



COMMENTARY

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THE DEFENCE POLICY STATEMENT AND ITS VISION OF EXPEDITIONARY CAPABILITIES

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The Canadian government has recently released its Defence Policy Statement (DPS), titled *Setting Our Course*, which represents the defence policy component of the government's overarching – and reasonably (and surprisingly) integrated – International Policy Statement.

The central thrust of the International Policy Statement, and its DPS component, is on the need to reinvest in Canada's international role. This is perhaps the Statement's most important contribution – a recognition that there is indeed a need for re-investment in Canada's core defence, diplomatic and international assistance commitments. As Prime Minister Paul Martin states in the Foreword of the International Policy Statement, as a result of the erosion of

what can be termed our hard power assets, "our international presence has suffered."

The need for a reinvestment in Canada's expeditionary military capabilities is given a particularly prominent place in the Defence Policy Statement. The sharp end of this capability would be the Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), a joint military formation capable of operating in both Canada and abroad, and which would include an expanded Joint Task Force 2 (JTF-2), alongside intelligence, aviation, maritime and land and other support capabilities.

Such a force would be ideal for rapid evacuation operations, as well as provide an enhanced combat and intelligence capability for the Canadian Force. According to recent reports, JTF-2 will be supported by a Light Force of fast-moving highly trained "ranger" troops. Comparisons have been made to the disbanded Canadian Airborne Regiment, though perhaps a better comparison would be the US Army Rangers – due to their key support role for US special forces. The Light Force would be used to secure an area, and to enable the JTF-2 force to conduct its smaller, surgical missions.

According to the DPS, the SOTF will be joined by a Standing Contingency Task Force (SCTF), a larger high readiness force made up of designated land, air, maritime and special operations forces. This force will be based on a strategic sealift capability, centered on what Chief of

Defence Staff General Rick Hillier has called a "big honking ship" (BHS). Little detail has been given on the BHS, though it will likely be an amphibious assault vessel similar to the 25,000-tonnes *San Antonio*-class LPD (Landing Platform Dock) used by the US Marine Corp. Such a vessel would be equipped with a flight deck for helicopters, as well as a well deck for a landing craft.

The BHS would be combined with the strategic lift capability of the three proposed Joint Support Ships (JSS), of which – due to their likely placement on both our coasts – two JSS may be made available for use by the SCTF. These ships would be capable of carrying the fuel, stores and/or the equipment for the landing force and its accompanying Naval Task Force.

This strategic sealift capability would be complemented by a tactical airlift capability, likely in the form of medium to heavy-lift helicopter platforms. Possible candidates include the CH-47 *Chinook*,

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the workhorse of the US Army since its introduction in the 1960s, or the CH-53 *Sea Stallion*, which has the added advantage of having a larger lift capacity and being shipboard compatible and designed for amphibious operations. The CH-53, it should be noted, is currently employed by US Marines. With this mixture of strategic and tactical lift, the SCTF should represent a relatively significant power projection capability for the Canadian Forces.

Both of these Task Forces are especially tailored for joint expeditionary missions, and are therefore designed to be interoperable with our allies and rapid-reactive. They are also very much complementary. On one hand, the Special Operations Task Force can provide some much needed "covert surveillance and other capabilities" for the SCTF. On the other hand, the SOTF – as a small but robust force – may find itself deployed to a hostile environment and in need of aid, and may therefore require the support of the SCTF. Of course, whether the Standing Contingency is actually used in such a capacity, given the relative surety of the SOTF deployment in a larger coalition operation (most likely with the United States), is another matter.

The creation of these two Task Forces also seems to be a recognition by Canadian defence planners that a fully multi-purpose, combat-capable CF – able to operate seamlessly with our partners (especially the Americans) *at all levels of conflict* – has become infeasible, due to both fiscal realities as well as our accumulated capital deficiencies. While one can argue (and many have) that an immense infusion of resources is therefore required to prevent this decline, the likelihood that this will take place is looking increasingly slim.

Instead, the Defence Policy Statement appears to be advocating a division of labour in the Canadian Forces. On one

hand, the SOTF – as the sharp end of the stick, so to speak – will represent our primary means of participating in high-intensity "intervention operations" with our American allies, particularly against unconventional and asymmetrical threats such as terrorism (though its usefulness against conventional threats should not be forgotten). The highly specialized nature of the SOTF – based largely on the small but precise missions of JTF-2 – does limit its utility. But such a high value, interoperable force would at least allow the CF to continue working with the Americans in dangerous "intervention operations."

On the other hand, the SCTF – aside from providing a more significant support for special forces operations – is clearly designed to deal with the threat posed by failed and failing states, which are seen as planting "the seeds of threats to regional and global security," whether in the form of terrorist sanctuaries or refugee flows. Such low to medium-intensity "stability operations" require a significant and reasonably robust "boots on the ground" presence, and this need will likely be fulfilled with the expeditionary and more manpower-intensive SCTF.

This emphasis on stabilization missions has led some critics to bemoan the lack of emphasis on a high-intensity "combat-capable" force in the DPS document. This view is misplaced. Failed and failing states are indeed a central concern for Canadian security and national interests, and have been throughout the post-Cold War period, as our extensive operational experience in stabilization and robust/complex peace support missions seems to indicate. An emphasis on low to mid-intensity combat operations, as opposed to conventional high-intensity combat operations, is therefore warranted – at a time of limited resources, such an emphasis more closely matches means and ends.

In addition, failed or failing states are, for the most part, in the developing world – the likelihood that Canada will be involved in high-intensity combat operations in such circumstances can be overestimated. Of course, there is a possibility that Canada *may* be faced with a high-intensity and/or conventional threat in a failed state. However, forces designed for robust "stability operations," and the dangerous and chaotic "three block war" operational environment, would be far from defenceless in such an event. These are not, nor does the DPS envision them to be, the lightly-armed traditional peacekeepers that, for the most part, supervised cease-fires during the Cold War.

One should also recall that Canada is unlikely to operate alone in any future stabilization mission. The need for a substantial ground presence, as well as Canada's longstanding proclivity for interoperable forces and coalition operations, precludes that option. The danger to a force designed for "stability operations" must then be examined in the context of a joint coalition operation, as it is more than likely that any such deployment will include allied forces capable of operating at various levels of conflict. As such, the danger posed to Canadian security of not having such a combat capability, when compared to the increased (and one can say unrealistic) hopes of maintaining a fully combat-capable CF, can be overestimated.

This division of labour in the CF is, of course, not an ideal situation by any means. Such a defence policy option is based more on our limited resources and our growing capital erosion than on any sound defence assessments, and its envisioned capabilities represent only modest changes to current Canadian capabilities. For example, our ability to be involved in a conventional, high-intensity "intervention operation," like the US invasion of Iraq, would be limited to a contingent of

special forces and their enhanced support forces.

But one should neither discount such a small but highly useful contribution, nor overestimate the importance of sending a larger, significant contingent of fully combat-capable (as opposed to stabilization) forces. The SOCT would have been valued, if only to give Canada's imprint on any such intervention. A more sizable contingent would likely give some further political capital in Washington, but the difference would not – in the end – be all that significant. And any loss of political capital can be regained by the deployment of a SCTF stabilization force for the inevitable post-war reconstruction and robust peace support phase of the operation. At a time when even the United Kingdom is struggling to maintain its military relevance vis-à-vis the increasingly sophisticated US forces, one cannot overestimate Canada's influence, even at the best of times.

In the end, the expeditionary vision of the DPS – rather than a fundamentally new concept – represents a necessary stop-gap measure, informed by an analysis of our strategic situation, to prevent the further erosion of our capability to operate in both "intervention operations" with US forces and "stability operations" with US and – more likely – European forces. We may not be able to operate in both types of operations equally, but we will be able to preserve some capability to do so. In many ways, this reflects an Afghanistan model of operations – where we have provided a substantial presence in the "stability operations" under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and a much smaller, combat contingent in the "intervention operations" under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

Even in this imperfect but perhaps necessary solution, much uncertainty still remains. Strategic lift is *the* critical component for any expeditionary capability,

for both the SOTF and the SCTF, but few details – with the exception being General Hillier's vague comments on a BHS – has been forthcoming. The growing obsolescence of the CF's existing platforms, and the significant length of the procurement cycle, may make even this limited policy irrelevant in the short to medium-term. And the degree to which both Task Forces are used in an expeditionary capacity, as opposed to a domestic/continental capacity – a critical component of the DPS – remains to be seen.

Perhaps most importantly, this limited expeditionary capability is heavily dependent on the over \$12-billion promised in the 2005 Budget, most of which will be released in 4-5 years. While the government may have promised this infusion, this does not necessarily mean that it *will* put the necessary resources – in defence and elsewhere – to expand Canada's international role.

However, the government has at least publicly recognized and accepted that there has indeed been a significant erosion in Canadian defence capabilities, and therefore, in its international influence. While Ottawa may not give the CF its promised resources, one can hope that by stating the need and promising such resources, it has created a public commitment from which government may be "trapped" to fulfill, or at the very least, provide a benchmark upon which future policies may be judged. This may not be a perfect solution, but it does appear to be a particularly Canadian one. ■

The views expressed are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute or its members.