



DND photo ET2012-5012-09 by Corporal Malcolm Byers

HMCS *St. John's* conducts operations in the Davis Strait east of Baffin Island on 16 August 2012 during Op *Nanook 12*.

REVIEWING DEFENCE POLICY

by Martin Shadwick

In the later years of the Trudeau government, it became customary—indeed, almost obligatory—for academics, parliamentary committees, think tanks, media pundits and retired senior officers to press the merits of a new white paper on defence, or, at the very least, its functional equivalent. The rationales for a fresh look at Canadian defence policy varied from commentator to commentator, but, at root, shared the conviction that the Trudeau government's unduly optimistic, détente-era white paper of 1971 had become an outdated historical curiosity by the early-1980s. The proponents of a new white paper acknowledged that the Trudeau government's much more pragmatic Defence Structure Review of 1975 had rescued the Canadian military from the financial wilderness, and had restored NATO to its pre-eminent position in Canadian defence policy, but posited that the government had failed to provide a thoroughgoing intellectual foundation for the capabilities-oriented Defence Structure Review, and had not fully addressed the infamous 'gap' between Canada's declared defence commitments and actual military capabilities. The arguments were well-founded, but the Trudeau government, for a variety of reasons, never did produce a second white paper on defence.

The government of Stephen Harper, which rolled out its Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS) in 2008, has not yet been on the receiving end of such a steady pro-white paper bombardment, but it is patently clear that calls for a meaningful dialogue on defence, a thorough update of the CFDS, a defence review, or a full-fledged white paper—in any event, something more than a mere tweaking of the CFDS—are on the rise. Indeed, the first criticisms that the CFDS was more shopping list than intellectual foundation (arguably the opposite of a defect in the defence component of Paul Martin's *International Policy Statement* of 2005) surfaced within days of its release. In a more recent but essentially similar vein, Eugene Lang and Eric Morse, writing in the *Toronto Star* in 2010, argued that "... at a minimum, our political leadership owes Canadians a conversation about the military as an instrument of Canada's foreign policy. An honest conversation about the nature of our military today, the realities of the dangerous world in which we live, the imperfections of our international organizations, and how a Canadian contribution to international peace and security can fit with these realities."

Paul Chapin and George Petrolekas, in *The Strategic Outlook for Canada*—a February 2012 Vimy Paper published by the Conference of Defence Associations Institute—observed: “Canada’s defence budget has doubled in the last ten years and now exceeds \$20 billion a year. The new resources have gone to fighting in Afghanistan and more recently in Libya, to smaller CF deployments across the globe, to replacing equipment lost in battle—and, finally, to beginning the long process of modernizing the army, navy and air force. With ‘transformation’ likely to reduce the defence budget in the order of 15 [percent] and with limited room for economies (the transformation of 1994 cut \$7 billion and 30,000 CF personnel), the CF will only be able to do ‘less with less’ in 2012 and beyond.” This state of affairs, they posit, “begs for policy clarity on a number of fronts.” What, for example, “... are the government’s expectations in respect of the capabilities of the Canadian Forces in the event that they are called on to participate in a new NATO or coalition operation this year or next? [In a] budget-constrained military, will decisions already taken regarding new equipment purchases have to be revisited and new choices made driven by affordability, return on investment, and emerging strategy?” Can “previous sacred cows such as general purpose combat capability be maintained or is some degree of specialization needed across various elements of the Canadian Forces? For example, do we need specialized units and if so, what kind?” What balance, they ask, should be “struck between domestic and expeditionary capabilities”? What trade-offs may have to be made “between traditional priorities such as the commitment to NATO and emerging priorities such as defence against cyber attack and ballistic missiles, sovereignty in the Arctic, security relations with partners in the Americas, and the geopolitical shifts underway in the Asia-Pacific region? Will a new balance have been struck between the weight placed on the three services (more navy and air force, less army?) and will forces have been realigned between the East and West coasts of Canada?”

They conclude that the CFDS “needs to be updated if it is to continue to serve its purpose of ensuring that the Canadian Forces have the people, equipment and support they need to meet existing and emerging security challenges. Before engaging in a re-write, the government should consider a series of first principles to guide the work and define more precisely the contribution the Canadian Forces are expected to make to the nation’s security.” They further recommend: “[that] the Defence Investment Plan should be critically evaluated to ensure that the scope, timing and relevance of new [capital] acquisitions correspond to their operational sustainability and future affordability” and, given that “the growth in the DND budget has outstripped the Department’s capacity to gain approvals and to deliver the capital program, with significant dollars remaining unspent at year-end, the government should permit reprofiling of lapsed capital funds to future years when the available funding will align more practically to actual project spending projections.”

In a June 2012 commentary for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, Canada’s distinguished military historian and defence authority Jack Granatstein posited: “The

Harper government and the military leadership of the Canadian Forces have been silent on what they expect the CF to do in the next five or ten years. Canada has no national security strategy, for one thing, and the nation’s defence policy seems to be wholly reactive—Libya? Send a frigate and CF-18s—rather than trying to plan for likely contingencies and to shape a military to meet them. As budgets decline, as new equipment procurement inevitably stalls, it is time to re-think what Canada does and how we do it. Do we want Canada to continue to have three small services of roughly equivalent weight as at present? Or do we believe the future calls for the RCAF to be pre-eminent, featuring [F-35s], drones, and C-17s? Do we foresee an army that can deploy a division overseas and sustain it or one that must strain to support a battle group? Do we want the Royal Canadian Navy to be larger and to have its weight in the North Atlantic, as at present, or do we want to shift to the Pacific? Do we want ships designed to go anywhere or only to protect the Canadian coasts? We simply have no idea what the government is thinking, if it is thinking anything other than that the CF’s equipment needs seem to cost the earth. (Nor, incidentally, do we have any idea what the Official Opposition believes about defence other than that the [F-35] will cost too much and is the wrong aircraft and the Americans are nasty.) After more than a decade fighting a war in Afghanistan, surely the time has come for the government to make some fundamental decisions about the future of the CF. Ideally this should be done in the form of a White Paper produced by the Defence and Foreign Affairs departments, but in Mr. Harper’s Ottawa the centre rules. That likely means that the Prime Minister’s Office would shape the policy for departmental drafters to polish. That may not be ideal, but it would be better than doing nothing, better than the drift that now seems to be Canadian defence policy.”

Potentially a central factor in determining the optimal means of tackling these and related questions is the current state of the decision-making environment for defence in Canada. For the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, this means a curious and complex amalgam of factors. On one hand, the Canadian Forces cannot be accused of hibernating since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the full scope of Canadian military activity since 1989—be it military, quasi-military, or non-military in *nature*, or domestic, continental, or global in *scale*—has been extraordinary, ranging from the Oka Crisis and the Persian Gulf War, and a massive surge in peacekeeping and peace support operations in the 1990s, many of which, in due course shifted from UN to NATO auspices. Other notable taskings included large-scale disaster and humanitarian relief operations at home (i.e., the “ice storm of the century”) and abroad (i.e., Haiti), and from Human Security/Responsibility to Protect-style interventions in Kosovo and Libya, to a diverse and demanding set of commitments post-9/11, most notably, of course, combat operations in Afghanistan. These exertions, arguably, have sensitized Canadians to the volatile and unpredictable geo-strategic environment. However, Jennifer Welsh takes note of some encouraging trends in an intriguing analysis in the June 2012 *Literary Review of Canada*, including enhanced public support for the retention, just in case, of a least some form of “multi-purpose, combat-capable” defence establishment, and the re-



DND photo IS2012-2003-205 by Master Corporal Marc-André Gaudreault

Corporal Daniel Fullerton from A Company, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, conducts Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) at the US Marine Corps training area, Waimanalo, Hawaii, 30 July 2012.

connection of many Canadians with their armed forces. This most assuredly did not mean that all Canadians supported the combat role in Afghanistan, but most Canadians were prepared to acknowledge the sacrifices of their military personnel.

On the other hand, a number of roles that have traditionally commanded high levels of public support have not fared well in recent years, a development that could erode broader public support for defence. Examples include peacekeeping and peace support operations under the flag of the United Nations, although it must be acknowledged that the significant slippage in Canadian participation pre-dated the Harper government, search and rescue, buffeted by delays in modernization and perceived shortcomings in levels of service, and potentially at risk of full privatization, and Arctic sovereignty. The latter should have been an area of real strength for the Harper government, but serious delays in such key projects as the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ship (AOPS) and the de-scoping of such initiatives as the Nanisivik refuelling facility—now a mere “gas station,” laments defence (and Arctic) expert Professor Rob Huebert—have undermined its credibility. For Canadians anxious to maintain a security link to Europe—in part to balance Canada's security relationship with the United States—recent decisions to exit the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) project and, in particular, to eliminate the Canadian contribution to the NATO AWACS force—are additional causes for concern. Also required, in any event, is a much sharper and much more holistic understanding of public attitudes to defence in 21st century Canada. To what extent

might Canadians embrace the assertion advanced in some circles that Ottawa is attempting to rebrand Canada as a ‘warrior nation’? How might changing demographics alter public perceptions of defence and the Canadian Forces? Long-standing priorities and commitments that appear entirely appropriate to a fifth-generation Winnipegger, for example, may—or may not—appear equally appropriate to a newer arrival.

For those charged with updating, reviewing, or ‘resetting’ Canadian defence policy, the two most immediate areas of concern are tight money and managerial competence. The former is nothing new in the often parsimonious world of Canadian defence, but the magnitude of the challenge—given weaknesses in the Canadian economy, significant damage to Central Canada's manufacturing sector, the global economic recession and continuing uncertainty, numerous competing demands upon the public purse, and the sheer scale of DND's procurement backlog—clearly provides a point of departure from other post-1945 eras of restraint. Economic measures of the type flowing from the federal budget of 29 March 2012—such as reductions in the civilian and full-time reservist workforces, the elimination (i.e., ADATS) or pruning of selected weapon systems, and the disposal of surplus facilities and real estate—provide some (painful) measure of budgetary relief, and will undoubtedly be followed by additional such steps, but ‘shaving the ice cube’ can only go so far. Small wonder that we are witnessing renewed speculation that Canada may be forced to select military ‘winners and losers,’ thereby replacing three multi-purpose, combat-capable services with two (or

fewer?) multi-purpose, combat-capable services, and one essentially-constabulary service. The enormous risk, of course, is that there is no way to guarantee the accuracy and durability of our choice, no way to necessarily ‘get it right.’ The view expressed in some quarters after the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991 that Canada should favour its navy and air force at the expense of its army may have appeared modestly tempting in 1991, but it would have looked hopelessly shortsighted, and option-limiting, in 2001.

Managerial competence in defence procurement is not a new issue either, but the particularly lengthy list of projects that have encountered difficulties of one type or another—the F-35 (particularly badly battered in reports by the Office of the Auditor General and others), the *Cyclone* maritime helicopter, the *Chinook* medium transport helicopter, the Fixed-Wing Search and Rescue Aircraft, the Joint Support Ship, the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ship and the Close Combat Vehicle, to cite but some examples—is both new and extremely disquieting. In fairness, one should note that DND’s relevant project management expertise was significantly eroded during the 1990s (another legacy of the “decade of darkness”), that the procurement system was simply not designed to cope with so many large, and, in some cases, extremely complex projects,

and that DND is by no means the only actor (or culprit) in Canadian defence procurement. On the other hand, some of the projects on the aforementioned list are not particularly complex, not ‘rocket science,’ and should have been able to navigate the shoals of even Canadian defence procurement in a smoother and more timely fashion. Others have faulted DND for a perception that budgetary restraint is merely a temporary obstacle, and for a sense of entitlement borne in part of the operation in Afghanistan. The ‘bottom line,’ in any event, is that the procurement system has become dysfunctional and must be addressed on a priority basis. The Harper government announced a raft of changes to the CF-18 replacement project following the Spring 2012 Report of the Auditor General, including the creation of an F-35 Secretariat within the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada, and more such changes must be anticipated. Such changes will involve further angst for DND and the Canadian Forces, but the risks incurred in losing the confidence of the Canadian people—and the Harper government—would be infinitely greater.

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DND photo BN2012-0210-37 by Corporal Pierre Habib

This CF-18 *Hornet* manoeuvres dynamically during an air show held at La Baie, Quebec earlier this year as part of the celebrations surrounding the 10th anniversary of the amalgamation of Saguenay.