

LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA?

Canada's friends and allies have been churning out defence White Papers at a prodigious rate. Particularly intriguing was Australia's end-of-year White Paper, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*. Although the Canadian Forces and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) confront different geo-strategic and national realities — the ADF, for example, has a profoundly regional (i.e., Asia Pacific) focus, is arguably more tightly woven into the fabric of Australian society, and functions in a defence policy environment which stresses self-reliance — at root the Canadian Forces and the ADF face many of the same challenges. Both are defence establishments of comparatively modest size attempting to grapple with recapitalization, the Revolution in Military Affairs, recruitment and retention, financial and management reform, the future of reserve forces, and a host of other issues.

In phraseology starkly familiar to Canadians, the White Paper identifies a mismatch “between our strategic objectives, our defence capabilities and our levels of defence funding”, and concludes that “Defence had reached the point where we could not maintain our present range of capabilities at our present levels of spending. We needed to make a choice to spend more on Defence or expect Defence to do less.” After reviewing “Australia's regional environment, and our strategic interests and objectives, it was clear that the Government could not responsibly consider cutbacks in Australia's military capabilities. But we also recognized that just promising more money would not fix the problem. We needed to take a new approach to defence planning.”

The centrepiece of this new approach is the Defence Capability Plan (DCP) — a detailed and costed ten-year blueprint that will “provide the ADF with clear long-term goals for its development, and the funding needed to achieve these goals”. “The DCP”, notes one observer, “will finally allow defence project managers and industry participants to plan more precisely the ADF's capital equipment acquisition initiatives from system procurement to end of life-of-type.” It envisages budgetary growth averaging three percent per annum in real terms over the next decade, and an increase in regular force personnel from 51,500 to 54,000.

The naval procurement agenda includes at least three anti-air warfare vessels, new patrol boats, support ships and amphibious warfare vessels, and upgrades to ANZAC-class frigates and Collins-class submarines; its air force counterpart embraces up to 100 new combat aircraft to replace the F/A-18 and F-111, four airborne early warning and control aircraft, new-generation tankers, C-130H refurbishment, and the replacement or refurbishment of the P-3C. Army capital programmes include 20-24 armed reconnaissance helicopters, additional trooplift helicopters, M113 upgrades, a successor to the Rapier surface-to-air missile, 20 LAV-mounted

120mm mortar systems, tactical unmanned aerial vehicles, and new trucks, night vision equipment and communications systems.

Structured around three brigades and a Special Operations Group, the army “will be able to sustain a brigade on operations for extended periods, and at the same time maintain at least a battalion group available for deployment elsewhere.” The role of the Reserves will be changed “from mobilisation to meet remote threats to that of supporting and sustaining the types of contemporary military operations in which the ADF may be engaged. Increasingly, the Reserves will provide those skills not held within the permanent forces or held only in small numbers”.

The White Paper has come as a relief to more than a few ADF personnel, but it is not universally revered. The Australian correspondent for *Jane's Defence Weekly*, for example, has criticized its equipment ambiguities and the inadequacy of the proposed funding. Concerns also have been voiced over the apparent blunting of the army's warfighting capability. “In broad terms”, notes the White Paper, “a major Australian contribution to a coalition for higher intensity operations would more likely involve air or naval forces than land forces. The air and naval forces we develop for the defence of Australia will provide the Government with a range of options to contribute to coalitions in higher intensity operations against well-armed adversaries. Our land forces would be ideally suited to provide contributions to lower intensity operations including peace-enforcement, peacekeeping and many types of humanitarian operations. Such operations are much more likely than high intensity operations and would emphasize mobility and the levels of protection and firepower appropriate for our own environment, rather than the kinds of heavy armoured capabilities needed for high intensity continental warfare.”

It is readily apparent that not all of the White Paper's initiatives are applicable or desirable in a Canadian context, but its candour in acknowledging a commitment-capability gap, and its willingness to enhance key defence capabilities, are to be applauded. It is heartening, too, that the White Paper does not reduce the profession of arms to a business equation. ‘Vision statements’ and ‘mission statements’ are conspicuously absent. To be sure, it identifies a role for ASD, but cautions that “reform measures that are...appropriate in the civilian sector...may be less appropriate in the military context. We are very conscious of the unique nature of military service, and of the need to ensure that reform measures do not detract from it.” The White Paper also acknowledges the need for “senior leadership development initiatives”, but stresses that “the aim is to ensure that an effective ‘leadership culture’ is in place, not a ‘bureaucratic culture’.” Vision, indeed.

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