

AIR TRANSPORT GROUP (ATG)

1. ATG and conventional defence today

Some fundamentals

Canada's defence requirements and commitments determine Air Transport Group's role in the national defence effort. The white paper soon to be issued is intended to set out the basic objectives of Canada's defence policies and thus provide the framework for restating, and reviewing where necessary, the detailed military tasks of the armed forces.

The defence policy statements of the present government to date suggest that Canada is likely to continue its commitments to the protection of national sovereignty, the defence of North America, NATO, and peacekeeping, even though the priorities may be altered and some specific responsibilities might be questioned, amended, or put forward for renegotiation with our allies. ATG will have to continue operations across Canada and, almost certainly, in support of various Canadian forces assigned to NATO defences in Europe, peacekeeping, emergency relief operations and other occasional special missions around the world.

The greatest challenge facing ATG will continue to be that of preparing for the eventuality of emergency-period operations on Canadian territory and in Europe. Peacetime operations are vital for maintaining Canadian sovereignty and preserving the Western deterrent, but as an essential component of the armed forces, Air Transport Group is not an airline: it has to be ready to perform effectively its essentially military role in periods of tension or warfare.

The question then arises: how large should Air Transport Group be, and what kind of aircraft holdings should it have? This is the issue that needs to be examined carefully here, after taking into account the following basic considerations:

- (a) In crisis periods the crucial requirement is for effective national decision-making systems, emergency legislation, mobilization arrangements and management structures as well as a certain mass of military air transport. It is not possible to provide 100 per cent aircraft coverage for all the demands which could arise, almost simultaneously, during an international crisis: what is crucial is effective decision-making about priorities plus streamlined implementation systems and a relatively high level of available air power.