

Dr. Jack Granatstein gave a summary of his recent book, "Who Killed the Canadian Military". He started by asking how we fell into this perilous state of a fragile military conducting operations in dangerous places. He then proceeded to question the performance of Canadian politicians who contributed to the forty-year-long demise of the Canadian Forces.

Prime Minister St. Laurent was not responsible for the death of the Canadian military. In fact, his leadership and ability to explain to Canadians the necessity of military participation in Korea and NATO serve as a role model in challenging times. During his tenure, defence spending averaged 6.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's (1957-1963) tenure conjures up security/military issues related to NORAD, nuclear weapons delivery, and the Avro Arrow fighter jet. He was suspicious of the USA, and of President Kennedy in particular. During the Cuban missile crisis, he delayed putting the military on alert, infuriating the Americans in the process. Diefenbaker failed to understand Canada's national interests; he made the Canadian Forces political and used defence policy to "smack" the US. Diefenbaker killed the military.

Lester Pearson's only fault was that, as foreign minister to 1957, he did his job too well. His understanding of international affairs and responsible leadership led to the successful interposition of Canadian troops and the defusing of the Suez Crisis in 1956. He won the Nobel Peace Prize, making him the model statesman and envy of politicians. He established the Pearsonian peacekeeping myth that continues, today to hurt the military (peaceful intervention leads to the faulty deduction that there is no need to acquire arms for the military). Succeeding Liberal leaders have tried to emulate Pearson by sending Canadian Forces on a myriad of "peacekeeping" missions. The peacekeeping myth, along with the reluctance to arm Canada's military, has dealt the military a mortal blow. Mike Pearson killed the military.

Defence Minister Paul Hellyer also ranks as one of the killers of the Canadian military. The idea of unification was not a bad one. The military should work together. However, Hellyer's tactics were terrible: changing uniform and rank structures was not necessary to effect unification. Hellyer went too far and killed the Canadian military.

Pierre Trudeau viewed soldiers as unintelligent thugs. Likewise, his perception of the major powers was distorted: he saw the USSR and US as moral equivalents. His belief that Canada could find a new way in foreign and defence policy led to European-based Canadian military reductions in NATO. Trudeau killed the Canadian Military.

Brian Mulroney came to power with the promise to restore the Canadian Forces after the Liberal government's long neglect. Every promise was broken; expectations raised by the 1987 White Paper were dashed. Mulroney killed the Canadian Forces.

Jean Chrétien finished off the Canadian Forces. He did not understand Canada's national interests nor did his government understand the US response to 9/11. With no coordinated purpose or knowledge of interests, he sent Canadian troops all over the globe during his tenure, weakened the military, and failed to tell the Canadian people that he had depleted their force of last resort. Jean Chrétien killed the military.

But it is the Canadian people who really killed their military. We elected our national leaders; we the people are responsible. We believe that defence spending is unnecessary. Canadians killed their military.

In concluding, Dr. Granatstein offered counsel. We need to stop anti-Americanism and be realistic. We cannot opt out of North American defence; otherwise we lose our sovereignty. We need to defend ourselves from too much help from the Americans. The Americans in defence of their their homeland will need to defend the approaches to their nation, even if those approaches go through Canada.

A military force cannot be conjured up overnight. It took decades to render the military bankrupt; it will take a long time to restore it. Who can rebuild the Canadian Forces? We can!

In response to questions, Dr. Granatstein cautioned that engaging Canadians for input to a foreign and defence policy review is likely to be counter-productive. Canadians, for the most part, are ill informed on national interests, defence needs, and the new world order. Sadly, Canadians believe in the "blue-beret" peacekeeping myth. The people must be educated on defence matters.