

Canada's new military plans

by Joseph T. Jockel

Prime Minister Mulroney, commenting on his government's new White Paper on Defence, told the House of Commons that "Everyone and his brother will have an opinion on . . . this important matter." That is only to be expected, especially given that *Challenge and Commitment, a New Defence Policy for Canada* which was released on June 5 by the Minister of National Defence Perrin Beatty, is the first such White Paper to be issued in sixteen years. Yet the Prime Minister's phrasing is, however inadvertent, emblematic of the approach his government has taken to defence policy. For the short run, the new White Paper has something in it for just about — but not quite — "everyone and his brother" among the Western allies and at home.

For the United States, and for others abroad and in Canada who remain both deeply suspicious of the intentions of the Soviet Union and worried about the expanded scope of Soviet military capabilities, *Challenge and Commitment* offers the tough, realistic and welcome rhetoric of allied solidarity and collective defence. It asserts as "a fact, not a matter of interpretation, that the West is faced with an ideological, political and economic adversary whose explicit long-term aim is to mould the world in its own image. That adversary has at its disposal massive military forces and a proven willingness to use force, both at home and abroad, to achieve political objectives." Sections of *Challenge and Commitment* often read, and even look, like the slick Pentagon annual production, *Soviet Military Power*. Moreover, contrary to some predictions, Canada can tell its allies that it is retaining the same number of military commitments to NATO it has had for decades.

The way it is

As well, for the critics of past Canadian defence policy, the White Paper has elements of absolutely refreshing candor. Gone are the attempts of past Liberal governments to deny that Canada's defences have reached a state of advanced decline. The last Liberal defence minister, Jean-Jacques Blais, once went so far as to claim that Canada "needed to take a back seat to no one" in terms of its NATO contributions. The Tory White Paper, in sharp rhetorical contrast, devotes a chapter to "the commitment-capability gap" and admits that "much of the equipment of most elements of the Canadian Forces is in an advanced state of obsolescence or is already obsolete." For these elements of honesty Mr. Beatty deserves praise.

For the Germans, there is the announcement that the Canadian contribution to the NATO central front is to be modestly enhanced. This is a victory as well for the Department of External Affairs and others (including officials of the

United States) who have argued that Canadian Forces Europe must remain, largely for political reasons, a centerpiece of Canada's military involvement in the Western alliance. Two eastern Canada-based rapid reinforcement squadrons, each with twelve CF-18 aircraft, will be committed for deployment in Germany in the event of an emergency, to join fifty-four CF-18s of the three squadrons which constitute No. 1 Canadian Air Group (1CAG), based at Canadian Forces Base Lahr in Germany. Previously, the destination of those reinforcement squadrons was north Norway. The 5è Groupe-Brigade du Canada (5GBC), headquartered at CFB Valcartier, Quebec, had also been slated for emergency deployment to north Norway as the Canadian Air-Sea Transportable (CAST) Brigade Group (BG). Now "over time," as the White Paper puts it, equipment for 5GBC is to be pre-positioned at CFB Baden-Soellingen, Germany, so that its troops can be airlifted there to join No. 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4CMBG). Together 5GBC and 4CMBG would constitute a division-sized force.

Out of Norway

To be sure, the Norwegians are net losers in the wake of the new Conservative defence policy. Still, the White Paper had a little something positive for them, too. Ottawa was unwilling to sever altogether its military ties with NATO's Northern Flank. It is thus retaining the commitment to airlift a battalion-group of about 1200 personnel drawn largely from the 1st battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment based at London, Ontario, to the Northern Flank where it would join the multinational Allied Command Europe Mobile Force-Land. Equipment being pre-positioned in north Norway for what was to have been the lead battalion of the CAST BG is to be left there for possible use by Canada's AMF(L) battalion-group. The government also expressed the hope of "continuing our very close and rewarding bilateral military relationship with the Norwegians." But it is very hard to see how that relationship can in fact remain close and rewarding now that its central elements, the two air squadrons and the CAST BG, have been cut out.

There is something as well for each of the armed services to support. For Mobile Command there is the termination of the CAST commitment and the enhanced role in Germany. Many of Canada's soldiers were long unhappy with the CAST commitment, which they called "Hong Kong in the snow" or "Canada's next Hong Kong," after the disaster

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