

Muscular Multilateralism

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Canada's most profound military tradition is to be continually and woefully unprepared for conflict while the men and women in our armed services acquit themselves quite admirably once wars occur. This combination of national failure in preparedness and individual success in soldering is a kind of schizophrenia the country can no longer afford. With weapons of mass destruction, terrorists can now inflict horrific damage instantly, no longer giving us the option of months of frantic activity to make up for years of neglect. In the 21st century, Canada must either steel itself to do things very differently in the area of national security or at worst we will be responsible for putting citizens at risk or at best condemning Canada to foreign policy irrelevance. In this new century we must unlearn the national defence habit of muddling through. The world has changed and so must we.

In the recent federal budget, Defence Minister John McCallum and Finance Minister John Manley should be congratulated for increasing the department of National Defence's base budget from \$11.8 billion CAD this year to \$12.75 billion CAD in the upcoming fiscal year. This new money will allow the forces to function more adequately as they can now purchase spare parts, put gasoline into our aircraft, hire specialists such as mechanics, and pay for deployments to the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan. The chief of the defence staff, General Ray Henault, told Canadians last July that the status quo at the Department of National Defence was "unsustainable"; after last week's budget at least the defence department is no longer in danger of shutting down.

But before too many hosannas are sung, Canadians should realize that even after the increase the defence budget will only return to what it had been in 1993 and in the intervening ten years the price of everything military has gone up. Last week's increase in military spending was a system-maintenance budget to avert a system breakdown. When I first went to Ottawa in the mid-1960s, Paul Hellyer, defence minister in the Pearson government, promoted the radical change of unification to reduce duplication in order to ensure that at least 25% of the defence budget was spent on equipment. Today we spend only 10% on equipment, the lowest amount in NATO, and the equipment demands are staggering – new transport aircraft, new supply ships, new helicopters and the list goes indefinitely on. We have been robbing the equipment budget to pay for ongoing operations. The McCallum-Manley increase will pay for a host of small procurement needs but the big-ticket items remain.

So the February 18, 2003 budget vis-à-vis national defence was a useful, much needed incremental addition to Canada's defence readiness. But it was not a breakthrough in Canadian defence policy-making, and it is a breakthrough or a drastic shifting of priorities that we require.

In defence policy we are still making policy in the Ottawa box rather than the “out of the box” thinking that Canada’s new situation demands.

Only once in the entire peacetime history of national defence did Ottawa respond to a crisis with sufficient innovation and resolve. After World War II, similar to what occurred after World War I, the government of Mackenzie King demobilized Canada’s large military forces (in 1945 we were likely the fourth largest military power in the world) and radically reduced the size of the regular forces and the militia from their wartime levels. By 1947, from the 1.1 million Canadians who had enlisted or were conscripted during the war, the military was under 33,000. Neither the Cold War nor the creation of NATO in 1949 created any groundswell of opinion that military preparedness should be a major priority. But in June 1950 North Korea attacked the Republic of Korea, the United States ordered American forces in Japan to intervene, and the Cold War suddenly became hot. The Korea War in June 1950 was the September 11th of its era: it was a shock, it was a massive intelligence failure, and it seemed to be the augury of worse things to come. Having agreed to war in Korea by his allies might Stalin next plan war in Europe? After Korea things were never the same again: Canada agreed to join the United States in a UN sanctioned war to defend South Korea, both Canada and the United States agreed for the first time to send large armies to defend Europe in peacetime, and both countries hugely expanded their military forces from very low levels, a policy from which the United States at least has never wavered.

Returning to Ottawa by train from the Toronto funeral of Mackenzie King, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in 1950 began to make defence peacetime decisions that would have astonished their old isolationist leader. A special brigade was raised for the Korean theatre, soon after another brigade and the First Air Division were sent to Europe and the size of the military more than doubled to 105,000. The defence budget more than tripled from \$403 million in 1950-51 to \$1.45 billion in 1951-52. In comparison, the February 2003 budget raised the budget of the Department of National Defence by under 8%. In the view of military historian Jack Granatstein in his excellent new book *The Canadian Army*, starting in 1950 and lasting until about 1965, “for the first and only time in its peacetime history, Canada mattered militarily.”

Mattering militarily meant that with the F-86 Sabres, the first Canadian air division provided the best aircraft to defend Europe, when the threat was highest; mattering militarily, meant the Commander of the British Army of the Rhine said in 1957 that Canada’s brigade was, “the best fighting formation in the world.” Mattering militarily meant that General E.L.M. Burns, a Canadian, was chosen to head up the United Nations Emergency Force that ended the Suez Crisis of 1956, and mattering militarily had members of the Eisenhower administration in the US praising Louis St. Laurent, CD Howe, Lester Pearson and the Canadian way of doing things rather than gripes about a porous border. It is no coincidence that Pearsonian diplomacy, the high water mark of Canada’s influence in the world was backed up by significant Canadian military assets. Although it did not use the term, the government of Louis St. Laurent practiced “muscular multilateralism,” a cooperative approach to world problems bent on using international organizations to the full, but with Canada punching above its weight in providing armed muscle as the sinews of the international organizations we were attempting to build.

What was done in 1950 in defence can be done today. We have done it in other areas. The

February 2003 budget in a little noticed section committed Canada to doubling our spending on international development by 2010. It is right that we do so because economic assistance is also part of foreign policy capacity. But we need a similar commitment to national defence. We need a regular force of 85,000 well equipped, trained, and able to move by sea and air to the world of disorder outside of our borders.

In 1994 General Romeo Dallaire, a Canadian commanding the UN force in Rwanda said that with a professional brigade of 5000 soldiers he might have been able to save thousands from genocide. Canada could not respond because we did not have the capacity to do so. In 1956 when Mr. Pearson invented modern peacekeeping he knew that the Canadian forces could back up his initiative. Do we want to return to the Pearson era when Canada meant something in the world or are we content to shadow box with ourselves?

The world needs multilateralism as much today as it did in 1956, but influence does not come cheaply. There is a world of disorder outside our borders that threatens us all. Let us commit to turning that world of disorder into a zone of peace so that like our predecessors after the Second World War, we too can be present at the creation.

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