localized natural disasters appears to be increasing due to impacts associated with climate change, this spreading thin of existing capacity is unlikely to end once the current pandemic has passed.



Members of the Canadian Forces pack buses at Denison Armory to convoy to CFB Borden amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on April 6, 2020 in Toronto, Canada. Troops will remain ready to respond to any requests made by any levels of government in Canada to help fight the pandemic. COLE BURSTON / Getty Images

SUPPORT ON THE HOME FRONT A GROWING TREND POSING CHALLENGES FOR THE CAF⁴⁴

The pandemic represents a symptom of a larger trend affecting the CAF, namely the increasing demand from Canadian governments for support during domestic emergencies⁴⁵. The CAF has seen a 1,000 per cent increase in requests to assist civilian governments in supporting cleanup after natural disasters over the past four years.⁴⁶ Answering these requests is perfectly reasonable in itself, as providing assistance to civil authorities during domestic disasters or major emergencies is one of eight core missions of the CAF as outlined in the current defence policy, *Strong, Secure and Engaged*.⁴⁷ Furthermore, a recent poll by IPSOS, commissioned by the CDA Institute, indicates that 9 out of 10 Canadians are supportive of the CAF being called up to assist governments in their fight against COVID-19.⁴⁸

The issue, however, is that the demand for such support is steadily increasing at a time when demand for more focus, expertise, resources and assets is also augmenting in all of the CAF's other core missions. Global military and non-military security challenges are becoming more complex, numerous, and far reaching, including forcing a refocus of priority on the home front. The defence of Canada is without question the most important mission for the CAF, but within the benign continental traditional security environment in the post-Cold War period, successive Canadian governments have increasingly oriented the military towards overseas operations and commitments. Strategic and military implications of an opening Arctic region; new missile, cyber and space capabilities from increasingly capable rival great powers; and the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters in North America and Canada⁴⁹, have elevated the importance of continental and domestic security for the CAF. COVID-19 has occurred at a time when there is a somewhat lighter CAF footprint globally, making it easier to recall forces, compared to the mid-late 2000s when Canada had a large contingent of forces in Afghanistan and the Middle East which would have made any significant demand for domestic support a serious challenge to our ability to succeed in our operations abroad.

As the CAF begins to mobilize extensively on the home front, the demand for international support will most likely rise as the COVID-19 continues to spread globally. The Global South is only beginning to feel the effects of virus spread, where many states have less-capable healthcare systems and abilities to impose slow down measures on their economies.⁵⁰ The pandemic, furthermore, may exacerbate existing conflicts and the suffering of those caught in them.⁵¹ It is uncertain, though, that the CAF would have the capacity to support missions abroad over at least the next six months. As well, in the aforementioned IPSOS poll, only 28% of respondents supported the CAF being deployed abroad on COVID-19 related missions.⁵² As well, it is predicted this year's hurricane season will be above normal in terms of numbers and severity of hurricanes threatening the United States and Caribbean.⁵³ If these forecasts are true, there will most likely be greater international requests of support for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, especially from smaller Caribbean states. This is a region the CAF has a wealth of experience assisting humanitarian operations in. Whether the CAF will be able to assist during this season remains uncertain given the COVID-19 preparations and almost certain domestic deployments.

These demands question the viability of the military fulfilling its core missions, both in terms of having the proper capabilities and sufficient capacity given the growing geographic extent, and the range of competencies required to do so. In this context, capability refers to having an ability to do a certain function whereas capacity refers to the ability to do a specific function which meets the overall demand. Such a distinction is important when determining if meeting growing demands, assuming this is the goal, from enlarging capacity requires more efficiency from existing capabilities, such as greater coordination mechanisms or assigning more duties, or if new capabilities and specialization of forces must be developed.

Australia is already confronting this reality, with a rethink of the missions, resources and capabilities of their military after it was overstretched during this year's wildfire season (which is only expected to get worse in future), as it struggled to provide support to the government to fight the fires while maintaining other defence duties.⁵⁴ A similar rethink may be needed for Canada, for if these domestic request trends continue they cannot be seen or dealt with as periodic responses to one-off



Australian Defence Force medical and scientific personnel from the Army, Air Force and Navy boarded a C-130J Hercules aircraft at Royal Australian Air Force Base Amberley, Queensland, travelling to assist with a recent COVID-19 outbreak at North West Regional Hospital in Burnie, Tasmania. Photo by Trooper *Jonathan Goedhart*.

incidents but rather a new baseline of demand requiring more committed and specialized assets and forces. This is not a call for the CAF to stop supporting government requests or not be involved in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. It is not unrealistic, though, to anticipate the CAF could become overextended due to increased demands on all fronts, combined with the personnel and asset shortages they currently face.⁵⁵

A NEED TO RE-EVALUATE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CAF?

There will be many lessons learned for the CAF (as there will be for governments, public services, companies and civil society organizations across Canada) regarding its response to COVID-19. However, these should not primarily or solely be approached and studied as just technical, resource, or financial issues. Rather, the missions, roles, and responsibilities of the CAF should be thoroughly reviewed when the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, as a standalone review and/or a more comprehensive one undertaken by Ottawa looking at the national response in general. Now is not the time to debate and investigate such matters. Lives are at stake, frontline services are increasingly under strain, and many Canadians are anxious about the present and future. An instrumental approach, finding solutions to meet immediate needs with the existing capabilities at hand, is needed at this juncture. When we begin to 'return to normal' as a society and a government, however, this should be a time to reflect, review and enact changes, some possibly dramatic. The duties of the CAF are first and foremost a political determination by the public and government of *what* the military is tasked with and *how* they are empowered and resourced to achieve it. A critical component of any such investigation is examining how the CAF is situated within, and their relations to, the broader constellation of security forces and authorities charged with protecting and defending Canadian national security and national interests. This is particularly salient because of natural disasters and other emergencies domestically which are increasingly placing greater demands on the CAF.

While not proposing definitive answers or recommendations with respect to the exact purview and specifics constituting such a review, below are a number of issues we believe should be included.

- *Re-assessing The Core Missions* - Currently the CAF has eight core missions they are assigned to fulfill. These require being able to successfully operate within complex and fast evolving security

environments, placing greater demands on the CAF on virtually all fronts be that enhanced Search and Rescue capabilities, contributions to NATO missions, and increased calls for support to combat natural disasters and other emergencies at home. As well as modernizing much of its forces to operate in existing domains, the CAF is developing new capabilities and competencies in emerging ones such as space and cyber. Even with the expansion of the force in terms of personnel, is it reasonable to expect the CAF can fulfill all these core missions, especially during periods of simultaneous, large-scale strain on multiple ones?

- *Fiscal Fallout From The Pandemic*- The short and long-term defence economics implications of COVID-19 in Canada are uncertain.⁵⁶ *Strong, Secure, Engage* includes many ongoing and expensive budgetary commitments for a host of new assets, competencies, and augmenting the size of and benefits to the Regular and Reserve forces. Given the huge fiscal burden the Federal Government is currently bearing to combat COVID-19, it is unclear what the future of current procurement projects will be, such as the National Shipbuilding Strategy, and planned but unbudgeted ones such as the North Warning System replacement and new fighter aircraft.⁵⁷ This is not even considering other multi-billion dollar asset replacements such as submarines⁵⁸, where a decision is needed soon if there is to be no capability gap. Financial strain in government and the CAF may require re-organizing not just in asset priorities but more fundamentally in missions as well.
- *Overall Security Orientation*: While maintaining defence duties in Canada and North America, the CAF has predominantly been externally oriented beyond the continent. Over the past two decades, the CAF has developed new non-traditional capabilities (that is capabilities not designed to fight other militaries) in order to adapt and operate in the Post-Cold War era defined by the increasing importance of non-military security threats. While these challenges remain, as outlined in *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, the changing global balance of power has resulted in, and been a product of, the return of great power competition as a defining feature of global politics. Great power competition is not a siloed security issue, but one which intersects and connects multiple domains into arenas of contestation. Such a reality places stress on the CAF to be able to function and operate along a security domain continuum ranging from traditional military arenas and military capabilities to ‘grey zones’ and civilian-military hybrid capabilities. The current pandemic, furthermore, highlights great power competition is becoming part of, and a disruptive feature within, all security issues. This creates a precarious and challenging landscape for Canada to find like-minded partners in supporting the essential foundations of world order, including a commitment to multilateralism.⁵⁹ Foundations have been stressed for a while, and may be fundamentally so after the current pandemic is over.⁶⁰ The emphasis of orientation the CAF has towards domestic, continental and global contexts should be reviewed in this landscape. A defence policy review was prioritized over a foreign policy one when the current government came to power in 2015 in order to create legitimacy around committing to a number of large defence procurement projects whose future needed to be decided quickly. The need for a foreign policy review, however, has and is becoming increasingly clear.
- *Multi-Hatting Versus Specialization*: There must be the avoidance of seeing military personnel as hyper-competent and multi-purpose agents which can do any task set before them, thus being used as a backstop for any and all challenging situations. The CAF is not a swiss army knife which can be expected to take on and competently execute multiple, simultaneous duties in a complex security environment. This was the lesson of the ‘three-block war’ concept in

Afghanistan where CAF members were expected to be soldiers, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers whenever and wherever the need arose.⁶¹ CAF personnel and units are some of the most competent and highly trained in the world. But there is a limit as to what they can be reasonably expected to do and to what degree outside their core skill set areas, which require years of training and continuous refinement over time. While the CAF can be employed in jobs that are either layperson-level in training and/or commensurate with their training (such as engineering and logistics) in supporting domestic crises, there needs to be an investigation as to whether these type of security challenges require more refined, specialized skills sets, possibly necessitating the creations of new capabilities to meet these demands.

- *Looking Inside the CAF* - One possible area for such in-CAF specialization in this regard could be the Reserve Force. Reserve Forces can fill one or two basic roles: strategic (essentially a pool of trained personnel to augment the Regular Force) and/or functional (responsible for specific capabilities). In the current defence policy, the role of the Reserve Force is both: become more fully integrated with the Regular Force while maintaining distinct functions they are responsible for. An example would be the development of a Naval Security Team, a unit to protect RCN ships on deployment, by the Naval Reserves.⁶² Whether the reserves should retain both strategic and functional roles should be examined. The relationship between reserve and regular forces differs among the three services, but a case could be made that if the CAF were to continue to support growing demands associated with domestic emergencies then perhaps the reserves should become a more functional capability charged with these duties exclusively. Alternatively, an additional reserve service could be constructed with distinct trades and training specifically oriented towards disaster management and domestic emergencies support. Such possibilities could help insulate the Regular Force in order to focus on other defence duties while allowing the Reserves, or a subset of these, to focus on domestic emergency support. Relying on volunteer-reserves, though, does have its limitations and may not be the best model for emergency management. Approximately one-fifth of all reservists in Canada would have to agree to full time contracts to meet the Reserve Force contribution to the CAF's COVID-19 standby force.⁶³ In ensuring the reliability of such a force, the government will most likely have to alter existing laws to protect the civilian jobs of these members should they be called up.
- *Looking Outside the CAF* - Beyond the CAF and existing emergency management organizations at the provincial and municipal levels, Canada may need to consider building a civilian disaster response agency at the federal level which rapidly deploys when authorities are overstretched and that is specially constituted for this task (akin to the United States' Federal Emergency Management Agency). Looking to retool existing agencies, including the CAF, may be mistaking the prioritization of finding efficiencies in and better effectiveness of these bodies to work together in pooling resources and information with the need to expand capacity by creating a new, specialized organization mandated, equipped and trained in addressing these security issues. Such a move would not necessarily erase the CAF's mission to be prepared to support, but rather create an intermediary federal organization more specialized and organically linked to existing emergency management organizations which could be better oriented to assume such duties and allow the CAF to largely retain focus on their traditional defence duties. A civilian organization, as well, would retain the traditional political cultural norm in Canada of the CAF not being excessively involved in domestic security issues. Currently, Canada's emergency management approach relies on leveraging external organizations, specifically the Canadian Red Cross as an 'auxiliary

to government', rather than building in-house expertise and capacity. The Canadian Red Cross has played an important in recovering from natural disasters in Canada and is currently providing several services and supplies to combat COVID-19 at the behest of Canadian governments and indigenous communities.⁶⁴ Whether this approach can meet the increasing demands placed on governments and communities as a result of natural disasters and other domestic emergencies should be investigated.

Augmenting severity and frequency of natural disasters and domestic emergencies combined with the regularized practice of employing the CAF as a defacto response force challenges the notion of the military as a fail-safe, to be called upon when all other options and agencies are exhausted. The CAF, instead, is becoming increasingly employed as part of the frontline response in these regards, not the option of last resort. This trend indicates a gap in the existing capacities of governments and public services to manage such issues. Whether the CAF should fill this gap, in part or in full, is not a technical, budgetary or resource issue but more fundamentally a political one.

CONCLUSION

Once the current conditions of the pandemic have passed and day-to-day life in Canada resumes in the context of whatever level of new normality emerges, a Royal Commission or other high-level review to look at Canada's COVID-19 response from a whole-of-government perspective should be initiated. Such a review will touch on many aspects, including but not limited to, intelligence gathering and sharing (both within Canada's intelligence community and between other countries in multi-national intelligence organizations such as Five Eyes⁶⁵), public health, federal-provincial responsibilities in terms of emergency management, and the effectiveness of social programs in responding to the economic fallout. The issues outlined in this paper make it clear that such a review must also include a likely separate report about the CAFs domestic role and the distribution of duties, mandates and resources for the organizations in Canada's security communities.

The CAF will always be ready to defend Canada and help Canadians through a crisis, but are they properly mandated and should they be tasked with the increasing domestic duties they have been asked to take on? Is placing such burdens on the CAF fair to its members and the public and what are the public's expectations of its military? Is a more dedicated force, either functionally tasked to do so within the military, or a new civilian agency, a better fit to meet the growing demand from domestic emergencies? These are questions that do not have easy answers. Further, they are not exclusively, or even primarily, questions of logistics, funding, or technical capabilities. Above all, they are questions that must be answered by policymakers and the public at a more overarching political level and rest on fundamental beliefs about what their military is *for*.

For too long, the question of what Canadians expect from their military, and to what extent they are comfortable with military personnel operating on the Homefront in peacetime, has gone without serious consideration. Rather, this drift into serving as the de facto disaster response option for the federal government has been a result of reflexive policy-making without a clear vision of the future. The COVID-19 pandemic is not the first scenario to raise these questions, but it could prove definitive in charting the path forward.

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