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“CANADIAN ARMY STRATEGIC READINESS” – HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?

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HOW CAN WE IMPROVE**

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AIM

1. This paper will contend that the biggest issue facing the Canadian Army (CA) in the next ten years will be the achievement of true strategic readiness. Strategic readiness refers to the CA’s ability to rapidly respond to the Government of Canada’s (GOC) defence objectives with deployable military capability. This paper will focus on the short notice, deployable expeditionary aspects of the CA’s contribution to strategic readiness. Even though the CA maintains readiness in accordance with its traditional 30/60/90 day mandated levels, it has currently lost its strategic readiness, and is incapable of providing government with feasible, cost effective and timely options for short/no notice expeditionary missions. The key obstacles that hinder CA strategic readiness include an exhaustive road to high readiness (RTHR) cycle that is delinked with current Army operational missions, the hierarchical CA organizational structure and the CA’s over reliance on the force structures contained within the managed readiness plan (MRP). With improvements in the above three areas, the Canadian Army could enhance its strategic readiness to meet emerging GOC expeditionary priorities and better nest its preparation within national strategic direction.¹ This would enable the CA to become the governmental force of choice for specific, short notice expeditionary deployments.

¹ Michael Roi. “Canadian Defence Priorities, CF Force Posture and Strategic Readiness.” *Defence R&D CORA Technical Memorandum*, 2012. http://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc121/p537113_A1b.pdf, 1-10.

INTRODUCTION

2. When discussing no notice and short notice deployments at the governmental/strategic level within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), force posture and readiness to deploy, are their own form of currency. “On the most basic level, military readiness consists of two elements: capability to execute a military task; and the time necessary to bring capability to the point that it is able to perform specified ... tasks.”² This concept of readiness is predicated on two separate elements; readiness in terms of time, and what level of preparedness a force needs to achieve to ensure they are effective.³ Driving both of these elements is a clear assessment of the adversarial threat as well as a general understanding of the operating environment where the deployment will take place.⁴ The notion of readiness is an essential element of force posture, which “relates to the orientation of ones existing force structure in time and space to deal with the perceived demands of ...[both]...operational theaters...and government policy direction.”⁵

3. This paper will not contest the importance of maintaining a combat capable, large scale conventional force on stand-by for full spectrum expeditionary operations, but it will convey the importance of concurrently maintaining strategic readiness which equates to CA relevance. While it is important to examine historical examples to augment and amplify this argument, this paper will only focus on recent historical examples in the CAF’s post Afghanistan time period. The purpose behind this narrowed focus is to acknowledge the CA’s substantial force projection to the Afghan war, and how it would have dramatically changed the CA’s strategic readiness at that time. It also must be noted that this paper is by no means a criticism of the current force

² *Ibid*, 1-10.

³ *Ibid*, 1-10.

⁴ *Ibid*, 1-10.

⁵ *Ibid*, 1-10.

readiness structure, it merely represents some potential refining steps that could assist the CA's agility and reaction time to GOC emerging priorities. Throughout this paper, Operation REASSURANCE rotation 0 will be referenced as it represents a recent CA rapid deployment, and the lessons that can be drawn from this experience.

DISCUSSION

Readiness Cycle Delinked from Operational Outputs

4. One of the most significant factors hindering the CA's ability to provide strategic readiness options to the GOC is that its managed readiness plan (MRP) has become de-linked from its current missions and operational outputs. An important element when considering the MRP is that in order for the plan to be effective, it must work for the CA as the end product user and not the other way around. The CA maintains, what it refers to as 'key terrain' and 'vital ground' as level 7, brigade operations and level 5, combat team, combined arms training, respectively. This collective training focus, although it makes complete sense from a CA general-purpose capability development and funding perspective, does not align well with GOC priorities or strategic readiness. The MRP outlines a plan to prepare and collectively train general-purpose combat capabilities in the CA and this process diverges from GOC priorities who often seek task tailored, highly specific, cost effective capabilities for short notice deployments. This statement is amplified in a report by Defense Research and Development Canada (DRDC) that posits, "the current readiness approach of [military] force generators is inward looking and self-referential."⁶ The report further critiques the tendencies of the CA as

⁶ *Ibid*, 1-10.

being “driven ...by the cycles of the readiness management systems themselves rather than based on the actual demands of operations or the strategic environment.”⁷

5. Presently, the CA MRP outlines three various levels of readiness: reconstitution, the road to high readiness (RTHR) and high readiness (HR). While these respective states of the MRP are assumed by the CA’s combat brigades, the current construct of the MRP does not account for short/no notice deployable capability. The formation that occupies HR stand-by, which would theoretically align combat forces and enablers toward a full suite of ‘be prepared to’ (BPT), short notice missions, is actually fully committed and unable to achieve such tasks.

6. The example that illustrates this point comes from 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (CMBG) in 2016/17. When 2 CMBG completed their RTHR and assumed the role of HR stand-by in the CA MRP, they actually had five significant tasks that prevented them from being able to deliberately plan for any short notice contingency operations. 2 CMBG had all of its manoeuvre units tasked during their HR phase on two rotations of Operation UNIFIER in Ukraine, two rotations of ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE in Latvia, the force generation of a Non-Combatant Evacuation (NEO) battalion, and various staff/command positions within Operation IMPACT. These cumulative tasks left 2 CMBG not only unable to generate any additional capacity for un-forecasted, short notice deployments, it additionally left them incapable of generating the mandated 30/60/90 capability requirements as detailed in the MRP. The reality last year for the HR element in the MRP was that they were operationally ‘all in’ and unable to react to emerging missions which in essence, negated the objectives and aims of the MRP. This example shows exactly how the force generation of short notice deployable

⁷ *Ibid*, 1-10.

capability in the CA directly conflicts with the MRP, which can lead to an ad hoc approach toward short notice deployable capability and the achievement of strategic readiness.

7. When the CA generated the initial rotation of Operation REASSURANCE in Poland, 2014, the element that was tasked to deploy forces within a short, 7 day timeframe was from 1 CMBG who was, at that time, in the reconstitution phase of the MRP. This again shows that the MRP and the CA's ability to be strategically ready and reactive to emerging GOC priorities are divergent. The short notice deployment of forces within the reconstitution phase imposed additional, unquantified risk including personnel not meeting departure assistance group (DAG) status requirements, limited time for medical/immunizations preparations and limited time to conduct individual and collective pre-training requirements.

The CA is not Structured to React Quickly

8. The CA is an inherently vertical organisation that manages its span of control through a hierarchical command structure from the CA level down through its lowest company and platoon levels. This command structure, while highly effective at managing the deliberate planning of long term operational missions, struggles to provide agile, innovative, timely responses to GOC emerging priorities/missions and enable true CA strategic readiness. When comparing the structure of the CA, to organizational examples in business, it is evident that the tenets of centralized control and de-centralized execution do not apply in the mission planning domain. The planning environment in the CA as it relates to emerging missions is top down driven and "features many management layers and a central authority figure"⁸ to force generate short notice

⁸ Sophie Johnson, "Structure of Agile Organizations." *AZ Central*. Last accessed 1 February 2018. <https://yourbusiness.azcentral.com/structure-agile-organizations-11216.html>.

mission capabilities and requirements. As a result, “the rigid [CA]...structure...and control hamper [its] agility and ill suits [rapid decision making].”⁹

9. Operation REASSURANCE again provides an excellent example of how the hierarchical structure of the CA hindered agility and rapid deployment on a short notice mission. From the very outset of the mission, there was a clearly defined political objective to quickly deploy CA forces to conduct multi-national training with US and Polish forces. The urgency aspect of this deployment resulted from Russian aggression and incursions into the Crimea, which led to a deployment timeframe of approximately 7 days from notification, to the CA force achieving its initial operating capacity in Poland. During this 7 day window, paratroopers from the CA were screened for deployment, RCAF assets were aligned to support inflow and the advance party/main body forces were deployed.

10. The rapid deployment of CA paratroopers was hindered by two key aspects; the lack of decision quality information pushed to the Canadian Joint Operations Center (CJOC), and staff confusion that resulted from information flow between the various levels of CA HQs. The lack of decision quality information resulted from interactions between the various stakeholders including CJOC, the CA (which includes CA HQ, division HQ, brigade HQ and battalion HQ levels) and the Canadian Army Doctrine and Training Centre (CADTC) who was responsible for determining collective training events suitable for CA participation in Europe. At no time in the deployment of Operation REASSURANCE did any of the stakeholders map out “the organization’s key decisions [required]...or where in the organization those decisions should

⁹ *Ibid.*

[have] happened.”¹⁰ This information, early in the process would have enabled all stakeholders, including the actual deployed force to streamline their information reporting and better enable decisions pertaining to critical aspects such as host nation logistical support capability etc. Instead, there was no clear understanding about “the level of authority decision makers need[ed] [or had],”¹¹ and the resulting “information flow and processes...related to [critical] decision making,”¹² were severely disrupted. For this reason, the CA needs to institutionalize a short notice deployment capability and operating procedure, and constantly refine the associated processes much like how the DART rehearses its CONPLAN RENAISSANCE. This activity would ensure that information flows between CA HQ elements and decision quality information requirements would be clearly understood, timely and able to support rapid deployability within the CA. While the CA was able to deploy forces on short notice in support of Operation REASSURANCE, it did so in an ad hoc fashion that lacked efficiency and introduced additional risk.

Lessons from SOF Incremental Deployment Capability

11. While the deployment of Operation REASSURANCE to Poland was relatively safe in terms of the intelligence picture, this is not a luxury that the CA can rely upon for future deployments. For this reason, the CA could improve its ability to rapidly deploy by adopting some key lessons from our SOF counterparts. With special reconnaissance as a core task of SOF, they are relied upon to deploy into ambiguous, poorly defined situations and bridge the gap “in

¹⁰ Marcia Blenko. Michael Mankins. Paul Rogers. “The Decision Driven Organization” Last modified June 2010, Last Accessed 2 February 2018. <https://hbr.org/2010/06/the-decision-driven-organization>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

the no man's land where politics/policy and military power meet.”¹³ This is a space that the CA needs to become more familiar operating in to ensure the force remains relevant and a viable option on future short notice deployments.

12. Much like the heavy reliance on the MRP cycle, CA staff have a tendency to over-rely on the structures contained within this readiness plan. The over-reliance on these structures could lead to miscommunication between the political/strategic policy level and the strategic levels of the CA. As emerging missions present themselves, key GOC decision makers will look for military options that appease public will for response, while carefully managing CAF and CA commitments in terms of personnel, equipment, time and funding. It is important to highlight that none of these GOC priorities reference at any time, CA readiness force structures within the MRP such as battle groups, company groups and enabler capabilities. As such, CA key staff need to be prepared to not rely solely on the structures of the MRP, but rather, be prepared to deploy small elements early into an emerging crisis. This will enable the definition of new, innovative structures that could better satisfy the anticipated political and strategic level constraints. Conventional forces need to be prepared to tailor what SOF refer to as a ‘bespoke’ force that could potentially use MRP structure as their basis, (ie. Elements from the NEO Bn), and provide the GOC a ‘menu of military options’ to rapidly deploy. This approach would improve operational relevance, timely responsiveness and improve communications between strategic level FG decision makers with GOC officials to increase the CA’s strategic readiness.

¹³ Michael Roi. “Canadian Defence Priorities, CF Force Posture and Strategic Readiness.” *Defence R&D CORA Technical Memorandum*, 2012.
http://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc121/p537113_A1b.pdf, 1-10.

CONCLUSION

13. In order for the CA to maintain relevance in today's constantly changing operational environment, it needs to improve its strategic readiness. It is important to note that strategic readiness will not be solved by minor adjustments to an existing plan or structure, but rather, by a fundamental departure from our current approach. The CA must acknowledge that the GOC defence objectives during rapid deployments, will seldom, if ever, be neatly solved by the structures or timelines contained within our current MRP. Based on this knowledge, the CA needs to increase its innovation and agility to better anticipate GOC priorities and task tailor a more bespoke 'menu of military options' that better meets anticipated governmental requirements and constraints. Building a rapidly deployable capability within the CA, can leverage some of the existing core components and concepts of the MRP, but ultimately it will require a fundamental shift in current CA mindset and approach. This reorientation will guarantee that the CA stands ready in the future to react effectively on short notice to GOC defence priorities for expeditionary operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. MRP produces and maintains a company-sized element on 7 days notice to move. This element must have clearly defined restraints and constraints as well as a rehearsed operating concept that is captured in a standing CONPLAN. While I acknowledge that this capability is the intended purpose of the recent force employment concept for the new light infantry battalion (LIB), there needs to be a stop gap measure put in place to fill this requirement now.

15. Realign the MRP with readiness and operational outputs. The MRP needs to re-adjust its process to streamline preparations for current operational outputs and forces capable of holding meaningful stand-by positions. These stand-by forces would fill the 7 days notice to move category and be trained, rehearsed and potentially confirmed much like the NEO capability is fielded, during the HR phase of the MRP, to hold a subsequent HR posture during the brigades' reconstitution phase. This would provide a suitable and manageable delineation between HR stand-by tasks and the operational outputs associated with the current CA contributions to named missions.

16. Rehearse the CA rapid deployment capability to ensure strategic readiness. The rapid deployment triggers such as timelines, likely operating environments, equipment limitations and critical considerations need to be rehearsed at all levels to guarantee success on activation. This process should be institutionalized through the MRP and include follow on continuation training requirements that not only builds the Army's capacity to rapidly deploy, but also maintains that status throughout a designated period of time.

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