

C. THE CANADIAN FORCES

The Committee was repeatedly reminded that the primary purpose of the armed forces is to defend Canada against military threats. Admiral Robert Falls, former Chief of the Defence Staff, stated:

...if Canada's Armed Forces are properly structured and equipped for the right reasons, they will first and foremost be a professional military force, and the ability to use force in response to a direct challenge to our sovereignty will automatically have been adequately addressed. Such forces will also have the capability to provide the surveillance and presence necessary to the assertion of sovereignty and be available to assist in the enforcement of Canadian law...⁽⁶⁷⁾

The Committee agrees that the Canadian Forces must always be prepared to defend Canada militarily, and to operate in a military threat environment.

Nevertheless, in the absence of a clear and present military threat, there may be a public perception that the need for armed forces is diminishing. As the Gulf crisis has shown, however, the international environment is neither static nor particularly stable. Once allowed to disappear, military capabilities are difficult and costly to rebuild, and it is the Committee's view that even in a pure military sense, it is important to maintain balanced and flexible military forces.

At the same time, the benefits the Canadian Forces provide to Canada go far beyond purely military ones. In the Committee's opinion, the work the Forces do on a day-to-day basis in such areas as search and rescue and cooperation with other departments in maritime matters is not fully appreciated by most Canadians. Apart from these ongoing roles, the military is also available to assist civilian authority as necessary in emergency situations. While their training and expertise allows them to assist in many areas, however, the military cannot automatically solve problems or confront challenges it has not prepared for. As a Report to the Premier of British Columbia on marine spills noted with regard to military aid in spill emergencies:

The Canadian policy with respect to the use of the military appears to combine the worst of all worlds. On the one hand, the military is expected to respond to spill emergencies when other agencies have shown themselves incapable of handling the problem without them. Inevitably, this means that they will be called in late, when the opportunity of a successful effort will be slim indeed. On the other, because they constitute a final reserve, it is unlikely that spill response training will be a matter of priority, or that the personnel ultimately sent will be effectively equipped and trained with specialized equipment. Indeed, at the present time, I understand that the Canadian military

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Ibid., 16:6.