

Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, Admiral Buck, Madame Chief Justice, Minister Graham, Distinguished Head Table, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am still recovering from the shock of the telephone conversation I had the morning I learned I was to be the recipient of the Vimy Award. My office told me that I had an urgent call from Ottawa from Peter Forsberg of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute. Since the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (of which I am very proud to be Vice President) has a number of collaborative projects with the CDAI (including the Ross Munro Award), my first thought was “oh, hell, something’s gone off the rails.” When I finally reached Peter, he told me to hang on while he passed the phone to the Chief Justice.

My first thought then was, “Chief Justice of what?” followed by “Oh my God, I must be in deep trouble with someone!”

To be here tonight, to have my name added to those very distinguished people who have received the Vimy Award, is deeply humbling. I especially treasure it because –with the exception of my brief career as an honorary - I have never served in the uniform of this country. I do not come from a “military” family.

When my father, his brothers, his cousins grew up in the years between the wars, the Jewish community in Canada was small and young. Few Jewish men had anything to do with the military.

When the Second World War broke out, the men in my family volunteered. All those of military age on both sides of my family served in the Second World War, and one of them – Pilot Officer Bernard Bercuson, 29 years old, was killed in action in flying with No. 433 Squadron of No. 6 Group (RCAF) on 16 August 1944.

When the war ended they - and more than a million other Canadians - came home, started families, and re-entered civilian life. They had little thought of perpetuating their military experiences. To virtually all of them, the war was something to get past, not to re-live.

Our “unmilitary people” as George Stanley once called Canadians – did remarkably well in the greatest trial in our history. They worked a miracle in transforming a nation disarmed in 1939 into a significant partner in the Allied victory of 1945.

In 1950 Canada answered the challenge of defending freedom once more. Canadians took up arms to fight Communist aggression in Korea, then launched the largest peacetime mobilization in Canada’s history. We stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our NATO Allies to defend western Europe and North America. We did what duty demanded of us.

But then, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, something began to change in the Canadian psyche. We began to care more about ourselves, and less about the world around us. We slid slowly back into military unpreparedness. We resorted to the rhetoric of soft power, and human security, to cover up the fact that our armed forces were growing weaker, while Canadians shied away from paying the price of freedom.

It has always been easy for Canadians to hide from global realities when they wanted to. Eighty years ago Senator Raoul Dandurand, Canada’s ambassador to the League of Nations, proclaimed that Canadians lived in a fire proof house, far from inflammable materials. Too many Canadians still agree with that today.

It is incredible that a nation that depends so much on the rest of the world should be doing so little to keep the peace of that world.

Are Canadians not aware that fully 40% of our Gross Domestic Product is dependent on our international trade?

Are Canadians blind to the fact that bitter conflicts in the Middle East, or the Far East, or Africa will eventually afflict us right here in Canada?

Do Canadians not know that our society, our standard of living, our ability to sustain Medicare, or to keep peace in our streets, is rooted in profits we earn from the free flow of goods, people, and ideas across international boundaries?

Are Canadians ignorant to the fact that the western, democratic, secular, rights-based international society that grew out of the renaissance, the reformation and the enlightenment are now under murderous attack by suicidal religious fanatics?

It is not that Canadians do not know; it is that facing the truth will demand much of us, and perhaps more than some Canadians are prepared to give.

In the past - in my father's generation - there was time, barely enough time, but still enough time, to rally and to win.

Now, when those who threaten us can strike virtually anywhere, without warning, and do us, or our allies, or our very good neighbours to the south, grievous harm, - maybe soon with weapons of mass destruction – complacency puts us in grave danger.

Senator Dandurand was wrong then, and he is still wrong, but Canadians once again need to be reminded of that stark reality.

The world DOES need more Canada, but it needs a Canada that recognizes that its blessings come at a cost, and which is prepared to pay that cost. It needs a Canada that knows that both Canadian values and Canadian interests oblige military preparedness and sometimes military intervention.

I believe that, in time, Canadians will understand what is at stake. In time they will truly learn, as my father's generation did, the price of freedom and they will be prepared to pay it.

The only question is, will they learn it in time?

It is OUR job to convince them that they dare not wait too long.

Tonight, tomorrow, every day, let us re-dedicate ourselves to that task. Thank you.