

The DND/CF Manpower Crisis

In his first official public address at the Royal Canadian Military Institute (RCMI), in September 2004, Defense Minister Bill Graham made the announcement that the CF would see 5,000 more Regular Force positions and another 3,000 more Reserve positions created to ease the present manpower crisis in the military.

The problem with this bold pronouncement is that it clearly doesn't take into account the existing manpower deficit of some 5,000 personnel (some estimates are as high as 10,000). It should be noted that the Canadian Forces (CF) list some 62,012 regular forces personnel (the manpower ceiling is 60,000 troops). However, this number is misleading given that it does not take into account those personnel who are classed as "Non-Effectives on Full Pay" (personnel on disabled lists, in jail, sick, pending release, have not completed their trades training, Officers without trades training, and new Officer Cadets).

Given the known problems of the military personnel cycle with recruiting at one end, and the inability to retain personnel at the other end, one has to wonder how the CF hopes to recruit all these people as the numbers envisioned by the Minister, would in fact require recruiting some 13,000 to 18,000 new personnel.

Part of the disconnect inherent in the statement by the Minister is the widespread ignorance of both our elected officials and the public more generally about the role and operations of the CF. As LGen (ret) Charles Belzile remarked in 2001, "less than one percent of elected federal officials in Canada have any national service, no wonder there is little useful communication and understanding between the hierarchy of the military and the government." While, the 2002 Morton Report noted, "like other Canadians, most new Ministers of National Defence know little about the Canadian Forces." It seems that the Minister of National Defence must rely on what the bureaucrats at DND (Department of National Defence) and NDHQ (National Defence Headquarters) say are the military realities.

Too Many Chiefs...

So what IS the reality at NDHQ and DND? Though there is a manpower crisis in the rank and file of the CF, quite the opposite situation exists within the officer ranks. It might be described as 'officer bloat,' a situation whereby, from a practical military position, there are statistically too many officers for the number of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and soldiers in a military organization.

Traditionally, in a modern military, officer numbers represented between 5-10% of the total military force strength. Assuming the ideal size of the officer corps should be no more than 15% of a total military force, this begs the question as to why the ratio of officers to non-commissioned members (NCMs) ranges between 25-29% in the CF.

In defence of such high numbers, it can be argued that the CF cannot use economies of scale in terms of officer manpower. In other words, the CF, unlike the US military, cannot assume that there will always be a body of officer recruits available due to the small size of Canada's population and demographic make-up. Also, it has been suggested that in peacetime there is a need for a higher officer ratio to make up for replacement training time in future conflicts, which is compounded by the apparent need to make pilots officers (which creates a disproportionate number of officers in the air force). Finally, it can be argued, given the present recruiting and retention crisis, that a large pool of officers means the CF has a solid cadre of leaders available over the long-term.

Frankly, these reasons are bureaucratic smoke and mirrors to justify officer bloat. History has shown that the Canadian military and many other militaries have always been able to provide skilled officers in a time of war or national crisis.

Bloat has moved the CF from a traditional pyramidal organizational structure to an egg-shaped profile when taking into account the preponderance of Captains/Lieutenants (N) and Sergeants/Warrant Officers and Corporals/Master Corporals (and their Naval equivalents). This profile is even worse in reserve and militia units where officers and NCMs can represent up to 50% of the unit strength. The officer bloat situation, aside from being costly, creates an environment, or at least a perception, of a self-serving hierarchy that is too interested in its own well being in the form of self-employment and promotion.

Functionally, when there are too many 'chiefs,' especially in a highly structured organization like the military, the authority given by rank is diluted. As Desmond Morton observed some years ago, "the number of officers and senior non-commissioned officers has grown too large for rank to be identified with leadership and responsibility." The situation is worst among the highest officer ranks and within the civilian bureaucracy of DND.

Presently there are 73 Regular Force General/Admiral positions. This is down from a high of 122 in the 1980s. Even though there has been a reduction in general and flag officer numbers since the 1980s, the number of these officers does not fit the rank grade in terms of unit formation size. At most, the CF requires no more than 30 to 31 general or flag officers, and only if all the reserves are included.

If the senior officer corps were serious about the reduction of officer bloat, a substantive ratio change would have been seen within its own ranks, but nothing has really happened. In the mid-1980s, the ratio was approximately 1 to 700, while in 2001 the ratio was 1 to 882. It is obvious that there can be no justification for so many general/flag officers, as the 1999 Minister's Monitoring Committee on Change in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces noted:

"We have observed that... the tendency to re-interpret the meaning and intent of accepted recommendations so as to fit within the pattern of current activities or accommodate some assumed constraints on achieving change. This is particularly evident in areas such as: the mandated reductions in the size of the general officer corps..."

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that officer bloat has manifested itself in the most critical area of the civil-military relationship in Canada – NDHQ. Recently there were close to 6,000 uniformed personnel at NDHQ, the majority of whom are officers. But, in a cynical move to reduce this ratio, some 1,000 personnel were sent to CFB Kingston in an effort to argue that there were less people at headquarters. The critique by former CDS, General Gerry Theriault, is telling:

"Little understood by civilians and military alike, however, is the large degree to which the military has become institutionalized and bureaucratized; and the ways in which culture and corporate nature, compounded by the intensive manner in which it socializes and develops its people, act to undermine its capacity for objectivity, critical self-study and renewal."

Civilian Executives a Large Part of the Problem

DND employs over 21,000 civilians, nearly 120 of these are senior-executive level positions which are the equivalent of the military General ranks. The bloat is even greater within DND as these people really run the show, as they are, for the most part, permanent civil servants.

The senior officers and bureaucrats seemingly have a vested interest to not allow a ratio reduction in their ranks. Therefore, there must be a cultural change at the highest level of leadership within the CF and DND to change the existing situation. As the *Minister's Monitoring Committee* further noted:

"The Committee believes firmly that a successful renewal program depends first and foremost on dynamic leadership to drive the necessary transition in attitude and culture among the current defence team and to instill it among those who will be the leaders of the future. This is particularly true, although not exclusively so, of the officer corps and civilian management."

Without a doubt, rank clearly defines one's leadership within the military. Rank is also an explicit recognition of professional skill, technical knowledge and, in some cases, long tenure of service. However, in the CF this is no longer the case. Due to the 'civilianization' process over the past three decades, there has been massive rank inflation amongst both the NCM and officer ranks, which has created part of the foundation of the bloat scenario. In the case of officers, as Desmond Morton observes, "Officer bloat fosters 'ticket-punching' careerism, lower-rank contempt for superiors, high personnel costs and a familiar combination of over-supervision and lack of responsibility."

This bureaucracy costs the Canadian taxpayer at least 1 billion dollars annually. Think of how many more soldiers could be hired by reducing the number of civilians at DND and officers in the CF. This includes returning a majority of uniformed bureaucrats at NDHQ to operational units. If this had been done, the CF might not be facing the manpower crisis it now faces, and the Canadian government might still be able to fulfill international obligations to its allies. Moreover, with the funds saved on wages and paper shuffling in Ottawa, Canadian troops would not be forced to use obsolete or old equipment, and possibly tragedies like the *Chicoutimi* could have been avoided. **FL**



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This article includes excerpts from a 2003 paper by Sunil Ram and Tim Mau for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, entitled "The Nature of the Civil-Military Relationship in Canada and its Impact on the Leadership Role of the Officer Corps."