

Canada's planned defence review is an opportunity for our nation to take a giant stride

The defence review that the federal government has promised by the end of 2016 will be the first in more than 20 years. Given the amounts of money and numbers of people and strategic and industrial questions involved, and the infrequency of such searching examinations, it will be a very important initiative and is to the new regime's credit that it is doing this. The previous government talked a good game and always spoke as an upholder of Canada's military, but it was so inflexibly attached to the twin (and virtuous) constraints of a balanced budget and an HST incapable of being raised, that it fell far short in commitment of resources. The (Justin) Trudeau government inherits an annual defence budget of \$19.1 billion, or about one per cent of GDP, which is half the NATO target and informal commitment level, albeit a target only the United States and Poland meet. Though the history of the Canadian military in action is a distinguished one, the history of military policy and strategic thinking by Canada's federal government has been sluggish since Louis St. Laurent's time, except, up to a point, for Brian Mulroney.

In 2010 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Canadian Navy, but in fact, it did not really begin for some time. Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberals adopted the idea of a Canadian navy, with a Canadian system for training officers and seamen and a domestic shipbuilding industry, as a compromise. Robert Borden's Conservatives considered a Canadian navy imperial heresy and preferred instead simply to make a financial contribution to the Royal Navy, which would commission the construction of new battleships in British

yards by British shipbuilders and man them with British sailors. The first such battleship was named HMS Canada, but was eventually sold to Chile, and the British did not remit the proceeds.

On the other hand, Henri Bourassa's Quebec Nationalists, who had worked with Borden's Conservatives to defeat Laurier in 1911 (their shared opposition to Liberals being almost the only thing they could agree on), opposed any contribution to any navy as likely to increase the chances of Canada becoming entangled in a European war that was no earthly concern of Canada's. French Canada has never had any significant maternal attachments to France in the way English-speaking Canada has had to Britain. Although French-Canadians have always been militant about defending this country, and largely saved it from joining the American Revolution and from being annexed in the War of 1812, they have generally been rather isolationist and are more resistant to this day than English-speaking Canadians to supporting alliance initiatives overseas. The one exception to this was the Korean War. The Union Nationale government of Maurice Duplessis and the Roman Catholic Church leadership whipped the population up to such paroxysms of anti-Communism, Quebec was eager to send a larger contingent than Canada did to Korea. The archbishop of Quebec, the subsequent Cardinal Maurice Roy, had served in the chaplains' corps in the Second World War, attaining the rank of colonel and receiving the Order of the British Empire for bravery in combat. He eventually became the chaplain general of the Canadian army.

Despite its deemphasis, defence remains a large budgetary item, and as I have written here and elsewhere ad nauseam, this is the most effective form of stimulative public spending, if it is done with that objective in mind, as the new government has pledged to do. Most procurement is in high-tech, high-growth economic areas, encouraging the most sophisticated segment of the work force. Construction is

mainly of ships, aircraft and land vehicles, all relatively complicated manufacturing which ramifies throughout heavy industry: steel, aluminum, rubber, glass, and into top-end manufacturing of smaller items – controls and instruments, radar, optics, and engineered products of all kinds. The traditional multiplier effects on economic growth are very gratifying. Like the United States but on a smaller scale, the Canadian armed forces are incomparable engines of adult education and virtually all those who enlist in them get an incentive and ability to raise their academic qualifications as well as their technical skills that they would not enjoy anywhere else.

Without lapsing into the cant of the pretended veteran, there is also little doubt that service in the armed forces often promotes traits invaluable to almost all who have served in them, whether in or near combat or not. This was the secret of the so-called Greatest Generation of the United States: Franklin D. Roosevelt saved the youth of America from unemployment with his infrastructure and conservation workfare programs, then had brilliant commanding officers, Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Arnold, and Admiral Nimitz, lead them to victory in the most just of all wars, and then posthumously propelled them into lifetimes of achievement with the GI Bill of Rights that educated and financed the launch of the civilian careers of the 15 million returning veterans (in a population of 135 million people). There is no prospect now of a general war, but increased recruitment in the armed forces is a much better and prouder visa to a better life than the welfare system, and not greatly more expensive.

The most important aspect of the military strength of a country is the influence such strength confers on it in the alliances and councils of the world. The fact that Canada was not invited to the recent meeting of the United States and its principal allies in the action against the Islamic State (ISIL) was not disconcerting to me because, in the interest of

giving a new government the benefit of any doubt, I assume that the Trudeau government's reduction of Canada's contribution on that front is due to its doubts that the current alliance is altogether coherent. The West, led by the United States, is making common cause with Iran and Russia, a dubious proposition on its face, in Sunni Iraq, around Baghdad, but in Syria is attacking the Iranian and Russian-sponsored Assad regime, while joining Iran and Russia in attacking ISIL, and even as those countries assault the Western entry in the Syrian civil war, the so-called moderate faction. The Kurds appear to be doing most of the heavy lifting and ISIL seems gradually to be losing ground, and probably has not more than 50,000 fighters in its demented crusade for a Caliphate for Sunni Muslims from Turkey to Iraq and through the Arabian Peninsula and across North Africa. It is possibly the most insane political endeavour that has attracted Great Power attention since the Cargo Cult of the Melanesian Pacific Islands wanted to buy President Lyndon Johnson in the mid-sixties and mystically replicate the American consumer society and economy. (Though just as other-worldly as the Islamic State, this was naturally a good deal less troublesome.)

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The anti-ISIL cause is a good one, but the diplomatic effort is a farce. The answer isn't the Liberal addiction to dropping blankets on refugees when they were in opposition, and the withdrawal of our six aging CF-18's and three non-combat airplanes since their election is militarily irrelevant. But in addition to the economic benefits, Canada could move militarily, as it has economically, to a G7 status. Canada has one of the world's 10 greatest National Products, among 198 countries (including Palestine, Taiwan, and the Vatican), but its military strength is much less formidable. The failure to meet more than half the official target as a percentage of GDP

of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the most successful alliance in history, of which Canada was a co-founder, is on a par with the perennial failure of any country to pay any attention to its undertakings to reduce carbon emissions. But in the case of the military, we are failing in our ability to have a force that would enable us to have any weight in revitalizing the Western Alliance. NATO degenerated from "An attack upon one is an attack upon all" to "a coalition of the willing" to an incoherent talking shop and Tower of Babel. Apart from the United States, which has the muscle, but has elevated as commander in chief first a trigger-happy cowboy and then a pacifist and appeaser, nobody has any weight in NATO, except, in extremities, Britain and France because of their nuclear deterrents.

If Canada raised the HST marginally on elective spending, it could double its military strength, raise its position in the aerospace industry, be taken seriously by, and help to revive, NATO, and render immensely more assistance than its generous nature has been able to give in natural catastrophes such as tsunamis and earthquakes that strike unpredictably but inevitably. We should start with an aircraft or at least helicopter carrier; this is how a country shows its flag in the world. Thailand, Spain, and Brazil have one, and India and Italy have two, as Canada once did, and plenty are on offer. Pierre Trudeau scrapped our last aircraft carrier, the Bonaventure, in almost as serious an error as John Diefenbaker's cancellation of the Arrow interceptor. It would also give us a powerful shot in the arm economically. While we're at it, we can spruce up our military uniforms, which haven't entirely recovered from the amiable champion of intergalactic life, Pearson Defense minister Paul Hellyer's, stab at monochromatic unification of the armed forces 50 years ago. I am usually deluged with messages mocking me as a couturier wannabe when I write this, but I urge readers inclined to that response to put "Chinese women's military parade" into their search engines and see what pride and

ambition can be engendered in well-trained and crisply uniformed forces.

The defence review is an opportunity for Canada to take another giant stride, the greatest since the defeat of the Quebec separatists and the successful Mulroney-Chrétien-Martin assault on the federal budget deficit, to gain Canada the status it has otherwise earned as one of the world's important powers.

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