

A Sovereign Cure

Canada's military posture has always been determined by political considerations. The first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, established the edge of autonomy by refusing to send Canadian soldiers to the relief of Chinese Gordon, the British Empire builder, in 1884. A privately-recruited Canadian expedition, called the Nile Voyageurs, did go, but they were formally and factually a non-military force. The next year Macdonald began a distinct Canadian military tradition by raising a militia, which went west with a force of British regulars to put down Louis Riel's second rebellion.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the British were reluctant (as they had been in 1812) to become committed in North America; and the Canadians, following Macdonald's lead, were equally reluctant to dispatch troops to the hot spots of the British Empire. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier permitted voluntary contingents to go to the Boer War, as part of the British, not the Canadian army.

In World War I Canadian involvement in the Empire came to a historical crossroads. Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden immediately committed Canada to full participation, and the passage of the Conscription Act of 1917 alienated Quebec from his party for generations.

Borden also took the opportunity to establish a new degree of sovereignty. The Canadian Army Corps fought in France as a unit, under a Canadian commander. In 1922 the perennial prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, took autonomy a step farther by refusing Lloyd George's request that Canada send troops against Mustafa Kemal, the original young Turk.

At the Imperial Conference in 1937, Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Stuart, a future Canadian Chief of Staff, argued that the imperial interests defined by British Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond were actually the interests of the United Kingdom. Canada's interests were building transport and industry rather than military power. Between 1936 and 1938, Mackenzie King resisted several British requests for Royal Air Force training facilities in Canada; but when war broke out, Canada became a huge school for pilots and navigators under the Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

In 1939 Canada issued its own declaration of war a few days after Britain. It entered a new alliance with the US through the Ogdensburg Agreement and still maintained close cooperation with Great Britain. Ships of the Canadian Navy

were frequently under British command; more than sixty per cent of Canadian airmen served in RAF squadrons, and a great many Britons served in the RCAF.

After the war Canada remained involved in joint military projects, though no longer primarily with Great Britain. It became a contributing member of NATO's common defence in 1949, a partner with the United States in the defence of North America, forming NORAD in 1958, and a regular contributor to the peace-keeping efforts of the United Nations.

Canada's Beartrap system makes it almost easy to land a helicopter on the deck of a rolling, pitching destroyer. The hovering 9.5-ton helicopter lowers a wire rope, which is attached to a heavier cable on the ship. The cable is pulled into the helicopter and locked into position. The apparatus on the deck then reels the helicopter in. When it touches the deck, it is centred in the six-foot square "Beartrap," and two parallel steel beams are fired pneumatically to secure it in place. The entire assembly then travels in a slot along the centre-line of the flight deck to the hangar.

