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DECLINING DEFENCE SPENDING AND STRATEGIC ENABLERS: HOW DOES THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT PLAN TO PROJECT ITS FOREIGN POLICY POWER THROUGH DND?

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JCSP 40

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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**DECLINING DEFENCE SPENDING AND STRATEGIC ENABLERS:
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The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) describe the following roles in which the Department of National Defence (DND) could be and will likely be employed to conduct or assist: Economic Sanctions, Human Rights, participation in International Organizations, international security, Natural Disasters, Office of Religious Freedoms, and Stabilization and reconstruction activities.¹ This statement implies that the DND will be used in most, if not all of these roles but does not clearly define the level of involvement. The Government has purposefully left the level of involvement vague to allow for flexibility on what the volume of participation will be on a case by case basis. The danger in this approach is that the DND must remain in a fairly robust, general purpose capability state to be able to respond to the needs of the Government.

The end of OP ATTENTION brought to a close an era of defence spending that was the largest Canada had ever taken on in the past 5 decades. Government initiatives like Deficit Reductions Action Plan (DRAP) and Strategic Review (SR) have reduced defence spending to below 0.6% of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), much to the chagrin of NATO and our global partners. Canada needs to play a role in global, continental, and national security as well as fulfill all the government mandated tasks outlined in foreign policy.

¹ Government of Canada, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada website statement on Canada's Foreign Policy. <http://www.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/index.aspx?lang=eng> accessed on 12 May 2015.

Canada's most effective choice in projecting its foreign policy presence in the world of declining defence spending will be its strategic assets like the transport capabilities brought by the C17, the multi mission capabilities of SOF, and the humanitarian capacity of the disaster assistance response team (DART). This paper will first examine Canada's ability to maintain its position as a middle power in the world of global security with its current defence spending and declining Defence budgets. The paper will then discuss and demonstrate the benefits of investment in the smaller more strategic elements of SOF and airlift capacity as a practical course of action open to the Canadian government if they wish to remain a reputable contributor to NATO and global security.

“Canada plays the part of the independently-minded middle power, abstaining from or joining coalitions depending on its national interest or political proclivities. Militarily, pursuing this flexible participation policy has meant focusing on interoperability with the United States military. Following the coalition model provided above, Canada has linked, but not tied, itself to the world coalition leader in order to secure its overseas interests and to be recognized as an independent international player.”² In addition, the Canadian government also recognizes its need for domestic security and response as well the ability to preserve some autonomy within the context of a coalition. The *Canada First Defence Strategy* (CFDS) was written to reflect the realities of the new millennium. This may have been an over ambitious strategy when the cost of equipping the CAF, as CFDS described, were combined with maintaining the mission in Afghanistan.

² Philippe Lagassé, *Specialization And The Canadian Forces*, Occasional Paper No. 40, (2003), The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, http://www3.carleton.ca/csds/docs/occasional_papers/npsia-40.pdf accessed on 12 May 2015.

DEFENCE SPENDING TRENDS IN CANADA

In 2010-11, Canada's defence spending was approximately 23 billion dollars, which for the sake of comparison was 26 % higher than peak expenditures during the Cold War and 61% higher than in 1998-99, Canada's lowest spending year.³ Certainly the Harper Government did more for defence spending than the previous Liberal Government, which in 2005-06 budgeted only 14.7 billion dollars for defence. The cost of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan was a combination of capital expenditure on projects to make and keep the force relevant in the conflict as well as future planning initiatives as dictated by CFDS. The end of Canada's direct involvement in Afghanistan, as well as several failures or delays in some of the procurement has resulted in the less than fulsome realization of the procurement initiatives outlined in the CFDS. Joint support ships and joint strike fighters are just two examples. However, Canada was successful in delivering tanks, desert camouflage and four C17 Globe Master Airframes that provided the much needed strategic airlift capacity that was lacked.

In 2009, a global financial crisis and recession created significant pressure on the Government of Canada as it struggled to stabilize the domestic economy and avoid the disastrous results felt in the United States. The victim, however, was defence spending as it is the only the prime source of discretionary money for the Canadian governmental budget. Instead of increasing defence spending, it has decreased it and it is estimated to continue decreasing to an estimated amount of 17.6 billion for 2016-17. New fighter jets, Arctic patrol ships and maritime helicopters have been pushed out to far horizons which expose them to possible cancellation. The Government has instead decided to preserve

³ Bill Robinson, *Canadian Military Spending 2010-11*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Foreign Policy Series, (March 2011), 1. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/canadian-military-spending-2010-11> accessed 2 May 2015.

manning with 68,000 military personnel and a reduced civilian work force. This is a costly decision where savings will have to come out of reduced overhead and maintenance expenditures as well as reduced foreign operations.⁴ These decisions are contrary to what had previously been outlined as the way ahead for the CAF in the CFDS.

The specter of affordability now looms for the CAF and the debate rages as to what kind of program can be afforded and would best suit the needs of the Government. The current Government has directed a “reset” to the CFDS which will in theory adjust the priority and likely force size. While the Government’s intent is to keep a general purpose force, it must also consider the possibility of a specialized force to make an affordable alternative and achieve cost savings.⁵ NATO has recently accused Canada of not pulling its weight within the organization by citing the underspending of defence dollars. NATO cites 2 % of GDP as an acceptable figure for a nation to spend and Canada is spending well under half of that. While the Government attempts to control its deficit through the reduction of discretionary spending, the CAF needs to find ways of delivering some capability that will allow Canada to remain relevant and preserve its ability to fulfill its defence needs and obligations. This will have to be achieved within current resources, both in personnel and in budgetary dollars, as there is no sign of an increase to the defence budget in the foreseeable future. What this means to the CAF is maximization of existing force packages and platforms and the possible creation of niche

⁴ By M.D the Blog Americas View, Commentary in the Economist: Canada’s Defence Spending, Darkness Falls again, (19 March 2014). <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2014/03/canadas-defence-spending> accessed 5 May 2015

⁵ Daniel Schwartz, What kind of military can Canada afford? CBC News/Politics, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/what-kind-of-military-can-canada-afford-1.1230004> accessed on 5 May 2015,

capabilities within the existing footprint. The CAF will have to invest in capabilities that deliver the maximum defence and political return for the dollars that are available. These capabilities will include smaller force packages that can deliver results, an obvious such package is the Special Operations Forces. Strategic airlift capability is another area that will allow Canada to bring an essential capability or service to coalition partners and others in the international community.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES (SOF) AS A STRATEGIC PLAYER

Army, Navy and Air Force have long been the strategic assets Canada would use to project its power and to a great extent has been very successful in doing so. In the past, Canada massed large force packages for the World Wars and similarly smaller force packages for the Korean War. Canada consistently deployed right sized force packages to UN peacekeeping missions and NATO peace building operations up to and including Afghanistan. The proliferation of terrorism and unconventional warfare has begun to reshape how conflict is viewed and as a result SOF have been added to the cast of strategic assets that could or would be employed.⁶

SOF bring a very unique, small footprint, agile force that can be employed to produce a variety of outcomes with a high possibility of success making them a valuable tool to both military and political leadership in Canada. Well known military thinker, Colin Gray, asserted, “special operations forces are a national grand-strategic asset: they are a tool of statecraft that can be employed quite surgically in support of diplomacy, of foreign assistance (of several kinds), as a vital adjunct to regular military forces, or as an

⁶ Bernd Horn, *The Strategic Utility of Special Operations Forces*, The Canadian Military Journal, Vol 14, No 4. (Autumn 2014). <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol14/no4/page66-eng.asp> accessed on 2 May 2015

independent weapon.”⁷ Highly trained, adaptive and agile force SOF can provide substantial value in projecting the political power or foreign policy of a government.

In Canada, SOF capability has been a relatively recent development. CANSOF has strategic utility that is embodied in the economy of force reality; it offers senior, government and military decision makers an expansion of strategic choice. If properly manned, trained, equipped and deployed, CANSOF can offer the prospect of a favorably disproportionate return on the military investment.⁸ Although SOF is not a magic bullet for affordable military capacity, it is an economically effective choice. CANSOF has developed three main capabilities, counter terrorism, CBRNE capabilities and the ability to conduct irregular or unconventional warfare. Since the standup of these capabilities, the Canadian SOF capability has been employed almost continuously.

SOF still requires conventional forces to provide support in missions, combat enablers like airlift, fires, intelligence, surveillance target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities, supply and maintenance to mention a few.⁹ Despite the reliance on some conventional forces support, the SOF capability make an ideal bolt on contribution to task forces in the coalition context, which is where Canada operates as a middle weight power. A good example of this is Canada’s current contribution to OPERATION IMPACT where SOF forces, as part of a larger coalition, are providing training to Iraqi forces without conventional CAF support. This kind of mission allows the Canadian government to contribute to global security in a meaningful way without having to commit to large troop deployments and expensive long term missions.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Doctor J. Paul de B. Taillon, *Canadian Special Operations Forces: Transforming Paradigms*, The Canadian Military Journal Vol 6, No 4, (Winter 2005-2006).
<http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo6/no4/operatio-eng.asp> accessed on 12 May 2015.

⁹ Ibid.

The ability to employ SOF assets are dependent on being able to get them into location/place where they will be utilized, as well as the ability to supply them. Strategic lift capability is needed in order to employ autonomously. Part of the CFDS was the procurement of strategic lift capability and while this was primarily for the conventional force it has worked very nicely for the employment of the SOF capability.

While not classically considered SOF, it is worth noting that a highly specialized force package like the DART is a capability that carries a lot of weight in the international community. Canada has effectively deployed the DART to many of the world's worst natural disasters. The DART has achieved very good results on bring aid to those who need it and in the preservation of Canada international reputation. The DART has many of the same support needs as SOF teams that include deployment, resupply and medical evacuation. The DART capitalizes on a small core of essential planners and force managers and the ability to draw from a large pool of troops that are assigned to the DART as a secondary duty. This is a very economical way of having a standing force ready to deploy to answer specific needs. Naturally, a strategic airlift capability is a requirement for this type of unit on deployment if vital autonomy is the desired outcome.

AIRLIFT AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

Strategic airlift is a highly flexible enabler and force multiplier, one that generates additional options for Ottawa decision-makers, and one that is relevant to all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces, to the full spectrum of non-military, quasi-military, and military roles, and to domestic, regional, and overseas operations.¹⁰ This point of view

¹⁰ Martin Shadwick, *How much Strategic Airlift is enough?* The Canadian Military Journal, Vol 13, No 3, (Summer 2013). <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol13/no3/page76-eng.asp> accessed on 4 May 2015

has indisputably led to the procurement of Canada's C-17 fleet of aircraft. Previously the capacity to move Canadian Forces relied on a large fleet of C-130 airframes. While Canada had a large fleet, over time this fleet began to age out and the capacity to move independently was lost. Military capability was allowed to atrophy to the point where Canada lost the ability to play a meaningful role on the world stage without complete reliance on a coalition partner or contract airlift.¹¹

The need to contract airlift from foreign sources was not only politically embarrassing but fabulously expensive and notoriously unreliable. Subsequently, as part of the CFDS, the decision was made to procure the C-17. This strategic airlift capability would provide Canada with the ability to move equipment and personnel on their own terms at the time of their choosing. This now enables the ability to respond domestically from coast to coast and into the Arctic with robust force packages and material. For international operations, it changes the way forces are deployed and the ability to support expeditionary missions. Fewer flights with bigger loads, fewer stop overs and far less stress on crews provide a measure of safety and efficiency never before experienced in the CAF.¹² At approximately 3.4 billion dollars over 20 years it represents a significant investment in capability. Further, if compared to the \$18M given to the Americans to move the PPCLI Battle group to Afghanistan for OPERATION APOLLO or the \$30K per flying hour cost to rent an Antonov¹³ and considering the measure of security, reliability and safety in owning airlift capability, it is a reasonable expense.

¹¹ Martin Shadwick, *THE STRATEGIC AIRLIFT ENIGMA*, The Canadian Military Journal, Vol 4, No 2, No 2, (Summer 2003) <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo4/no2/comment-eng.asp> accessed on 3 May 2015.

¹² Canadian Defence Review, News, *DND inks deal to acquire C-17 for strategic air lift*, (Feb 2007). <http://www.canadiandefencereview.com/news.php/news/24> accessed 15 May 2015.

¹³ Ray Dick, *The Need To Lift Our Own Weight*, Legion Magazine, (1 May 2003). <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2003/05/the-need-to-lift-our-weight/> accessed on 15 May 2015.

Aside from the domestic response capability and the ability to be self-sufficient for deployment and resupply on expeditionary operations, strategic airlift capability gives Canada creditability in NATO. The Canadian assistance to the French in Mali was a small offering of Canadian assets that were not committed to direct action but did allow Canadian contribution in a serious way. This enhanced the perception of participation as well as contribution to global security without the need to commit troops and incur the risks associated with direct action. The French Ambassador Phillip Zeller said Canada's contribution was "essential"¹⁴ signifying the value of the Mission and OPERATION SERVAL.

It would be reasonably easy to conclude that the use of Canadian strategic airlift would at least maintain Canada's position as a middle power without forcing the Canadian government to committing expensive Task Force size to the various hot spots around the globe. It allows the deployment and supply of SOF as required; it also provides a platform that can be used to move the DART in its various missions. Equally, robust evacuation capacity and the delivery of larger quantities of humanitarian aid can be provided if and when required. These are all roles and missions enabled by strategic airlift capacity already possessed. These kinds of missions fall within Canada's character as a middle power and preserve our country's reputation as a global player.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Forces tend to accomplish what ever task is set before it with efficiency and with the appearance of relative ease. This is indicative of the general "*can*

¹⁴ Steven Chase and Les Perreux, *Canadian sending military transport plane to bolster France's mission to Mali*, The Globe and Mail, (Jan 14. 2014).
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadian-sending-military-transport-plane-to-bolster-frances-mission-to-mali/article7320064/> accessed on 15 May 2015.

do” attitude that is an integral part of the ethos possessed by the soldiers and leaders of the CAF. As a middle weight power Canada’s military is funded in a way that appears to be sufficient despite NATO’s objections and complaints. Further, Canadians at large do not mind the funding of the military to whatever level as long as it does not impinge on health care or education within Canada.¹⁵ Regardless of this fact, the Government has always looked at defence dollars as discretionary money and as such will tend to use it to bolster spending in other areas or pay debt.

CAF force planners and strategists need to plan for force packages that will allow maximum results and maximum benefits to the Government of Canada so that when needed the Government knows they have the right tools to perform the tasks required of them. There needs to be enough skill set variety to allow flexible mission selection on the part of the Government. This essay has demonstrated that SOF provide the kind of capability that will allow them to be deployed in a wide range of conditions and bring results. This is also true for strategic airlift, with its capacity to be used domestically or internationally as well as in direct support of other Canadian capabilities or in support of our global partners.

These specific capabilities that can be used to project Canadian power and foreign policy into areas where the Government has interest are a worthwhile investment. The Canadian contribution to global, continental and nation security is critical to being considered a powerful nation. The fiscal realities of our government spending require a program that can deliver potency but is manageable and above all affordable. Force

¹⁵ Philippe Lagassé, *Specialization And The Canadian Forces*, Occasional Paper No. 40, (2003), The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, page. 17.
http://www3.carleton.ca/csds/docs/occasional_papers/npsia-40.pdf accessed on 12 May 2015.

packages like strategic airlift, SOF and specialties like the DART will go a long way to preserving Canadian credibility on the global stage during dark budgetary times.

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