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THE HEALTH OF THE CANADIAN ARMY

Maj Robert Yuvan

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SERVICE PAPER - ÉTUDE MILITAIRE

THE HEALTH OF THE CANADIAN ARMY

Maj Robert Yuwan

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The Health of the Canadian

AIM

1. The aim of this paper is to identify the single greatest challenge facing the Canadian Army (CA) and its ability to apply land power in the next ten years and provide some recommendations to mitigate this challenge. When looking to determine the most significant impediment to the application of land power one must certainly examine the CA's organizational structure, capabilities, leadership, and a host of other variables. However, the most precious resource the CA has is its personnel, and the biggest threat to the CA's ability to project land power is the health of that force. This paper will highlight some fundamental problems within the CA that negatively affect the health of the force and potentially the success of future operations. Although this paper will link many CA shortcomings to the health of the force, future analysis should be conducted on the same shortcomings but with a different lens, examining the overall effectiveness of the current approach.

INTRODUCTION

2. Before examining some key areas of improvement within the policies and operations of the CA this paper will first identify some key assumptions and examine the logic used to arrive at the conclusion above, that greatest challenge facing the CA is the health of its force. This paper seeks only to look at aspects within the CA's sphere of control. Despite an appetite for operations abroad, the CA can only influence political decision makers with regards to

deployments. In recent months the Canadian Government failed to deliver troops to a United Nations mission in Africa to the extent generally expected¹. Although this may be disappointing to the CA, it is beyond our control and thus not the greatest challenge. Similarly, if the Canadian Government decided to send our men and women in harm's way deficient a critical capability, it is my assumption that the government and CA would purchase a capability to fit the need much like the Chinook helicopter and tank in Afghanistan. In today's society and in the CA there is an increasingly common narrative surrounding mental health and the resilience of the CA. Social media and news outlets are inundated with woeful stories of injured soldiers and their struggles with Veterans Affairs and the government for more support. This is the biggest challenge facing the CA, the actual and perceived health of the force. If the CA cannot maintain a sizable and healthy force, or the politicians are unwilling to employ a perceived fragile force, it represents critical failure and the greatest challenge facing the CA.

3. The health of the CA is, and can be interpreted in many different ways or thought to be consisting of many sub-factors. In the context of this paper the term health includes the following sub-factors: physical, mental, morale, and retention. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the CA recognize its personnel as its most valuable resource and have made significant strides with improvements to the health services provided to ill and injured soldiers and their families. Strong, Secure and Engaged (SEE) discusses multiple other initiatives to promote a healthy workforce from enrolment to transition out of the military but this paper will focus on some glaring contradictions within the CA keystone documents that absolutely erode

¹ "We've Given Up on Canada's Military, so Let's Abandon it Altogether,"
<http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/weve-given-up-on-canadas-military-so-lets-abandon-it-altogether/>

the cohesion, morale and health of the force, the most important factor to its lasting success. In the discussion section, operational tempo and identify will be main areas of focus. Many of the strategic programmes related to health, retention, transition, and diversity will be applicable to the CA but for the most part dictated to the three services. This paper will focus on what the CA can change or significantly influence. For far too long soldiers and leaders in the CA have been asked to do more with less to the detriment of their men and women.

DISCUSSION

The Managed Readiness Plan (MRP) and Operational (Op) Tempo

3. When attempting to ascertain a member's op tempo military leaders often revert to a computer system that spits out a number in days that a soldier has spent overseas on deployment. Although in most cases this number may be quite low since the close out of Afghanistan, op tempo has a significantly different meaning for soldiers and their families than the chain of command. A spouse, a child, or a parent does not distinguish between time spent in Wainright Alberta and time spent in Latvia. To all concerned a loved one is away and with it comes all the stresses and challenges of an op deployment. Exercise MAPLE RESOLVE (EX MR) has unnecessarily swelled to monumental proportions and ultimately the soldiers in the units pay the price. For an output of a couple of company groups and a few headquarters, entire brigades and countless other enablers are participating in this massive exercise with few soldiers actually deploying. Two of our current international deployments, Op UNIFIER and OP REASSURANCE, are both in permissive environments and both top heavy with regards to manning, leaving less and less room or soldiers to deploy which significantly effects soldiers'

morale as well as retention. Soldiers are seeing less and less opportunity to fulfill themselves and senior non-commissioned officers and officers are asked to do even more, exacerbating an already existing problem.

4. Also, compounding the problem is that at every level of the chain of command, the same training is being conducted. For instance, B Coy, 2 RCR, conducted up to level 5 live fire training in Gagetown prior to deploying on Ex MR in 2017 for several months. This included numerous weeks in the field only to go to Alberta to conduct the same training and, upon returning to their home unit, not deploying. This leads the soldiers to question their role and significance within the CA. Endless three year cycles of Ex MR and the Road to High Readiness (R2HR) is not what they envisioned when they joined.

Lack of prioritization

5. As stated above, the senior leadership has within the CA has been asked to do more with less for too long. Senior leaders are quick to throw out buzz words like flexibility, agility, robustness, but the truth is problem is a lack of prioritization. If everything is a priority than nothing is a priority and this is a burden placed on the men and women in the CA units. In the CA Operation plan, level 5, combined arms team, is listed as the CA vital ground. So how does Ex MR become a three thousand plus person yearly training event? Because, level 6, battle group, is listed as key terrain. But then, it states that level 6 validation must be conducted in a

level 7, formation headquarters, context.² Thousands of soldiers from the CA participate in this yearly, inefficient behemoth, in the end for the CA only to deploy a few hundred people.

Commanders at the unit and brigade levels use the auspices of Ex MR to conduct collective training. Although there are surely some economies of scale to be gained through collective training, the hundreds of millions of dollars spent shipping equipment and personnel from across the country to Alberta as well as the added time away from home seems excessive and costly.

6. Soldier's year in and year out struggle to understand the logic and value in such an exercise, when the same objectives can be achieved at their own bases. Further, Advancing with Purpose proposes level 7 validation be done through command post exercises.³ Another sticking point with many CA members is the importance given to the R2HR and Ex MR. With the CCA's operation plan and with regards to force generation, support to CA individual training takes precedence over CA collective training, Ex MAPLE RESOLVE.⁴ The concept of "come as you are" also raises questions about the importance of the training event.⁵ Although units are embarking on the R2HR with named missions, such as Ops UNIFIER and REASSURANCE, priority is still not given to the work up training. Key personnel are tasked regularly to support individual training, national tasks, and even postings. This only fuels the burning questions within the CA as to the utility of Ex MR and the cost the soldiers pay to validate brigade commanders, something that could be easily done through a computer exercise. In the past units were named for upcoming operations, positions were set and personnel assigned to them with no movement for a year prior to deployment. This is no longer the case. As an example, within 2

² CA HQ OP PLAN FY 17/18, 19 June 2017, p.13-16.

³ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, *Advancing with Purpose: The Army Strategy : One Army, One Team, One Vision* (Ottawa: Dept. of National Defence,[2002]). p. 9

⁴ CA HQ OP PLAN FY 17/18, 19 June 2017, p. 22.

⁵ Ibid, p.

RCR, four out of five company commanders as well as the Commanding Officer were posted after conducting Ex MR. Further, during the R2HR the unit was tasked with 62 tasks, equating to 3192 days, taking key personnel away from the unit during the R2HR.⁶ Priority was obviously not the R2HR or the upcoming mission, or perhaps it was but the mission did not require such extensive amount of training before deployment. Regular force CA soldiers within the CA are more than capable of deploying to Latvia, or the Ukraine for a training mission without 12-14 months of rigorous training away from home that is not even afforded priority by the chain of command. This system is broken and grossly inefficient and erodes the cohesion and morale of CA soldiers.

Identity Crisis

7. The other primary area of concern within the CA keystone documents is that the CA wants to do everything. Its vision sees the CA as agile, flexible, scalable, joint, interoperable, and able to operate across the spectrum of conflict.⁷ Once again, the leaders of the CA are asked to do more with less and to achieve arguable unrealistic goals for an army this size of the CA. Within the CA operating plan, institutional credibility is identified as the CA center of gravity.⁸ Although, most will argue this refers to public perception, as it pertains to the health of the force, specifically morale and retention, it is paramount. It is essential for the members of the CA to feel they belong to an institution that has a plan and realistic expectations. Within SSE and the CA Op plan, many areas emerge as top priorities including, air defence, anti-armour weapons

⁶ Van Eijk, Jesse. Statistical Data collated from Monitor Mass. 2 February 2018.

⁷ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence = Défense nationale, [2017]).36-37.

⁸ CA HQ OP PLAN FY 17/18, 19 June 2017, p. 6.

systems, sustainment vehicles, and light forces. Further, it discusses the renewed importance of the North as a result of global warming and myriad other new capabilities on the horizon including targeting, space, and the cyber. Waypoint 2018, and Land Operations 2021 subscribe to the concept of Adaptive Dispersed Operations, and a force's ability to operate with agility in any environment. The idea of being capable of conducting full spectrum operations in any environment is an ambitious undertaking, and one that can ill afford wasted time and resources. Examples such as the CA nearly completing divesting away from tanks until the conflict in Afghanistan, and the re-emergence of mortars, anti-armour, and pioneers within the infantry battalions highlight the CAs inability to identify and master its role. Now, the burden of recreating and reintegrating capabilities of old, without any additional resources falls back on the men and women in the CA units, leaving them wondering who in their infinite wisdom discarded the capability in the first place. With such a small army, limited resources, and an extremely busy land force the constant evolution of the land force brings into question its credibility, creates unnecessary work, and negatively affects the health of its force.

CONCLUSION

8. In conclusion, the paper has argued that the biggest challenge facing the CA and its ability to apply land power of the next ten years is the health of the force. Although the CAF is moving in the right direction with regards to programmes and policies to improve the health of the force, including recruitment and retention, it has some work to do with regards to the MRP and the adverse effects it has on its men and women. The current 36 month cycle that sees brigades rotate from the R2HR, to HR, to support phase seems unnecessary for the current

mission set and threat. An excessive amount of time and resources are being expended for seemingly minimal output while harming the health of the force. In addition, this paper has illustrated that the CA's lack of identity, or overambitious goals also negatively affect the health of the force. If credibility is the center of gravity of the CA, then it should first look inward and ensure its own personnel view it as such. A great deal of undue stress is being put on the force by the CA's incessant willingness to do everything and constant reorganization.

RECOMMENDATION

9. With regards to the issues discussed surrounding the MRP and Ex MR it is recommended that the CA re-examine the MRP and the R2HR with a view to determining the actual validity and effectiveness of the two. With the limited resources at the CA's disposal in terms of personnel and material resources, alternate ways of validating level 6 and 7 headquarters can be achieved. It can be accomplished either by some form of command post exercise or simulation while level 5 training can be conducted in many locations other than Wainright. Further, the CA should determine whether or not this training is even still required given the current mission set. Finally, the timing and sequencing of the R2HR and MRP needs to be synchronized with posting season. It is nonsensical to put subunits through the training cycle only to remove key leaders within an organization prior to deployment. It undermines the importance of the training and erodes the health of the force through unnecessary and lengthy deployments.

10. Given the size of the CA it is recommended that the CA conduct a detailed analysis of its structure, capabilities, and the desired operational environments in which it wishes to operate. It is arguably unrealistic for a force, the size of the CA to be able to effectively operate across the

spectrum of conflict in various environments. The notion of an agile, scalable, and responsive force has perhaps been hindered by the CA constant pursuit of this goal. The CA may be better suited as a niche force, focusing in specific areas of expertise vice across the entire spectrum.

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