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Peace Diplomacy: Considering the Norway Model

Canada's move to bolster its developing defence partnership with Norway, most recently through the contemplated submarine deal,¹ should make this a good time to broaden its overall security relationship with Norway, including through learning from the latter's influential and widely respected program of peace diplomacy. In fact, Norway has indicated that Canada is among countries that have expressed interest in furthering peace diplomacy efforts, although Canadian officials have to date not responded to requests for confirmation and further information.

Norway's Approach

A compelling window on Norway's long-standing "diplomacy for peace and conflict resolution" is available in a 2025 Norwegian White Paper on the program.² The Norwegian Government's summary of the White Paper³ begins by clearly linking peace diplomacy to global, regional, and, notably, its own national security:

"Diplomacy for peace and conflict resolution is one of Norway's most important lines of action for a safer and more stable world, which is in Norway's clear interest. Efforts to resolve wars and conflicts are an integral part of Norwegian foreign policy and are intertwined with Norway's foreign policy efforts to ensure our own security and welfare and to find common solutions to global challenges."

The white paper points to Norway's emphasis on the diplomatic "defence of international law and the importance of efforts to reduce war and conflict," portraying conflict resolution efforts as "essential" to its own security.

Peace diplomacy is pursued, says the White Paper, "in close contact with close allies [take note, Canada], key countries in other regions, the UN and civil society." The paper counts "over forty wars and conflicts" that the program has addressed over the past thirty-five years. Through it "Norway has facilitated comprehensive peace agreements in distant conflicts" (e.g. Colombia, Nepal, Guatemala) and has facilitated ceasefires and humanitarian agreements. The program has also included attention to "conflicts that affect Europe more directly" (e.g. Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Yemen, Syria and the

Horn of Africa), and the paper notes that Norway has “drawn on [its] broad experience to support Ukraine in its preparation for and conduct of negotiations.”

While sustaining dialogue in trouble spots can be costly, it in fact represents a tiny fraction of overall security spending (which includes not only defence, but also development, diplomacy, and disarmament). For example, Norway’s 2025 budget for peace and reconciliation amounted to “about 0.68 per cent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ total budget for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation,” according to the White Paper.

The paper identifies a key requirement for effective peace diplomacy as the ability to muster the political will to stick with it (which obviously also means sustained funding):

“When Norway engages in a peace process, we have a tradition of doing so thoroughly and with a long-term perspective. The parties must be able to rely on us to accompany them through thick and thin, regardless of political winds and external storms. The prerequisite for this has been broad political support in Norway.”

Similarly, mature political will also means a willingness to risk failure. Success in such efforts is far from guaranteed (a reality that bedevils wars far more), as the White Paper acknowledges:

“The complexity is considerable, and the dilemmas are many. The political temperature in a conflict is often high, and the situation is unpredictable when hostilities are ongoing. Norway is therefore continuously working on conflict analyses, assessment of current issues, and extensive networking in order to have the best possible understanding of the situation and to be able to reduce the political risk of getting involved.”

Another key requirement is a “willingness to talk to all parties.” While Norway acknowledges risks that this could sometimes be perceived as legitimizing controversial conflict actors, successive governments have concluded that “the upsides” of such contacts “outweigh the downsides if the contact is handled...at the right level, with clear messages and expectations.”

The White Paper goes into considerable detail to elaborate other key elements of conflict resolution, notably impartiality and inclusion,⁴ and identifies four main types of action that Norway follows: direct contact diplomacy, informal facilitation, formal facilitation, processes formally led by others.

Canada’s Approach

While Canada has not been known to operate any similarly dedicated program of “diplomacy for peace and conflict resolution,” it has had a genuinely earned reputation, and self-image, as a bridge- and consensus-builder across various political divides.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, for example, led in the western world's gradual engagement with mainland China to bring it into the United Nations and onto the international stage. And near the end of his tenure, Mr. Trudeau embarked on a high-profile peace initiative aimed at jolting the US and the USSR into greater attention to curbing their dangerous Cold War nuclear arms race. A 2014 report in *Open Canada*⁵ reflects on middle power bridge-building and documents some Canadian efforts towards that end during the Cold War years.

It's clear you can't be an effective leader in major initiatives like the Ottawa landmines treaty or the International Criminal Court without determined political leadership and diplomatic engagement in building some critically important bridges. The establishment of the Arctic Council owes much to Canadian diplomatic bridge-building. Those examples go back to a particular period of Canadian diplomatic activism, including leadership in advancing human security and the "responsibility to protect," led by then Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

A more recent example was highlighted a few years back in the *Ceasefire.Ca Blog*, as documented by the International Crisis Group, when Canadian diplomats facilitated key talks in Cameroon between Government and separatist leaders.⁶

Canadian diplomats have also been recognized for their roles in international forums, including of course the UN and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conferences, as committed to finding common ground, building consensus, and promoting multilateralism more broadly.

Canada was once a pioneer in peacekeeping, and with that came reliable conflict de-escalation diplomacy in conflicts that required ongoing peacekeeping intervention and commensurate diplomatic attention and engagement.

Since 2016 Canada has, through Global Affairs Canada, supported a related "Peace and Stabilization Operations Program." It is very different from Norway's "diplomacy for peace and conflict resolution," but is aimed at similar challenges and outcomes related to regional stability, respect for a rules-based order, and ultimately the security of Canada. Canada's PSOPs is described as "a flexible tool to address evolving threats in conflict-affected countries before they reach Canadian shores."⁷

Descriptive material on PSOPs says Canada's strategic interests, from Canadian security and prosperity to upholding a fair and effective international rules-based order, "are advanced through meaningful diplomatic engagement." Indeed, they are, but diplomacy is not really the focus of this program. It was launched in 2016 with a three-year budget of \$450 million.⁸ About 78 percent of the annual \$150 million was designated for programming through grants and contributions, while another roughly 12 percent was directed toward the deployment of Canadian police officers and civilian experts "for rapid response to crises and natural disasters."

What now?

The PSOPs program thus joins other programs that are part of a history of worthy Canadian peace advancement and bridge-building efforts (which, of course, recalls the apocryphal story of an international competition for the most boring news headline of the year, with the winning entry being, "Yet another worthy Canadian initiative" – in a world of constant political drama and overt military aggression, a lot more of those boring headlines would be a welcome relief).

However, those types of positive Canadian initiatives are not a prominent feature of current Canadian diplomacy, despite the obvious and growing needs for just that in a rapidly militarizing world of dangerously heightened tension.

Instead, the great powers and their compliant allies greet accelerated militarization with an enthusiasm reminiscent of *Dr. Strangelove's* Major Kong whooping and waving astride the bomb as it plummets toward universal doom. And it is in this dangerous world that Canada has decided to take an axe to diplomacy and other war prevention funding.

Years of budget cuts at Global Affairs Canada are continuing, with spending projections that indicate the department's basic budget will have dropped by 27% from 2025-26 to 28-29.⁹ The stated aim of the cuts is said to be "aligning development, peace, and security programming with current strategic priorities."¹⁰

Even more dramatic are the projected cuts in spending on the PSOPs program, dropping by 43 percent from 2025-26 to 28-29.¹¹

Canada is also joining "the world's wealthiest countries" in "chopping foreign aid."¹² According to analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, "by 2029, Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) relative to the size of our economy (Gross National Income–GNI) is projected to fall to 0.17 per cent - the lowest since 1964, five years before [former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson] laid out his challenge."¹³ That challenge, issued by a commission led by him, proposed that aid from wealthier countries be at 0.7 percent of their GNI. The proposal was taken up in a UN resolution with an expectation that the target could be broadly met by 1975¹⁴ – with some countries, like the Nordics, routinely meeting that benchmark, though Canada never has.

While there are debates about the continuing effectiveness of economic development assistance in promoting long-term economic growth and prosperity in lower income countries, it's clear that the issue of aid effectiveness will not be advanced by funding cuts. Furthermore, the more immediate humanitarian impact of foreign aid is universally acknowledged as essential and life-saving – and for that, much more, not less, is needed.¹⁵

The Carney Government's increases in military spending, however excessive one may judge them to be, are generally in response to some widely understood and genuine needs, but no one can reasonably argue that the government's severe cuts to diplomacy, peacebuilding (e.g. through PSOPs), and development and humanitarian assistance, are a response to declining need.

Now Canada rides the militarism wave, while the Government keeps telling us, and rightly so, that we live in a dangerous, perilous world – but it is a world in which we will come to learn all over again that the perils the planet now faces have no military solutions. Rather, it is skilled and consistent peace and conflict de-escalating diplomacy, peacebuilding, peace support operations, and development/humanitarian initiatives to address the fundamental sources of instability and war, that clearly are what the world desperately needs more of.

Foreign policy and diplomacy experts have been calling for a revitalized foreign affairs department and diplomacy.¹⁶ Prof. Michael Manulak of Carleton University calls on Canada to focus the Prime Minister's vision of resurgent middle powers, set out in his now famous Davos speech,¹⁷ on reinforcing the multilateral structures that are "badly in need of support," notably the United Nations. In one of the more substantive, and constructive, responses to the Prime Minister at Davos, Prof. Manulak proposes a rethink of the Prime Minister's idea of a "variable geometry" of middle powers addressing different issues through different *ad hoc* coalitions of the willing: "Rather than dispersing [middle power] efforts among dozens of plurilateral initiatives, they should direct that political energy toward making multilateralism work."¹⁸

Acknowledging the magnitude of the challenge, he says that "middle powers can play a lead role again" to reinforce the UN as an "institution of collective security," by emphasizing its role in conflict prevention, "putting new ideas about peace and security" on the UN agenda, providing greater financial support, and devoting some of the enhanced middle power military capabilities "to UN collective security and UN-authorized peace operations."

Notably, A significant objective of Norway's peace diplomacy and its efforts to "resolve wars and conflicts" is explicitly stated as building "support for multilateral institutions and security policy cooperation."

There is one mention of Canada in the Norwegian White Paper:

"A number of countries have recently wished to strengthen their involvement in peace processes and wish to learn from Norwegian experiences. Some seek to strengthen or build up an internal apparatus for peace diplomacy. Countries we are in contact with about this include Brazil, **Canada [p. 34]**, Cuba, Finland, Indonesia, Ireland, Kenya, China, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, South Africa, Turkey, and Uruguay" (emphasis added).¹⁹

Global Affairs Canada has to date not responded to requests for more information about Canada's engagement with Norway on "peace and conflict resolution efforts" and the nature of Canada's apparent (and welcome) interest in peace diplomacy.

End Notes

¹ Government of Norway, "Canada to enter into historic submarine partnership with Germany and Norway," Press release, 07 July 2026. <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/whats-new/canada-inngar-historisk-ubatsamarbeid-med-tyskland-og-norge/id3168664/>

² Full Norway White Paper PDF: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/5bf6f15145ad4936bdff30dcd90a8d80/en-gb/pdfs/stm202420250030000engpdfs.pdf>

³ The Norwegian Government's summary of the much more detailed White Paper: "Norway's efforts for peace and conflict resolution in a troubled world." Meld. St. 30 (2024–2025) Report to the Storting (white paper) <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/meld.-st.-30-20242025/id3108206/?ch=2>

⁴ The point of impartiality and inclusion is "that all actors and sectors affected by the conflict and the peace that is being negotiated are listened to and can provide input." The participation of women is identified as "a particular priority."

⁵ Hanna Kassab, "Canada: The bridge between weak and powerful states," *Open Canada*, 18 September 2014. <https://opencanada.org/canada-the-bridge-between-weak-and-powerful-states/>

⁶ <https://www.ceasefire.ca/canada-and-mediation-china-and-avoiding-war-hypocrisy-as-policy-and-more/>

⁷ Peace and Stabilization Operations Program. <https://international.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/corporate/reports/departmental-plan/global-affairs-2026-2027-departmental-plan-supplementary-tables>

⁸ Backgrounder – Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (2016-11-02), Global Affairs Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2016/08/backgrounder-peace-and-stabilization-operations-program.html>

⁹ Global Affairs Canada's 2026-27 Departmental Plan.

In 2024-25 and 25-26 there was a spike in the GAC budget, which overstates the decline, but even from 2023-24 to 28-29 the decline is still 20% from a level that had already been declining in the earlier 2020s.

¹⁰ Neil Moss, "Feds' plan to slash foreign ministry budget by 20 per cent 'ill-timed and short-sighted': observers," *Hill Times*, 18 March 2026. <https://www.hilltimes.com/2026/03/18/feds-plan-to-slash-foreign-ministry-budget-by-20-per-cent-ill-timed-and-short-sighted-observers/495776/>

¹¹ Global Affairs Canada's 2026-27 Departmental Plan.

¹² Steven Chase, "Wealthy countries, including Canada, cut foreign aid," *Globe and Mail*, 06 June 2026. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-part-of-global-retreat-on-foreign-aid/>

¹³ David Macdonald, "The end of Pearson's dream: The devastating impact of federal cuts on international aid," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 20 April 2026. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/the-end-of-pearsons-dream-the-devastating-impact-of-federal-cuts-on-international-aid/>

¹⁴ Jacky Habib, “The Surprising Story Behind Canada’s Declining Leadership in Foreign Aid,” *The Future of Good*, 16 September 2019. <https://futureofgood.co/the-surprising-story-behind-canadas-declining-leadership-in-foreign-aid/#:~:text=The%20Pearson%20Commission's%20breakthrough%20report,leadership%20in%20the%20next%20decade>.

¹⁵ Andrew Sherriff, “The consequences of international aid cuts,” ECDPM (the European Centre for Development Policy Management) commentary, 10 April 2026. <https://ecdpm.org/work/consequences-international-aid-cuts>

¹⁶ For example:

Colin Robertson, “Time to Revitalize Canada’s Foreign Service,” *Policy Magazine*, 08 May 2022. <https://www.policymagazine.ca/time-to-revitalize-canadas-foreign-service/>

Senators Peter M. Boehm and Peter Harder, as chair and deputy chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, spearheaded the Committee’s 2022 report, *More than a Vocation: Canada's Need for a 21st Century Foreign Service*. In broad terms, the detailed report called for an overhaul of Canada's foreign service and enhance its diplomatic capabilities. <https://sencanada.ca/en/info-page/parl-44-1/aefa-canadian-foreign-service/>

¹⁷ Mark Carney, World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, 20 January 2026. <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minister-carney-addresses>

¹⁸ Michael W. Manulak, “The False Choice Behind Values-Base Realism,” *Policy Magazine*, 20 July 2026. <https://www.policymagazine.ca/the-false-choice-behind-values-based-realism/>

¹⁹ Full Norway White Paper PDF: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/5bf6f15145ad4936bdf30dcd90a8d80/en-gb/pdfs/stm202420250030000engpdfs.pdf>