

Opinion



Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne has been tasked by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured at the National Press Theatre on Jan. 11, to lead the establishment of a Canadian Centre for Peace, Order, and Good Government. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A new Canadian peace centre could make a world of difference

Canada provided pivotal leadership and ideas in the past and it could definitely help again, with the promised Canadian Centre for Peace, Order, and Good Government being a step in the right direction.



Peggy Mason, Peter Langille

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Who isn't concerned about our shared global chal-

lenges? It's hard to miss overlapping crises, many fuelled by militarism, marginalization, and inequality.

Canada provided pivotal leadership and ideas in the past and it could definitely help again. The recently announced Canadian Centre for Peace, Order, and Good Government therefore is a much-needed step in the right direction.

The details have yet to be finalized, but this much is clear: the new Canadian Centre is part of an effort to "lead by example and help make the world a safe, just, prosperous, and sustainable place." Mandate letters to cabinet ministers suggest an interdepartmental centre (i.e., within government) is proposed "to expand the availability of Canadian expertise and assistance to those seeking to build peace, advance justice, promote human rights and democracy, and deliver good governance."

While this is promising, three concerns need attention: is the scope sufficiently broad to address our urgent global challenges; should the centre be within government or independent; and is there a better Canadian model?

The mandate needs to reference peace and security, disarmament and sustainable develop-

ment, defence and foreign policy, and the deeper co-operation required to address these shared global challenges.

Further, a centre within government will be inclined to represent government policy and priorities without providing independent analysis, constructive criticism, and innovative policy options now needed.

This is not how issues of peace and conflict are approached in other highly recognized national centres in Sweden (SIPRI), the United States (USIP), Norway (PRIO), Switzerland (GCSP), Japan (JCCP), Austria (IIPS), etc. Being independent and at arms length from government is crucial for the credibility and the capacity of the centre. Canada once led in this respect, too.

In 1984, the late Right Honourable Pierre Elliot Trudeau provided a very good model in the Canadian Institute of International Peace and Security (CIIPS). Bill C-32, at that time stated:

"The Purpose of the Institute is to increase knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to international peace and security from a Canadian perspective, with particular emphasis on arms control, disarmament, defence and conflict resolution, and to: a)

foster, fund and conduct research on matters relating to international peace and security; b) promote scholarship in matters relating to international peace and security; c) study and propose ideas and policies for the enhancement of international peace and security, and; d) collect and disseminate information on, and encourage public discussion of, issues of international peace and security."

When initially proposed, the throne speech noted: "Reflecting Canada's concern about current international tensions, the government will create a publicly funded centre... Fresh ideas and new proposals, regardless of source, will be studied and promoted."

CIIPS initially focused on four priority areas: arms control, disarmament, defence, and conflict resolution. As new needs arose, it responded with projects on UN peace operations, internal conflicts, confidence building, and conflict prevention.

The approach of creative and innovative research, education, outreach and policy proposals targeted four priority audiences: the public, the scholarly community, the government, and the international audience.

Within just two years, CIIPS was widely recognized and central to collaborative projects with other national institutes and international organizations, as well as numerous universities and centres of expertise. In providing support for civil society and academia, it was also appreciated on the home front.

CIIPS helped elevate discussions on international peace and security in a period of high-risk and high anxiety. As the late Geoffrey Pearson and Nancy Gordon wrote, CIIPS' demise in 1992 was effectively "shooting oneself in the head."

The underlying rationale for the former CIIPS remains relevant. Prime minister Pierre Trudeau recognized the growing risks to global security and the lack of independent analysis, facts, and policy options available to the Canadian government.

Twenty-five years of austerity has drained and depleted much of Canada's independent expertise on peace and security. Most of our foreign and defence policy think tanks rely heavily on funding from DND and the defence industry.

There is also considerably less institutional memory and enthusiasm to explore what might be doable on the key global issues of peace, security, and sustainable development. These include the prevention of armed conflict and its peaceful resolution, protection of civilians, and UN peace operations—all of which should be central to a feminist foreign policy. Instead, we see a focus on new means and methods of warfare from "hybrid conflicts" to offensive cyber operations to space war.

Canada had a positive model in CIIPS; one that may now be emulated and modified in support of a new 21st century Canadian Centre for Peace, Order, and Good Government.

The Rideau Institute and other leading Canadian NGOs, in the context of the 2016 Defence Policy Review, recommended: "As one of the few leading OECD members without such an institution, Canada should establish an expert, arms-length, non-partisan, domestic institute for sustainable common security, with long-term financial viability... Its Board of Directors should be diverse and include academic, non-governmental, and international expertise."

In light of the new CPOGG proposal, the Rideau Institute went on to say that first and foremost, the focus must be on enhancing Canadian capacity for analysis and policy development on international peace and security, as the only solid basis for "lending expertise to others." It also suggested that to be credible and sustainable, the mandate must ensure the centre's independence, diversity, and long term-financial viability.

Finally, the work of the Centre must be firmly grounded in the principles of international co-operation: peaceful conflict resolution; and inclusive, sustainable common security that underpin the United Nations Charter. Canada cannot help to build international peace and security by seeking to impose on others an inward-looking version of "Canadian values." Instead, our work must be fully and transparently grounded in global principles as reflected in international law and in respect of which Canada has played a key role in developing and strengthening.

In short, for this recently proposed peace centre to be worthwhile, let's reflect on what is now urgent so we can aim higher.

Peggy Mason is the president of the Rideau Institute and a former Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament to the United Nations. Dr. Peter Langille specializes in peace research, conflict resolution, and initiatives to improve UN peace operations. *The Hill Times*