

# Canada's Air Force *vs* Defence Priorities

Canada's new Defence Policy is a bold and innovative approach to peace and security in the 21st century. Rightly so, the CF must abandon Cold War thinking to be more operationally oriented, and thus have a greater ability to react to emerging threats, both at home and abroad – especially in light of 9/11. For the first time in a long time, the CF has that operational expertise to accomplish its roles.

However, even if there is the influx of defence dollars as projected, the CF, and especially the Air Force, is still well into rust out. It will take many years of careful, well-planned spending to bring the Air Force anywhere close to satisfying much-needed requirements. Yes, there is CF-18 modernization. There is the CP-140 Aurora update. However, before money is committed to new initiatives, Fixed-Wing SAR has to be fast-tracked. This project received Treasury Board approval over fourteen months ago and the project now seems to be stalled.

Strategic airlift must be moved off of top dead center and moved along expeditiously. While the talk of leased aircraft may seem like a quick and dirty solution for moving critical troops and equipment, it is a myth, from both a practical and cost-effective perspective. The RAF had

leased four C-17s but found it to not be cost-effective. That being said, CF personnel currently on exchange with the United States Air Force are flying the C-17 and they find it to be a proven and acceptable platform, albeit not the only possibility. Some time ago, strategic lift was supported all the way to Treasury Board approval, however, Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister at the time, cancelled the programme as too expensive.

NATO countries are not able to commit to assured heavy airlift. There are simply not enough assets. All countries are struggling for airlift capability and there are many more countries vying for the capability on a lease basis than there is capacity. Why is Canada not looking at procuring and then leasing its services to its allies – much as we now do with NATO flying training in Canada?

Canada needs to look at both tactical and strategic airlift and it has to do it now. Any school child can tell you that any military needs to be able to move personnel and equipment within any of the defence review scenarios. While our main defence objective is to assist “failed and failing states” in a “three-block war,” we must not “throw the baby out with the bath water.” Canada must maintain

flexible, general purpose Forces that are able to adapt to any future scenarios without cost-prohibitive, long-lead-time personnel and equipment limitations.

In addition, the Air Force has been handcuffed by an infrastructure base that is sucking operational dollars. In a combination of crumbling 1950's era buildings and excess Bases, the infrastructure tail is restricting critical operational capability.

Canada's Air Force has reached its critical mass. It is now half the size it was 10-15 years ago and it has twice as many taskings. Leased aircraft and civilian aircrew would reduce the mass significantly until there is no such thing as a viable Air Force. There is no more flexibility to move aircrew between fleets or to cross-train. The same applies to groundcrew. The Air Force has recently stood down three squadrons in an effort to reassign personnel resources. The Air Force is fragile. There is nothing left to give.

All three environments require a significant increase in resources. No one element is more important than the other in terms of operational commitment. Canada must have an adaptable, effective, balanced military, or we have no military capability at all.

Finally there is a vision for the CF, however, we must be certain to ensure it will survive the test of time – at least in the near future. **FL**



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*This article is a synopsis of his recent presentation to the Senate Standing*

*Committee on National Security and Defence.*

## Letters....

### Fast-tracking visual minorities

I have read periodically that the military and Royal Canadian Mounted Police wish to have sufficient visual-minority personnel as members of their outfits and that Lt. General Rick Hillier also specified that need recently.

Yet, it appears to me that nobody has researched the problem that visual-minority Canadians

seldom apply for enlistment and rarely become officers. As a former member of the RCAF and of the RCMP, I suggest we start evidential research to find out why this is true.

My stepdaughter is black, and she was a member of 2410 Royal Canadian Army Cadets of Bell Island for eight years. She proceeded through all the cadet ranks

from Private to Regimental Sergeant-Major, and at the age of 24, she has been in the Naval Reserves for about four years.

I understand that even as one of the few black persons, if not the only one, at HMCS Cabot, she is not scheduled to be considered for officer training until she has seniority.

Even though the military has been instructed to enlist more visual-minority Canadians, this

group must compete along with everyone else serving. Given the fact that persons of the visual-minority class of citizens in Canada are not prone to serve voluntarily, it follows that a system of affirmative action has to be taken and followed strictly if the policy prescribed by Cabinet is to be successful.

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