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## Darfur and Afghanistan: Canada's Choices in Deploying Military Forces

Ambassador David S. Wright  
Kenneth and Patricia Taylor Distinguished  
Visiting Professor in Foreign Affairs  
Victoria College, University of Toronto



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## Preface

I am pleased to present this lecture by David Wright, currently Kenneth and Patricia Taylor Distinguished Visiting Professor in Foreign Affairs at Victoria College, University of Toronto, and formerly Canadian Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Professor Wright spoke in our Munk Centre Distinguished Lecture Series on September 22, 2006. The event was cosponsored by the Munk Centre, the Cambodian Genocide Group (a University of Toronto student organization interested in human rights issues), and The Asian Institute.

David Wright has had a long and remarkable career in the Canadian Foreign Service, far beyond the staid backwaters of diplomatic capitals. He was Canada's ambassador to Spain during the 1995 Turbot War. He was Assistant Deputy Minister for Europe in the Department of Foreign Affairs at the time of the Eastern European revolutions, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and Canada's Ambassador to NATO for six years (1997–2003) during the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. As Dean of NATO's Council, he presided over the historic invocation of Article 5 after September 11, 2001. At heart, Article 5 is a commitment by all to come to the aid of any one member subject to an armed attack. It had been designed to keep the Americans committed to European defence in the time of the Cold War, not vice versa.

Many thought, after end of Cold War, that we would move to a new world where military inventions became less common, that other issues — human and economic development, the environment, women's and children's rights — might rise to the top of the international agenda. But recent events give us pause. Indeed, the world seems to have changed a lot in the past few years. NATO's theatre of operation has expanded considerably with the current mission in Afghanistan, while other conflicts, notably the one in Darfur, rage on with little external involvement.

Professor Wright joins the ranks of an outstanding group of individuals in our Distinguished Lecture Series, including Marek Belka, former Prime Minister of Poland; Lieutenant-General (Ret.) Roméo Dallaire; Norwegian Olympic Gold Medalist Johann Olav Koss, President and CEO of Right to Play; and James D. Wolfensohn, former President of The World Bank Group.

Marketa Evans, *Executive Director, Munk Centre for International Studies*

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# Darfur and Afghanistan: Canada's Choices in Deploying Military Forces

Ambassador David S. Wright

*David Wright is the Kenneth and Patricia Taylor Distinguished Visiting Professor in Foreign Affairs at Victoria College, University of Toronto. He was Canadian Ambassador to NATO from 1997 to 2003 — during the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq — and was the NATO Council's Dean. He was Canadian Ambassador to Spain at the time of the Canada–Spain fisheries dispute in 1995. As Assistant Deputy Minister for Europe in the Department of Foreign Affairs, he helped to manage Canadian policy during the years prior to and following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his distinguished career in the Canadian Foreign Service, Mr. Wright also served in Rome, at the United Nations in New York, in Tokyo, and as Deputy Head of Mission in Paris. He has published extensively on foreign affairs and economic issues.*

Would that we had a simpler world: one in which conflicts end cleanly, the UN Security Council authorizes intervention by well-meaning peacekeepers, and former protagonists step back, lay down their arms, and welcome them. And the peacekeepers are accompanied by aid workers, and civil society rebuilds democratic governments and viable economies. And everyone lives happily ever after.

Sadly the world does not work like that. Conflicts tend not to end cleanly. The choices governments must make in dealing with international crises are very difficult, often between a bad alternative and a worse one. The risks of intervention are huge in terms of human life and political life. And of course there are risks of inaction too, but those are much harder to measure.

Let me start with some very basic questions:

1. Should force ever be used to confront leaders killing their own people?

2. Should democratic countries ever use military force as part of their efforts to combat terrorism?
3. Should Canada ever be engaged militarily abroad in the pursuit of its own interests and values?

Unhesitatingly, I say yes to all these questions. But that's the easy part. The harder parts in deciding on military engagement are, Where and for how long? With what mandate? With what mission? With what resources?

In 1999, when NATO countries debated the decision to take military action to combat Milosevic's ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, I remember we asked one of these very basic questions: "Can a dictator be permitted to kill his own people?" NATO answered that question by launching air strikes against Milosevic. It decided "in practice" to act, even though it could not agree on the "theory." The then nineteen members of the Alliance had different reasons for deciding to act. There was no unifying legal basis for their action. The UN Security Council had not explicitly authorized the use of force because Russia would have vetoed it. Yet NATO acted, rightly and successfully, in my view.

Kofi Annan said at the time: "No government has the right to hide behind national sovereignty in order to violate the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its people." But many were troubled by the lack of a common set of rules to govern such actions, necessary as they may have been.

After Kosovo, the UN General Assembly, with Canadian leadership, set up an International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. That commission developed the concept of the responsibility to protect. The main theme was that "states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophes — from mass murder and rape, from starvation — but when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states. There must be no more Rwandas."

The responsibility to protect doctrine has been widely, although not universally, supported. And a very obvious case has been staring us in the face for over three years — Darfur. Darfur has been called a "genocide." An estimated 200,000 people have died. If ever there was a classic case for responsibility to protect, Darfur is it. Yet action to date has been shamefully weak.

An ill-equipped African Union force of 7,000 has been largely ineffective. It is struggling and has just recently extended its commitment to the end of the year. The UN Security Council has authorized a UN peacekeeping force, but Sudan has refused to accept it and China's veto has ensured that the UN does not push Sudan too hard. China protects the Sudan government to ensure a steady supply of oil.

The truth is that very few countries with real military capability want to intervene in Darfur. They don't want to take the military and political risks. They don't want to invade Sudan. And African sensitivities about so-called "neo-colonialist" Western forces are a convenient reason to support the African Union's presence, as Canada has done very extensively, but not to push for much more.

There should be no illusions. A Western force in Darfur would involve bloodshed and sacrifice. There would likely be fighting and casualties. And the op-ed pages that have called for action in Darfur could then well be debating "how did we get into this mess?"

Governments are right to be very cautious about the use of force. And it is much safer to make speeches about "never again" than to engage in a long and costly military struggle. Even if Canada were willing to send combat troops and pressure Sudan into acquiescence, who else would join us? The United States is so tainted by its presence in Iraq that its direct involvement would probably be toxic and counterproductive. So it would have to be the usual suspects — our European NATO allies plus a few others. But I sense little willingness on their part to engage militarily in a robust operation in Darfur. Especially not with the other demands that are being placed on Western military forces in other trouble spots — like Afghanistan and Lebanon (and Iraq for the unfortunate few countries that are left). That doesn't mean that public pressure shouldn't continue. It should. Perhaps positions will change. But I am not optimistic on this one, especially after three years of dithering. History will not judge the international community well on Darfur.

This brings us to the broader issue of deployable troops, resources, and burden sharing in this turbulent world.

The era of straightforward peacekeeping in relatively benign environments is largely past. Those who speak with nostalgia of Canada's traditions in this respect as being a model for the future are out of touch with contemporary reality. Peace-building environments are less permissive, more hostile. Troops engaged in these complex tasks need

to be highly trained and capable — as Canadian forces are. But few countries have forces of this quality. Thus, the most demanding tasks tend to go to the most capable countries.

As a wealthy country with a population of 32 million, with interests all over the world, it should not be a huge stretch for Canada to field at least 3,000 soldiers for extended periods of time anywhere in the world. Let us look at the case of Afghanistan. A mission that once was widely supported in Canada has become controversial. Each soldier or civilian killed or injured is a human tragedy and the casualty level has been growing.

The origins of our mission in Afghanistan are in the events of September 11, 2001. Within hours NATO invoked, for the first and only time in its history, Article 5 of its treaty. An attack on one is an attack against all. Canada has been in Afghanistan virtually from the outset — both in a fighting role and in peacekeeping and peace building. We are now part of a force that is UN approved, NATO led, and to which we have committed ourselves until February 2009.

As is often the case in missions like this, circumstances evolve and goals become crystallized. To me, the key task for now is to keep the Taliban from returning to power, to reduce the threat to the security of the country. Building a prosperous democracy in Afghanistan, while desirable, is a very long term proposition indeed. Canada has been enormously generous in its aid to Afghanistan — our largest aid recipient in the world. But if the security situation regarding the Taliban is not stabilized, no progress will be made on the important broader goals of nation building. Building schools and hospitals only to have them destroyed is futile. So the security focus is the right one, for now.

We mustn't forget that the Taliban were one of the most reprehensible regimes we have seen on this planet in decades. Women were oppressed, girls were not permitted to go to school, historical monuments were blown up. Life was deprived of any joy under the dark shadow of this regime. Terrorism was harboured and nourished, and we all know the results. Anyone who thinks we can negotiate with the Taliban is naïve. Standing aside and saying that Afghanistan is not our war and that we have no interests there is wrong and short-sighted. Does Canada not care about violation of human rights or the nurturing of terrorism? Are we not engaged in the world and vulnerable ourselves? Of course we are. Are we suited only for the exercise of soft power and unsuited for the exercise of hard power when it is

needed? Of course not. Canada must do its part in meeting the global challenges of combatting terrorism and protecting human rights.

Arguing that this is Bush's war and that this is all about the United States is intellectually dishonest. We mustn't confuse this multilateral mission with an unpopular and misguided U.S. campaign in Iraq. Indeed, one of the many downsides of the U.S. involvement in Iraq was that it never committed adequate resources to finish the task in Afghanistan.

Could we do Darfur as well? Yes, we could. But we would need real engagement by other serious allies. And democratic countries would have to push Sudan much harder. This is not an issue of resources for us. It is an issue of political will on the part of all democratic countries.

That holds for Afghanistan too. Clearly Canada should not bear a disproportionate burden in any of these dangerous missions. But we mustn't retreat at the first signs of danger and naively wish for a simpler, risk-free world. Demands have changed from the early years of peacekeeping, for which some seem still nostalgic.

When it comes down to it, each government has only one well of political capital to draw on, one set of armed forces to deploy, and one budget to spend. Each government has to judge how, where, and to what extent to engage its assets. In doing so, leaders must determine their countries' interests and values, and must assess competing demands in a turbulent world. That is what Canada is doing.

We are blessed in this country in many ways — among these with remarkably capable and professional armed forces. Their engagement in Afghanistan, and perhaps someday in Darfur, is a key part of our Canada's contribution to a world that needs them. For a country with global interests, as ours certainly is, this is part of our world citizenship.



