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CANADIAN ARMY STRUCTURE REVIEW: IMPROVING READINESS THROUGH CENTRALIZATION OF CAPABILITIES

AIM

1. Canada's defence policy, *Our North, Strong and Free* (ONSAF) defines the current operating environment as one of increasing global instability.¹ In a December 2024 interview with the Commander of the Canadian Army (CA) conducted by Canadian Army Today for an article titled *The Modernization Agenda*, Lieutenant General Wright emphasized the importance of establishing a CA capable of supporting any mission assigned by the Government of Canada.² Wright highlighted structure review as a component of the modernization agenda, including ongoing efforts to update *Advancing with Purpose: The Canadian Army Modernization Strategy*.³ This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on structure review through the lens of individual soldier readiness, advocating for centralized capabilities to enhance the pool of deployable soldiers while simultaneously improving soldier satisfaction and mitigating burnout.

INTRODUCTION

2. *Advancing with Purpose: The Canadian Army Modernization Strategy* identified the necessity of updating the structure of the CA in 2021.⁴ The FORCE 2025 initiative also developed courses of action (COA) to guide the restructuring process.⁵ Despite selecting "COA 3: High Readiness Level 2 Headquarters", the plan was not fully implemented, leaving the CA structure predominantly unchanged.⁶

3. One notable structure change to the CA came with the establishment of 6 Canadian Combat Support Brigade (CCSB) under the 5th Canadian Division in 2018. 6 CCSB serves as a model for concentrating capabilities within an asymmetrical brigade structure. The CA's remaining three Regular Force brigades retain a predominantly symmetrical structure intended to support the three-year Managed Readiness Plan (MRP) by enabling brigade rotation through the deployment cycle. Although the MRP was recently updated to facilitate a brigade's commitment to Operation REASSURANCE within the Committed to NATO year of the cycle, the foundational structure of these brigades involved in force generation remains relatively unaltered.⁷

¹ DND, *Our North Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*, [Cat. No.: D2-668/2024E-PDF] (Ottawa: National Defence = Défense nationale, 2024), 3.

² Christopher Thatcher, "The Modernization Agenda," *Canadian Army Today* 8, no. 2 (2024): 14.

³ Christopher Thatcher, 15–16.

⁴ Canadian Army, *Advancing with Purpose: The Canadian Army Modernization Strategy*, 4th ed. (Department of National Defence, 2021), 2.

⁵ Canadian Army, 3.

⁶ Major Tyler Collings, "Canadian Divisions or Militia Districts: Support for Army Restructuring as Planned in FORCE 2025" (Canadian Forces College, 2023), 1.

⁷ Canadian Army Land Warfare Center, *Waypoint 2018: The Canadian Army Advancing Toward Land Operations 2021* (Kingston, 2015), 35.

4. One notable exception to this trend is the centralization of Leopard II Main Battle Tanks (MBT) within the unit Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) (LdSH[RC]) under 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (CMBG) in Western Canada. Both 6 CCSB and 1 CMBG are tasked with deploying their specialized capabilities persistently using an internal rotation model.

5. *The Canadian Army Reconstitution Order* was groundbreaking, emphasizing improving the “soldier experience” to enhance CA readiness.⁸ This paper asserts that structural reforms within the CA aligned with other centralizations of capabilities are essential to enhancing operational readiness, reducing burnout, and increasing job satisfaction. It proposes that offering consistent deployment opportunities to units will address challenges related to individual soldiers’ desire to deploy or need for respite, being misaligned with deployment cycles. To achieve these goals, the paper advocates for the specialization of the CA’s four regular brigades into light, medium, heavy and combat support configurations.

DISCUSSION

Current and Future Operating Environment

6. The current operating environment is increasingly hostile and complex. *ONSAF* “identifies a rapidly changing climate, new challenges to global stability, and accelerating advances in technology” as challenges to Canadian security and prosperity.⁹ Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine has destabilized the rules-based international order, underscoring the renewed possibility of high-intensity, full-scale conflict. Meanwhile, China’s assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific and self-proclaimed status as a “Near Arctic State” complicate the geopolitical landscape.¹⁰ These developments highlight the necessity for the CA to adapt its structure to effectively respond to global threats, each demanding distinct operational capabilities. Implementing structural reforms will mitigate deployment inefficiencies, optimize force generation, and enhance overall readiness to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving security environment.

The Readiness Challenge

7. The Department of National Defence (DND) *Departmental Results Report 2023-24* identifies a critical risk: “there is a risk that DND/CAF will not have the right military

⁸ Canadian Army, “Order on Canadian Army Reconstitution - Improving Our Readiness and Our Soldier’s Experience and Conditions of Service While Delivering the Army of Tomorrow” (Canadian Army, 2023), 7.

⁹ DND, *Our North Strong and Free*, 3.

¹⁰ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Arctic Policy” (Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2018), https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm.

personnel, in the right numbers, at the right place, and the right time.”¹¹ Addressing readiness issues requires the reduction of inefficiencies within the deployment system. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is attempting to improve the quality of readiness statistics through an ongoing Force Posture and Readiness (FP&R) review to better reflect the reality of deployable soldiers. A central reason for the mismatch is the fact that the units the CA deploys are comprised of people, all of whom have individual situations affecting their desire and ability to deploy. Compounding this factor is that those people change through postings and career progression. The three-year deployment cycle leads to instances where people who are available, ready and willing to deploy are posted to units with no opportunities, leading to dissatisfaction. Conversely, soldiers in other units may face deployments at inopportune times, increasing burnout.

8. Under the existing system, for example, a newly-promoted Sergeant eager to benefit from completing a baseline job operationally is at the whim of where the unit lies within the MRP cycle. Whereas within the example of the LdSH[RC], the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) can assign the Sergeant to the squadron that is entering the deployment cycle. Within the infantry context, a no-cost move or attached posting as an augmentee within Regiments to align people with deployments is simple and common, but posting out of a Regiment or location to enable a deployment is complex and not typically done. While finding a solution to problems stemming from career management processes and the Regimental system is unlikely, the centralization of capabilities and, therefore, tasks to common brigades in fixed locations optimizes the ability of taskers to manage individuals.

9. No one understands CA soldiers better than Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) and central to the staffing of tasks is the cadre of RSMs. Similarly, Commanding Officers (CO) and their deputies understand the individual officers within their units. A deployment system that enables a persistent ability to place an individual on a road to high-readiness stream and deploy, will allow the people who understand CA soldiers and officers to better manage which people occupy high-readiness positions. The centralization of capabilities to brigades and units, such as with the Leopard II MBT centralization to the LdSH[RC], enables this persistence. Centralization of capabilities also enables access to persistent periods of rest for those who are not currently able to deploy, which can again be managed by the people who understand CA soldiers and officers best.

Heavy Capability Centralization

10. Canada has committed the bulk of a brigade’s worth of soldiers and equipment to the NATO Forward Land Forces (FLF) in Latvia. By 2026, Canada intends to rotationally deploy up to 2,200 soldiers to the multinational brigade comprising persistent

¹¹ DND, “Departmental Results Report 2023-24: Core Responsibility 2: Ready Forces,” 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-results-report/2023-24-index/results-core-resp/ready-forces.html>.

and surge elements.¹² Canada's persistent contribution can be classified primarily as heavy, given the recent commitment of a squadron of Leopard II MBTs. Unlike the plan to staff the squadron with soldiers from the LdSH[RC], the persistent infantry battalion task will rotate through the six mechanized infantry battalions throughout three CMBGs across the country. The centralization of mechanized equipment within the infantry units of 1 CMBG would allow for a similar rotational structure that would rotate the persistent battalion deployments through three mechanized battalions within a heavy brigade. Similar tasks would follow for already centralized heavy combat engineer forces and any future heavy artillery element when new capabilities come online. This centralization of capabilities aligns heavy tasks with regiments and locations, enabling lower-level taskers to manage people, translating into a larger pool of ready soldiers while improving individual satisfaction and reducing burnout.

Medium Capability Centralization

11. In a similar way to maintaining centralized high-intensity warfighting capabilities within a single heavy brigade, there are many benefits to maintaining a centralized medium brigade. Medium forces are highly flexible and can respond rapidly to government needs. Centralizing mechanized infantry equipment within three mechanized battalions of a single regiment would enable this flexibility. Similar centralizations of wheeled armoured, engineer and artillery equipment within a medium brigade would create a capable and flexible force. This force could take on the responsibility for much of the remainder of Canada's commitment to the FLF through surge requirements, including a second mechanized infantry battalion. It would also be ideally poised to execute other Government of Canada priorities such as conducting Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO). 5 CBMG (5e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada) is well suited to gain additional mechanized equipment and become this medium weight and flexible force.

Light Capability Centralization

12. Light forces are also critical to the Government of Canada's ability to rapidly project capabilities around the globe. The CA maintains the 500-person Global Response Task Force (GRTF) to have the ability to rapidly project presence in line with the Government of Canada's priorities.¹³ *ONSAF*, as well as the newly published *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*, both speak to having the ability to expand or enhance Canada's presence in the Arctic,^{14,15} a task that is ideally suited to light forces. When reducing the notice to deploy soldiers, the central readiness problem compounds, increasing burnout in

¹² NATO, "NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance" (NATO, 2024), https://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/topics_136388.htm.

¹³ DND, "2024-25 Departmental Plan: Ready Forces," 24, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-plans/departmental-plan-2024-25/planned-results/ready-forces.html>.

¹⁴ DND, *Our North Strong and Free*, 25.

¹⁵ Government of Canada, "Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy," 2024, <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/transparency-transparence/arctic-arctique/arctic-policy-politique-arctique.aspx?lang=eng>.

over-deployed soldiers while decreasing satisfaction in under-deployed soldiers. Centralization of light forces into a single brigade would allow the NCO corps to manage people at the lowest levels, drawing from a larger pool on short notice.

13. Others, including Lieutenant-Colonel Cole Petersen in *The Asymmetric Army*, have argued for a centralized light brigade.¹⁶ This paper agrees that 2 CMBG located in Petawawa, Ontario, is ideally suited to this given the congested training area and proximity to other light capabilities such as Canada's Chinook helicopter squadron and the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR). It further agrees that 2 CMBG elements not currently in Petawawa, comprising one infantry battalion and one armoured squadron, be transferred to 6 CCSB.

Combat Support Capability Improvement

14. Being a relatively new brigade, 6 CCSB comprises many unique capabilities but lacks other forms of combat support that the CA should have a persistent ability to deploy. 2 CMBG's orphan infantry battalion and an armoured company co-located with two of the larger units of 6 CCSB in Gagetown, New Brunswick, are ideally situated to augment the combat support capabilities of 6 CCSB. Having an inherent armoured reconnaissance squadron, anti-armour company, mortar company, and a regular army influence activities (IA) company would be welcome capabilities to have for smaller persistent or larger surge deployments. More importantly, the people would be collocated with other 6 CCSB personnel, reducing deployment strain, especially as it relates to any-trade or staff positions.

Other Considerations

15. Centralization of capabilities as it relates to equipment has the added benefit of simplifying sustainment chains. The centralization of Leopard II MBTs drastically reduced the number of spare parts sitting on shelves within the spare parts supply section (SPSS). It also reduced the need for maintainers with specialized qualifications to be posted to multiple locations.¹⁷ Further centralization would also reduce the need for logisticians to maintain heavy capabilities and vehicles in multiple locations. These logistical benefits would reduce both people and equipment requirements on already stressed logistics supply chains.

16. Some argue that persistent deployments are unsustainable and balanced brigades enable flexibility.¹⁸ This analysis typically lacks the granularity of the individual soldier either being over-deployed or missing out on deployment opportunities due to being posted to the wrong place at the wrong time. This paper acknowledges that centralization

¹⁶ Lieutenant-Colonel Cole Petersen, "The Asymmetric Army," *Canadian Army Journal* 19.1 (2021): 48–65.

¹⁷ Commander Canadian Army, "LEOPARD 2 FAMILY OF VEHICLES CENTRALIZATION - MASTER IMPLEMENTATION DIRECTIVE" (Canadian Army, 2023).

¹⁸ Pierre-Luc Nicolas, "The Need for Symmetrical Brigades" (Canadian Forces College, 2020), 3–4.

of capabilities will likely neither ameliorate nor worsen the issues stemming from deploying many of the enablers and HQ-level staff on numerous deployments.

17. Improved expertise would also be a benefit of centralization, especially as it relates to combat arms soldiers operating within the regimental system. For example, a soldier posted to a light battalion often obtains multiple time-intensive specialist qualifications to be effectively employed. When that soldier is posted to a mechanized battalion, they must essentially learn a different way of warfighting. Aligning the CA structure with the rigid regimental system would enable investments in expertise to apply across the span of a career, especially for senior NCOs.

CONCLUSION

18. Structural changes to the CA are long overdue and ongoing analysis in this regard is welcome and critical. While the centralization of capabilities into specialized brigades has been argued before,¹⁹ this paper adds to that analysis through the lens of the individual soldier experienced by low to mid-level operations staff. Top-down analysis might miss the level of detail that the individual tasker witnesses, with soldiers waiting years to deploy while others are overworked and burnt out. Centralizing capabilities aligns tasks with brigades, locations and regiments, increasing the pool of available soldiers while offering persistent deployment and rest opportunities to be managed by the CA's corps of NCOs.

19. Specialization also increases the overall capabilities of the CA. A heavy brigade focused on high-intensity warfighting offers the Government of Canada a critical capability during times of increasing instability while at the same time fulfilling core remits to the FLF in Latvia. A medium brigade offers flexibility and is able to fulfill short notice and surge roles, including NEO tasks. A light brigade fulfills the GRTF and other high-readiness requirements, including the CA's ability to demonstrate presence in the Arctic. Finally, enhancing the capabilities of 6 CCSB through structural efficiencies enables the CA to deploy in other important roles.

20. While no perfect solution exists, centralizing capabilities has several other benefits. The improved logistical supply chain and maintenance requirements seen through the centralization of the Leopard II MBTs would be compounded. There would be a drastic reduction in SPSS warehousing, and maintenance inefficiencies would be greatly reduced. Canadian soldiers would also become true masters of their trade through specialization and maintenance of similar skills.

¹⁹ Major Matt Rolls, "FORCE 2021: An Argument for Asymmetrical Brigades" (Canadian Forces College, 2020).

RECOMMENDATION

21. The CA should reorganize to centralize equipment into heavy, medium, light and combat support brigades. Centralization will increase readiness by aligning ready soldiers with persistent deployment opportunities, improving satisfaction and reducing burnout.

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