

Serving Canadian Interests:
A Defence Policy for Canada

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Last month Minister of National Defence Bill Graham told a Toronto Audience that the government was “now in the process of completing the Defence Policy Review in conjunction with the government’s overall review of Canada’s place in the world.” He was referring to the long mooted, but not yet surfaced, defence review that was promised by Paul Martin within days of Martin’s assumption of the leadership of the Liberal Party in early December 2003, almost 11 months ago.

Graham went on to say “We expect to complete our review in the fall. After which, we intend to seek the views of Parliament through the committee process. This should permit ample opportunity for public discussion and input.”

That was on a Wednesday.

Three days later, CanWest newspapers carried a story by Mike Blanchfield which began: “The long-awaited blueprint for the future of the Canadian Forces won’t be completed until next spring, but defence minister Bill Graham says the Liberal government should not wait that long to put serious money behind its campaign for 5,000 new full time troops...We can walk and chew gum at the same time.”

As if to prove how adept the government is at walking and chewing gum at the same time, the prime minister gave a speech to a sparsely-filled hall at the

United Nations General Assembly in New York on the same day that Graham was speaking in Toronto. The Martin speech contained a robust call for greater multilateralism. The UN needs to intervene more effectively and more quickly in international crises, Martin asserted. Under certain conditions, he urged, it ought even to ignore national sovereignty in places such as Darfur, in the Sudan, when ongoing and systematic atrocities are being committed – or countenanced – by a national government. Martin vowed that Canada would “act independently when lack of agreement at the world body prevents desperately needed interventions, as in Rwanda or Bosnia.” Not surprisingly, the speech did not prompt the New York Times to put “Canada to Act Alone in World Crises” in big red letters on its front page.

One week later, as Haitians desperately tried to cope with some 1500 deaths from Hurricane Jeanne, short of food, water, medicine, with their flimsy infrastructure turn apart and bodies rotting in flooded hospitals, Canada Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew announced from Port-au-Prince that Haiti was “happy” with the three million dollars in aid that Ottawa had promised. The Disaster Assistance Response Team or DART that has languished in Trenton since 1999 wasn’t going.

“DART is a very expensive thing” Pettigrew complained. “I mean it’s all very nice to say DART, but it represents several billion dollars.” Minister Pettigrew can be excused for adding a few zeroes to the cost of a DART deployment. After all, this IS the same government that turned a two million dollar gun registry into a one billion dollar boondoggle simply by adding a few

zeroes. Sending the DART to Haiti for a week or two would have earned Canada untold good will and respect in the Caribbean and cost nowhere near a billion dollars. It would have been more like the \$200 million or so that the government threw away on AdScam.

Then, just two weeks ago, came the fire in HMCS Chicoutimi followed by the death of one Canadian sailor, the injury of eight others and a gruelling five days at sea in a submarine with virtually no power, at the mercy of the North Atlantic, until the submariners and the sub itself were saved - by our British and American allies.

The submarine fire once again evoked the question of why Canada had purchased four used British Upholder-class submarines. The Canadian Forces, defended the decision to purchase the subs, made in late 1997. It was pointed out by the sub's defenders that all complex systems have teething pains, which is surely true. But what the navy didn't say - because nobody asked it - was that they no doubt would have much preferred brand new submarines from Germany or Holland or Sweden if they could have afforded them. Yet it is imperative to ask: if the government decides that Canada needs submarines, should it not follow that the subs we send our sailors to sea in ought to be the best that money can buy?

The government suffers from what CanWest News defence writer David Pugliese calls "Analysis Paralysis". In a recent CanWest series on the Canadian military Pugliese pointed out that in early 2002, while New York's emergency workers were still pulling bodies from the smoking ruins of the World Trade

Centre, then Minister of National Defence Art Eggleton announced that the government would finally undertake a long awaited review of Canadian defence policy. It was long awaited in 2002 and it is even longer awaited now, because the last policy review was done in late 1993 and early 1994 and gave rise to the 1994 White Paper

Bill Graham has asserted – and he is certainly correct in this - that the government need not paralyse itself in upgrading and enlarging the Canadian Forces while it contemplates the next iteration of Canadian defence policy. After all, the broad strategic considerations that must underpin Canadian defence policy are not so complex that they require an advanced degree in rocket surgery to figure out. In a nutshell they are:

- 1) Canada must defend its sovereign territory to the best of its ability.
- 2) Canada must help the United States defend North America.
- 3) Canada needs to assume a “fair share” of the cost of protecting freedom and democracy in the world.

This last point sounds like some fuzzy and naïve notion of trying to make the world a better place, or guarding human security, or making nice, but it isn't. It is exactly what Canadian troops did in two global wars and Korea, throughout the Cold War, through international peacekeeping operations starting in 1957, and since the early 1990s in small wars and civil wars from the Balkans to Afghanistan. We have done it, and we must continue to do it, because our national interests depend on it. So, no, we don't need another White Paper to tell us that.

There are other things that are already happening – and should be happening - without waiting for a new defence policy: The CF is moving toward Army transformation, refurbishing the CF-18s and CP-140s, and starting the process to replace the Navy's AORs with Joint Support Ships. It made a decision – ten years later than was necessary, but better late than necessary – to purchase new Maritime Helicopters. It purchased the Cormorant rescue helicopters and is replacing the deservedly maligned Iltis vehicles. New twin engine rescue aircraft are on the way. So is the Mobile Gun System.

Everyone knows that an expeditionary military requires lift, firepower, and logistics. The trouble, however, is in the details. To what extent should Canada continue to deploy troops abroad to assume a “fair share of protecting freedom and democracy in the world”? And what is “a fair share” anyway?, The Defence Science Advisory Committee and a number of eminent Canadian defence experts have recently advanced the idea that Canada out to focus its military effort on home defence and continental protection and maintain only a token expeditionary capability. It is a legitimate viewpoint – with which I vehemently disagree – but the sort of thing that ought only to be decided in a full fledged policy review.

I predict that we will NOT have a full scale, all-out policy review anytime soon. We will not have it this spring because a minority government will not want to nail itself down to defence policy decisions made by a minority Parliament, heavily influenced by a Standing Committee on National Defence and Veteran's Affairs that will have a majority of its members from Opposition

parties. We may also not have it because we may be in an election campaign in the spring.

We will not likely have it later, I believe, because a full examination of all aspects of Canadian defence policy will gore too many oxen. It will expose too many shortcomings in our procurement non-system, or the operation of National Defence Headquarters. It will reveal the intense rivalries within the high command of the three branches of the Canadian military. It will show the extent to which real unification has not occurred where it ought to have, in operations. It will identify the massive spending shortcomings that continue to hamper recruitment, training, procurement, operations, and planning and even the replacement of worn-out parts.

There is, however, one even more basic reason why Canadians will not soon see another exercise such as the one that gave us the 1994 White Paper: real defence policies entail real spending and priority decisions for a government and thus real political risks; Canadian governments are simply not prepared to run political risks over defence matters.

Defence is not unimportant to the current government. But Defence is NOT a core priority. Nor is this government unique in relegating defence to the ranks of the also-rans when it comes to the top of the "to-do" list. The government is, I believe, quite serious about improving Canadian defences at home and working more closely with the United States to defend North America. Paul Martin is NOT Jean Chretien. His approach to the United States is clearly grounded in a more realistic evaluation of the importance of American good will

and the absolute imperative of maintaining a secure and open border between the two countries. Operational cooperation between the militaries of our two nations remains good and more integration in continental defence is in the cards. Foreign Affairs Canada is also examining new strategies to work to improve Canadian leverage in the Congress, where many of the irritants to Canada-US trade are born. But when it comes to an off-shore military capability for Canada, one that goes far beyond our sea frontiers, the message is far more mixed.

There has long been a belief in some quarters in Canada that Canada's greatest strategic problem is that it has no strategic problems. That is simply untrue. On the domestic and continental front 9/11 sent us hurtling back in time to the late 1940s when the rising threat of a developing air/atomic capability in the Soviet Union placed Canada in the and centre of American military planning. Not since the late 1960s has Canada been so important to American security. That does not mean, however, that Canada ought not to seek to play a role of any real significance in international military interventions. Such a course of action would severely damage both Canadian interests and Canadian pride.

One of the sweeping tendencies that drove the development of this nation was the perpetual search for international markets. From Canada's earliest colonial days, the business and political elites of first New France, then Quebec, then British North America needed to reconcile two contradictory realities. First; the European-rooted peoples of the colony aspired to a relatively high living standard. Second; although abundant land and resources could sustain that living standard for a very small population, it was not enough to build a complex

society on and certainly not enough to sustain the growth and development of distinct “Canadian” political units. What was needed instead, was more sophisticated internal generation of wealth and external markets to make that generation economically feasible, especially with Canada’s small population base.

Thus was born the endless Canadian search for external markets. Under the old colonial systems of France and Britain, the need was mostly met by the old mercantile colonial systems and the Navigation Acts that sustained them. When those systems began to break down in the early nineteenth century, the search for alternative external markets heated up. The first outright political manifestations of that search were the Annexation Manifesto of 1849 and the Reciprocity Treaty (the Elgin-March Treaty) of 1854. And the search has not stopped yet.

The challenge that always faces Canadians, and likely always will, is that of sustaining a high standard of living on a small population base. In the late 1930s and throughout the Second World War, the Canadian thinkers and bureaucrats who J.L. Granatstein called The Ottawa Men and Doug Owsram called The Government Generation believed in free trade as a fundamental principle of Canadian economic policy. It was they who engineered the Canada-US Reciprocity treaties of 1936 and 1938 and who strongly supported the establishment of the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, and what was once called the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – the GATT, now the International Trade Organization – as fundamental Canadian war aims. They

also pushed for a Canada-US free trade agreement in 1948, and would have had one had they not run into Mackenzie King's political instinct that such a deal would scupper his government.

As it stands today, some 80% of what we produce we must sell beyond our borders. And of course some 80% of that we sell to the United States. Some 40% of our trillion dollar GDP is earned from our exports. We have built a high standard of living and a complex social welfare system based partially on that trade. But in addition to trade, we have benefited greatly from the international flow of people and ideas that have accompanied freer global trade. Canada today is among the best examples of what globalization can accomplish; a world of freer trade, more open immigration, and virtually limitless communication. Given our small population, it must ever be so, as even the Canadian Labour Congress is now prepared to admit.

Such a world offers great benefits to a nation such as ours that is prepared to gain from it; it also poses great dangers. The very flow of goods, people, and ideas that brings us so much social and economic wealth carries with it the germs of international crime and terrorism and the consequent challenges to our national sovereignty. It also makes us far more vulnerable than ever to those whose actions threaten to impede that flow, whether it be a handful of guerrillas threatening Nigerian oil production, international pirates raiding the sea lanes of southeast Asia, or a nuclear-armed North Korea bringing fear and destabilization to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and the Philippines.

To mention these realities is not to imply that we can, or ever will, take a leading role in imposing stability in far away places. But can we afford not to play any role at all? No post-Second World War government of Canada has ever avowed that Canada has no significant role to play in preserving the very international system of freedoms that has nurtured us. Indeed, it has been the opposite aim of Canadian foreign and defence policy since 1945 at least.

Our chief strategic problem is NOT that we have no strategic problems, but that Canada's strategic challenges are so subtle, so undramatic in so many ways, so nuanced compared, say, to those of the US, or Britain, or Australia, that it is easy for Canadian governments - and for Canadian citizens - to ignore them.

Canada's chief security and defence challenges arise from its two basic national interests: the maintenance of beneficial relations with the United States and, beyond North America, the continuing evolution of a global society that is as free as possible for the movement of people, things, and ideas. From these strategic interests other issues flow: the need to help the US secure North America from attack; the need to add our weight to the international military effort to destroy terrorism on its home ground; the need to secure global trade, communication, and legal immigration from interdiction; the desire of Canadians to help war-torn societies heal themselves through the application of hard or soft power. These must be the chief aims of a modern Canadian defence policy and provide the requirements for the capabilities of the Canadian military.

A more educated and canny Canadian public will only support its military if it can take greater ownership of it. That must translate into greater accountability

in the shaping and administration of defence policy and the preparation and deployment of the Canadian Forces.

Forms of democratic government differ. Thus will the means of accountability. But in Canada, the centralization of power in the Prime Minister's Office and the almost complete lack of Parliamentary oversight of the operations, organization, and administration of the Canadian Forces has relegated the CF to the status of a prime ministerial instrument. In the recent past the Prime Minister has selected important CF missions without consultation with Parliament and sometimes even over the objections of the military. He has dominated the procurement process. This cannot continue.

If indeed "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", it is the lack of wider civilian oversight which has established conditions in which the military becomes dominated by one authority and at the same time loses touch with the Canadian people at large. This latter result comes in part because none of the people's elected representatives, other than the PM and possibly the Minister of National Defence, have any substantial oversight over the Canadian military. Unless they break party ranks at their political peril, ordinary Members of Parliament have virtually no opportunity to offer their own views of how troops are used.

In our system of government, with no real separation of the executive and legislative branches, Parliament can only assume greater responsibility for the military if Parliamentary committees are given greater powers, with commensurate resources, to investigate the defence establishment and greater

freedom to determine the shape of legislation concerning the military. It should be adopted as a matter of course that Parliament debate and approve all substantial off shore deployments and that the unforeseen costs of such deployments are paid for out of government contingency and not out of DND's normal capital or operating budgets.

Parliamentary committees should also undertake regular reviews of Canadian security and defence policy and operations, perhaps every three to five years and monitor the state of both the operating and capital budgets. Only in these ways will the CF's structure, administration, preparation, and operations become transparent to all citizens. Greater accountability of the CF to Parliament and of the Government to the welfare of individual CF members is the essential step for all other changes in Canadian defence policy.

A more accountable military will work two ways; it most certainly will give the military a chance to actually hold a public dialogue with the government about the tasks it is given, or the resources made available to it, but it will give government a better lever to force military reform. As John C. Studt, retired United States Marine Corps Colonel wrote in the introduction to William S. Lind's Maneuver Warfare Handbook: "the entire movement for military reform is driven largely by civilian intellectuals, not military officers...this is not surprising. [The military] have never institutionalized a system that encourages innovative ideas or criticism from subordinates." Studt probably goes too far when he asserts that the entire movement for military reform is always civilian rooted, but a general overview of major military reforms, during peace and war, seems to indicate that

the preponderance of change was civilian based whether in Britain, the United States or Canada. In our own case, the most significant change in the Canadian military over the past decade – the edict that we were to have a degreed officer corps, and all that went with that edict – came directly from Minister of National Defence Doug Young in 1997.

A Canadian military tasked to serve Canadian interests must be more joint in planning, training, operations, procurement and command. This is important not only for cost savings, but to expedite operations that serve Canadian interests and which also profile Canada's commitment to an international regime based on liberal democratic forms of government and free access to markets. Jointness will promote concentration of Canada's hard power assets on operations, raising the nation's profile, gaining the nation influence, and stimulating pride within Canadians' of the concrete contributions their forces make to international peace and order. As Brigadier-General Glenn Nordick's article in the most recent Canadian Military Journal points out, jointness is still a goal not achieved some 40 years after Paul Hellyer's unification.

The Canadian Forces must strive to maintain combat capability, but within a realistic range of possible scenarios. In fact, that has been true of the Canadian military since the end of the Second World War. Canada, for example, eschewed the strategic bomber role in 1945, never acquired fleet aircraft carriers, doesn't have nuclear missile firing submarines, etc. Canada has never gone to war alone and it never will. It is important that Canada be able to supply some, but not all, combat capabilities. The current argument, especially among armour

aficionados, about the government's decision to replace the Leopard tank with the Mobile Gun System is a case in point. The replacement of the Leopard by the MGS will not degrade Canadian combat capability, but it will transform it. We must bear in mind that all-out war a la World War Two is extremely rare in human events; with limited resources, it is unrealistic to prepare for it.

Finally, the ability to deploy is as important for the Canadian Forces as the ability to shoot. In fact, there will never be much to shoot at unless there is a means of getting to where the shooting is. Deployability has long been treated as an afterthought by those who shape and administer Canadian defence policy. But deployable forces are, by definition, the *sine qua non* of expeditionary capability. And since Canada's military forces, from the Boer War to Kabul, have served Canadian interests abroad as much or more than they have physically defended the nation at home, they must have cost effective, but efficient and readily available means, of getting where they need to go.

Canada owes military intervention to the world that nurtures it. Our privileged position among the nations obligates us to return part of what we have earned from them to them. It is good business and it is morally just. Thus we have a choice to make, to use our wealth only for our own comfort, convenience and care, or to return part of it to those who protect us, trade with us, nurture us, sustain us, or look to us for succour. The choice is up to us; future generations of Canadians will judge us by our decisions.