

because *The Journal* interviewed a pyromaniac the night before. Whatever our misgivings about prophecy, defence policy cannot be for the here and now. Time matters in war and peace; officers and troops take years to train; modern weapons systems take decades to build or procure. Virtually every ship, plane or vehicle the Mulroney government has so far handed over to the armed forces got its start under the Trudeau government. The high-tech wizardry of the 1991 Gulf War was conceived in the 1970s.

THE FUTURE IS UNKNOWABLE, BUT WE must prepare for it with billion-dollar decisions. Hidden in the Pearkes Building, a new defence policy takes shape. One prediction alone is safe: it will deliver savings to the federal treasury. It is hard to argue with Admiral Thomas that keeping approximately forty-four bases in the wrong places is a contribution to regional economic equalization, not to national defence. But is it necessary to agree with him that proficient ground forces with up-to-date equipment can be written out of Canada's foreseeable future?

Though Tories in opposition used to emphasize that Canada's defence effort ranked down with Iceland and Luxembourg, current rhetoric puts the stress on the fact that at \$12 billion a year, we are about the fifth or sixth biggest military spenders in NATO. Much of the money is devoted to politically-convenient bases, using defence contracts to create jobs and votes, and paying more generals than we had in the Second World War.

One result is an old-fashioned inter-service battle. While Admiral Thomas and General De Chastelain helped make the debate a little more public, the details remain shrouded – ominous to those who care about defence and absurdly irrelevant to the rather larger group of Canadians who do not. Admiral Thomas insists that we preserve our navy and air force at the expense of bases and the army; the soldierly Chief of the Defence Staff apparently favours all three services sharing reductions in the name of balance, flexibility and the unpredictable.

WHAT NO ONE SAYS IS THAT THE THREAT OF domestic disorder gives the army pride of place in any new defence policy. While highly-trained, tightly disciplined soldiers would be needed in any public order emergency – and ill-trained militia could only aggravate the crisis – neither politicians nor generals want to contemplate an army that resembles Mexico's or Guatemala's: fit to intervene against rural guerrillas or urban insurrection. Instead, the army pleads for continued "real soldiering" with tanks and artillery.

Competing services need only ask where the war will be and for what cause young Canadians would die. Armies mean bloodshed, and Canada sent no troops to the Persian Gulf. If every CF-18 dispatched to the region had been blown out of the sky by the Iraqis, twenty-four Canadians would have died – a small price for a good day's fighting by an armoured brigade group.

A post-Cold War world is already more complex for Canada than the bi-polar world of 1987. Conceivably, it is even more dangerous.

The sailors have been luckier or more cunning than the soldiers. Its worn-out state is national knowledge. Its dozen splendid new patrol frigates may each cost as much as Montreal's "Big O" but they are also a significant source of Quebec jobs. The Persian Gulf War showed how proudly and bloodlessly such modern warships might have represented Canada. That such conventional surface vessels may be too slow and vulnerable for any future naval warfare is a heresy that drives admirals apoplectic, as do questions about the relevance of such ships to our three-ocean frontier. Is it a common sense of claustrophobia that banishes that short-lived but best of solutions, the nuclear-powered subs of 1987?

Luckiest of all is the air force, its backbone of CF-18 fighter aircraft acquired, still youthful and now proven in action. Since Mackenzie King, politicians have liked the air force and believed themselves modern-minded as they echoed the claims of its enthusiasts. Now larger by far than its sister services, its survival sure, it can be arbiter of the fate of its rivals.

BUT IS THE ALTERNATIVE REALLY TO CANNIBALIZE one service to spare the others? Are there not other answers, all the more valid for being unthinkable? Admiral Thomas raised the issue of the number of bases, most of them small, jerry-built towns with roads, sewers and aging buildings. How many such towns, with their commanders and administrators and maintenance crews do we really need? The answer would come from anguished politicians. Are jobs in key constituencies really a defence responsibility?

Must we periodically gear up to build a few warships or could we buy them from our major allies with fast delivery at forty to sixty percent less cost? Must we always have Canadian-made bullets and shells and service-pattern trucks costing eighty to one-hundred percent more than imports? Why not be highly

selective in the defence industries Canada fosters in peacetime?

It is easy to lecture politicians. The Canadian Forces have found their own way to comfort themselves. We may not have money for tanks or even for sufficient rifles but there was no delay in creating a divisional headquarters and then a range of regional headquarters. Each was an opportunity to add a major-general and an accompanying hierarchy. Rank inflation spreads. What other defence force boasts more corporals than privates?

Rank proliferation, we are told, is vastly worse in the civil service. Good people need an incentive to remain for a full career. But why persuade them to stay to age fifty-five? Why not seek faster promotion and a flatter hierarchy by routinely ending most military careers at age thirty plus? How many men and women over that age could, in any case, endure the strain of modern combat? An outflow of trained veterans would meet the greatest need of Canada's reserves, and they would also be fit and qualified, with a little specialized training, for a host of civilian careers. Thousands of first-rate people would no longer have to be kept in expensive storage, waiting for their pensions. This would save money.

CANADA IS NOT REALLY SUCH A CHEAPSKATE IN defence spending, but do we get value for money? The Dutch have as many planes and warships as we do, all of them modern, and almost twice as much of an army – at half the cost. They do not do it with low pay. Surely we, too, could do better, without slashing already limited effectives or wiping out expertise it takes decades to develop – and months to lose.

Canada's defence problems are not new. In 1873, Lt. Col. Henry Fletcher, the governor-general's secretary, offered the young Dominion of Canada his best wisdom on the making of defence policy. There were, he suggested, three elements in the equation: money, manpower and preparedness. The answer to any two questions resolved the third. Recognizing that Ottawa had set \$1 million as its limit for defence, Fletcher urged that Canada maintain only as many troops as could be made efficient for the money. Politicians, of course, spread the cash over 40,000 militia who often could train every other year. The rewards were political; votes repaid militia pay. In different guises, Fletcher's equation still defines defence policy in a country whose need for military force is as recurrent as it is unpredictable. □