

# DEFENCE POLICY AFTER GENERAL HILLIER

by Shaun Tymchuk



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General Rick Hillier.

**G**eneral Rick Hillier passed the torch to General Walt Natynczyk recently, after almost three-and-a-half intense and transformational years as Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Even before the announcement of his departure in mid-April this year, tributes poured in from every quarter in recognition of General Hillier's immense and distinctive contribution as Canada's top soldier.

Journalists, commentators, and scholars have been virtually unanimous in their praise for Hillier's re-establishment of Canadian military effectiveness, the recovery of the military ethic, and the reconnection of the Canadian Forces (CF) with the society it serves. They emphasize the billions of dollars of new defence funding and the acquisition of essential new capabilities, the increased recruiting, and the war-winning confidence and unified effectiveness of our navy, army, air force, and Special Forces operating together at home and abroad. Above all, they point to Hillier's refreshing candour and populist appeal in

speaking directly to Canadians – the restored national pride shared by Canadians for their armed forces, and the resilient morale of our men and women in uniform at war under his inspiring leadership.

Some knowledgeable commentators have pointed to the pivotal role played by General Hillier in shaping defence policy and the structure of the CF. Former Minister of National Defence (MND) Bill Graham, who pushed General Hillier's nomination for CDS to Prime Minister Paul Martin, refers to him as the "architect" of today's armed forces.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Douglas Bland goes further, suggesting that, in the absence of guidance, Hillier became "...almost accidentally ... the architect of Canada's defence policy." Moreover, Bland believes that the "renaissance" of "professional spirit" that has firmly taken root in the Canadian officer corps will perpetuate in Hillier's successors a more active role for the CDS in public policy.<sup>2</sup> Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang agree in part with Bland, suggesting that "Hillier...was asked to fill a void in a dysfunctional policy making system." They maintain that General Hillier "...did not take control of policy from civilians; he was given control of policy by elected leaders."<sup>3</sup>

At this watershed transition in Canadian military leadership, it is useful perhaps to examine the role of political leaders, government officials, and military leaders in the development of Canadian defence policy and in shaping our military force structure. Is General Hillier an "eccentric aberration," or is he the prototype for a "new breed" of post-Cold War CDS?<sup>4</sup> Can we expect General Natynczyk to continue General Hillier's trend?

From the earliest days of Confederation, defence issues have been dominated by Canadian domestic politics. Issues such as defence appropriations, commitments to participate in foreign wars, and military service were all seen as being potentially divisive to national unity. This perception alone was enough to ensure the subordination of defence policy to civilian control, despite the desire of a succession of British officers to protect the Canadian militia against harmful meddling by civilian amateurs. Nonetheless, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the issue had been settled. Not even the well-connected, energetic, and reform-minded General Hutton, whose goal of a "National Army" and direct appeals to the populace bear some resemblance to General Hillier's style, could resist the will of the

Laurier government to exercise its legitimate right to decide defence policy, and to ensure that soldiers carried out Parliament's will. Minister of Militia Sir Frederick Borden's reforms – specifically the Militia Act of 1904 – firmly established national defence under ministerial control.<sup>5</sup> To this day, civil control of Canada's armed forces has never been in doubt. What is more relevant, however, is the extent and quality of collaboration, and the level of trust and confidence between senior military leaders, their civilian counterparts, and their political masters.

The customary relationship between foreign policy and defence policy in Canada provides additional insight into the roles of the key players responsible for the development of these policies. During the tenure of Louis St Laurent as Prime Minister, as Canada assumed a more active role internationally, it became increasingly common to view Canada's armed forces and its defence policy as instruments of foreign policy, with foreign policy decisions being prior decisions in a 'means-ends' relationship.<sup>6</sup> Successive federal governments made statements to the effect that defence policy is the logical extension of foreign policy, including Pierre Trudeau's hint of a policy review in speaking to a Liberal Association dinner in Calgary in 1969, when he suggested: "It is a false perspective to have your military alliance determine your foreign policy.... We have decided to review our foreign policy to have a defence policy flow from that."<sup>7</sup> Although such pronouncements effectively illustrate intent, they do not describe how defence policy and military structures can be derived with precision from foreign policy objectives. Moreover, the implied 'means-end' model does not work well in a resource-constrained environment where, at times, foreign policy decisions might reflect existing military capabilities, akin to 'the tail wagging the dog.'<sup>8</sup>

The division of responsibilities between the Minister of National Defence (MND), the Deputy Minister (DM), and the CDS for the development of defence policy is somewhat ambiguous and dependent upon personality, custom and practice, and trust and confidence. According to Douglas Bland, the *National Defence Act (NDA)* "...was originally framed to acknowledge that these three individuals, although in no way equals, share with the prime minister responsibility for the national defence of Canada."<sup>9</sup> The MND, Parliament's agent for civilian control of the military, is assigned "...the management and direction of the CF and all matters relating to national defence" by the *NDA*.<sup>10</sup> These responsibilities include defence policy, but, according to Bland, few ministers have been able to direct defence policy on their own.<sup>11</sup> The authority of the CDS is based upon the *NDA* and upon custom. The CDS is a key advisor to the government on matters involving the armed forces, including the development of military structures and capabilities. Thus, the CDS is

commonly seen to, and is expected to, have a critical role in shaping defence policy, but he is not responsible for *producing* defence policy. The *NDA* is silent on the responsibilities of the DM for defence policy, and his relationship with the CDS is based upon custom, practice, and the personalities involved.<sup>12</sup> But how is defence policy actually crafted?

In their book, *Canada's International Policies: Agendas, Alternatives and Politics*, Brian Tomlin, Norman Hillmer, and Fen Osler Hampson use John Kingdon's 'multiple streams' approach to policy development to explain the factors, forces, and 'actors' that contribute to public policy change and continuity in Canada.<sup>13</sup> Informed by their analysis of which issues make it to the policy agenda, the alternatives considered, and the political considerations that affect policy choices, the authors make a number of revealing observations. They suggest that the international policymaking process in Canada is messy and often unpredictable, consisting of less method and structure than is commonly believed. Change is not a constant. In fact, change tends to occur *only* when the three streams converge: that is, when the problem is compelling, a solution is at hand, and political support is assured. The authors are adamant that entrepreneurial leadership is critical "...in getting problems onto the policy agenda, moving these agendas forward, translating them into viable policy proposals, and steering those proposals through the minefields of the federal bureaucracy and the political arena."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, they are convinced that a crucial policy leadership function is "...to seize windows of opportunity to introduce new policy initiatives – a process in which timing is everything."<sup>15</sup>

Viewed in the context of a multiple streams approach, General Hillier's pivotal role as policy entrepreneur for the 2005 Defence Policy Statement, and his shaping of the International Policy Statement, speak glowingly to his exceptional personal and professional abilities – his vision, determination, and leadership. But multiple streams analysis highlights other factors and circumstances beyond Hillier's direct control, which proved crucial to the favourable outcomes achieved. Prime Minister Martin urgently sought fresh ideas to differentiate his government from the preceding Chrétien regime, and he was not satisfied with the policy advice he was receiving from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). On the other hand, General Hillier's vision of expeditionary operations for the CF resonated deeply with Prime Minister Martin and Defence Minister Graham, both for the influence they would generate, and as a means to repair the Canada-US relationship. This assisted Hillier to quickly gain and then hold their confidence. The DM and senior civilian officials at DND also extended full cooperation to General Hillier. The Canadian public mood was receptive to greater engagement on defence issues, and tolerant of more spending on defence. Government budget



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General Walter Natynczyk.

surpluses allowed deficiencies in defence capabilities to be addressed without cutting into other essential programs. Little was known of the enormous difficulties to be faced in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

Is it reasonable to expect General Natynczyk to duplicate his predecessor's feat, to continue leading the development of defence and foreign policy? Canadian historical experience in civil-military relations would suggest a more likely role of contributing to the development of defence policy and leading in its

implementation. Multiple streams analysis would suggest little likelihood of a repetition of the circumstances and opportunities of 2005 that made General Hillier's feat possible. This is in no way a criticism of General Natynczyk, who is an exceptional officer in every respect, with all the qualities needed to lead the CF successfully into the future. It simply recognizes that the situation General Hillier faced when he assumed command was different from the conditions that confront General Natynczyk today.

At the same time, members of the CF expect General Natynczyk to perpetuate the renaissance of the military profession in Canada: to consolidate military effectiveness, to foster the military ethos, and to promote the connection between the CF and the society that it serves. This will require the CDS to not only set the example but to 'speak truth to power,' as most, but not all, before him have done – especially on matters of operational effectiveness, the integrity of the institution, and the safety and welfare of Canada's sons and daughters in military uniform. On occasion, without dictating defence policy or engaging in partisan politics, it will also require the CDS to communicate directly, unambiguously, even bluntly with Canadians to ensure that they are adequately informed of important defence issues. This is the enduring legacy of General Hillier.

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**NOTES**

1. See Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking, 2007), pp. 149-150.
2. Douglas Bland, "Hillier and the New Generation of Generals: The CDS, the Policy and the Troops," in *Policy Options*, March 2008, p. 56.
3. Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, "Too Few Hilliers: The General Goes Where Ottawa Mandarins Fear to Tread," in *The Walrus*, April 2008, p. 37.
4. Bland, p. 54.
5. Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 33-35 and pp. 62-67. Also, Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), pp. 67-68.
6. James Eayrs, "Military Policy and the Middle Power: The Canadian Experience," in J. King Gordon, *Canada's Role as a Middle Power: Papers given at the Third Annual Banff Conference on World Development, August 1965* (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1966), pp. 69-70. Also, Denis Stairs, "The Military as an Instrument of Canadian Foreign Policy," in Hector J. Massey, *The Canadian Military: a Profile* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972), p. 86.
7. See D.W. Middlemiss and J.J. Sokolsky, *Canadian Defence: Decisions and Determinants* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 3, and Larry R. Stewart, *Canadian Defence Policy: Selected Documents 1964-1981* (Kingston ON: Queen's University Centre for International Relations, 1982), p. 20.
8. Stairs, pp. 87-88.
9. Douglas L. Bland, *Chiefs of Defence: Government and the Unified Command of the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, 1995), p. 144.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
13. Brian W. Tomlin, Norman Hillmer, and Fen Osler Hampson, *Canada's International Policies: Agendas, Alternatives and Politics* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford, 2008). Also, John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).
14. Tomlin, Hillmer, and Hampson, p. 2.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-154. See also Stein and Lang, pp. 148-157.