

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE, ENTITLED: *CANADA'S TASK FORCE MALI*

Introduction

The Government would like to thank the members of the Committee for undertaking a study on Canada's Task Force Mali. This response outlines the Government's intention to reduce the tempo of operations on schedule, while maintaining the medical evacuation component of Operation PRESENCE, Canada's mission in Mali, until August 31, 2019, to help ensure a thorough transition of the mission to Romania. It also outlines steps that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF) is taking to help the Romanian Armed Forces achieve Initial Operational Capability as early as possible, including the potential provision of logistical and heavy airlift assistance.

Canada's Task Force Mali is just one element of a broader Canadian commitment to support United Nations (UN) peace operations. In 2017, Canada hosted a UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver and championed a Smart Pledge system for strengthening cooperation among troop contributing countries. The mission in Mali is consistent with these efforts to reform and improve the UN's capacity to plan and conduct peace operations.

Operation PRESENCE is part of a whole-of-government approach to contribute to peace and stability in Mali. Building on over 50 years of engagement and people to people ties, our contribution to peacekeeping is an important tool to support efforts toward durable peace and sustainable development in Mali. Since 2000, Canada has provided more than \$1.6B in international assistance to Mali which has helped promote stability, improve governance, reinforce the rule of law, reduce poverty and inequality, and improve the lives of Malians. Canada contributed \$6M to the UN trust fund for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and a further \$27M to MINUSMA through assessed contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget. Mali has been a member of Canada's Military Training and Cooperation Program since 2005 and receives further support through Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) Peace and Stability Operations Program and through its Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Program.

Recommendation 1 – Adhering to the Withdrawal Deadline for Operation PRESENCE

That the Government of Canada adhere to the one-year withdrawal deadline of July 31, 2019 for Operation PRESENCE that was announced in March 2018.

The Government agrees with this recommendation, and will implement the withdrawal in a responsible way to ensure a thorough transition. The Government recognizes the potential for MINUSMA to experience a capability gap in Mali between the reduction in the tempo of Canadian operations on July 31, 2019, and the beginning of Romania's mission on October 15, 2019. While the CAF will reduce the tempo of operations as originally planned on July 31, 2019,

by gradually downsizing the mission and removing the tactical transport capability, it will continue to provide a medical evacuation capability until August 31, 2019, to mitigate the capability gap.

By maintaining the medical evacuation component of the mission, the CAF will help the continued provision of vital medical evacuation services to Canada's MINUSMA partners on the ground in Mali. A gradual redeployment will also help ensure continuity of MINUSMA operations in Mali and in this way bolster Canada's overall efforts to help set conditions for durable peace, development and prosperity in the country.

As a further risk mitigation measure, the CAF is working closely with the Romanian Armed Forces to accelerate their arrival. This support will include the provision of advice and other forms of operational assistance, including the potential provision of logistical and heavy airlift assistance, should Romania request it. Romanian efforts to speed up their arrival, together with our measured withdrawal plan, will help to mitigate the capability gap. The Government is also working closely with the UN to minimize the operational impact of the transition on MINUSMA.

A gradual withdrawal will bolster Canada's credibility as a trusted and effective partner in UN peace support operations and emphasize Canada's commitment to Smart Pledges. By closely coordinating with Romania to eliminate gaps in troop and equipment contributions, Canada is demonstrating how a successful, predictable transition among UN members can improve the effectiveness of UN Security Council-mandated peace support operations.

Recommendation 2 – Examining Actions to Accelerate the Transition of the Mission to Romania

That the Government of Canada examine the full range of actions that could be taken to expedite the transition of the air detachments in Gao, Mali from Canada to Romania. In identifying these actions, the focus should be on minimizing the operational impact of the transition in the theatre of operations.

The Government agrees with this recommendation. In collaboration with GAC, DND/CAF has given detailed consideration to the full range of actions that can be taken to support the Romanian mission and will continue to do so.

The CAF has offered to provide advice and mentorship, when requested, to the Romanian Armed Forces as they prepare to deploy. Canadian officials have already briefed Romanian officials extensively on the operating conditions in Mali and key considerations that may affect their deployment. This support has reduced uncertainty, allowing the Romanian Armed Forces to prepare for their mission more effectively and expeditiously. In addition to formal government-to-government contacts, working-level relationships between military officials continue on an ongoing and as-needed basis. Support of this nature will continue until the transition is successfully completed.

This support is entirely consistent with the spirit of the Smart Pledge system, which emphasizes

cooperation among troop contributing countries. By setting an example of effective handover between missions, Canada helps to reinforce the Smart Pledge concept. Support to the Romanian Armed Forces is also consistent with the deep defence ties and cooperative spirit that exist between the two countries as Allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Recommendation 3 – Supporting the Transition to the Romanian Deployment

That the Government of Canada, on a best efforts basis, support the transition in the deployment of Romanian forces as Canada’s successor in Mali.

The Government agrees with this recommendation. National Defence has been working closely with Romania and the UN to ensure a smooth transition. For several months, the CAF has been sharing its experience in Mali with its Romanian counterparts and has made extensive advice and expertise available to them. The CAF has also facilitated Romanian reconnaissance visits into Mali.

In March 2019, Canada’s former Air Task Force Mali Commander and his command team visited Romania, sharing lessons-learned and best practices from the Canadian experience. During that visit, Romanian officials provided a detailed explanation of Romanian capabilities. Based on the Romanian planning to date, the CAF provided logistical and technical advice to support the transition.

Canadian officials will continue to collaborate closely with their UN and Romanian counterparts during the Romanian contingent’s transition preparations.

Recommendation 4 – Providing Logistics and Heavy Airlift Assistance

That the Government of Canada provide logistics and heavy lift air assistance to the government of Romania to facilitate the delivery and transition of operational personnel and equipment to Mali.

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Canada is currently engaged with Romania to define its strategic airlift requirement. Should the Government of Romania make a request for airlift support to Canada, the CAF will carefully consider available options to support, taking into consideration the requirements of other ongoing operations. The CAF will seek to provide the best possible assistance to transport Romanian equipment and personnel to Mali, potentially including heavy airlift and logistics, provided it does not compromise the CAF’s ability to deliver on other critical operations and remains within approved funding limits.

The CAF is already providing advice and mentorship to Romania to support the arrival of Romanian troops and equipment.

Recommendation 5 – Providing a Thorough Explanation of How Operation PRESENCE Serves Canada’s National Interests

That the Government of Canada provide to Parliament a thorough explanation of how

Operation PRESENCE serves Canada's national interest.

The Government agrees with this recommendation. This response represents the requested explanation.

Operation PRESENCE has made a valuable contribution to addressing a dangerous security situation in Mali. Continued violence and conflict in the West African country contributes to broader regional instability in the Sahel. By helping to stabilize the security situation, setting the conditions for a durable and inclusive peace, Canada advances its own national security interests. It is also consistent with Canada's commitment to human rights and development around the world. Furthermore, Canada's whole of government approach in Mali addresses the drivers of conflict and instability by supporting development and humanitarian objectives, prosperity, diplomacy and stabilization. In addition, Canadian investments contribute to inclusive economic growth and play a leading role in responsible business conduct in Mali to foster socio-economic development. A stable and prosperous Mali also has tangible benefits for the safety of Canadians abroad, either working, visiting or living in the region.

In its contributions to peace and stabilization efforts in Mali, Canada has prioritized support to the UN system, enabling the essential role played by the UN in maintaining international peace and security.

In addition to contributing to the achievement of UN objectives in Mali, therefore, Operation PRESENCE serves a broader set of priorities by serving as a successful example of the Smart Pledge system at work. In so doing, it advances Canada's broader peace operations reform goals and improves the UN's capacity to plan and conduct peace operations.

Finally, Operation PRESENCE is an example of continued close cooperation among NATO Allies to deliver critical capabilities to the UN. Productive collaboration in the UN context between the Canadian, Romanian, and German armed forces, among other Allies, deepens NATO ties and advances shared values. Deployments into such complex and multidimensional environments serve to enhance experience and military capability across members of the Alliance, which itself is a cornerstone of Canada's national interest.