

At Issue: A Viable Air Force



No sovereign nation with the size and location of Canada can be without a balanced military. “Boots on the ground” is the current buzz phrase. Do we need more and better equipped soldiers? Yes, and we also need a strong, effective, and efficient Air Force and Navy. Any threat to Canada and its sovereignty will not be resolved without a well-equipped, balanced military, including an Air Force capable of responding to a multitude of situations defined by a Defence Policy that prioritizes the roles of the Canadian Forces.

Canada’s military is under strength and under funded by any standard. With a GNP funding level of 1%, Canada is woefully below any realistic funding level of any developed country in the world. If GNP is to be the measuring stick, Canada requires closer to 1.8% of GNP allocated to defence. Any start point in revitalizing the military is an immediate decision to achieve that base funding, certainly over the next five years.

The new CDS, Gen Hillier, seems to have developed a strategic plan for the Army, and to a lesser extent, the Canadian Forces, in the absence of a foreign policy for Canada. There can be absolutely no doubt that there must be a larger, robust Army – no matter what defence policy falls out of an internal foreign policy review. However, Canada’s defence policy must admit to a multi-role, expeditionary capable force that is readily adaptable to emerging real-world scenarios while maintaining a capability to respond to domestic threats and disaster response. Putting all “the eggs in one basket” commits defence dollars to “what if and maybe” scenarios. Perhaps regional instability within undemocratic societies is the real threat to world peace and security. However, where does response to that threat fit within Canadian foreign policy? Is Canada’s role in world affairs tied to peacemaking, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, or threats to Canadian sovereignty, be it from the land, sea, or air? Or is it all of the above?

Canada’s Air Force cannot be a “make-do” Air Force. It cannot be an air

power designed solely by funding. If one looks at every facet of air requirements it becomes a simple exercise. Canada is a maritime nation. Consequently, the necessity for shipborne helos and fixed-wing long-range patrol aircraft for surveillance and security of our waters along with environmental issues such as pollution, fisheries patrols, and drug smuggling. Recent history shows the value of air power as demonstrated in the first Gulf War, Kosovo, Haiti, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. Do we need a fighter aircraft? As Vic Johnson, Editor of *Airforce* magazine, has said, “an air force without fighters is like an army without guns.”

Second to the defence of Canada is the defence of North America. And that is the role of NORAD. This has become even more critical since 9/11. We in Canada smugly ignore the possibility of a hijacked commercial airliner aimed at the CN Tower, GM Place, or Place Ville Marie. We should not even be thinking about an air force without fighters – if Canada does not protect its airspace, someone else will do it for us. Therefore we need to have CF-18 modernization now – and a long-range plan for the CF-18 replacement. Former Defence Minister Art Eggleton once said to me “CF-18s are



expensive.” Any viable and effective defence is expensive!

Gen Hillier has now admitted that Canada’s military requires medium to heavy lift helicopters to support ground forces in the scenarios in which Canada’s Army is now placed.

In addition to this, within any military, both tactical and strategic airlift is mandatory. A developed nation such as Canada should not be depending on others for airlift support. This has to be a priority now – not after all of the CC-130 Hercules are grounded for good!

Fixed-wing Search and Rescue replacements for the Buffalo aircraft, while part of a strategic plan, are long overdue and the result is the over tasking of the fragile Hercules platform.

And who one can argue the efficiency and effectiveness of UAVs within a modern military?

The Canadian Government must have a full and open review of its foreign policy. A fallout must be a comprehensive defence review to determine what it is we want our military to do. Following that, the three environmental chiefs have to provide input into how the roles and taskings can be achieved. As it now stands, our military is emasculated and reacts as best it can to changing scenarios. All identified requirements, including personnel and infrastructure, must be placed on the table, costed, and prioritized within the order of both rust out and foreign policy guidelines. All of this must be adequately funded according to a strategic phase-in plan. We have “made do” for far too long.

A realistically funded army, navy, and air force would prevent the changing of priorities that causes a frustrated General Hillier to suggest the “cheap and dirty” solution. I recommend Andrew Cohen’s “While Canada Slept” for a true picture of what we as a sovereign nation have become and where we sit in the eyes of the world. The solution to defence is adequate funding for a balanced military that is far greater than the current 1% of GNP. Let’s not mask the real issue here. ■

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