

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



A Multi-Dimensional Approach to the Challenges of the Afghanistan Conflict

Lieutenant-Commander Pierre-Luc Dessureault-Beaulieu

JCSP 48

Service Paper

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2022

PCEMI 48

Étude Militaire

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2022

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 48 – PCEMI 48

2021 – 2022

Service Paper – Étude militaire

A Multi-Dimensional Approach to the Challenges of the Afghanistan Conflict

Lieutenant-Commander Pierre-Luc Dessureault-Beaulieu

“This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions, which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

“La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.”

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

AIM

1. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have been in a perpetual cycle of obligatory mission success¹ while being plagued with understaffed units² and low resource availability for the past three decades. The aim of this service paper is to convey to the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) and the staff of the possibility that the 2011-2021 military era of uncertainty might be coined in the future as a “second decade of darkness” and to establish the similarities and differences existing between this time and the 1994-2005 period.

INTRODUCTION

2. For numerous years, “The decade between the release of Canada's *1994 White Paper on Defence* and its 2005 *International Policy Statement* was a period of crisis within the Canadian Forces.”³ A multitude of senior military leaders and Department of National Defence (DND) civilian counterparts referred to this period as a turning point for the CAF:

“Dubbed the “decade of darkness” in 2006 by Canada’s chief of defence staff, General Rick Hillier, the budget cuts of the 1990s gutted Canada’s defence from about two percent of GDP in 1989 down to 1.1 percent of GDP in 1999, and prevented Canada from replacing even the most obsolete pieces of equipment [...]”⁴

From budget cuts to reduction of personnel and an operational tempo continuously increasing, the 1994-2005 era was a period of instability and uncertainty for the CAF and its domestic and international commitments. Following the GDP reduction, personnel management was at the forefront of the issue and it was assessed that “a key problem during the Decade of Darkness was a failure on the part of DND to collect, analyze, and transmit data about many important personnel sustainment issues [...]”⁵ Finally, although money allocation was sparse and personnel management became a major issue, “Canadian troops kept being sent to the Balkans, Africa, Asia, and Central America, putting an enormous strain on manpower and morale.”⁶

¹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la Défense nationale. 2017. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence

² *Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence* 2016. Auditor General of Canada.

³ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004. P. Ab

⁴ Moens, Alexander. 2008. "Afghanistan and the Revolution in Canadian Foreign Policy." *International Journal (Toronto)* 63 (3): 569-586. P. 572

⁵ ———. 2012. "From Combat Stress to Operational Stress: The CF's Mental Health Lessons From the ‘Decade of Darkness’." *Canadian Military Journal (Ottawa)* 12 (4): P. 16

⁶ Moens, Alexander. 2008. "Afghanistan and the Revolution in Canadian Foreign Policy." *International Journal (Toronto)* 63 (3): 569-586. P. 572

3. The decade of darkness describes the consequences of the three main issues established earlier in this paper. However, the era was one of constant geo-political flux which created whole-of-government uncertainty and intra-departmental instability resulting in leadership and management challenges. Many senior leaders and civilian counterpart were left to themselves to establish systems that were not systemically supported or approved. Allan English, in his essay *From combat stress to operational stress: The CF's mental health lessons from the "decade of darkness"* establish that "perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the Decade of Darkness is that unless we establish and maintain systems to distill and teach lessons from our past experience, the knowledge we have acquired so painfully in the past will be lost again."⁷ The 1990s are not just the CAF's past, they might be our immediate future and "when employing history as guidance for the future, it is just as important to consider the differences as it is the similarities."⁸ Therefore, to establish if the 2011-2021 will be coined in the future as the "second decade or darkness" for the CAF, this paper will analyze three principal themes and establish its similarities or differences from the 1990s. First, it will assess personnel management from a recruitment and retention point of view. Second, it will discuss the overall operational tempo of the CAF from a commitment and policy perspective since the end of the Afghanistan effort. Finally, it will conduct a deep dive into CAF ethic, lack of trust in the Chain of command and culture management issues.

DISCUSSION

Personnel management issue: recruitment, attrition, and retention

4. The purpose of this section is not to conduct an in-depth analysis of the CAF recruitment of retention challenges. Indeed, an impressive number of essays and analyses are conducted every year on the topic. The aim of this segment is to establish if the CAF have seen a continuous struggle with its personnel management from a recruitment and retention perspective and establish similarities from the decade of darkness. It already has been conveyed that "the CF's retention problems continued throughout the 1990s".⁹ In a 2002 report from the Office of the Auditor General, "DND research staff reported that, "depending on recruiting success, it could take up to 30 years before the military population profile is such that the right numbers are available with the skills and experience to match the demand"(Canada, Office of the Auditor General 2002: 12)"¹⁰. In 2016, another report from the Office of the Auditor General reported that "the Regular Force decreased in size since the 2011–12 fiscal year [and] it is unlikely that it will be able to recruit, train, or retain sufficient personnel to meet its target of 68,000 members by the 2018–19 fiscal year."¹¹ The release of the report predate the 2017 release of Strong,

⁷ ———. 2012. "From Combat Stress to Operational Stress: The CF's Mental Health Lessons From the 'Decade of Darkness'." *Canadian Military Journal (Ottawa)* 12 (4): P.15

⁸ Lacey, James. "A Revolution at Sea: Old is New Again." War on the Rocks, 17 October 2019.

⁹ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004." P. 330

¹⁰ Ibid., 330

¹¹ *Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence* 2016. Auditor General of Canada. P. 3

Secure, Engaged (SSE), Canada's Defence Policy which established a requirement for the regular force will grow by 3,500 (to 71,500) military personnel.¹² Therefore, based on the 2016 Office of the Auditor General report, one can extrapolate that the SSE growth requirement will likely not be achievable. The assessment of the report is of great importance because "inadequate numbers of trained personnel can affect National Defence's ability to meet Canada's international and domestic requirements."¹³

5. In addition, SSE created nine recruitment and retention initiatives. However, none of these enterprises are occupation and trade specific. One the 2016 findings established that "Having enough staff available and trained in each occupation—not just the right overall number of members—is important for accomplishing its operations."¹⁴ The CAF is, based on the many findings, experiencing a recruitment and crewing crises. Furthermore, the CAF regular force is also experiencing "high levels of attrition in some occupation [and] although it knew the causes of attrition the Regular Force had not implemented its most recent overall retention strategy, nor had it developed specific strategies to respond to the challenges of each occupation."¹⁵ Although in 2014, the Canadian Armed Forces Retention Group planned to develop a revised retention plan, as described in SSE since 2017, the strategy as yet to provide any substantiated data or numbers of its result, success, or failure. Finally, and most equivalently, the report concluded that several occupations have been understaffed for many years because of issues with recruiting, training, or retention."¹⁶ Although not a planned reduction in personnel as shaped in the 1990s, the CAF continue to be in an overall personnel management emergency where human resources to task demand remain flawed.

Defence policy and operational requirements

6. In 2002, in the middle of the now established decade of darkness and based on the high operational tempo and resources allocation issues that commenced a few years earlier, the Senate defence committee recommended that Canada and the DND bring home its armed forces for a complete organizational overhauling.¹⁷ In addition of a personnel reduction of nearly 20,000 troops during the period, Canadian forces equipment purchases were also badly needed. According to a treasury board estimates conducted in the early 2000s, "of the 25 major platforms (ships, tanks, planes, and trucks) in all three services, 12 were past their designated lifespan and seven had less than half their service life left."¹⁸ In accordance with the *White Paper on Defence*, Canada would have to maintain a combat capable forces for "1) the protection of Canada and Canadians, 2) the defence of North America, in cooperation with the United States,

¹² Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la Défense nationale. 2017. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence, P. 13

¹³ *Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence* 2016. Auditor General of Canada. P. 4

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁷ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004.

¹⁸ Moens, Alexander. 2008. "Afghanistan and the Revolution in Canadian Foreign Policy." *International Journal (Toronto)* 63 (3): 569-586. P. 574

and 3) the promotion of international peace and security.”¹⁸ However, defence senior leadership struggled to effectively manage the ever growing scope of operations with limited and declining resources. The overall result was “policy incoherence – the failure to match ways (methods), means (defence resources), and ends (defence policy objectives), resulting in the need in 2004 to withdraw the CF from overseas operations.”¹⁹

7. In 2017, SSE generated an ambitious yet vague CAF core missions and concurrent operations which instituted a military resource plan.²⁰ Like any other government strategy, “The overall policy objectives [...] provide the guidance through which civilian and military defence managers make decisions.”²¹ Similarly to the *1994 white paper on defence*, although SSE provided a great number of goals it never created a clear prioritization of the 111 initiatives or proper guidance on assets management. Therefore, “defence managers are forced to make educated guesses about how to allocate resources and how to prioritize defence capabilities.”²² At the same time as the CAF is currently struggling to recruit and retain troops, a 2007 treasury board report estimated that 19 out of the 25 major platforms would be beyond their life span by 2017.²³ Moreover, while the CAF has limited and declining resources and assets, the organization is still and currently involved in operations in Central and South America, Europe, Africa, Middle East and the Indo-Pacific in addition to the multiple joint military exercises and domestic operations.²⁴ Although, the two defence strategies (1994 and 2017) were created under a different national political agenda and an evolving global security environment, in both cases, “the government failed to update its policy guidance to reflect these new challenges.”²⁵ Resulting in the same or equivalent operational requirements challenges and consequences.

CAF ethics, culture and toxic leadership

8. Allan English in his essay *Corruption in the Canadian military? Destroying trust in the chain of command* explain that “destruction of trust often begins with what has been called “resource–mission mismatch”²⁶ This paper already demonstrated that there is a significant divergence between the defence policy demands and CAF available resources. The intention of

¹⁸ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004. P. 331

¹⁹ Ibid., 332

²⁰ Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la Défense nationale. 2017. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence

²¹ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004. P. 325

²² Ibid., 326

²³ Moens, Alexander. 2008. "Afghanistan and the Revolution in Canadian Foreign Policy." *International Journal (Toronto)* 63 (3): 569-586. P. 574

²⁴ Current operations list - Canada.ca

²⁵ Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004. P. Ab

²⁶ English, Allan. 2017. "Corruption in the Canadian Military? Destroying Trust in the Chain of Command." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23 (1): 32-46. P. 35

this section is to establish where a deficiency in resources in conjunction with an ethical and cultural erosion could equate to a lack of trust in the organization and leadership at all level.

9. Many studies have agreed that “The long-term result of resource–mission mismatch is cheating, dishonesty and a corrosive ethical culture that few acknowledge and even fewer discuss or work to correct.”²⁷ Following the Somalia Commission, one of the key recommendation made was that “[professional military] education (PME) – not just training – was necessary to prepare CAF leaders adequately for operations.”²⁸ Based on the recommendation, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, CAF ethics reference documents were in the process of being overhauled after the dramatic event in East Africa. However the replacement of the “CAF’s values-based ethics reference document in 2012 by an entirely inadequate DND and CF Code of Values and Ethics threatens to undermine the progress that has been made in CAF ethics education and training since the Decade of Darkness.”²⁹ Furthermore major reforms to CAF’s PME are now being dismantled due to budget cuts.³⁰ In addition, based on the analyses of the current situation, many argues that “the outlook for the future is not good given widespread cuts to Canadian PME, including training and education in ethics and the military profession.”³¹ When resources are scarce, cuts are usually made in what is considered the “least important” requirements to maintain an effective fighting force. However, issues in PME as it pertains to ethic could result in catastrophic outcomes generating a lack of trust in the organization.

10. In addition to the internal potential lessons identified from the 1993 Somalia ethics tragedy, comes the realization that “any profession that forfeits society’s confidence in its ability to exercise its professional duties ethically may face the prospect of losing its privileges of autonomy and self-regulation.”³² the CAF prioritized their organization wide analyses to a mix or internal (CRS now ADM(RS)) and external (Office of Auditor General) agencies with varying results. In 2015 however, the CAF and DND had a dire requirement for a complete investigation upon its culture and potentially toxic ethos and the “external perspective provided by the Deschamps report clearly identifies problems related to trust in chain of command, values and CAF culture that needs to be addressed.”³⁴ The report triggered the senior leadership of the CAF to create an organization wide plan to eradicate some of the unwanted poisonous behaviour to right the overall CAF culture in generating Operation Honour. However, as Allan English wrote, “Op Honour” provided bureaucratic solutions that were vague about how issues of “comprehensive culture change” or a “deep mistrust that the chain of command” were going to

²⁷ Ibid., 35

²⁸ ———, 2016. “Cultural Dissonance: Ethical Considerations from Afghanistan.” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 22 (2): 163-172. P. 168

²⁹ Ibid., 171

³⁰ Ibid., 168

³¹ Ibid., 168

³² English, Allan. 2017. “Corruption in the Canadian Military? Destroying Trust in the Chain of Command.” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23 (1): 32-46. p. 35 ³⁴ Ibid., 43

be resolved.”³³ Although seen as a promising solution, bureaucracies such as the CAF and DND tend to favor sequential and resource management-based techniques. However, difficult problems (Social or cultural) must be addressed using a non-linear method to be efficient. Furthermore, a bureaucratic solution has contributed, in the past and currently, to an erosion of military ethos “allowing “a culture of personal careerism and bureaucratic self-interest [...] resulting in a CAF culture “characterized by cautious leaders” trying to protect their “own interests.”³⁴ CAF ethic and culture challenges would benefit in continuous analyses soon, as the topics deserve the full attention of senior decision makers.

CONCLUSION

11. While the present-day CAF is undoubtedly is a period of personnel management, resources to mission mismatch and ethic and culture crises, the organization continues to lack clear, coherent, and tangible solutions. Although potential solutions are currently being done under the SSE umbrella, most of these efforts are conducted under the horizon 3 or 2040 timeframe. Furthermore, although the mission in Afghanistan slowed the effect of the initial decade of darkness, valuable lessons identify were never learned or applied resulting in the CAF making similar mistake yet expecting different results. Lastly, although not analyze based on ongoing investigations and still to recent to avoid biases, it is likely that the 2021 leadership crises will exacerbate the lack of trust in the organization on many levels.

³³ Ibid., 43

³⁴ Ibid., 36

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The following recommendations are made with respect to personnel management:
 - a. Advocate for the creation of a CAF recruitment and retention enabler command with appropriate ARAs.
 - b. Establish a dedicated recruitment and retention team in conjunction with the Office of the Auditor General to identify credible and achievable goals in line with current limited resources and CAF strategic requirements.
13. The following recommendations are made with respect to defence policy and operational requirements:
 - a. Examine the possibility of reducing the CAF international output while maintaining our “Engaged in the world” policy commitments and requirements.
 - b. Establish a dedicated internal and external resources to mission team under the Vice-Chief of Defence Staff enabled to:
 - i. Recommend mission cuts and repatriation to senior CAF leadership including the possibility of an operational pause.
 - ii. Educate senior political leader on actual and factual CAF and DND current and future capabilities and resources without CAF senior leadership pressures.
14. The following recommendations are made with respect to CAF ethic and culture adjustment:
 - a. Conduct with the help of non-CAF leadership and ethic professional a complete overhaul of the CAF leadership and ethic self-generated literature.
 - b. Advocate for an overhaul of the CAF PME with a focus on proper leadership and ethic education as part of the core DP program.
 - c. Establish a senior officer promotion criteria board to examine a new assessment criterion based on character-based and empathetic leadership skills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence 2002. Auditor General of Canada.

Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence 2016. Auditor General of Canada.

Canada. Dept. of National Defence. 2005. *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*. Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute.

Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la Défense nationale. 2009. *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*. Ottawa: Published under the auspices of the Chief of the Defence Staff by the Canadian Defence Academy - Canadian Forces Leadership Institute.

Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la Défense nationale. 2017. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. Ottawa, Ont.: National Defence = Défense nationale.

Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Canada. Dept. of National Defence, and Canadian Defence Academy. 2007. *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Leading the Institution*. Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy, Canadian Forces Leadership Institute.

Crossan, Mary, Gerard Seijts, and Jeffrey Gandz. 2015. *Developing Leadership Character*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

Edgar, Alistair D., Rupinder Mangat, Bessma Momani. *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces through Diversity and Inclusion*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.

English, Allan. 2017. "Corruption in the Canadian Military? Destroying Trust in the Chain of Command." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23 (1): 32-46.
doi:10.1080/11926422.2016.1250654.

———. 2016. "Cultural Dissonance: Ethical Considerations from Afghanistan." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 22 (2): 163-172.

———. 2021. "The CAF Path Towards its 25.1% Employment Equity Objective: A Look Through the Lenses of Attraction and Recruitment" *Canadian Military Journal (Ottawa)* 22 (1): 5-13

———. 2012. "From Combat Stress to Operational Stress: The CF's Mental Health Lessons From the 'Decade of Darkness'." *Canadian Military Journal (Ottawa)* 12 (4): 9.

Hartfiel, Robert Michael. 2010. "Planning without Guidance: Canadian Defence Policy and Planning, 1993-2004." *Canadian Public Administration* 53 (3): 323-349.

Lacey, James. "A Revolution at Sea: Old is New Again." War on the Rocks, 17 October 2019.

- Mbithi, Elijah and Canadian Forces College. 2018. *Strategies to Promote Recruitment and Retention of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*. Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College.
- Moens, Alexander. 2008. "Afghanistan and the Revolution in Canadian Foreign Policy." *International Journal (Toronto)* 63 (3): 569-586.
- Saideman, Stephen M. 2017. "What the Afghanistan Mission Teaches Canada." *International Journal (Toronto)* 72 (1): 131-141.
- Stevens, Rhonda and Canadian Forces College. 2018. *Leveraging Diversity: Gender-Based Recruitment and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces*. Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College.
- Zamorski, Mark A. and David Boulos. 2014. "The Impact of the Military Mission in Afghanistan on Mental Health in the Canadian Armed Forces: A Summary of Research Findings." *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5 (1): 23822-13.