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The Peace, Order and Good Government Centre: An Exciting Opportunity for Canada

By Sujit Choudhry

Synopsis

In response to the mandate letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs directing the establishment of a Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Government (CCPOGG), Sujit Choudhry provides some preliminary ideas on how such a center could operate. This article includes an overview of the current global context and its respective challenges, a look at Canada's comparative advantages in addressing these challenges, and proposals for the structure of activities while highlighting four thematic areas on which CCPOGG could focus.



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! Introduction

In his recent mandate letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, François-Philippe Champagne, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau directed Minister Champagne to:

establish the Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Government 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

The **CCPOGG** represents an exciting opportunity for Canada to create a leading international institution that uniquely combines democracy support with mediation and conflict resolution work. In this brief, I set out some preliminary ideas on what CCPOGG could be.

I begin with the global context and the challenges they create – democratic backsliding, civil wars and internationalized mediation, the (mis)use of social media and digital platforms, and the exclusion of marginalized groups (Section B). I then turn to Canada’s comparative advantages in addressing these challenges – Canadian soft power, Canadian expertise, and our existing strength in democracy support and peace processes (Section C). I suggest how CCPOGG could structure its activities – thinking and doing, being independent of the Government of Canada, and international partnerships (Section D). Finally, I suggest **CCPOGG** for CCPOGG, where it can be strategic by focusing on niches that are not squarely addressed by peer institutions in Canada and abroad, but which complement existing offerings (Section E):

- **CCPOGG** will be a leading international institution that uniquely combines democracy support with mediation and conflict resolution work.
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- **promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups (e.g. women, youth, indigenous peoples, and LGBTI communities) as a cross-cutting theme.**

I conclude in Section F, by making the case for Canadian leadership.

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CCPOGG would come at a pivotal time in the struggle for democracy and peace across the globe. I draw attention to four contemporary challenges:

- **Democratic backsliding.** Over the past four decades, democracy has advanced dramatically. In 1975, only 25% of the countries in the world, and 36% of the world’s population, lived in democracies; by 2018, 62% of countries and 57% of the world’s population did, with non-democracies evenly divided between authoritarian and hybrid (i.e. semi-democratic) regimes (International IDEA, 2019). Transitions from authoritarian and hybrid regimes continue – for example, most recently in Armenia, Ethiopia, and Malaysia. However, a second front has opened up – democratic backsliding in countries where democracy was thought to have been consolidated. This includes newer democracies (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Turkey) as well as older ones (e.g. India). During the Cold War, the greatest threat to democracies came from unconstitutional seizures of power. Now the threat to democracy comes from parties that comply with the law, contest and win democratic elections, and capture democracies from within. The would-be autocrats’ tool kit has become increasingly sophisticated. It extends beyond undermining political competition through electoral fraud and manipulating electoral systems, restricting civil and political liberties and closing civic space, to encompass aggrandizing executive power, marginalizing legislatures, politicizing career bureaucracies, capturing independent courts, and creating networks of corruption, patronage and clientelism.

• **Civil wars and internationalized mediation.** In the post-Cold War period, interstate conflicts are relatively rare and intrastate conflicts are the norm. In 2019, there were 52 armed conflicts with at least one party being the government of a state; of these, 50 were intrastate conflicts (Pettersson et al., 2019). Civil wars vary in structure: they can operate across the state as a whole, with competing groups contending for power at the centre (e.g. Mozambique) or with a significant regional minority seeking to share central power and secure autonomy against a majority (e.g. Cyprus); or they may be regional insurgencies launched by small minorities to obtain special autonomy (e.g. Philippines). The causes of civil wars are disputes over political power, economic resources, physical security, and/or cultural identity, and effective peace agreements must address these issues. International mediation support has become the norm, often through the United Nations (Secretary-General and Special Envoys, Security Council), regional organizations (e.g. OAS, AU, EU), and/or contact groups of interested states.

• **(Mis)use of social media and digital platforms.** Digital communications platforms have become pervasive factors in the democratization and democratic backsliding, as well as in peace processes. This presents both opportunities but also real challenges. Digital platforms potentially provide a platform for public participation in political processes that are still largely in the hands of elites. But as has been noted, the same platforms are at the root of the “increasingly toxic nature of the digital public sphere, the amplification of misinformation and disinformation, the declining reliability of information, [and] heightened polarization” (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019). Digital platforms have been used to target the integrity of electoral systems, encourage political violence in fragile contexts, and undermine public faith in political institutions and processes.

• **The exclusion of marginalized groups.** Marginalized groups – such as women, youth, indigenous peoples, and LGBTI communities – have been excluded within, or disadvantaged by, democratic backsliding, peace processes and digital platforms. For example, democratic backsliding has generally gone hand in hand

with erosion of rights for marginalized groups; those groups are generally underrepresented during negotiations leading to transitions to peace (as the United Nations has recognized through Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security) and digital spaces can be threatening (but also empowering) for these minorities. Canada has a comparative advantage that positions it to play a global leadership role in developing and implementing agenda-setting programs to respond to these challenges to democracy and peace.

C. Why Canada?

At the outset, it must also be acknowledged that Canada’s overseas development assistance has been declining. CCPOGG would be a visible way to address this critique.

• **Canadian soft power.** Canada has re-engaged internationally under the Liberal government. It has become a vocal champion of multilateralism and the rules-based international order and has been visibly engaged in its defense (e.g. in Ukraine and Venezuela). Canada’s domestic political and economic model – as a federal constitutional democracy, that is open, multicultural, multilingual, and committed to human rights and the rule of law – has enhanced Canada’s soft power on the global stage. We are an international leader with respect to the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples, women, youth, and LGBTI communities. Canada’s institutions and constitutional framework – especially the Supreme Court of Canada, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the constitutional accommodation of difference through federalism, aboriginal rights, and language rights – have attracted considerable attention across the world. More recently, our political and economic resilience and steadfast commitments to diversity and tolerance, at a very troubled time, makes our successes even the more notable on the global stage.

• **Canadian expertise.** As has often been remarked, Canadians have for many years been at the forefront of democracy support and peace processes globally, albeit not always from within Canadian institutions. A leading example is the National Democratic Institute, with

particular expertise in political party support. Many of its most highly regarded experts have been Canadian. Another example is the United Nations Standby Team of Mediation Experts, with expertise on issues including dialogue processes, gender and inclusion, power-sharing, security sector reform (SSR), and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR). A disproportionate number of members of the Standby Team have been Canadian. A third example is the International Peace Institute, based in New York. Finally, Canadian scholars (e.g. Will Kymlicka, John McGarry, and Charles Taylor) have been leading global figures in framing practical solutions to questions of peace and democracy in diverse societies. Crucially, Canadian expertise is not limited to expertise on Canada; rather, it extends to a broad variety of cases and examples, enabling advice to field-driven and responsive to local stakeholders.

- ***Building on strength.*** Canada has a number of institutions that have been active on questions of democracy and peace on the international stage. These include: the Forum of Federations, a global centre of excellence for federalism and devolved governance; the Parliamentary Centre, which strengthens legislative capacity around the world; the Global Centre for Pluralism, which is a global platform for comparative analysis, education and dialogue about the choices and actions that advance and sustain pluralism; the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), one of the world's leading think tanks on international governance; the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), which invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve the lives of people in the developing world; and the Center for Constitutional Transitions, which generates and mobilizes knowledge in support of constitution building.

D. How CCPOGG should work

- ***Think-and-Do Tank.*** CCPOGG should both ***think*** and ***do***.

- ***“Thinking”.*** CCPOGG should be a global centre of excellence for thought leadership on democracy and peace, through world class knowledge outputs. It should aspire to be a go-to resource for cutting edge analysis on emerging issues – by policy makers and practitioners, academic experts, and the public. Its agenda should be field-driven, to get

decision-makers the resources they need. It should promote its knowledge outputs across multiple platforms, in multiple languages, to achieve a global scale for its audience, extending well beyond the direct participants in its programs to the broader global public. The experience of other organizations shows that thought leadership requires stable, core funding over many years.

- ***“Doing”.*** These knowledge outputs would provide the framework within which CCPOGG’s “doing” should occur – i.e. the provision of technical support, which should include at least two components. First, in-country programs would provide technical support for specific projects through a combination of local and Canadian staff, and consulting experts. To be effective and build trust with national actors, such programs require at least a three-year timeframe. Second, experts could be deployed on an ad hoc basis, to provide technical analysis in a very tight timeframe in a fluid political context (modeled on the Venice Commission for Democracy through Law, of which Canada is a member). Technical support can be supported by a mixture of core and project funding. Technical advice should be nimble, flexible, and entrepreneurial – to provide support, where it is needed, quickly, effectively, and efficiently.

- ***Independence but close partnership with Government of Canada and other Canadian institutions.*** CCPOGG should be independent of the Government of Canada, so that it is not perceived as tied to the government of the day, can tackle difficult issues that may be too politically sensitive for a government to address, and can operate programs over a timeframe that extends beyond the life of a single government. But there should be a close partnership between CCPOGG and the Government of Canada on strategic directions and specific programming. Models for how to structure this relationship come from Switzerland and Norway – which like Canada, are advanced industrial democracies but which are not global military powers. Both Norway and Switzerland have created ecosystems in Oslo and Geneva, consisting of publicly funded think and do tanks, ministries of foreign affairs, overseas development agencies, universities, and NGOs. Those

ecosystems are now global hubs for conversations about peace processes. These networks of institutions also operate closely on in-country programming, making them greater than the sum of their parts internationally. With the active encouragement of Germany, Berlin may be emerging as a global hub for democracy support, with Berlin-based institutions presenting attractive partners for CCPOGG. A Canadian ecosystem would consist of Global Affairs Canada, CCPOGG, IDRC, CIGI, the Forum of Federations, the Parliamentary Centre, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and the Centre for Constitutional Transitions. CCPOGG could run its own programming, and in addition play a convening and coordination role among these institutions where their mandates overlap (e.g. federalism and decentralized governance as a check on democratic backsliding).

- **International partnerships.** Financial and programmatic partnerships – both project-specific and longer-term – are indispensable for marshalling resources, achieving visibility and scale, and ensuring impact. International partners could include the United Nations (Secretariat and UNDP), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the Council of Europe (where Canada is an observer) including the Venice Commission, the National Democratic Institute, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the German political party foundations (e.g. Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation), Interpeace, Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth, Democracy Reporting International, etc.

E. Defining a niche for CCPOGG

For CCPOGG to be effective, it must be strategic – that is, it must focus on a niche that is not squarely addressed by peer institutions in Canada and abroad, but which complements existing offerings. Below, I set out four potential focus areas:

- **Safeguarding constitutional democracy.** Most democracy support organizations focus on transitions to democracy, a post-1989 agenda that can be traced to 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The principal focus

of international support has been on political party development, electoral system design and administration, and civil society capacity building, all in emerging democracies. Updating the democracy support agenda to address democratic backsliding requires a broadened lens, that extends beyond its traditional focus to constitutions and the institutions of constitutional democracy, such as courts, executives, legislatures, and bureaucracies. In addition, CCPOGG could also provide thought-leadership and technical advice on the links between safeguarding constitutional democracy and anti-corruption mechanisms (including outside the political party financing context), a crucial area that warrants serious attention. CCPOGG would be unique globally in defining a mission that addresses both democratic backsliding and democracy support. It could complement the work of existing organizations, such as NDI and International IDEA.

- **Transitioning from civil war to peaceful democracy.**

The worlds of conflict resolution and mediation and democracy support exist in silos. They involve different organizations, e.g. in the conflict resolution and mediation world, Humanitarian Dialogue and Interpeace, and in the democracy support world, International IDEA and NDI. Their approaches are very different: for conflict and mediation work, activities are shorter-term, rarely address institutions, and include confidential negotiations among a small number of parties vs. for democracy support, programs are longer term, building and reforming institutions are central, and include more public engagement with a broader cross-section of political actors. However, these worlds increasingly intersect. There are many recent examples. In Venezuela, mediators have engaged the various parties (government, opposition, military) on both conflict resolution and mediation-specific issues (e.g. amnesties) but also constitutional reform. The Colombian peace agreement contained key constitutional commitments. In Yemen, UN-led mediation has addressed transitional governance arrangements during an interim period, including their relationship to the Yemeni constitution. In Myanmar, negotiations between the military and ethnic armed organizations on the sequencing of security sector reform (SSR) and demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) are increasingly tied to broader

questions of constitutional reform, including federalism. It was ongoing disputes over DDR and SSR that almost wrecked Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions in their early years, and only when the security issues were tackled that the political institutions stabilized. In Cyprus, one cannot get to a new constitution unless one also addresses the security concerns, of the Greek Cypriots in particular. CCPOGG would be unique in defining its agenda at the intersection of the peace and democracy support agendas – which would immediately place it at the forefront globally.

- ***Digital platforms, democracy and peace.*** The democracy support and peace process worlds, focused on elites, currently lack the tools to grapple with the interlinkages between digital platforms and fake news. A coherent policy response to the challenges posed by digital platforms would be truly global, traverse the regulation of content, data and competition, and involve a broad range of actors and institutions that have historically not been concerned with democracy or peace. CCPOGG should position itself as a leader of a coalition of institutions addressing these challenges, with a particular focus on how any initiatives would relate to its core activities, with respect to safeguarding constitutional democracy and defining the juncture of democracy support and conflict resolution and mediation work.

- ***Cross-cutting theme: promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups.*** In its programming on the three focus areas (safeguarding constitutional democracy, transitioning from civil war to peaceful democracy, and digital platforms, democracy and peace) CCPOGG should promote the inclusion of marginalized groups – such as women, youth, indigenous peoples, and LGBTI communities – as a cross cutting-theme. This would be a distinctively Canadian contribution to the democracy support and the conflict resolution and mediation worlds.

F. Conclusion: A time for Canada to lead

Canada has long been committed to democracy and peace. CCPOGG presents an opportunity for Canada to institutionalize its commitment to these ideals at a time when they are under unprecedented stress across the world. With CCPOGG, Canada could place itself at the forefront of the democracy support and peace and conflict resolution worlds, by building an institution that is strategic, innovative, and entrepreneurial. Canada should rise to this challenge.

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