



Fred R. Fowlow

## The Canadian Forces are Ready Aye Ready For Transformation and Change But is the Government?

Among Prime Minister Martin's many challenges in 2004 will be rebuilding the rusted-out military, restoring the fractured relationship between Canada and the United States, and providing additional federal funding to support the transformation of the Canadian Forces (CF) for 21st century operations.

Despite widespread agreement of Canadians that the armed forces need a long overdue increase in funding, "the PM has indicated there will be no rush toward heavy spending for larger, abler, better-equipped military, so we can pull our weight as an American partner."<sup>1</sup> The appointment of the Hon. David Pratt, the recent highly-respected Chairman of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs (SCONDVA) to the position of Minister of National Defence will bring to DND, by virtue of his SCONDVA experience, much needed understanding of the problems and issues facing the armed forces. He is the right person to lead the rethinking and re-grouping, and to support the refinancing of the armed forces as they prepare for the 21st century.

Defence problems facing Paul Martin's government are not an exaggeration; David Abshire, President of the Center for the Study of Presidency correctly observes: "Canada was once a major player in NATO, but its influence in world affairs has eroded steadily since the 1980s and could be edging towards irrelevance."<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister must decide if it will be financially feasible to increase the funding for the CF, or to continue to allow diminishing

defence resources to destroy Canada's military, which can no longer be sustained on overseas deployments at the present scale of activity. Alternatively, he must consider the question — are Canadians prepared to face the possibility of leaving the defence of our country to the United States?

Historically, Canadians have never had the capability of assuring their own security. We have been more comfortable spending on our security through the medium of alliances and supporting world organizations. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a vacillating change in attitude toward defence. At long last the mind glazing recitations of naïve, ill-informed parliamentarians regarding our need for sovereignty, our moral commitments to collective security alliances, and service to peace, freedom and humanity around the world, are wearing thin and regarded as little more than propaganda by a public that is slowly recognizing they have been misled by their political leaders.

Many would agree with Dr. Colin S. Gray, a respected analyst of British, American and Canadian military affairs who, at the request of the Atlantic Council of Canada prepared an essay, "Canadians in a Dangerous World," in which he wrote: "The potential cost of too little defence for Canada is national embarrassment at best, and significant national damage at worst."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Gray's poignant comments were presented to members of the one-time Special Joint Committee on Canada's Defence Policy and members of the special Joint Parliamentary Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy, with no apparent impact on the Chrétien government. A read of Gray's essay by Prime Minister Martin might con-

ceivably prompt him to recognize the error of accepting the optimistic assumptions and bad advice given by the "soft power" advocates in foreign affairs, or faceless bureaucrats in the Defence Department. The latter group has been described in a Canadian Security in the 21st Century article as people without a proven track record ... and are the same gang who brought in two successive White Papers (1987 and 1994), each discredited within a year of publication, and were intimately involved in the "management" of the Somalia deployment.<sup>4</sup>

Retired MGen. Lewis MacKenzie added his assessment of the situation facing our military leaders when he wrote that Canadian "uninformed leadership is trapped within a bureaucratic structure imposed by the Defence Department. Ever since the Forces' headquarters was integrated into the department in the early 1970s, serving generals and admirals who are called before parliamentary committees do not have the freedom of speech enjoyed by their US counterparts."<sup>5</sup>

The 1970 reorganization of DND, a masterful degree of what this writer calls managerial blundering, shifted senior military leaders into an organizational structure dominated by civilian bureaucrats who cater to political whims, play cost-effectiveness and efficiency games, as opposed to military leaders who are rightly concerned about operational requirements as well as the morale and safety of their troops.<sup>6</sup>

One is reminded that much of Defence Minister Pratt's previous work as Chair of the

<sup>1</sup> "Written in Sand," Douglas Fisher, *Ottawa Sun*, Jan. 4, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> "Canada's Forces in Peril Says US Defence Expert," Mike Blanchfield, *canada.com* News, 6 Sept. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> "Canadians in a Dangerous World," Dr. Colin S. Gray, The Atlantic Council of Canada, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> "Today's Lesson—Civil Control of the Military," Council for Security in the 21st Century, March 2, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> "There's No Bureaucratic Life Like It," *Globe & Mail*, October 14, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> "Difficult Decisions, Decades of Neglect," *National Network News*, Vol. III, No. 3, July 1994.

Commons Defence bipartisan Committee was blocked, not by military commanders, but by the department's bureaucrats with serious questionable results. The question must therefore be: if Canadians prefer the military not to determine policy involving the deployment of troops to potential war operations, is it really any better to have the tasking of our forces conjured up in the office of civilian bureaucrats in DND?

For the first time in generations — perhaps ever — Canada hopefully has a Defence Minister who will be more inclined to take the advice of his service chiefs.<sup>7</sup> This is important because he arrives at a time when he must undertake the daunting task of taking the CF out of the quagmire of documented neglect, a situation so ably described in "Canada Without Armed Forces," a Queen's University study prepared in collaboration with the Conference of Defence Associations Institute.

The Queen's study maintains that the Canadian military will be retrenching for years to come regardless of how much new money the government commits to defence in the near term.<sup>8</sup> It suggests that if DND funding continues to decline at its 1980's rate, the air force will likely disappear through the 2008-13 time frame, and either the army or the navy will disappear at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

It is perhaps an exaggeration that sometime in the near future, Canadians will wake up one morning and find the country without a navy, army or air force. Nevertheless, someone, not politicized DND bureaucrats or military leaders who are not permitted to speak freely without being candidates for dismissal, must help Canadians become better informed about the state of our armed forces.

The message to be delivered to parliamentarians of all political persuasions is they must assume a bipartisan attitude toward security and defence matters, and then they must work to ensure Canada doesn't lose the marginal capability the forces have today. In the process, the commitment and

professionalism of our troops must be enhanced and retained. All re-enforced by the modernization and transformation of the Forces' combat-capability to a point where domestic and international security operations can be handled in an independent and sustained way.

Paul Martin's statement that there will be no heavy spending on the military tells one that much of what is described in the Queen's study will happen, unless government support of the armed forces improves. No increase in defence funding will mean that the forces will probably wait for decades before they have an independent air- and sea-lift capability — new replenishment supply support ships. And who knows what else in the way of modern defence equipment.

Clearly, a vision with an affordable plan for change must be developed as the CF moves through the period of revolution in military affairs (RMA).

"Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020," and the Army's "Advancing With Purpose: The Army Strategy" (nothing from the Air Force), together with the 2002-2003 Chief of the Defence Staff's (CDS) annual report, "A Time for Transformation," offer a sound foundation of observations and recommendations which could be the starting point for the development of a solid plan for the rebuilding of the Forces.

The CDS' "A Time for Transformation" reminds us that in his first annual report: "I argued quite emphatically that the Canadian Forces were at the crossroads, that the status quo was not sustainable, and that urgent action was needed to ensure that the Forces were both affordable and sustainable."<sup>10</sup>

One accepts the CDS' statement that: "A central element of transformation must be to accelerate our efforts to modernize our defence and security capabilities,"<sup>11</sup> however, one cannot avoid observing that in Canada's case, the early transformation of our forces is easier said than done. Until a foreign and defence policy review is completed, not much is going to happen in the way of building a plan which will ensure the modernization of our defence and security forces.

One expects that the foreign and defence

policy review will not commence until after the up-coming federal election and a new government is in place. The CF must therefore await a new defence policy and the rebuilding of our military, while other allies such as the Czechs, Australians, Germans, Dutch and the USA, have already launched transformation initiatives which will better prepared them for 21st century operations.<sup>12</sup> To add a sense of urgency to correct the Canadian situation, we are told: "our allies have lost confidence in Canada as a reliable partner, especially our key trading partner the United States. If we do not do our part in NATO and other coalitions, and bilaterally in North American defence, the USA will do it for us with the attendant loss of sovereignty that implies."<sup>13</sup>

If the PM has the slightest intention of moving to ensure that Canada will take the initiative to return to the position of being a viable middle power, he must be prepared to maintain a credible defence establishment. Canadians have been told repeatedly that if we are going to have any say at the conference tables in this dangerous new world, either political or economic, we'll have to pay the price of our seat.<sup>14</sup>

Since we are going to need allies in the future, and no one wants an ally who cannot contribute its share to the common cause, our government must focus attention on two important modernization undertakings which are highlighted by the CDS in his last annual report.<sup>15</sup>

Identified as one of the key elements of transformation and force modernization is the improvement of joint combat capability and interoperability. Here we are talking about two or more services working together in pursuit of common objectives. The navy, as we know, has worked in such a mode for decades with maritime patrol aircraft and shipborne helicopters, all supplied by the air force. Both are recognized as valuable efficient force multipliers for our frigates.

Canada's three services look to the air force for air transport and air-lift capability

<sup>7</sup> "Building New Defence Relationships," Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century, [www.ccs21.org](http://www.ccs21.org), January 6, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> "Martin's Juggling Act: The Budget & Defence," [globeandmail.com](http://globeandmail.com), January 1, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> "Armed Forces Not Ready to Collapse," Bill Cleverley *Times Colonist*, [canada.com](http://canada.com) News, Dec. 28, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> "A Time for Transformation," CDS' Annual Report 2002-2003.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "A Time for Transformation," CDS' Annual Report 2002-2003.

<sup>13</sup> "The State of Canadian Security and the Canadian Forces," LGen. (Ret'd) Belzile's address to the Institute of Public Affairs of Montréal, May 2003.

<sup>14</sup> "Canada Needs Deterrence Capabilities," J. A. D. Leamy, *National Network News*, Vol. III, No. 3, July 1994.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

which is certainly not the best since we seem to prefer to depend on the Ukraine and the US for large scale air-lift to overseas theatres. All, I might add, with questionable air-lift home if a real hot war broke out while our forces were deployed overseas.

For decades, the navy's other joint operation has found our ships attached to the NATO Standing Force, or participating in Atlantic and/or Pacific exercises with the US Navy and other allies. One can safely say that interoperability with these forces has come as a matter of routine. Clearly, none of the aforementioned operations will continue to be feasible if our forces do not receive the financial support to continue with technological updates to our command, control and communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) equipment. All comprise most important elements if C4ISR is to be maintained at a high level and enhanced during the transformation process.

Next on the CDS' list is the enabler of mobility, rapid-reaction and deployability. This calls for the development of reliable air- and sea-lift capability, which Canada frankly doesn't possess.

A more recent addition to the rapid-reaction and deployability aspect of our military operations is the challenging, but in many respects logical suggestion that Canada acquire carrier or amphibious ships to move rapid-reaction forces and their equipment overseas, and to provide ongoing logistical support for the forces once deployed. This recent interest is advocated and strongly supported by MGen. (Ret'd) Lewis MacKenzie, and as Martin Shadwick suggests, reflects vision and a quest for new approaches to Canadian defence policy and force structure.<sup>16</sup> In a way, it reflects recognition of littoral operations which are capturing the attention of all allied maritime forces as they move closer inshore on peace enforcement and potential combat operations. Can anyone recall when a real vision for the CF originated with NDHQ? MacKenzie's proposal is certainly one which warrants careful consideration. At least it will give the surplus number of generals and admirals in NDHQ a challenge to use their

grey cells.

What has been said here comprises a brief appreciation of a few of the many complex defence issues that await remedial action by our new Minister of National Defence. It goes without saying that many who have watched the move toward the demise of our armed forces are confident that with the full support of the Prime Minister, the Queen's University study predicting the ultimate collapse of the Canadian Forces will be avoided.

One final comment. All parliamentarians are reminded that Canadians do support the needs of the armed forces and want transparent feedback when it comes to the when, why and how the deplorable situation that has been allowed to build up over the years, will be fixed.

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<sup>16</sup> "Carriers, Sea Lift and Replenishment," Martin Shadwick, *Canadian Military Journal*, Autumn 2003.