

Speaking Notes for the Honourable Gordon J. O'Connor, P.C., M.P. Minister of National Defence, at the Conference of Defence Associations Institute 2006 Annual General Meeting:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's truly an honour and a pleasure to be with you today.

This is my first speech since being appointed Minister of National Defence, and I'm glad to be delivering it here, before the Conference of Defence Associations and CDA Institute † an audience that is so knowledgeable about defence issues.

Let me tell you, when I received that phone call from Prime Minister Harper asking me to join Cabinet, I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility.

Those who know me know that I was a soldier for 32 years and that my father, uncles and brother all wore the uniform at one point or another.

My interests until recently were not in politics † I was focussed first on my service as a soldier and, later, on my career in the business world.

However, through my experiences, I learned all too well how our military men and women were being let down by successive governments.

Lack of funding, personnel shortages, sub-standard equipment, poor housing † the list goes on † were all becoming the institutional reality for these men and women.

Later, when I worked in the business world, I observed the ongoing difficulties with government procurement.

I came to realize that something had to be done. And the only political leader consistently standing up for the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces; the only leader consistently standing up for Canada's national interest was Stephen Harper.

I ran for Parliament in 2004, compelled by his unfailing support for the Canadian Forces.

So today, I'm very proud of the responsibility that Prime Minister Harper assigned me † namely to implement the Conservative government's plan to revitalize the Canadian Forces.

Alors que je commence mon mandat comme ministre de la Défense nationale, je suis heureux d'avoir la possibilité de travailler avec vous et avec tous les autres

membres du milieu de la défense canadienne.
Je pense notamment à la communauté académique.

Lorsque j'étais un jeune soldat, il était difficile d'obtenir de l'information publique sur les questions de sécurité et de défense.

Aujourd'hui, grâce au travail de la communauté académique, les questions de sécurité et de défense occupent une place sans précédent dans le domaine public.

C'est là une contribution exceptionnelle, et elle doit continuer. Je suis donc un grand partisan de la communauté académique de défense.

This morning, I'd like to tell you more about the actions that the Conservative government intends to take when it comes to Defence. I'm going to tell you where I think the Canadian Forces are today, and where I see them going in the future.

As we said throughout the campaign, this government will implement a ³Canada First² defence strategy that strengthens our national sovereignty at home and abroad.

As I've said, Prime Minister Harper is a strong supporter of the Canadian Forces. He understands how important they are for Canada. He understands how proud they make Canadians feel.

But most of all, the Prime Minister wants to ensure the Canadian Forces have the resources they need to better defend Canadians against the unpredictable threats we're facing.

Where Are We Now? Canada in an Uncertain World

It's obvious to me that, since the end of the Cold War, there hasn't been a direct conventional military threat to Canada.

And, I think you'd all agree that, as far as we can see, there's little chance of a global conflict between great powers.

But it's also clear that the world remains a very unpredictable and dangerous place.

The Conservative ³Canada First² strategy focuses on strengthening Canada's sovereignty along three traditional lines: throughout our nation, in cooperation with the United States for the defence of North America, and within Canada's longstanding global role.

Ladies and gentlemen, the primary responsibility of the federal government is to

preserve our sovereignty at home.

This means that Canada must be able to fulfill its own responsibilities. Canada must be more self-reliant.

The priority of the Department of National Defence and of our armed forces must therefore be to defend Canada. In other words, protect Canadians here at home.

Defending Canada means that the Canadian Forces must fulfill essential national responsibilities, such as the surveillance and protection of our territory and approaches.

Defending Canada means that our military must be able to assist civilian authorities in responding to natural disasters or major emergencies.

And of course, defending Canada means that our armed forces need to maintain their ability to conduct search and rescue operations.

Cela n'est pas une tâche facile. Après tout, le Canada est un pays immense, avec une faible population, et entouré de trois océans.

Mais la création, récemment, du Commandement Canada nous permettra de mieux planifier et de mieux mener des opérations à l'échelle nationale et continentale.

Grâce au Commandement Canada, nous voyons maintenant le Canada † tout comme nos approches maritimes et aériennes † comme un théâtre d'opérations intégré. Cela nous permettra d'être plus efficace lorsque nous réagirons à des urgences au Canada.

But transforming our command structures is not sufficient to get the job done. Fundamentally, new defence capabilities are required in every region of the country.

This means strengthening our capabilities in Western Canada, in Ontario, in Québec, and in Atlantic Canada.

This also means making new navy, army, and air force investments in Canada's North.

But, ladies and gentlemen, because of geography, a large part of Canada's defence perspective will always involve looking south.

Together with the United States, we share a responsibility to defend North America and it's important that we strengthen our cooperation with our American neighbours to protect the lives of our citizens.

After all, the United States is Canada's most important ally. It's in our national

interest to continue to work closely with them to defend our continent. And the United States must know that Canada is a reliable defence and security partner.

This is why this government will move ahead in strengthening our bilateral defence cooperation. We will begin with the North American Aerospace Defence Command.

NORAD is a key element of the Canada-US defence relationship. For close to 50 years, it has watched over the skies of North America and protected Canadian and American citizens. The current NORAD agreement will expire in May, and this government is committed to renewing and strengthening it – notably by giving NORAD a role to play in maritime surveillance and early warning.

Through the new Canada Command, we will also be able to enhance our ability to work with the US Northern Command. This will help us exercise our sovereignty, and allow us to strengthen cooperation with the United States, as partners, dedicated to North American security.

Beyond North America, Canada's defence is also tied to stability in the rest of the world.

Canada must squarely address threats to our sovereignty and security before they reach our shores.

This is what generations of Canadian veterans did when they put on the uniform and went overseas to defend our interests, our values, and our way of life.

Aujourd'hui, et dans l'avenir, la communauté internationale devra affronter les dangers causés par les États en déroute, le terrorisme et la prolifération d'armes de destruction massive. Le gouvernement conservateur s'assurera que le Canada sera en mesure de faire sa part.

Nous allons défendre de façon responsable les intérêts nationaux de notre pays sur la scène internationale dans le contexte de notre implication de longue date dans l'OTAN et les Nations-Unies.

Pour ce faire, le Canada doit avoir les moyens de réagir à des événements internationaux qui mettent en cause notre intérêt souverain. Les paroles ne sont pas suffisantes. Nous devons pouvoir faire une différence.

Where Are We Now? Staying the Course in Afghanistan

Ladies and gentlemen, our allies are counting on Canada to continue doing its part in promoting international peace and security.

Two weeks ago, I attended my first NATO Ministerial Meeting. I told my Alliance counterparts that Canada remains committed to NATO and that we'll be a strong

and engaged partner, particularly in Afghanistan.

We've never been a nation that shies away from its responsibilities. We will shoulder the burden. We will stay the course in Afghanistan.

Together with troops from other countries, the Canadian Forces are making a real impact in Afghanistan. All over the country, buildings are being rebuilt. Refugees are returning home. Marketplaces are bustling. And little girls once again attend schools.

There has also been substantial progress in governance. Afghans were able to choose their own leaders in free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections. And institutions such as the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police are assuming ever-increasing responsibilities.

However, the reality in Afghanistan is not all sunshine and it would be irresponsible not to recognize the enormous challenges facing Canadians there.

In Afghanistan, extremism remains a force and the drug trade remains a currency for many. The government is also short on funds and infrastructure to provide services.

Long-term success in Afghanistan requires a long-term commitment from NATO and the United Nations. But clearly, thanks to this commitment, for the first time in decades, the people of Afghanistan are looking to the future with hope.

But this doesn't mean that our work is over. We continue to support Afghanistan by increasing our commitment to the UN-mandated operations in that country and by deploying in a leadership role to the southern region of Kandahar.

We're in the midst of building our force level to 2,300 troops to further strengthen the region's security situation and support the expansion of NATO's International Security Assistance Force to southern Afghanistan. In fact, for the next nine months, Canada will head the multinational forces in the Kandahar region.

Ces nouvelles troupes s'ajouteront à celles de l'Équipe canadienne de reconstruction provinciale, qui est dans la région depuis l'été dernier.

Les membres des Forces canadiennes qui font partie de cette équipe aident à renforcer l'autorité du gouvernement afghan dans la région de Kandahar. Ils font aussi des patrouilles de sécurité, soutiennent les institutions locales et facilitent la réforme du secteur de la sécurité. Tout ça, évidemment, en respectant le contexte religieux, ethnique et culturel local.

Mesdames et messieurs, Kandahar est une région que les Forces canadiennes connaissent bien. Après tout, elles y étaient ‹ dans un rôle de combat ‹ en deux

mille deux pour aider à défaire les Talibans et Al-Qaïda.

As we return to Kandahar, we do so with our eyes open, and fully aware of the risks that our men and women (military and civilian) are exposed to.

The security situation on the ground is volatile and, sadly, we have already experienced casualties.

But I can assure you that Canada will not be intimidated or deterred by terrorists. We will stay the course because our mission in Afghanistan is important.

It's important for the future of Afghanistan. It's important for the stability of the region. And it's important for international security.

But most of all, our mission to Afghanistan is in our national interest. On September 11 th 2001, terrorists attacked North America and Canadians were killed. Let me be clear: when terrorists attack Canadians, Canada will defend itself. That's why we're in Afghanistan.

As I mentioned earlier, it's important to address threats to our security before they reach our shores.

That's precisely what we're doing in Afghanistan: our troops in that country contribute to the safety of Canadians here at home by ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a base for the spread of terrorism.

It's also important for Canadians to better understand our commitment to Afghanistan. Our success in that country depends on the support of Canadians and the Conservative government is determined to openly explain the nature of our commitment in Afghanistan in Parliament.

Where Are We Going? Rebuilding the Canadian Forces

Ladies and gentlemen, not only is our deployment to Afghanistan the largest and most important Canadian Forces operation at the moment, it's also quite representative of the type of missions that our military will be called on to perform in the future.

I can't tell you exactly how this future will look, but one thing is sure: to succeed in Afghanistan, and in any other operation, we'll need to revitalize and expand the Canadian Forces.

As Minister of National Defence, I'm taking over an institution that has been under significant pressure for a number of years.

The Canadian Forces need to be revitalized. They need to be rebuilt.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that's why I'm here.

The Chief of the Defence Staff's vision for the future of our military and the concept of Canadian Forces Transformation have laid a good foundation.

But I believe that more ‹ a lot more ‹ needs to be done to rebuild and revitalize our armed forces. This is where the Conservative plan for Defence comes in.

I'm sure that most of you have read our electoral platform and that, as a result, you have a pretty good idea of where this government will go.

We made a number of commitments in that platform, and we have every intention of meeting them.

Increasing the strength of the Canadian Forces to at least 75,000 Regular force personnel is a clear priority. We also intend to increase the Reserve force personnel by 10,000.

Comme je le disais, l'augmentation de l'effectif de la Force régulière à soixante-quinze mille personnes est l'une de nos plus importantes priorités. Nous avons également l'intention d'augmenter la Force de réserve de dix mille personnes.

Le recrutement, l'instruction et le maintien de l'effectif sont donc au cœur de notre plan. Pour être honnête, si nous ne pouvons pas recruter et former du nouveau personnel, nous ne pourrions pas mettre en œuvre nos idées pour l'avenir de nos forces armées.

Les Forces canadiennes devront remplacer les nombreux *baby boomers* qui prendront leur retraite dans les prochaines années. Elles devront régler les manques à gagner existants dans certains corps de métiers critiques. Et elles devront se diversifier et devenir plus représentatives de la société canadienne.

Mais une chose est certaine: l'avenir de nos forces armées est prometteur. Les Forces canadiennes offrent de nombreuses possibilités de carrières intéressantes et je vais m'assurer que tous les Canadiens voient les Forces comme un employeur de choix.

Ceci dit, nous devons faire plus qu'augmenter notre nombre de recrues. Nous devons également nous assurer qu'elles reçoivent la formation dont elles ont besoin dans un délai raisonnable. En effet, il est inutile d'ouvrir nos rangs à plusieurs milliers de nouvelles personnes si la plupart d'entre elles demeurent inactives en raison de goulots d'étranglement dans notre système d'instruction.

To meet this requirement, we'll expand the existing recruitment and training system, as well as look at alternate ways to increase personnel levels, such as temporarily tasking selected operational units to act as trainers
In addition to recruitment and training, an expanded Canadian Forces needs to

be adequately equipped.

Our armed forces can no longer afford to take years and years to obtain major pieces of equipment.

Over the last 20 years, it's taken an average of nearly nine years to get from identifying an operational deficiency to awarding a contract. And there are too many examples to name of projects that have taken too long.

Our acquisition process needs to be fair. It needs to be transparent. And most of all, it needs to give the Canadian Forces the equipment they need when they need it.

Our government also intends to create new capabilities for the armed forces, as well as expand and transform existing ones.

This will give the Canadian Forces greater strength at home and greater impact abroad.

We will increase our military's deployability.

We will improve our national surveillance capabilities.

We will acquire new equipment and upgrade existing platforms.

We will improve Defence's infrastructure.

And, we will take better care of our men and women in uniform.

The Canadian Forces are not only about operations and equipment. They're also about people. When you spend 32 years in the military, you quickly learn that the armed forces is a big family. And you learn just how important it is to take care of all those who make up that family.

We need to support our troops when they're deployed. But we also need to be at their side after they've returned. And we need to support their families. In short, we need to take care of our people.

Prenez par exemple la question des logements militaires. Les Forces canadiennes peuvent faire mieux dans ce domaine. Je le sais car j'ai habité plusieurs années dans des logements militaires !

Mesdames et messieurs, peu importe où ils vivent au pays, les Canadiens peuvent s'attendre à des vrais changements au sein de leurs forces armées.

Il y aura des vrais changements parce que nous avons l'intention d'augmenter la présence des Forces canadiennes dans toutes les régions du pays † y compris dans le Nord. Comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, l'Arctique est une région qui recevra une attention particulière de la part du gouvernement conservateur.

Last year, I travelled up North ‹ to Whitehorse, Yellowknife, Cambridge Bay and Iqaluit to be precise. There, I was able to see first hand the resources we have to keep watch over in this immense part of our territory.

And frankly, what I saw worried me, because currently, Canada does not have the necessary capabilities to fully exercise its Arctic sovereignty responsibilities.

This is unacceptable, particularly when we consider that Canadian territorial waters in the Arctic could be more accessible to shipping within 10 to 20 years, and when we consider the significant natural resources wealth in the North.

International law and diplomacy are important instruments in the protection of our sovereignty. However, our claims must also be backed by strong military capabilities. This means the capacity for both surveillance and presence over every part of Canada's Arctic territory.

This is why the government has developed an ambitious plan to bolster Canada's military capabilities in the Arctic. It's our intention to devote more people, more equipment and more money to the defence of our great Northern areas.

And finally, to allow us to go forward with all the initiatives of our ³Canada First² defence strategy and to make the rebuilding of the Canadian Forces a success, the Conservative government will provide new funding for National Defence in the upcoming federal budget.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, the plan for Defence that I have just outlined will increase the pride and confidence that Canadians have in the Canadian Forces. Canadians will know that our men and women in uniform will continue to answer the call in times of need, whether here at home or overseas.

I can summarize this government's defence vision quite succinctly: it's about having a three-ocean navy, a robust army, and a revitalized air force. They would all operate as part of an integrated and effective Canadian Forces team anywhere in the world.

During the electoral campaign, the Conservative Party talked about standing up for Canada. Well, this is exactly what our approach to Defence will do.

We'll put Canada first by strengthening our national sovereignty and by increasing Canada's self-reliance in matters of Defence.

Tel que promis pendant la campagne électorale, nous placerons le Canada d'abord en renforçant notre souveraineté nationale et en augmentant notre autonomie en matière de défense.

Nous accroîtrons notre leadership et notre impact sur la scène internationale. Mais avant tout, nous permettrons aux Forces canadiennes de mieux défendre les Canadiens face aux menaces imprévisibles auxquelles nous faisons face.

Comme je l'ai souvent dit dans le passé, les hommes et les femmes des Forces canadiennes représentent le meilleur de ce pays.

Servir son pays comme membre des forces armées est un grand honneur et un devoir solennel. Cela démontre la volonté d'un individu d'assumer les responsabilités les plus exigeantes et les plus dangereuses de la citoyenneté.

The Canadian Forces are made up of professional and dedicated men and women who put the service of their country and the safety of their fellow citizens before their own interests.

It's the solemn duty of the government to make sure that these courageous men and women receive the support they deserve and need to succeed. As Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, ³our Forces stand on guard for us [...]. So we must stand up for them.²

As Minister, this is exactly what I'll do.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.