

# A Comprehensive Counter-Insurgency Strategy: How a return to hard power can benefit the Trudeau government

by Corey Scott

In today's world, the most significant threat to global peace is the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This stateless entity is driven by radical ideology and countries seeking to combat the spread of its power and influence must realize where the strength of an enemy like this lays—their ability to organize quietly and blend into communities and their growth due to highly politically and socially unstable environments.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the ideological structure of ISIL, the exclusive use of either hard or soft power<sup>2</sup> to combat ISIL is not the best way to extinguish this insurgent group. As such, Canada, a member of the anti-ISIL coalition, should balance its soft power contributions with their previously contributed hard power resource, such as fighter jets used to launch sorties.<sup>3</sup> This combined contribution is vital not only to help to destroy ISIL, but will also maintain the perception of Canada as an important leader in such an endeavor.

Canada's counterinsurgency doctrine calls for the incorporation of three components to its military contributions to COIN (counterinsurgency) campaigns—"moral, intellectual and physical."<sup>4</sup> This doctrine embodies a smart power approach, as it combines public diplomacy, social infrastructure, military advice, and military force. Operation IMPACT (August 2014- present), Canada's contribution to the anti-ISIL coalition, initially consisted of all three requisite components. However, the election of a new federal government in 2015 ended the "physical" component, by removing Canada's six fighter jets. Before the removal decision, the six fighter jets conducted 1,378 sorties and 251 airstrikes and successfully destroyed over two hundred fighting positions, over a hundred ISIL equipment and vehicles, and thirty IED factories and storage facilities.<sup>5</sup> Airstrikes ceased on February 15, 2016, and Canada's air support in the coalition's campaign was limited to reconnaissance and refueling missions on behalf of the coalition.<sup>6</sup>

While the Combined Joint Task Force and the US-led anti-ISIL coalition utilize both hard and soft power to combat ISIL, the Canadian government's policy currently only takes a soft power approach. This falls short of that expected of a country of its stature. The removal of the hard power component has led to an imbalanced and incomplete contribution, when their activities are viewed through the lens of their own military doctrine. One might point to the presence of military advisors as being proof of some hard power element remaining. However, these advisors, due to the nature of their tasks such as training and developing strategies, fall more accurately under the intellectual component, than the physical component, of Canada's COIN doctrine.

Canada's decision to focus on soft power and withdraw its fighter jets from the military coalition was a key component of the platform on which Prime Minister Trudeau's Liberal Party campaigned. Under this platform, the Liberal Party ultimately gained a majority of seats in parliament during the 2015 federal election. Nevertheless, public opinion polls show that the majority of Canadians are not in favor of this policy.<sup>7</sup> 2016 polling data points to the approval for the Canadian COIN contribution to be balanced through the reintroduction of a controlled hard power, namely airstrikes. Public opinion suggests a strong desire for Canada to avoid being perceived as slipping into the shadows, rather than making a contribution similar to that of larger countries in the anti-ISIL coalition.

The Trudeau government ought to take these poll findings seriously and the government should move to align its policy regarding the anti-ISIL campaign to the will of the people by reintroducing Canadian fighter jets. Not only will this better represent the interests of the Canadian people, it will also to enhance Canada's reputation as a global leader in the fight against ISIL.

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Defeating ISIS Policy Notes
- 2 Militaries, as a result of their training, are capable of engaging with other military personnel, militia, and insurgents. They are not, however, capable of combating ideologies through hard power, as physical force cannot kill an idea. Hard power has traditionally been used by countries in pursuit of hegemonic foreign policy goals. In contrast, soft power focuses on regenerative methods, including nation building, resource distribution, and infrastructure. Canada's use of hard power, often complementing a similar effort by the United States in coalition military campaigns, is most valuable when "the enemy" is a state rather than a non-state actor. For more on smart power see Joseph Nye
- 3 Sorties are defensive attacks used by military forces
- 4 Canadian Counterinsurgency Operations
- 5 Operation IMPACT airstrike statistics

- 6 Operation IMPACT general information
- 7 Angus Reid Institute Poll 2016- CBC News

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