

## LEGACY QUEST

**T**he Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs (SCONDVA), which in recent years has proved a prolific cataloguer of military ills, offers up a typically blunt assessment of Canada's military capabilities in its May 2002 report, *Facing our Responsibilities: The State of Readiness of the Canadian Forces*. Eclectic and wide-ranging, the report offers much with which the defence community would agree. However, like others of its genre, it has been essentially dismissed by some elements of the community because its proffered remedies to operational readiness and related problems would require funding that is unlikely to become available, and even less likely to figure in any prime ministerial legacy quest.

At the core of the report is the conviction that in an increasingly troubled and complex global security environment, Canada requires "a balanced, well-equipped, combat-capable force," one that can "deploy rapidly and that is interoperable with its major allies. As a Committee, we are convinced...that we are not spending sufficient funds to ensure this commitment." It recommends that Ottawa "increase the annual base budget for [DND] to between 1.5 [percent] to 1.6 [percent] of GDP, with the increase to be phased in over the next three years, and continue to move towards the NATO average." The committee further recommends that "in order for DND to be able to purchase necessary capital equipment, in a timely fashion, the annual shortfalls identified by the Auditor General be made up as quickly as possible." It is also important, warns SCNDVA, that "we not allow a capabilities-based [planning system] to be used to justify...an inadequate budget."

The committee's critique of service-specific operational readiness draws heavily upon DND business plans, and paints a familiar picture of budget and capability shortfalls, personnel and equipment shortages, the disconcerting stress levels associated with a high operational tempo, and increasingly painful trade-offs. The Chief of the Naval Staff, for example, pointed to the struggle to maintain "a balance between sustaining current capabilities at a minimum level, investing in 'quality of life', generating savings for the future and implementing change." His Army counterpart noted that the land force "is overdrawn on its human capital account, in both the physical and psychological senses" and "not sustainable under the current circumstances," while the Chief of the Air Staff warned that "the Air Force is 'one deep' in many areas and has lost much of its flexibility, redundancy and ability to surge."

With chagrin, the committee notes that audits performed by the Auditor General "have repeatedly shown" that the CF has inadequate "readiness reporting and management systems." It calls upon DND to "put in place a comprehensive system" for determining operational readiness. This system "should set clear and standardized measurements of operational readiness for the CF and its component units." At the same time, SCNDVA heartily endorses Douglas Bland's reminder that "the operational readiness of the Canadian Forces is a political responsibility, not merely a military responsibility."

The committee recommends that "the Army proceed as quickly as possible...to ensure that all its units undergo, on a regular basis, the full extent of combat training required to improve and maintain its state of readiness at a high level, including training at the battalion and brigade levels," that the future of JTF2 be re-examined, and that DND "make a commitment as quickly as possible to fund Phase 2 of the Land Force Reserve Restructure project." The report devotes comparatively limited, and rather vacillation-prone, attention to the capital requirements of the Army. It appears understandably reluctant to jettison the main battle tank, but acknowledges that "difficult decisions will have to be made on whether or not to retain all of the current capabilities."

On the maritime front, SCNDVA calls for "at least three replenishment ships with roll-on roll-off capabilities to provide a strategic sealift capability...and to replace the two [existing] replenishment ships," the replacement of the four Iroquois-class area air defence and command and control destroyers, and the awarding of "a high priority" to the mid-life updates of the twelve City-class frigates. It also urges — in a recommendation potentially at odds with the April 2002 report of the senior interdepartmental committee on Federal procurement and shipbuilding — that "new replenishment and other ships acquired for Canada's Navy be constructed in Canadian shipyards."

The committee recommends that all 18 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft be retained and modernized, that Sea King replacement be "accelerated" (a tricky proposition, given the committee's own fears that the splitting of the maritime helicopter project between the airframe and the mission avionics will cause delays), and that Canada's airlift capabilities be enhanced. The report implicitly favours adding a type larger than the Hercules, but acknowledges the complex array of trade-offs (e.g., the impact on the existing Hercules fleet, the impact of acquiring a new fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft) and, consequently, eschews a detailed prescription. The report expresses concern that "only 80" CF-18s will be updated.

Where does this leave us? Some pundits have suggested that a prime minister in search of a legacy would do well to ponder a revitalized Canadian Forces. They also note that SCNDVA-type blueprints are readily available. Others, pointing to a myriad of competing — and politically more palatable — claims on the legacy purse, and the demonstrated defence predilections of the Chretien government, suggest that the only way in which DND could get a piece of the legacy action would be if military engineers are allowed to participate in the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway. In the final analysis, though, some might argue that the key is the point at which not recapitalizing defence becomes a genuine political (in addition to security, sovereignty, diplomatic and trade) liability. The Trudeau government, admittedly well prior to the proverbial eleventh hour, eventually reached that point.

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