

Stephen M. Saideman (Carleton University), Defence Review Statement

As the government considers Canada's defence in a challenging world, there are many topics to address. While others will focus on threats, I think one way to organize the discussion is to focus on what the money is spent on—equipment, operations and personnel. The media and the parliament tend to focus almost entirely on the procurement of equipment. I might guess that much of the discussion at the various roundtables will be as well, so I will focus elsewhere—on operations and on personnel. My points will be simple ones—that NATO drives Canadian operations, that readiness is often overlooked, that the size of the Canadian Armed Forces [CAF] is something that needs to be considered, that the CAF is already specialized yet can still do combat, and perhaps the Panel ought to consider developing varying recommendations which depend on levels of risk tolerance, not unlike the military.

First, my observation of this Liberal government is that **NATO** is an afterthought. The focus on UN and peacekeeping fits with Liberal values and is aimed at reversing the efforts of the previous government. In their defence platform, NATO was only briefly discussed. But the reality is that whenever NATO engages in an operation, Canada shows up and expends a great deal of effort: the defence of Western Europe during the Cold War, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya, and now the reassurance mission. Rumors of the “ask” for the new NATO mission in the Baltics/Poland suggest a significant commitment. Canada has opted out of some coalitions of the willing, and there are so many UN missions so Canada has to pick and choose. But with NATO, Canada participates, so the review should consult NATO and consider what the alliance will need from Canada down the road. My guess is that the CAF will be disappointed—that NATO will not demand a full spectrum military but perhaps want Canada to focus on some things Canada does well, even if it means doing other stuff less. Which things/stuff? The people in Brussels and Mons may have some answers to those questions. The British consulted with NATO extensively during their recent review. I hope this review does the same.

Second, one of the big differences between American and Canadian debates about military spending is that you don't hear the word “**hollow**” much up here. In the US, there is always the concern that there is not enough spending on training, maintenance and operations, that the military will be big but not capable. In Canada, most of the discussion is on procurement. But we need to think seriously about how operations/maintenance/training is funded as that determines readiness—can Canada fight well when it has to? Despite being out of Afghanistan, Canada faces a pretty high pace of operations—rotating into and out of Eastern Europe on a regular basis as part of NATO's reassurance missions, supporting the training mission in Iraq. But when the budget gets squeezed, it almost always comes out of readiness, as procurement has its own calendar and as personnel costs are seen as fixed.

This leads me to my third point: **personnel costs are nearly 50% of the budget**. So, any defence decisions should take seriously this part of the budget. I am not saying that we need to cut pay or benefits, but that the size of the force is a key constraint that cannot be ignored. If one assumes that Canadians will not want more money spent on defence or that this government is unlikely to do so, then the size of the force is a key consideration for whatever is planned. A related trend is this: with every defence program becoming more and more expensive, Canada will buy less. The next fighter plane purchase will certainly lead to fewer planes than the original F-18 procurement. The shipbuilding program is not going to lead to fifteen ships (latest estimate seems to be twelve or less). So, we are likely to need fewer pilots and fewer sailors. To

keep the intra-CAF peace and also to face the current budgetary reality, cutting the Army's size down a bit is probably a least worst solution.

My fourth point is that we need to overcome the tendency to think that making hard choices means producing a military that is not capable of combat. In discussions over the spring, it became clear that there is a tendency within the Canadian defence community to equate "full spectrum force" with "combat capable" and "specialized/niche" forces with a military that cannot fight. That is misleading at best. The **CAF is already a specialized force**, as is nearly every military in the world. The only full spectrum force is the US armed forces. Maybe Russia and China come close. Canada does not have aircraft carriers or amphibious ships, nor does Canada have long-range bombers or attack helicopters. The CAF lacks key capabilities and always will, which reinforces the point above—Canada always operates with other countries, who bring to the fight capabilities that the CAF lacks. The hard part is figuring out whether and how Canada should specialize further. A key military maxim is *to reinforce success and not to reinforce failure*, so the investments should be focused on what Canada does very well and prune those programs where CAF has done less well. While there are participants in these processes who have far more expertise on the specific programs/branches/weapons systems than I, let me quickly illustrate some possible strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths: Anti-submarine Warfare, Strategic Air Lift, Infantry (capable, well-led and largely free of restrictions that inhibit the armies of many of our allies)¹; Special Operations Forces.

Weaknesses: Submarines (four subs get us a total of 250 days at sea per year),² Armor (leasing proved to be a handy, temporary solution), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (re-joining NATO's joint program would be a smart move), Tactical Air Support.

My fifth point refers to the supply side of the equation: that what Canada can do with its military depends on what the government is willing to spend. This review has not been told what the government intends to spend. So, I recommend that the panel imitates many militaries by presenting **three sets of options**: low risk/more money; medium risk/medium money; and high risk/less money

I do think that the best decision would be for Canada to spend more on its military, but I recognize that this is probably a non-starter. Whatever increases will probably not catch up to inflation. I also recognize that Canada will continue to spend more and get less due to the insistence on buying Canadian built equipment even when better/less expensive kit is available. Given these trends, the CAF is in for hard times ahead (although calling a new decade of darkness is a bit much)—expected to keep up the pace of operations while avoiding hard decisions about priorities. Perhaps the Defence Review will lead to some difficult decisions actually being confronted.

¹ See my co-authored book, *NATO in Afghanistan: Fighting Together, Fighting Alone*.

² Sub proponents always mention that having subs forces the US to share information about their submarine operations in the Arctic. This is a political issue that could be resolved in some other way than dedicating many dollars to a broken program. While subs are a great anti-access/area-denial weapon, they are only good at that when they are at sea, and Canada simply does not have enough to do the job, and it is unlikely that Canada will buy enough new subs in the near future to do adequately the task assigned to them.