

Minister's Challenge: The Defence Review

In Defence Minister Bill Graham's impending defence review, he should consider two factors: the rapidly evolving technology; and the significant changes in the threat.

TECHNOLOGY

The US-led concept of Military Transformation envisages joint forces controlled by network-centric communications and guided by high tech surveillance, that destroy the enemy on land and at sea with devastating, precise smart bombs. Lighter manoeuvre forces mop up any enemy that survive these high-tech effects.

Canada's military identified its own Transformation strategy. The Air Force envisages "effects-based" operations, calling for modernized aircraft and the acquisition of standoff, all-weather, precision-guided munitions. It would also rationalize its capability to airlift Canadian Forces contingents.

The Navy would similarly acquire increased lethality, range and precision in firepower and self-defence suites for its improved Task Group as well as a new Joint Support Ship to re-supply its fleet and support joint operations.

According to former Defence Minister John McCallum in an address to the CDA, the Army is "replacing brawn with brains." Manoeuvre (troops on the ground) would be relegated to the support of "precision effects based firepower... this fundamental change will be achieved through the improved use of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance." Existing manoeuvre units were reduced significantly as scarce funds were redirected to the acquisition of high-tech surveillance units, long-range weapons and the creation of a high-tech training centre in Alberta.

In 2003, this "Transformation" concept seemed to be fully vindicated. The US "shock and awe" campaign obliterated Iraq's massive armed forces in two weeks.

The rapid, and relatively unopposed, drive of two US divisions through the smouldering wreckage of the Iraqi Army into Baghdad appeared to confirm a new era in which US high-tech precision-guided weapons were unchallengeable!

THE CHANGED THREAT

This technology-based transformation was so effective, however, that it generated an equally revolutionary change in the "threat." Conventional forces, such as those of Saddam, cannot survive in the face of US technology.

However, the continued fighting and civil chaos in Iraq vividly demonstrates that war fighting does not end when the enemy's tanks and headquarters buildings are obliterated. The modern enemy disappears into the population, or other "difficult terrain," where the tools of Military Transformation provide little help. The underlying proposition that technology would win the day is no longer valid in an age of insurgency that some are now calling "4th Generation Warfare."

The Americans are moving quickly to fix this problem. The most recent U.S. long-term military strategy would accelerate the US shift away from conventional threats in order to focus more firmly on terrorists and low-tech guerrillas. The US has reportedly identified the objective of developing a force able to deploy 200,000 soldiers into a territory to deal with guerrilla warfare. Congress imposed a significant increase in the strength of the Army.

Despite its commendable transformation effort, the time has come for Canada, as well, to recognize that the very basis of current transformation has changed dramatically. The notion that skeletal manoeuvre forces on the ground are but a supporting element to the "effects" of high-tech warfare must be set aside. There are now, few imaginable scenarios

where Canada's Armed Forces would be able to resolve a military challenge by directing devastating stand-off firepower onto a conventional array of ships, air fields and tanks.

CHALLENGES

Minister Graham's imminent Defence Review must redirect our defence staff towards the much more difficult challenges of asymmetric warfare and counter-insurgency operations. It is obvious that both the Navy and the Air Force will need to give higher priority to expeditionary capability, including strategic lift as well as tactical transportation and local fire support. Some have grumbled that they would become "truck drivers" for the Army!

However, it is the Army that must face the most significant rethink of its transformation plans. Canadian battle groups must be rebuilt around manoeuvre forces, rather than high-tech, stand-off "effects." Although they will need and appreciate high-tech support, it is "boots on the ground" that will be the measure of the battle group's usefulness in bloody asymmetric war fighting as well as in robust Peace Support Operations. Future battle groups must have a predominantly infantry core.

Minister Graham's challenge is to lead the many internal DND constituencies into an understanding of the nature of the "major role" that Canada will play on the world scene, including the need to intervene militarily in "failed states." His success will be measured by the significance of the increase in the number of real soldiers that can "put boots on the ground," as well as the creation of a capability to provide them with combat support, lean logistics and rapid tactical/strategic transportation. **FL**

MGen (ret) Terry Liston served in 1987-1988 as Chief of Operational Planning and Force Development of the Canadian Armed Forces. Previously he commanded the Canadian Air Sea Transported Brigade Group (CAST) based on 5e GBC in Valcartier, and the 1er battalion, Royal 22e Régiment in Lahr, Germany. He is currently president of GatewayAmerica Consulting in Montreal. He can be reached at terry.liston@gatewayamerica.ca

*This article, expands on his previous text in the 2005 Winter edition of the CDAI **On Track**, and reflects his personal views.*