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Explaining Canada's practices of burden-sharing in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) through its norm of "external responsibility"

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Abstract

While Canadian burden-sharing practices within NATO in the 1990s are well documented, the data in the literature raise two central questions: (1) was the practice of Canadian burden-sharing a one-time event, or was it part of a larger pattern of practices? and (2) what factors motivated Canada to shoulder the burden to the extent that it did?. This article studies the extent of Canada's burden-sharing practices in the context of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. The article makes two arguments: first, Canada's commitment to NATO continued to be strong post-9/11; second, Canada's practices of sharing Atlantic burdens could be explained by its adherence to the norm of "external responsibility," which guided its foreign policy by appealing to Canada's humanitarian responsibilities to contribute at an extraordinary level to the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security.

Keywords

Afghanistan, Canada, burden-sharing, external responsibility, ISAF

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Introduction

That Canada has earned applause for its commitment to NATO is undeniable. In the early 1990s Canada joined NATO in intervening in growing civil wars, genocide, and humanitarian disasters in the Balkans, where Ottawa sent its troops, diplomats, and cheques to broker, enforce, and sustain peace agreements. Canadian troops participated in all of the UN's and NATO's Balkan missions, including the unsuccessful UN Protection Forces, NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR), Stabilization Force (SFOR), and the Kosovo Force (KFOR). In all of those instances, Ottawa answered NATO's calls for military and political assistance without hesitation and in spite of its own financial limitations and economic difficulties. Table 1 provides an overview of Canada's relative force contributions to those peace operations, and the third column compares Canada's contributions with those of its closest ally and major trading partner in North America, the United States (whose ranks are noted on the right sides of the boxes). In IFOR, for example, Canada was the fifth largest force contributor of a total of 16 NATO countries, and shouldered 1.6 percent of the relative force burden (with the US shouldering 1.2 percent). In other words, measured against its *relative* abilities¹ calculated as a percentage of the total force size, Canada outperformed the United States in terms of shouldering a slice of the collective NATO burden. This contrast is even more apparent when considering SFOR, IFOR's successor, and later on, KFOR in the province of Kosovo. In SFOR and KFOR, contrary to commonly held expectations of super power practices by the United States, Canada became the third and fourth, respectively, largest force contributor in *relative* terms.

These data raise two main questions: the first is whether Canada's practice of burden-sharing was a one-time practice that was perhaps limited to a particular region (i.e. the Balkans), or whether it was part of a larger pattern of Canadian burden-sharing, in which case the pattern should be observable in the context of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. Put differently, if similar patterns of Canadian practices could also be found in ISAF, this would strongly indicate that these practices are consistent over time (at least in the post-Cold War context). Thus the first objective of this article is to study empirically the extent of Canada's practices of burden-sharing in the context of NATO's ISAF operations. The second objective is to answer the question of *why* Canada shouldered the burden to the extent that it did. In other words, how can one explain such practices, and what are the motivating factors that guided Canadian burden-sharing practices in ISAF?

1. For more details and discussion, see (forthcoming) Benjamin Zyla, *Sharing the Burden? NATO and its Second-tier Powers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Benjamin Zyla, "Canada and collective action in Afghanistan: Theory meets practice," in Nik Hynek and Peter Marton, eds, *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2011), 104–123.

Table 1. Percentage of Canadian/US *relative* force contributions to peace operations in the Balkans.

	% of total national force size (Can/US)		Rank acc. to relative force contrib. (in %) (Can/US)		Out of × NATO countries
IFOR	1.6	1.2	5	9	16
SFOR	2.2	0.4	3	15	19
KFOR	7.3	1.1	4	16	19

This article makes two arguments: first, Canada's commitment to NATO operations continued to be high in the post-9/11 world order. One could thus expect a high share of burdens shouldered by Canada in the ISAF context, which would prove that the so-called "decade of darkness" in Canadian foreign and defence policy is at best a mythical construct and without any empirical evidence. Indeed, I suggest that the Afghanistan operations have become the most salient dimension of Canada's continued involvement in the Atlantic Alliance. The second argument this article makes is that Canada's practices of sharing Atlantic burdens can be explained by its adherence to the norm of "external responsibility," which not only guided Canada in its foreign policy practice and burden-sharing decisions but also appealed to Canada's humanitarian responsibilities to contribute at an extraordinary level to international peace and security.

The paper starts with an empirical analysis of Canadian burden-sharing practices in ISAF. The section that follows sharpens the analytical focus and elucidates *why* and *how* such strong burden-sharing practices by Canada, a middle power, can be explained. The third section is devoted to discussing the norm of external responsibility, and the penultimate section traces the norm of external responsibility in the Canadian foreign policy discourse on Afghanistan by using qualitative research methods.

Canadian burden-sharing practices in ISAF: The numbers

It is widely acknowledged in the foreign policy discourse that Canada first deployed troops to Afghanistan in January 2002 for three reasons. First, Canada wanted to assist its American ally in a time of need; second, it responded to the invocation of NATO's collective defence clause in Article 5; and third, Canada supported UN-Resolution 1363, which determined that the situation constituted a threat to international peace and security and implemented international sanctions against Afghanistan. One year later, in August 2003, the government decided to increase Canada's contingent to NATO's UN-sanctioned² International Stabilization Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO had assumed full operational responsibility

2. For the importance of UN involvement, see Thierry Tardy, ed., *Peace Operations After 11 September 2001* (London: Routledge, 2004).

over Afghanistan prior to that decision and had asked the member states for more troops. On 17 March Prime Minister Jean Chrétien told the House of Commons that Canada was not going to participate in the invasion of Iraq and was sending additional troops to Afghanistan instead.³

In line with the foreign policy approach of his predecessor, Prime Minister Paul Martin chose to redeploy Canadian troops from Kabul to Kandahar and to assume command of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT),⁴ whose objective was to foster security and development, while providing assistance to the local population. One thousand additional troops made their way to Afghanistan and operated there without caveats—that is, operational restrictions. Brigadier General David Fraser assumed operational command for the multi-national brigade of Regional Command South in ISAF in February 2006.⁵ Table 2 shows Canada's absolute ISAF troop deployments from 2007–2010.⁶

When considering the *absolute* numbers of troops that NATO allies deployed to the ISAF operation from 2007–2012, Canada is the most interesting case. While conventionally viewed as a middle power⁷ and thus, according to collective action theorists, having the tendency to free-ride rather than net-contribute to a collective cause,⁸ Canada became one of the top shareholders in ISAF. In absolute terms, Canadians not only stepped up to the plate when they received NATO's call, they also shouldered an exceedingly high share of the collective burden at 4.1 percent until 2011, when the decision was made to significantly reduce the Canadian force contributions by over 65 percent, which dropped the overall Canadian contribution to 2.3 percent (including 2012). Both before and after the reduction, Canada's

3. I have argued elsewhere that Canada indirectly supported the US operation in Iraq by sending 31 exchange officers to serve in Iraq alongside American forces, and by having its naval ships help to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq. See Benjamin Zyla and Joel J. Sokolsky, "Canada and the Atlantic Alliance in the post-Cold War era: More NATO than NATO?" in Nikola Hynek and David Bosold, eds, *Canada's New Foreign and Security Policy Strategies: Re-Examining Soft and Hard Dimensions of Middlepowerhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 231–250. Moreover, the lack of participation in those decisions by Parliament is noteworthy. For the ISAF decision see, for example, Philippe Lagassé, "Accountability for National Defence: Ministerial Responsibility, Military Command and Parliamentary Oversight," *IRPP Study 4* (March 2010).
4. For a greater discussion see Kenneth Holland, "The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team: The arm of development in Kandahar Province," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010): 276–291.
5. For a detailed account of the early years of Canada's Afghan mission, see James Cox, "Afghanistan: The Canadian Military Mission," Library of Parliament, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Ottawa, 2007.
6. "ISAF Placemats, 2007–2011," North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) <http://www.isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php> (accessed 24 Nov. 2012). All calculations were made by the author; numbers are rounded up.
7. Unlike great powers, second-tier powers do not hold sufficient material capabilities, and thus strategic reach, to project their power abroad. They cannot act alone internationally; they embrace the principles of multilateralism, compromise, and good international citizenship.
8. See, for example, Keith Hartley and Todd Sandler, "NATO burden-sharing: Past and future," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 6 (1999): 665–680; Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, "An economic theory of alliances," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48, no. 3 (1966): 266–279.

Table 2. Canada's absolute ISAF troop deployments, 2007–2010.

Country/year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total 2007–2012	% of total	% of total non-US	% of change 2007–10	Rank
USA	15,150	19,406	29,830	77,490	90,000	90,000	31,9875.7	53.7	151.0	494.1	1
UK	6539	8326	8587	9500	9500	9500	51,951.6	8.7	24.5	45.3	2
Germany	3031	3400	3664	4401	4930	4187	23,612.3	4.0	11.1	38.1	3
Italy	2239	2427	2477	3370	3871	3959	18,343.5	3.1	8.7	76.8	4
France	1020	2225	2891	3770	3962	2653	16,521.9	2.8	7.8	160.0	5
Canada	2363	2536	2826	2827	2115	811	13,517.1	2.3	6.4	-65.7	6
Total	22,835	27,455	58,711	114,199	127,317	123,019	473,535.8	85.3	239.9	2144.4	28
Total (non-US)	22,827	27,446	58,703	114,195	127,313	123,015	473,498.5	85.2	239.9	1650.3	27
Average	913	1098	2097	4079	4547	4394	17127.5	3.0	8.6	82.5	n/a

commitment was above and beyond its *relative* ability when compared to other middle and even major powers. Conventional practice to calculate a country's share of burden in the NATO alliance is to determine the share of gross domestic product (GDP) that a particular country spends on defence. According to this method, in 2012 Canada placed 11th among NATO allies.⁹ Indeed, until 2011 Canada punched above its weight and outperformed conventional major powers like Germany, France, and Italy. Even if one considers the entire time period of 2007–2012 and thus includes the force contributions that Canada made after it left the combat operation in 2011, Canada is still the highest-ranking middle power in the alliance that contributed forces. It is also remarkable that the United States shouldered by far the largest burden of all allies. It furnished a total of 139,876 troops, or 54.3 percent of the entire ISAF force, and thus surpassed the contributions of all other NATO allies combined. This makes America, in the language of collective action theorists, a net contributor rather than a free rider.

Such absolute measures of force share do not take into consideration the overall benchmark against which force deployments were made and thus neglect the situational and material context in which those decisions for deployments, i.e. burden-sharing commitments, were made. In order to gain a more complete picture of the practice of Atlantic burden-sharing in the ISAF operation, I suggest, one needs to weigh the absolute force contributions made by the member states against their *relative* abilities to send troops. This presupposition follows the logic that national force contributions to ISAF must be calculated (and interpreted) as shares of national armed forces. If, for example, country X maintains 80,000 personnel serving in the armed services, that country's contribution to the ISAF operation must be seen as a share of its total active military duty personnel (in this example, 80,000). Unlike banks that engage in lending practices and charge interest on unpaid debt, decisions on force deployments cannot follow such logic; that is, states cannot commit forces to a particular cause if they do not have those forces at their disposal. Calculating absolute force contributions as a share of a country's total troop strength clarifies the *relative* national ability of states to send troops on NATO deployments. Such calculations are shown in Table 3¹⁰ and produce a very different picture with regard to burden-sharing practices (and rankings) in the context of ISAF in Afghanistan. To be more specific, this index displays the share of military personnel deployed to Afghanistan calculated as a percentage of the size of the armed forces employed by the selected member state at a given time.

While Germany, for example, deployed a total of 14,496 Bundeswehr soldiers to Afghanistan, its relative force share currently deployed to ISAF was only 1.45 percent. For a country in the heart of Europe that employs more than 250,000 active military personnel, that is a rather low share. Most surprising in Table 3, however, is that conventional middle powers like Canada, the Netherlands, and

9. See International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2012.

10. Calculations were made by the author based on statistics provided by NATO.

Table 3. ISAF contributions as a share of active military duty personnel, 2007–11.

Country/year	% of total available nat. force	Rank
Canada	4.36	1
UK	4.35	2
Netherlands	3.29	3
Denmark	3.18	4
Estonia	3.11	5
USA	2.49	6
Lithuania	2.33	7
Norway	2.31	8
Latvia	2.22	9
Albania	1.79	10
Croatia	1.76	11
Czech Republic	1.61	12
Germany	1.45	13
Italy	1.36	14
Hungary	1.35	15
Bulgaria	1.32	16
Poland	1.28	17
Romania	1.24	18
Belgium	1.13	19
Slovak Republic	1.01	20
Slovenia	0.99	21
Luxembourg	0.91	22
France	0.76	23
Spain	0.71	24
Portugal	0.30	25
Turkey	0.22	26
Greece	0.09	27
Iceland	0.00	28

Denmark place as top-tier shareholders rather than free riders. In other words, they contributed more to the public good than they received from it, and thus proved the predictions of collective action theorists wrong: these countries were not free riders but committed international actors.

In summary, the relative force share index denotes the relative ability of states to deploy troops by weighting the states' absolute force shares against their national ability to deploy forces in the first place. As Table 3 suggests with regard to ISAF, medium-sized countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Estonia

outperformed states that are conventionally considered major powers, such as Italy, Germany, and France, and even the United States, NATO's super power. How can one explain such strong burden-sharing commitments made by middle powers? In the next section, I address that question by examining the case of Canada.

The norm of external responsibility

The above pattern of observed commitments seems to suggest that there is something more to Canadian burden-sharing practices than what can be explained by pursuing, as declinist scholarship in Canadian foreign policy often does, cost-benefit calculations that narrowly define national interests.¹¹ In fact, Canada had very little relative gains to expect from a war that was dominated by Uncle Sam under its umbrella of the "War on Terror." Moreover, open source material on Canada's entry into Afghanistan gives no indication that the US offered Canada (or any other NATO ally) private benefits for joining the ISAF effort.¹² That in itself provides the first indication that rationalist explanations for Canadian burden-sharing practices have limited explanatory value.

More plausible, I suggest, is that Canadian burden-sharing practices were driven by strong moral and normative principles, namely, what I call a perceived "external responsibility" to help others to foster peace, freedom, stability, and development in their milieus. Those structural normative predispositions at the state level, I suggest, help to better explain and understand Canadian burden-sharing practices in the context of ISAF in Afghanistan. Above all, sharing the burden of an international institution like NATO could be regarded as a social action that, informed by deep-seated normative beliefs, is directed toward a specific set of social purposes at the national and international level. Analysis of these normative predispositions appeals to a different kind of logic—the logic of appropriateness,¹³ as opposed to the logic of consequences—and suggests Canada's preference for a value-based, rather than strictly rational, foreign policy on Afghanistan.

The term external responsibility is based on Arnold Wolfers's argument that states can pursue "milieu goals" in their foreign policies. He defined milieu goals as those that reveal states' motivations to shape conditions in the environment in which they operate by promoting certain international economic, social, or

11. See, for example, Andrew Cohen, *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* (Toronto: MacLellan & Stewart, 2004); Jack L. Granatstein, *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* second edition (Toronto: HarperPerennialCanada, 2004); Kim Richard Nossal, "Pinchpenny diplomacy: the decline of 'good international citizenship' in Canadian foreign policy," *International Journal* 54, no. 1 (winter 1998–1999): 88–105.

12. For a detailed discussion see Zyla, "Canada and collective action in Afghanistan."

13. James G. March and Johan P. Olson, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

political conditions.¹⁴ External responsibility, according to Wolfers, is associated with great powers that, thanks to their material wealth, can afford to have interests beyond their narrowly defined territorial boundaries.¹⁵ Thus, the shouldering of international responsibilities is mostly expected by powerful states whose resources allow them to act beyond their national interests; they have a surplus of resources, as well as the ability to make those resources readily available for the pursuance of normative goals.

Before I trace the norm of external responsibility as a motivational force for Canadian burden-sharing practices in Afghanistan, I will briefly elucidate, from a theoretical point of view, what norms are and how they can influence the foreign policy practices of states.

To start with, norms are different from values. Sociologically speaking, values are attitudes that social actors hold toward, for example, certain public policies or practices. Values can easily change. In contrast, norms are deep-seated “intersubjective beliefs about the social and natural world that define actors, their situations, and the possibilities of action”¹⁶; norms do not operate at the individual level—they are formed and perpetuated through social interactions. For norms to form, statements guiding behaviour need to be accepted by a society.¹⁷ Once accepted, norms prescribe and/or regulate specific forms and standards of behaviour and “express the agents’ identities.”¹⁸ In that sense, norms have a prescriptive element, as they express how things ought to be in the world. In other words, norms are identified regularities among social actors and reflect actual patterns of behaviour.¹⁹ Norms also help actors to situate themselves in relation to other social actors, and to interpret these actors’ interests and actions. They are relatively rigid and context insensitive,²⁰ meaning they do not change easily with changing international environments. This characteristic makes norms traceable in history as

14. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 73–77; see also Inis L. Claude, “The common defense and great-power responsibilities,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 5 (1986): 721.
15. Inis L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, fourth edition (New York: Random House, 1971).
16. Alexander Wendt, “Constructing international politics,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 73–74.
17. For an excellent example, see Michael M. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
18. Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19; see also Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 22; Audie Klotz, “Norms reconstituting interests: global racial equality and U.S. sanctions against South Africa,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 451–473; Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).
19. Andrew Hurrell, “Norms and ethics in international relations,” in Walter Carlsnaes, Beth A. Simmons, and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds, *Handbook of International Relations* (London: SAGE, 2002), 137–154.
20. Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, “Toward a theory of international norms: some conceptual and measurement issues,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no. 4 (1992): 634–664.

justifications for social actions (such as practices of burden-sharing)²¹ and distinct from rational models of behaviour that elevate states' preferences in their explanations of foreign policy formation.

Studying the norm of external responsibility empirically in the context of ISAF

The difficulty with studying norms is in finding a method to show how norms regulate or inspire social actions—in this case, Canadian burden-sharing practices in Afghanistan. Indeed, the specific task at hand is to empirically show how non-material, ideational factors like norms affect Canadian practices in Afghanistan. Because norms contain statements about what ought and ought not to be done—they essentially prescribe social behaviours—one could identify normative expectations of behaviour by studying speech acts through, for example, discourse analysis, while highlighting the importance of argumentation, deliberation, and persuasion in the government's public statements on, for example, its military engagements. Put differently, norms can be viewed as communication devices²² that convey given sets of normative expectations and justifications for certain actions. Norms can therefore be studied empirically. Relevant speech acts can be made in oral form (as in major public speeches by government officials on Afghanistan) and in written form (as in official government reports). Both types of communication contain normative judgements on Canada's position on Afghanistan and reflect the government's views on desirable and appropriate approaches to Afghanistan.

In this article I present an empirical study of normative judgements (and their implicit expectations of behaviour) in the oral and written government discourse on Afghanistan through a qualitative discourse analysis of the government's speech acts. I use two sets of data—first, 95 publicly given speeches on Afghanistan made by members of the Canadian government (e.g. the prime minister, Cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, and parliamentary secretaries), as well as senior bureaucrats; and second, 49 publically issued government reports stating the government's positions and actions regarding Canada's involvement in Afghanistan (e.g. the government's quarterly reports to the House of Commons). The time period for the selection of the data was limited to the years 2006–2012. I employed the software Nvivo in processing the qualitative data. In the next sections, I present the results of that discourse analysis.

21. The norm evolutions of those three countries is beyond the scope of this paper. Consequently, I do not analyze the processes of "norm emergence," "norm cascade," and "norm internalization," as put forward by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International norm dynamics and political change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 895–905.
22. Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, identity, and their limits: a theoretical reprise," in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 485.

Help, assist, aid, support

The first normative justification for Canada's commitment in Afghanistan that emerges from the empirical data is that Canada has historically felt an obligation to help other countries in their efforts to build conditions of peace, freedom, stability, and prosperity. In his public speeches, Prime Minister Stephen Harper continuously reminded Canadians not only of their history but also of their external responsibilities and obligations to remain committed to uphold the values of global peace, security, and stability that Canada's history suggests. In 2008, for example, he argued that "this country has never been isolationist, and we have always harboured a strong desire to contribute to a better and safer world."²³ In his acceptance speech for the Woodrow Wilson Award for public service on 5 September 2006, the prime minister further noted that "Canadians have always wanted a government that plays a role in the world.... And I believe that Canadians want a significant role—a clear, confident, and influential role. As proud citizens, they don't want a Canada that just goes along; they want a Canada that leads. They want a Canada that doesn't just criticize, but one that can contribute. They want a Canada that reflects their values and interests, and that punches above its weight." In his February 2008 address to the annual meeting of the Conference of Defence Associations, Harper stated that Canadians have always demonstrated willingness "to make a positive difference in a dangerous world." In other words, Harper reminded Canadians of their international responsibility, as demonstrated by their country's history, to aid in bringing peace, security, and stability to war-torn societies.

Cabinet ministers echoed the prime minister's expressed normative expectations on their speaking circuits, when they reminded Canadians that Canada went to war in Afghanistan and supported the rebuilding of that country because Afghans "have asked Canadians for their help, and thus Canada has an obligation to help them realize their hopes, to help them make something better for themselves." In September 2007, for example, Defence Minister Peter MacKay told the audience at the Diplomatic Forum in St. Andrews-on-the-Sea, New Brunswick that "[the] Afghanistan government looked to Canada and the international community to help rebuild a country devastated by decades of war and plagued by insurgents." At the Munich Security Conference in 2009, MacKay reiterated that "It is common political and human sense that people in war-torn and fragile societies want stability, food, and shelter for their families, good governance, dignity, and hope for the future."

Similarly, in 2006 then Minister of Canadian Heritage Bev Oda justified Canada's rationale for contributing to the reconstruction process in Afghanistan and expressed normative expectations by saying, "We are proud to support this democratically elected government so that this choice delivers concrete results for

23. "PM unveils revised motion on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan," Office of the Prime Minister, Ottawa, 21 February 2008. Subsequent references to speeches and documents are available throughout the text.

the Afghans, and especially for Afghan women and children who have suffered so much. The Afghans need our help. We cannot abandon them.”

What is noteworthy in studying all those speech acts is that the terms “help,” “assist,” “aid,” and “support” together were used 1465 times by members of the Canadian government and senior bureaucrats in their publicly given speeches on Afghanistan. These terms also appear 1273 times in the written reports that were issued by the government to the House of Commons. This high frequency of normative, i.e. prescriptive, elements in verbal and written speech acts provides the first strong indication of the government’s normative expectations of Canada’s external responsibility to aid Afghans in rebuilding their country. It is notable that normative views on non-military considerations, such as concern for the rights of women and children and the rule of law, moved increasingly into the discourse of Canada’s elected leaders as Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan developed. Whether this trend was the result of a growing military insurgency in Kandahar province remains to be proven. Indeed, Oda was among those in Cabinet who stressed the non-military dimension of Canada’s commitments to Afghanistan. In 2006 she proudly reminded Canadians of their government’s success in having “helped over 200,000 Afghans, 75 percent of them women, to obtain small loans to start up their own micro-businesses or purchase tools or farm animals in order to meet their families’ needs.” Moreover, according to her, with the financial assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada aspired to help renovate up to 4000 community schools, start extracurricular activities, and train about 4000 teachers in Afghanistan.

In summary, the government tried to sell the Afghan mission as part of Canada’s moral responsibility to export peace, freedom, stability, and prosperity, and thus raised normative expectations to actively support and shape the international environment through reconstruction efforts. In a speech to the Economic Club of New York on 20 September 2006, the prime minister noted, “In Afghanistan and many other places, we go out in the world to do many other things: to promote men’s liberty, women’s rights and children’s education, to build roads and provide irrigation, to fight disease and protect the environment... We are striving to work with our democratic allies to advance our common interests and values.”

Defend freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights

Canadian government officials conveyed to Canadians a second obligation stemming from the norm of external responsibility—that of Canada’s duty to defend its cherished values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Indeed, officials invoked the need to defend those values and beliefs in justifying Canadian military and political engagement in Afghanistan. The prime minister, recalling that Canada’s Afghan commitment was based on a series of UN Security Council resolutions and insinuating that the commitment was thus blessed with high international legitimacy, told the UN General Assembly on 21 September

2006 that the UN was born of a combination of states' needs and ideals "to which we all should aspire." Three months earlier, on 15 June 2006, he had informed the House of Commons that Canada was committed to helping rebuild Afghanistan for two main reasons—first, to defend freedom in North America, because "terrorism is a menace to us all. And it must be confronted wherever we find it—at home or abroad," and second, because "it is the nature of Canadians to share the peace and prosperity we have achieved here with countries torn by war, poverty, or natural disaster." A few months later, while addressing the UN General Assembly, Harper argued that "if we fail the Afghan people, we will be failing ourselves. ... And like the others, we were motivated by our own pragmatic interests and noble aspirations for all of humanity."

The prime minister's normative expectations for Canadian commitments to Afghanistan were echoed by his Cabinet ministers. On 17 May 2006, for example, Josée Verner who at the time was the minister responsible for CIDA, reminded Canadians in the House of Commons that it was precisely these deep-seated beliefs in human rights and the rule of law that justified and called for Canada's actions in Afghanistan: "We will continue to promote principles that reflect Canadian values we take pride in, such as respect for human rights, gender equality, freedom of speech and democracy." On a different occasion Verner noted that "[the] promotion of liberty, democracy, the primacy of law, human rights and the rights of children, and equality between women and men are the principles that guide all of the Canadian government's development activities. These principles reflect the values of Canadian society."

At the Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan on 20 July 2010, then foreign minister Lawrence Cannon echoed these normative expectations. He argued that Afghans required international help to build a democracy in Afghanistan: "Addressing the legacy of past and present human rights abuses is a core element of building a relationship of trust between the Government of Afghanistan and its people. ... We have heard time and again from Afghans that limited access to justice and weak rule of law are some of the greatest challenges to their sense of security."²⁴

Together, the words freedom (used 138 in oral speeches and 30 times in written speeches), democracy (185 and 43 times, respectively), rule of law (327 and 141 times, respectively), and human rights (670 and 166 times, respectively) were used a total of 1320 times in the oral speeches by government officials, elected and otherwise, and a total of 380 times in the written government speech acts.

Development and humanitarian assistance

The qualitative discourse analysis also shows that the Canadian government justified its engagements in Afghanistan in terms of addressing development and

24. See also Remarks by Mr. Stephen Wallace at the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, Ottawa, 7 May 2009.

humanitarian needs by focusing mostly on two groups of Afghan society: women and children. Indeed, the word “children” occurs 605 times in verbal speeches and 271 times in the written government reports; the term “humanitarian assistance” occurs 96 times in the written and 20 times in the oral speeches. Through repeatedly invoking these concepts, government officials created normative expectations that Canadians should help to improve the development of Afghan society. As Canada’s ambassador to Afghanistan, Arif Lalani, reminded attendees of a conference in Kabul titled “Islamic Police Women Contributing to a Secure Future” on 1 October 2007, “Afghan women are counted amongst the most vulnerable segments of Afghan society, being particularly susceptible to impacts of instability, abuse, violence, and poverty. In some regions of Afghanistan, they continue to face enormous social obstacles that exclude them from mainstream Afghan society, deny them opportunity, and deny them their basic human rights. They have a range of unique needs that we need to recognize and address.” Additionally, Cabinet ministers reported that women in Afghanistan faced barriers to education, health care, and other necessary services, and that those conditions were expected to change with Canada’s help.

The Canadian government felt a particular obligation to help improve Afghan women’s human rights, access to health and education, and representation in government. It acknowledged that Afghanistan was the country with the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with 1400 deaths per 100,000 live births, and that Afghanistan’s women’s literacy rate was also one of the lowest in the world at 12.5 percent (compared with 39.3 percent for Afghan men).²⁵ Having framed these issues normatively as humanitarian assistance and maternal health issues, the Canadian government asked Parliament to justify the spending of tax dollars to improve access to basic health care in Afghanistan, especially among women and children.

The government also referred to the suffering of young Afghan children in terms of malnutrition, lack of education, and lack of basic human rights to encourage Canadians to expect their government to address these concerns, particularly by building community-based schools and learning centres in rural and remote areas and by training teachers to provide literacy and vocational training. Minister MacKay best summed up Canada’s moral obligation to help Afghan children when he told the Chateauguay Chamber of Commerce on 17 October 2007 that “[with] infant and maternal mortality rates among the worst in the world six years ago, more than one in 10 children died at birth, and a woman died in childbirth every 30 minutes. One in five children died before the age of five, mostly from preventable diseases. Shockingly, one in eight died simply because they didn’t have access to clean drinking water. ... We can be proud of having contributed to 40,000 fewer children dying at birth this year than during the Taliban’s rule.” MacKay went on to remind his audience that more needed to be done, especially in terms of providing immunization for children against polio and measles.

25. “Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Setting the Course to 2011,” Government of Canada, Ottawa, 2008, 5.

Conclusion and implications

Existing studies on Canadian burden-sharing practices in NATO pre-2007 suggest that Canada has not been a free rider but rather a committed ally.²⁶ This article examined the extent to which Canada's burden-sharing practices can be witnessed in NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan 2007–2012. It answered this question in the affirmative, suggesting that Canada's commitment to ISAF is part of a larger pattern of commitment to NATO burden-sharing. Indeed, rather than being a free rider, as collective action theorists and the declinist school of Canadian foreign policy posit, Canada was a committed NATO ally in the ISAF operation. When NATO members' absolute force contributions as a share of their *relative* capacities to send troops are compared, Canada is found to have deployed the highest percentage of its troops to Afghanistan (4.36 percent). In other words, no other middle power shouldered a greater slice of the collective NATO burden than did Canada.

The article then went on to ask why Canada shouldered the burden to the extent that it did, and how one could explain such a strong commitment to NATO and Afghanistan in particular. To answer these questions, I demonstrated that Canada's practices of sharing Atlantic burdens were informed by the norm of "external responsibility"—that it is Canada's deep-seated intersubjective belief that it should aid in helping other countries to secure peace, freedom, stability, and development. Put differently, Canada did not pursue narrowly defined national interests but absolute foreign policy goals in its engagement with Afghanistan because it was motivated by normative expectations to promote economic, social, political, and humanitarian development abroad.

A qualitative discourse analysis that conceive norms as communication devices allowed me to study the government's speeches about Afghanistan. My data set comprised 95 public speeches on Afghanistan made by Canadian government ministers and senior bureaucrats and 49 publicly issued government reports on Afghanistan. The analysis revealed that those speech acts showed the government's particular concern for women and children as vulnerable minorities in Afghan society that required Canadian's assistance. Government officials expressed strong normative predispositions to providing humanitarian assistance, fostering development, and promoting deeply held beliefs in individual freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Afghanistan.²⁷

On the conceptual level, the findings of the discourse analysis seem to contradict Wolfers's logic that only major powers can show strong normative predispositions, perceive an external responsibility to other states, and pursue what Wolfers called milieu goals. Indeed, Canada, a middle power, devoted its resources to NATO

26. See Benjamin Zyla, "NATO and post-Cold War burden-sharing: Canada the laggard?" *International Journal* 64, no. 2 (2009): 337–359 and "Years of free-riding? Canada, the new NATO, and collective crisis management in Europe, 1989–2001," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 22–39.

27. One obvious limitation of the approach undertaken in this paper (i.e. that of studying rhetoric) is the neglect of studying what actors actually do and to see if their behaviour complies with the identified norms (or not). Such an approach requires more space than was available for this essay.

above and beyond its *relative* capabilities on the basis of a perceived external responsibility to Afghanistan.

On the theoretical level, this article's empirical findings show that the commonly held ontological assumptions of rationalist collective action theory and its sister theories in the fields of international relations and Canadian foreign policy do not hold sufficient explanatory power. Above all, the theoretical presumptions of rationalist collective action theory fail to pay heed to the human nature of state actors and the ethics of national statecraft. They also fail to take into account the fact that states' normative predispositions and expectations are analytically prior to the states' exchanges in the political marketplace. Rationalist scholarship on NATO burden-sharing ignores the conscientious and independent thinking that can underlie state action. Consequently, the study of norms has been considered irrelevant to the study of the governing processes of states in rationalist thinking.

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