

CDA INSTITUTE ANNUAL SEMINAR 1998

Colonel Sean Henry Ret'd) - Senior Defence Analyst

The CDA Institute Annual Seminar 1998 addressed the highly relevant issue of the degree to which armed force should continue to be an important component of Canadian security policy. The selection of this topic followed from the perception that, in the midst of severe budget cuts, there has been movement away from the policy stated in the 1994 White Paper on Defence that Canada should continue field "multi-purpose, combat capable forces." More specifically, there has been concern over the apparent dichotomy between defence and foreign policy, with the latter stressing so-called "soft power," to the exclusion of war-fighting roles for the Canadian Forces in maintaining Canadian security.

In the morning, these factors were addressed by three distinguished speakers. Dr. David Haglund from Queen's University provided an extensive strategic overview and analysis of developing security trends in the world today. He noted that world peace remains an elusive dream, and therefore nations must make provisions to defend themselves and their values. Although new factors are entering the game, the basic components of grand strategy remain in place. Canada would be best served by continuing to maintain its military contributions to coalitions such as NATO. On the other hand there is nothing wrong with including in this scheme of co-operative security elements of national political culture, which might be termed soft power. Mr. Michael Pearson, former senior policy advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, elaborated on soft power and explained it was a question of presenting ideas which attract people to one's proposals, rather than forcing them into line. He also noted the vast change in security threats facing the world today, from economic forces to non-state actors in the realm of intra-state conflicts. He said that few understand the link between peace building, peace enforcement and peace keeping in this new context. In fact, there are places for both hard and soft power in these circumstances. He noted that defence money should be spent in support of those missions that would be most likely for the Canadian Forces. Dr. Joel Sokolsky from RMC presented the case for strong armed forces in Canada in peacetime. Canada needs to maintain combat capable forces for use in co-operation with allies overseas. On the other hand, commitments overseas must only be undertaken to preserve Canadian vital interests, not to serve humanitarian objectives alone. In addition, there must be political will to use effective armed forces in combat roles. Recent examples from the Gulf War through to Zaire suggest this will is at best lukewarm. But within the framework of combat readiness, armed forces must also be ready to adjust to new realities and the missions arising from them.

In the afternoon, a panel moderated by Senator Colin Kenny and comprising Maj-Gen Clive Addy, President FMUSIC, Mr. Paul Meyer, Department of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Ernie Regehr, Project Ploughshares, examined the various positions outlined in the morning. Additional factors emerged. The need for stable funding for DND in the first instance outranks the need for more funding. There is also a need for more parliamentary involvement in matters of defence. Nations of the world are becoming more interdependent than ever before. Since Canada has little military clout, it would be prudent to apply strong diplomatic and brokering skills wherever possible and appropriate. Canadian achievements in respect of achieving consensus to resolve crises is actually quite impressive. The problem is that soft power could prevail by

default since defence budget cuts have prevented implementation of the satisfactory defence policy in the 1994 white paper. This being the case, Canada must choose which policy will predominate in its security policy -- armed force or diplomacy and its adjuncts. However, there are suggestions that Canada's fiscal position is so fragile, and its political will regarding overseas interventions so low, even the capability to apply soft power may be in question. This raises the spectre of isolationism -- surely detrimental to our national interests.

In the end, it was clear that in today's world it would be counter-productive to pursue a "zero-sum" game in national security affairs. A better solution in the present atmosphere of conciliation, especially in Canada, is to simply ensure that armed forces are accepted as a key component of security policy, and that soft power alone will often not yield satisfactory solutions -- particularly in cases where vital national interests are at stake. Obviously negotiation should be first option selected to resolve a crisis. Often, however, past a certain point armed force becomes necessary, and provides the catalyst that leads to a peaceful solution. As a footnote, even Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy, in a major speech extolling soft power to businessmen in the United Kingdom in March 1998, did not discount the utility of armed force. It therefore rests upon the shoulders of CDA and the pro-defence community to convey this message to the public, and thereby generate the political will necessary to make it a viable option for Canada.