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## THE NEED FOR SYMMETRICAL BRIGADES

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**THE NEED FOR SYMMETRICAL BRIGADES**

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## THE NEED FOR SYMMETRICAL BRIGADES

### AIM

1. The aim of the service paper is to discuss the current Canadian Army (CA) structure and propose a new brigade structure that would be more suitable to meet the force employment concept detailed in the MIP 2018, Close Engagement, *The Canadian Land operations capstone operating concept*, and more importantly the Canada's defence policy – *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE). The current CA structure is not flexible enough to meet the requirement of SSE. More explicitly, all heavy elements (i.e. Tanks and heavy engineers) should be equally distributed amongst the three regular force brigades and bolstered with additional equipment in the near future.

### INTRODUCTION

2. This service paper to highlight the needs of symmetric brigades. Currently, the three regular forces brigades are asymmetrical, with one “heavy” brigade in the West, and two medium brigades in the center and east. The heavy armour assets are mainly in 1 Canadian mechanized brigade group (CMBG) with two squadrons of tanks, and one squadron of tanks that belong to 2 CMBG. There is also a future aspiration to also provide Tanks to 5 CMBG. On another note, the CA has put its center of gravity with the combat team level training. SSE requires a capability to deploy simultaneously on two sustained deployments consisting of up to 1500 military personnel each. It also states that an additional time-limited deployment needs to be supported, again with up to 1500 military personnel.<sup>1</sup> MIP Force 2018, signed by the Deputy CA, was released to issue direction on how to meet the requirements of the SSE. It states that the CA must be able to deploy, at the same time, two tank squadrons and two reconnaissance squadrons for sustained operations, and another armour squadron (not specific) on the time-limited operation.<sup>2</sup>

3. This service paper will be divided in two main parts. The first considers the armoured and engineer regiments within the brigade construct and explaining the need to have three similarly structured regular force brigades. Best practices from Canadian allies will be looked at, in particular the force structure of the Australian Army, as it is representative in size to the CA. Finally, it will be demonstrated that there is a need to acquire more heavy armour capability to meet the current *Force posture and Readiness* (FP&R) and to align the Army with Close Engagement, *The Canadian Land operations capstone operating concept*.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of National defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2018), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Deputy Commander Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Plan Force 2018: Alignment towards Land Operations 2021* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016), D-2/5.

## DISCUSSION

### THE BRIGADE STRUCTURE

4. The current Commander Canadian Army stated in his command philosophy that “character of war is changing dramatically, its nature is not.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore the CA still needs to be conscious of the environment and need to be able to face those situations. “All must embrace the notion that ultimately everything done in the Army is to produce combat forces whose fundamental role is the fight and win.”<sup>4</sup> Within the new contemporary environment, it needs to be considered that “the success of military actions must be measured by the effects on human behaviour generated by the synergy of combat action and engagement.”<sup>5</sup> This definitely was the case in Afghanistan with the arrival of the leopard tank and its effect on operations. To produce those effects, the Army has, for a few years now, set level 5 dry training as an annual requirement to be achieved by the regular forces. It is no different in the Army Operating plan 2019/2020 that mandates the requirement of level 5 training to all manoeuvre units. Understanding that if tanks are not available, “any armour direct fire sub-units can be used.”<sup>6</sup> Currently only two brigades can effectively complete this requirement with actual tanks as they have integral tank squadrons. This means that every time 5 CMBG is working up to high readiness, a tank squadron from another brigade needs to be detached to fulfill the heavy armour role. The current structure does not set the conditions for efficient force generation.

5. However, most publications on the future employment of the Army clearly state that balanced brigades are the structures of the future. The master implementation plan (MIP) Force 2018, which provides a road map towards Land Operations 2021 is clear in the fact that the CA must “build a force that is similarly structure”<sup>7</sup>, and also highlights that “the CA force development structural concept is predicated on three similar Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (CMBG), which must be modular and flexible.”<sup>8</sup> The Canadian Land operations capstone operating concept, *Close Engagement*, published in 2019 that details the Army doctrine for the next 10 to 15 years identifies that “Canadian land forces have the following characteristic: [...] an increasingly network-enabled medium land forces augmented by light and heavy forces.”<sup>9</sup> Close Engagement even proposes a solution for balanced forces that can be interpreted as the need for

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<sup>3</sup> Commander Canadian Army. *Command philosophy* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Department of National Defence, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Commander Canadian Army. *Army Operating Plan - Fiscal year 2019/2020 version 2* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Deputy Commander Canadian Army. *Master Implementation Plan Force 2018: Alignment towards Land Operations 2021* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Department of National Defence, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 15.

balanced brigades. “The Army will consider developing an approach to force generation that better integrates the various combat disciplines and thus reduces the time required for pre-deployment training”<sup>10</sup>

6. Returning to the current situation within the brigades, there is always unnecessary friction created by the ad-hoc regrouping required when 5 CBMG force generates to high readiness. Language is an issue, as the three tank squadrons in the Royal Canadian Armour Corps (RCAC) use English as their primary language whilst 5 CMBG uses French. It is also clear that “training must continue to emphasize and build the ability to rapidly transition from small task-oriented force elements to larger combined-arms groupings.”<sup>11</sup> The current situation is counter productive, especially when, on top of the need to adapt to each other during reorganisation, there is a language barrier that greatly affects operations at the lowest level. Therefore, effects on the battlefield could be less than expected. The impact could easily be minimized with a tank squadron, operating in French, being part of 5 CMBG. Having brigade symmetry throughout the Army would only provide more efficient and effective troops to be employed in a wide variety of tasks and operations.

7. There is also a big emphasis on “the ability to operate at brigade group [...], as it is the lowest level of headquarters that can synchronize joint effects. A brigade group consist of a headquarters that can command two to four manoeuvre units.”<sup>12</sup> Currently, 5 CMBG consists of four manoeuvre units. However, the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada (12<sup>e</sup> RBC), cannot perform the heavy armour task. Additionally, according to Close Engagement, the brigade group “will need balanced forces, with an appropriate mix of light, medium and heavy capabilities that can be rapidly deployed and employed. Land forces must be balanced agile and responsive.”<sup>13</sup> Placing at least one tank squadron within 5 CMBG would be a key enabler to allow easy regrouping with the infantry battalion, continual access to that squadron remove dependency on another brigade and allow effective operations as a brigade group. During Afghanistan, it was clear that concentrating tanks into one location created major issues, as the Lord Strathcona Horse (Royal Canadian) (LdSH(RC)) were unable to sustain the force generation over an extended period of time. In the end, every armoured regiment ended up providing a Tank troop, ( or even an entire squadron) to ensure proper coverage for every rotation. Specialisation of brigades has shown its limitations and caused some of our allies, e.g. Australia, to return to symmetrical brigades.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN PLAN BEERSHEBA**

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<sup>10</sup> Department of National Defence, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Department of National Defence, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

8. This paper takes into consideration what one of CA allies has done concerning its structure to reflect the current environment. Considering its size, the Australian Army with a total of approximately 30 000 regular forces and 17 000 active reserve<sup>14</sup> is a good comparative for the CA. The Australian Army went through a major Army restructure, announced in 2011 by the Minister for Defence he stated “we’re moving to three Brigades which will comprise and contain all of Army’s key skills – armour, infantry, communications, logistics and the like. This will enable flexibility – speedy response – but also make Army more efficient, and more effective.”<sup>15</sup> The Chief of Army has put even more emphasis on the need of a balanced brigade during the same press conference highlighting the “need to group assets together in a way that enables them to train as they would fight or operate at short notice.”<sup>16</sup> This plan was confirmed in the “2013 Defence White Paper [where] the government reaffirmed commitment to Army’s reorganisation under Plan Beersheba. Colonel Craig Bickel, the G5 at Forces Command Headquarters, Australia wrote in an article explaining plan Beersheba, an interesting quote from Colonel Ardant du Pic:

The organisation which assures unity of combatants should be better throughout and more rational ... soldiers no matter how well drilled, who are assembled haphazardly into companies and battalions will never have, never have had, that entire unity which is borne of mutual acquaintanceship.<sup>17</sup>

9. Even if this quote is from the 19th Century, it is still very relevant in today's reality. Colonel Bickel explained that “this is because, until Plan Beersheba, the Australian Army’s organisation and the temporary nature of its approach to combining arms has precluded ‘mutual acquaintanceship’ and thus constrained its combined arms capability.”<sup>18</sup> It could easily be argued this is also true for the CA. In 2013 “the [...] Defence White Paper reaffirmed the [...] Army’s reorganisation under Plan Beersheba. Plan Beersheba has reorganised the Australian Army from three specialised brigades into three ‘like’ Multirole Combat Brigade (MCB).”<sup>19</sup> Effective in January 2014, “the new structure [...] see tanks, infantry, and artillery permanently organised in each MCBs”<sup>20</sup>

10. This was the first step to reorient the Australian Army to ensure maximum flexibility and integration within their MCBs. The construct is currently the following: “each brigade [...] comprise [of] two standard infantry battalions (SIBs) together with an

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<sup>14</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Department of Defence, "Department of Defence Annual Report 2017-18", last accessed 22 October 2019, [https://www.defence.gov.au/annualreports/17-18/Downloads/DAR\\_2017-18\\_Complete.pdf](https://www.defence.gov.au/annualreports/17-18/Downloads/DAR_2017-18_Complete.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Minister for Defence, (speech, Announcement of Plan Beersheba) Australia, 12 December 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Minister for Defence, (speech, Announcement of Plan Beersheba) Australia, 12 December 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Colonel Craig Bickell, “Plan Beersheba: The combined arms imperative behind the reorganisation of the army” *Australian Army Journal* volume X (Summer 2013): 37.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 37.

armoured cavalry regiment (ACR) that include a tank squadron”<sup>21</sup>. One of the major changes that could be copied in the CA was within the Royal Australian Armoured Corp. “It involve reorganising the tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs), currently centralised in the armoured, cavalry and mechanised units, [...] in each brigade’s location.”<sup>22</sup> Currently each brigade group has direct access to a tank squadron within the ACRs and can effectively train. They can now form battle group within the brigade, which can train for an extended period of time together and therefore ensure maximum effectiveness of the MCB. Taking those actions, the Australian Army has positioned itself in a better state to face the current threats, ensuring at the same time high level of cohesion with combined-arms groupings.

## INVESTMENT NEEDED

11. The new Canadian land operations capstone operating concept, published in 2019 and signed by the Commander Canadian Army (CCA) has oriented the army capability development for the next 10 to 15 years. It also serves as a follow up document to the Land Operation 2021: *The Force Employment concept for Canada’s Army of Tomorrow*. Even if there is no specific statement of the need to purchase more heavy armoured assets, it is clear that “the Army must reinvest in key capabilities to ensure that Canadian land forces are prepared for combat operations, alongside allies, against a peer competitor.”<sup>23</sup> Current competitors have greatly invested in heavy armoured and direct fire capabilities, and we must be able to be competitive on the battlefield. The direct-fire capabilities of the CA needs to be reinforced to face, for example, battalions of T-90 or the new T-14. Thus the need to equip all armoured regiments with sufficient heavy armour capabilities (i.e. a total of 2 tank squadrons per unit) for them to act fully has a manoeuvre unit.

12. The continually changing threat environment results in the need for the Army to be able to operate in the full spectrum of conflict. The “full spectrum engagement necessitates mobile forces capable of dispersing rapidly to achieve positional advantage over the adversary and aggregating quickly to enhance force protection throughout the multidimensional battlespace.”<sup>24</sup> This is to be achieved with three specific aspects. First, “operational manoeuvre to place forces and resources at a critical place”<sup>25</sup>. Second, “tactical manoeuvre to position land forces to employ tactical capabilities to the best effect”<sup>26</sup>. Finally, “close engagement to defeat enemy forces, seize [...] advantageous positions to create appropriate effects anywhere in the multidimensional battlespace.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Department of National Defence, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 21.

<sup>24</sup> Directorate of Land concepts and design, *Land Operations 2021: The Force Employment concept for Canada’s Army of Tomorrow* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2007), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



The need of further heavy direct-fire capabilities is key to meet what is requested from the CA by the Canadian government. “Ultimately, everything we do in the Army is to produce combat forces whose fundamental role is the fight and win.”<sup>28</sup> In all major conflict that Canada has taken part, heavy armoured played a major role, even on the psychological roam, like in Afghanistan.

## **CONCLUSION**

13. The actual Canadian Army force structure do not provide an effective platform to meet training requirements for regular forces manoeuvre units. The Australian Army have already reacted to the current environment and rebalanced its brigade to ensure combined-arms cohesion, without ad-hoc regrouping for operations. Replicating the Australian Army ideas would see all three CMBGs with their own integral tank squadron, optimizing combined arms cohesion and effectiveness. Also, to face a near-peer enemy, the CA direct-fire capabilities needs to be reinforced and an investment would be needed to bridge that gap.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

14. The first recommendation is to reorganise the RCAC in ensuring balance through the three regular forces brigades. You can achieve this is with no person-year (PY) manning changes. The creation of a tank squadron within 12<sup>e</sup> RBC, mainly from the reallocation of tanks from the LdSH(RC) thus ensuring one tank squadron per brigade. This will create the possibility of combined arms grouping within each brigade and therefore shorter regrouping time, higher cohesion within combined arms grouping and ultimately an Army more efficient and more effective. Even more importantly, having a French-speaking tank squadron within 5 CMBG will increase significantly the effectiveness of the brigade group.

15. Finally, the Army should reinvest into heavy armour capabilities to provide a second tank squadron per armoured regiments. This will provide further capacities to the brigades to meet SSE deployment requirements, and especially the capacity to ensure long-term sustainment of operations. The capacity for the armoured regiments to act as a manoeuvre unit is closely linked to its capacity to use direct fire and destroy the enemy. Having two tank squadrons within each regiments bring back the value of an armoured regiment with a brigade context.

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<sup>28</sup> Commander Canadian Army, *Command philosophy* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 1.

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