

# START WITH WHY:

## Selection and Maintenance of the Aim on Exercise MAPLE RESOLVE

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## BACKGROUND

Exercise (Ex) MAPLE RESOLVE is the largest, most complex and highly resourced annual force generation (FG) exercise conducted by the Canadian Army (CA). The aims and focus of the exercise have changed over time, with it being taken as a given that the exercise is essential and that its conduct is critical to ensuring that CA soldiers are ready to deploy in any capacity.<sup>1</sup> This article offers that the CA should articulate very clearly *Why* it is doing Ex MAPLE RESOLVE so that it can properly define the *What*, *Who*, *When*, and *Where*, that drive the *How* (*Exercise Design*). The situation in the CA is always changing—topically with Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reconstitution—and the CA should be challenged to re-examine their *Why* through every annual planning cycle. Being clear on the *Why* enables the *Selection and Maintenance of the Aim*, the most critical principle of war.



Source: Combat Camera

## INTRODUCTION

The transition to the CA's adapted managed readiness plan (AMRP) saw 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (1 CMBG) enter the build phase immediately after completing the previous high readiness phase. As a consequence, between 2016 and 2021, the brigade (bde) provided the primary training audience (PTA) for Ex MAPLE RESOLVE three times and completed two force employment (FE) cycles. The authors specifically have combined experience on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE as a platoon commander, second in command (2IC) of an administration company (coy), officer commanding (OC) of a mechanized infantry rifle coy, 1 CMBG G3 (both authors), and 1 CMBG chief of staff (COS) as well as supporting as an observer, controller, trainer (OCT). In their garrison roles, the authors have seen the impacts of this exercise, both on the forces being trained as well as on the overflow of tasks onto the rest of the CA. Given this background, the authors provide some insight into what Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should be considering the current CA force structure, managed readiness plan and estimates around the impacts of CAF Reconstitution.

In its largest format, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE costs the equivalent of the annual operating budget of all three CMBGs combined, making it by far the most expensive FG activity on the CA training calendar. It also represents tens of thousands of soldier-days away from unit duties, home, and families and generates significant wear on critical fleets. A Canadian Forces Task Plans and Operations review of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 19 indicates that the field training exercise (FTX) portion alone generated 4,693 distinct tasks totalling 117,459 soldier-days.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the enormous resource investment, the precise aim of this exercise remains unclear.

This has created the impression that Ex MAPLE RESOLVE exists through institutional momentum and grows year over year based on unconstrained appetite for size, irrespective of cost or training value. While this is unlikely to be the case, it is pertinent to pose the following questions:

- Is Ex MAPLE RESOLVE a large-scale professional development (PD) training exercise that exposes participants to battle-group- (BG) and brigade-level operations in the field?
- Is it an experimentation opportunity to trial new concepts in doctrine and interoperability?
- Is it a validation activity to declare forces ready for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) contingency operations, including the NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI) and enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF)?

- Is it a showcase exercise to highlight CA capabilities and attract joint and multinational partners?
- Is it focused Theatre Mission Specific Training (TMST), which prepares and validates forces for a named operation?

In short: Why is the CA holding Ex MAPLE RESOLVE? Without answering the broader question, it becomes challenging to properly define the *Who*, *What*, *When*, and *Where* that drive the *How* (*Exercise Design*), and the exercise risks violating the most critical principle of war, *Selection and Maintenance of the Aim*.

## DEFINE THE WHY

The first question that needs to be answered with respect to Ex MAPLE RESOLVE is: Does the CA need it at all?<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that the CA vital ground of combat team (Level 5) training can be delivered at unit level and that the key terrain of brigade group (Level 7) training is better delivered at Ex UNIFIED RESOLVE in a computer-assisted exercise.<sup>4</sup> The Commander of the Canadian Army (Comd CA) has directed that Ex MAPLE RESOLVE will continue and will be executed by a PTA at BG level (Level 6) until at least 2025, so this paper will not seek to answer this question.<sup>5</sup>

With Comd CA directing the continuation of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE at BG level, the aim can be appropriately scoped. A brief analysis of the potential aims identified above includes the following possibilities:

- *A large-scale PD training that exposes participants to BG- and bde-level operations in the field.*
- *An experimentation opportunity to trial new concepts in doctrine and interoperability.*
- *A showcase exercise to highlight CA capabilities and attract joint and multinational partners.*

The resource investment for Ex MAPLE RESOLVE makes these aims unsuitable. Though there may be some secondary effects along these lines of effort, it is inefficient in a time of fiscal and human resource constraints to consume the scale of resources in play for a multiple BG FTX to achieve PD, experimentation, or international/joint engagement outcomes as an overarching aim. The remaining potential aims include the following:

- *Focused TMST that prepares and validates forces for a named operation.*

The transition to the AMRP, which sees two iterations of the active posting season (APS) between Ex MAPLE RESOLVE and committed phase deployments, by itself renders this aim untenable. Following Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 21,



the COs of both manoeuvre BGs, CO 1 Svc Bn, OC Recce, as well as the COS, G1, G2, G3, G4, and G5 were posted immediately. In addition, the divergent mission sets associated with the committed phase would make the design of a single exercise appropriate to all extremely challenging. The final potential aim is as follows:

- *Ex MAPLE RESOLVE is a validation activity that declares forces ready for NATO contingency operations.*

This aim seems most suitable given the positioning of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE in the AMRP. However, the concept of validation bears some further scrutiny. As there are no other high readiness forces available in the CA, the BGs on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE will be the forces assigned to NATO contingency readiness. Constructing Ex MAPLE RESOLVE as a “pass/fail” validation check consequently has limited value. Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should therefore focus on training and learning, ensuring that the BGs leave better than they arrived, armed with the tools to continue improving throughout the contingency phase. The senior leaders employed as validation authorities would provide greater value as mentors.

Given the analysis above, it is recommended that the initial aim of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should be to train BGs so that they are ready for FE on NATO contingency operations.

### RUTHLESSLY PRIORITIZE THE WHAT

Comd CA has directed that leaders must “ruthlessly prioritize what can be accomplished and where we can accept risk.”<sup>6</sup> Historically, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE has sought to include a wide scope of battle task standards (BTS) and scenarios, from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), to stability operations, to counter-insurgency (COIN) against an asymmetric threat, to major combat operations against a peer opposing forces (OPFOR). Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 19 started with a three-day stability operation that transitioned to major combat operations concurrent to an asymmetric insurgent rear-area threat. That left the brigade headquarters (HQ) unfocused and significant combat forces consumed stabilizing towns while the brigade was engaged in combined arms battles at disadvantageous force ratios down the trace.

Unconstrained inclusion of BTS results in an exercise that sacrifices tactical realism to ensure a bespoke inject is scripted for every BTS checkbox. In practice, these injects have become so repetitive and inserted at such unsuitable intervals that they are something of a running joke within the CA writ large (i.e. “Here comes the downed helicopter again. Is that before or after the mass grave?”). This phenomenon manifested on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 21, where there was emphasis placed on the ability of civilian actors to smuggle weapons in the trunks of their cars past BG defensive positions. The following question was not addressed: Why would a commander dilute their

combat forces and possibly sacrifice readiness within the position in order to stop a car with three AK-47s in the trunk while the BG was under direct threat of enemy rocket artillery and tank battalions? The answer is that they would not, but a lack of ruthless prioritization of important BTS led to continued attempts to exercise stability operation tasks in an unsuitable scenario.

Briefly, the BTS list needs to be prioritized and pared down to what is important and can be resourced with appropriate forces and time. For example, if an area defence is exercised, then sufficient time must be allocated for siting, occupation, preparation, and routine in the defence prior to major engagement with the enemy. These aspects need to be factored in, and once the time required to properly exercise prioritized BTS reaches the determined length of the exercise, as limited by factors to include finance and enabler availability, no more BTS may be added.



Source: Combat Camera



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Given the increasing likelihood of major peer conflict, BTS for major combat operations, namely defensive, offensive, and transition operations, must be exercised on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE as a priority. Given the associated difficulties of doing these right, and the consequences of getting them wrong, they should in fact be the only BTS exercised during the sole opportunity that the CA has to put multiple BGs in the field. These BTS can only be properly exercised with the scale of forces afforded by Ex MAPLE RESOLVE, whereas HADR, COIN, and other TMST events can be trained on smaller exercises. In summary, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should focus on core battle-winning BTS.

### BE RIGOROUS ABOUT THE *WHO*

There must be a direct linkage between participants and the operational outputs trained through BTS. The *Why* and the *What* must come before the *Who*. This paper argues that Ex MAPLE RESOLVE must train BGs in core battle-winning BTS so that they are ready for FE on NATO contingency operations. To do that, the PTA must control credible conventional forces. To illustrate, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 19 did not adhere to this concept and saw three PTA BG HQs:

- 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI);
- 3 PPCLI; and
- Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians).

Despite the aspiration to put three BGs in the field, personnel and equipment limitations resulted in there being only eight(-) manoeuvre sub-units for them to control:

- four mechanized infantry companies with limited dismounts;
- one understrength armour squadron that often fielded less than 10 tanks; and
- three light infantry companies.

As rear-area security tasks consumed a sub-unit, BG HQs on average controlled 2.3 understrength sub-units (approximately a combat team), which resulted in unrealistic training and poor lessons learned. The dynamic identified above was exacerbated by the desire to have a bespoke OPFOR, which, as a result of the same limitations, was limited to a single understrength mechanized infantry company and a UK light company. This OPFOR was unable to mass sufficient manoeuvre forces to pose a credible threat to the PTA, and the "multiple lives" and other mechanisms used in an attempt to increase the perceived size only led to additional problems with battle tracking while reducing tactical realism.

Constraining exercise participants to a PTA of two BGs, who compete or collaborate depending on the specific scenario, trains the forces allocated to NRI and eNRF and allows these BGs to control a reasonable number of sub-units while fighting a credible OPFOR and learn good lessons. This model, despite constraints on OCTs and activities imposed by COVID-19, was extremely well received by BG commanders on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 21. Any concept that draws forces from the PTA, to include adding a third BG or a distinct OPFOR, should be resisted.

It may be argued that adding a third, non-PTA, OPFOR BG provides simplicity in exercise design and execution. However, that argument results in increased cost, increased tasks, reduced realism, and reduced forces available to the PTA. The complexity of having PTA play both BLUEFOR and OPFOR is well worth the added training value associated with having healthy BGs and the related task reduction.

Participant control also frees the lead mounting division (LMD) to do more and better. In 2021, with only two BGs on Ex MAPLE RESOLVE, there were sufficient remaining forces within 3rd Canadian Division (3 Cdn Div) to support the exercise without tasks to other divisions. Additionally, 3 Cdn Div was able to maintain domestic operations readiness, support Operation VECTOR, maintain baseline institutional requirements without accepting excessive risk, and provide dedicated forces to preparing subsequent live fire ranges.

Allies, enablers and additional forces from within the LMD should be included in Ex MAPLE RESOLVE only if they directly support prioritized BTS. The inclusion of additional enablers and multinational partners for the purpose of demonstrating interoperability or experimentation, or for other reasons, tends to re-direct resources, add complexity, and reduce the laser focus on the training of the PTA that is required. To sum up, the authors recommend that Ex MAPLE RESOLVE participants consist of two BGs and only those enablers and allies critical to exercising prioritized BTS.

### THE *WHEN* MUST ENABLE PROGRESSIVE TRAINING

Having established the *Why*, *What*, and *Who* of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE, it is worth considering and reflecting upon the *When*. Though the basic time of year is likely fixed by factors such as APS and weather conditions, there is greater flexibility in the sequencing of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE with the other critical enhanced warfighting proficiency (EWP) element of combat team (Level 5) live fire.

The CA has an acknowledged problem with leader tempo and availability, and CMBGs do not have protected time for foundation training up to sub-unit level (Level 4).<sup>7</sup> Based on the feedback from OCTs and the authors' own experiences, this problem manifests in Ex MAPLE RESOLVE when BGs, that are supposed to be focused on BG (Level 6) BTS, are hampered by issues with basic skills at the section to



Source: Combat Camera



sub-unit levels. For the 2021 EWP cycle, 1 CMBG created unit time at Wainwright before Ex MAPLE RESOLVE to protect section (Level 2) to combat team (Level 5) dry training, and scheduled live fire as a subsequent activity in the following model:

- Ex AGILE RAM 1 – BG controlled dry training up to L5 dry;
- Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 21; and
- Ex AGILE RAM 2 – Enhanced Level 3 (EL3) and L5 live fire.

This model can be optimized to allow for L2–5 weapons effects simulation (WES)-enabled training, longer BG battle procedure prior to Ex MAPLE RESOLVE, and sequencing of the live fire after dry, which is logical and in accordance with CA doctrine.<sup>8</sup> That sequencing ensures that experienced, cohesive combat teams arrive at the L5 live fire ranges ready for CA vital ground training. Critically, it gives our soldiers and leaders every opportunity to validate tactics, techniques and procedures and build confidence before they embark on the inherently dangerous pursuit of combined arms live fire. In short, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should occur as a gateway to combined arms live fire.

### CONSIDER THE WHERE

Though Wainwright provides many advantages in terms of exercise control and WES infrastructure, it may not always offer the best solution. A deliberate annual analysis should consider whether a distributed model would better serve needs, given the prevailing circumstances. In the final analysis, however, the *Where* of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE is less relevant if the areas discussed above are adequately addressed.

### CONCLUSION

Ex MAPLE RESOLVE involves substantial investment in terms of money, equipment, and, most importantly, people. CAF Reconstitution makes it increasingly crucial to execute the exercise with a clear definition of its aim. Once defined, all the involved stakeholders

must relentlessly pursue the aim without allowing any divergences or distractions. The soldiers of the CA would benefit considerably from an exercise focused on the skills that will enable them to live and win in the brutal competition of modern mechanized warfare.

Based on the discussion and analysis above, the authors maintain that the aim of Ex MAPLE RESOLVE should be to train two BGs with appropriate enablers in core battle-winning BTS, in a major combat operations scenario, so that they are ready for combined arms live fire and FE on NATO contingency operations. Any concept, initiative, or other priority that deviates from this aim may not offer the appropriate, relevant and expected results. If Ex MAPLE RESOLVE is focused on training the PTA, resourced within the LMD, and constrained to relevant BTS, it will achieve participant buy-in and become the exercise that the CA needs to prepare to win the most important fight. 🍁

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### ENDNOTES

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2. CTPO>Archive>Incremental>Exercises>Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 19>2019>MAIN EX.
3. Canadian Army Order 23-21, pp. 8–11/25).
4. Canadian Army Operating Plan 2021–2022 v2, pp. 0–20/42.
5. Oral direction from Comd CA at the Ex MAPLE RESOLVE 21 post-exercise report.
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7. Canadian Army Operating Plan 2021–2022 v2, pp. 0–17/42.
8. B-GL-300-008/FP-001, *Training for Land Operations*, pp. 6-4-4.