

New NATO role for Canada

by Paul George

It is of little surprise that the prodigious attention given to the question of Canadian defence policy in the last few months has highlighted the basic discord over what should be the future course of Canada's defence policy. Unfortunately, the apparent incompatibility of the Conservative White Paper *Challenge and Commitment*, and the response of the New Democratic Party to it, *Canadian Sovereignty, Security and Defence*, threatens to impede an otherwise healthy debate on the defence needs of the country. Nevertheless, it is possible, within the context of both policy papers, to discern some common directions which would be well worth pursuing in the interest of a credible Canadian defence posture. The outcome need not be a zero-sum solution; rather, an alternative course for Canadian defence policy can be proposed which will balance the requirements of alliance membership with the indisputable domestic political need for a defence policy which clearly serves Canadian interests.

Despite the obviously different approaches to the question of Canadian defence, there is an unexpected degree of harmony in both policy papers. For instance, both publications fail to deal adequately with that perennial dilemma of Canadian defence policy: the Commitment-Capability Gap. On one hand, Mr. Beatty's case for amalgamating Canada's NATO roles in Europe is far from convincing. The argument that Canada has "insufficient strategic transport," as well as medical support formations, to meet our commitments both in Norway and Germany is a compelling one. However, no evidence is offered to suggest that Canada would be any better able to meet the requirements of only one sea line of communication if, as is declared, the commitment to Norway is dropped. Indeed, as much is admitted in the White Paper where it is stated that, "Consolidation will reduce, although not eliminate, the critical logistic and medical support problems posed by our current commitments." The Atlantic remains a formidable barrier and the advantage will always lie with the forces wishing to interdict passage across it.

NDP proposal

On the other hand, the NDP would take the consolidation process to the extreme and bring Canadian troops home to meet Canadian "sovereignty and security needs." Mr. Blackburn's (the NDP defence critic who released the document) argument that the Canadian forces stationed in Europe are "simply expensive symbolism" lacks conviction, for surely the same argument could be applied to the NDP's

policy aspiration. Would it not also be expensive symbolism to maintain an army in Canada, when there is no credible threat to the country, and even if there were one, the force available would be insufficient to meet it anyway? Within the needs/resources matrix, however, the implications of these disparate positions present more substantial problems.

Mr. Beatty's continuing commitment to a Canadian land force in Europe will necessitate the purchase of new tanks, more transport and fighter aircraft, and a considerable financial outlay in logistical and infrastructural improvements. Similarly, the NDP proposal to assume total responsibility for the conventional defence of the northern approaches to the continent ("excluding Alaska"), suggests an enormous investment in capital equipment and manpower. In short, the Commitment-Capability Gap would have come full circle; both policy papers retain enormous obligations for the Canadian forces, both would place serious strains on the proposed force levels and both would be very expensive for Canadian taxpayers. Most importantly, neither position proffers a distinctive defence role for Canada within the spatial context of our northern geography.

Time to reassess

There is no question that it is time to reassess the relevance of having Canadian forces stationed in Europe. As the NDP policy paper puts it: "Western European countries have rebuilt their economies and possess strong defence capabilities." However, it is a long way from that reality to argue, as the NDP does, that "Canada can now make a more effective contribution to peace and security outside of NATO." The NDP position is simply unrealistic. Not only does it go against the historical reality of Canada's dependence on collective security arrangements, it disregards the myriad intangible benefits that alliance membership gives us. Having a seat at the NATO table not only allows Canada to influence events of direct concern to its security, but more significantly it serves to balance what might otherwise be an overbearing US influence on our national affairs.

Few would question the significance of the political gesture manifested by the presence of Canadian forces in Europe. On the other hand, it is difficult to counter the NDP argument that "The stationing of one Canadian brigade and some CF-18s in Europe is no longer militarily significant." Plainly, the military contribution our forces make to overall NATO strategy is minor. Whereas there is no doubt of the veracity of Mr. Beatty's conviction that "Canada's security in the broader sense is inseparable from that of Europe," it does not follow that this necessitates the permanent presence of

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