

Taking Defence Responsibilities Seriously

In Defence, Every Pitfall is a Pratfall

On the eve of the forthcoming *Defence Review* and the inevitable *White Paper*, it is necessary to remind those responsible for this endeavour of the need to avoid some of the more egregious pitfalls and pratfalls of previous documents.

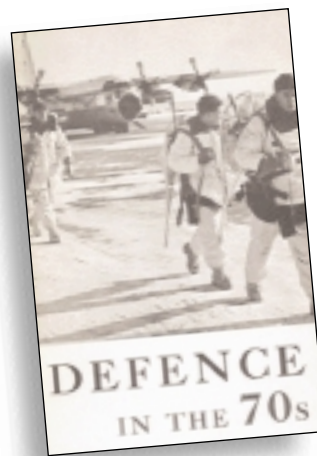
This nation cannot sustain itself on its previous practice of self-deception about potential threat and the need for military preparedness. We require the preparation of a realistic defence policy and program that will both demonstrate our intention to protect our sovereignty, our people and our resources and our intention to fulfill our role as a meaningful action on the international scene.

Overall, previous Canadian Defence Policy planning to this point has been focused more on political aspects than on actual defence needs. From 1868 to the present, the Canadian military planning has been lumbered by a series of myths, rationalizations, half-truths and misrepresentations that have been designed more to curb defence spending than to design a defence policy to meet the legitimate needs of the country. The result of these “factors,” in the four major conflicts of the 20th century, has been to cause Canada to expend far more blood, sweat and treasure than would have been needed if the Canadian military had been properly prepared for involvement in these conflicts. This is not to suggest that there has been some great conspiracy afoot. Simply, there is not proof to support such a contention. What is indicated when one runs through the various policy iterations and documents, however, is a national Canadian view that is essentially isolationist, naïve, overtly optimistic and inexperienced in world and defence affairs.

Because of their belief in these often-irrational myths, politicians and bureaucrats were able to rationalize their inaction regarding defence matters. They constructed a fundamental system of beliefs, that is still prevalent in some academic, government and societal sectors regarding Canadian defence, in order to justify their unwillingness to accept current realities and consequences of their failure to act.

Yet when one analyzes each of these “drivers” of previous Canadian defence policy, one finds that they are nothing more than a series of generalizations that lack factual evidence. There is little to justify why they remain so inculcated within the philosophical foundations of Canadian governance.

It is perhaps time to dispense with them and to start afresh. So, let us turn our attention to these pitfalls and pratfalls that have influenced Canadian defence policy.



Let's hope for a hard-hitting, insightful Policy Review and Defence White Paper for the 21st century – one that is based on “real” lessons learned in recent operations and not another sugar-coated “bureaucratic speak” like the amorphous White Paper of the 1970s.

“War is too important to be left to the Generals.”

Attributed to Georges Clemenceau, who headed the French government in WWI, this is perhaps the most egregious of all of the pitfalls and pratfalls of Canadian defence policy planning. It was a commentary on the responsibility of a national government to remain engaged in a global conflict. The context for this view in Canada surfaced in the *Glassco Commission* of the 1960's. In the final report, the Commission and the Public Service implied that the Canadian military was “out of control” with regard to spending and force size and not responding to direction. In fact, it was not the case. The Legislative Authority, Parliament, had voted on every appropriation. It appears to have been a case of the Bureaucracy wanting control over defence programs. This leads me to believe that we need to pursue the development of a new corollary: “Peace is too important to be left to the Bureaucrats and Politicians.” ■

“Militarism or Social Programs.”

This famous utterance of Prime Minister King, which has been incorporated into every Liberal government's defence policies since his governance, has shown the fatuousness of hasty and illogical generalizations. First of all, Canadians have no history of militarism and Canadians likely would never support a society where the military and military views formed the major component of their society's core values. Secondly, it obviates a major component of societal development's social contract where we as citizens surrender our right to take our safety in our own hands for the promise of protection by our society. Every nation's primary task is to ensure the safety of its citizens from all manner of threats whether external or internal. As for the comment about militarism versus social programs, it matches the propaganda intent of Herman Goering's famous “Guns or Butter” argument that the Nazis used to justify the massive build up of military forces by the National Socialists in pre-war Germany at the expense of social programs. Except for times of mobilization and imminent conflict, most modern nations, such as those in Europe, have managed to balance social programs and military needs quite well for an extended period of time, present difficulties excluded. ■

“ Our Allies will protect us. ”

This is an outgrowth of our experiences as a colony and as an extremely small country in the immediate period prior to and following Confederation. However, as a member of G8 and with a population of 32 Million souls, it is hard to conceive of our Allies coming to our rescue if we have not bothered to prepare to defend ourselves! Major General Chris Vokes, in his autobiography, suggested that as a minimum, Canada should have sufficient resources to stick the hand of any “invader” into a buzz saw for a minimum of 30 days. Apparently a sane and achievable goal for Canadian defence planners? ■

“ It will be a *Come as you are war,* and will use only *Forces in Being.* ”

This is left over from the defence policy tenets of the nuclear era. It was believed that North America was going to be attacked by the Soviet Union in a massive launch of InterContinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). This meant that there was no need to prepare for conventional war by having stockpiles of equipment, weapons, supplies and munitions because it was going to be all over in 30 days.

In a similar vein, there was no need to have large reserve forces or to prepare for mobilization because there would be insufficient time to prepare for the war. Despite being discredited, these two myths persist in Canada as justification for restricting government spending on defence. The build-up to most recent conflicts has often been both protracted and visible, if governments were willing to face reality. It is hard to conceive of any major military/terrorist activity going completely unnoticed unless the various intelligence services and their sources are completely incompetent.

Defence planners must shed these unhelpful beliefs and face the fact that we are no longer living in a stalemated xenophobic nuclear world of mutually assured destruction. The 21st century is, in fact, far closer to the reality of the 18th century than the reality of the 20th century. We are faced with declining power blocks, terrorism, banditry, pirates and small wars and we must be prepared to meet these threats alone or in concert with our allies. ■

Conflict in the 21st Century is far closer to the reality of the 18th Century than that of the 20th Century.

“ There is no threat. ”

This is the greatest impediment that this nation faces with regard to accurate Canadian defence planning. There is always threat and a risk of conflict! It is either high or low and every government gambles that its defence preparations will be sufficient to militate against those risks. Notwithstanding, as witnessed by the event of “9/11” or December 7, 1941 the introduction of hostile acts can occur which causes an immediate transition to armed conflict. Peaceful relations between nations can quickly erode, alliances can crumble and previously friendly nations or regimes can transform into aggressive belligerents or full-blown enemies over territorial disputes or perceived grievances that were previously thought to be minor. It is, therefore, a “red herring” to suggest that there is a definitive condition of “no threat” and therefore no need for defence planning and expenditures. In fact, as a nation Canada needs to become increasingly aware that as other nations deplete their resources and seek to acquire more, that our abundance will lead to increasing challenges to both our sovereignty and our control over these resources. ■

“ Canadians are an ‘unmilitary’ people. ”

If one takes this to mean that Canadians have not manifested any imperialistic tendencies, then I could agree completely. Canadians have not sought to acquire territory at other nation’s expense, nor have we sought to develop a hegemonic system of client states. Clearly, we have tended to our national and international affairs quietly. However, if one is supposed to believe that Canadians are pacifistic then that is another matter. Canadians have, except for some regional differences, have

participated in every major domestic or international conflict that this country has participated in. In addition, Canadians have also participated in the military forces of our allies. Canadians serve today in the forces of Great Britain and the United States. They have participated in the American Civil War, the Border Wars in India, the Nile Campaign, the Spanish Civil War, Vietnam and in the two gulf wars. The numbers of Canadians that have served abroad in other military forces is quite significant. It is therefore difficult to make the claim that Canadians are an “unmilitary” people. ■

“ We live in a ‘Fireproof House’. ”

This famous statement by Senator Dandurand reveals the lack of strategic awareness of many Canadians. To suggest that Canada is located far away from “hot-spots” is both naïve and dangerous. It may have been the case when the only way to get to Canada was by sailing ship, but with the advent of modern technology, Canada has had numerous instances of having her borders violated and injury done. ■

It is apparent that much of the “strategic” planning, that goes on in the various levels of government, is firmly rooted in an antiquated and dangerous reliance on discredited and faulty beliefs. These myths and rationalizations are used to marginalize the requirement for sound defence policy planning and strategic thought – I have illustrated only a few of the more outrageous explanations that I have encountered in various government documents and statements over the years.

Whenever you hear statements about defence policy beginning with “Canadians want,” carefully examine the generalized statements that follow. Chances are you will hear some version of the pitfalls listed here. Unfortunately, every pitfall is a pratfall when it comes to not taking the responsibility for defence seriously. Let’s hope that the government will dispense with these tired old clichés before we are presented with a new defence policy. ■



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