

The Budget—Mr. Forrestall

● (1540)

There are a number of factors emerging in the current debate with respect to defence spending that I believe require the closest scrutiny of Canadians. For some years now I have had the curious feeling that a direction for the Canadian Forces has been set, procedures laid down and ends to be attained, that has not had cabinet approval nor an adequate input from Canadians generally, let alone the House of Commons. From a standing volunteer force of some 125,000 about ten years ago, we have—with no reduction of agreed defence roles—seen the forces run down to the present level of less than 80,000.

After the Second World War the forces were initially established at approximately 50,000 men and women. For a country which at that time ranked as the fourth power in the world, one which was firmly committed to support of the United Nations and one that heavily depended on foreign trade, this level of military strength was low; indeed, it was considerably short of what our senior military people at the time deemed responsible or prudent. Nevertheless, 1947 saw total forces strength drop to approximately 35,000 at a time when the then secretary of state for external affairs saw fit to be highly critical of the United Nations Security Council, claiming it had become "frozen in futility". The then secretary of state also stated as a guiding principle that there was "need to accept responsibilities in the same way in peace as in war". In the same year, Prime Minister Mackenzie King was widely acclaimed for initiative in establishing the charter for the North Atlantic Treaty.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that from such actions and pronouncements of those most responsible for our external affairs, the people of Canada were led to believe we were prepared to back up words with action. The harsh reality of the outbreak of the Korean war on June 25, 1950, soon proved this assumption to be false. With the call for help to Korea on June 27, 1950, we were, fortunately, able to immediately dispatch from our small standing force a three-destroyer unit. However, with respect to the primary requirement for ground forces we were out in left field. We underwent the time-consuming and agonizing process of recruiting some 10,000 personnel and forming the 25th Infantry Brigade. This was a task that took much longer than our allies in that theatre would have wished, and a lot longer than was necessary or would have been taken if defence planning realistically had been tailored to external policy and the reality of the world around us.

The 25th Infantry Brigade was not in a position directly to contribute until February 19, 1951—this in spite of the fact that we were able to attract a large number of World War II veterans who were still competent in their military skills. As well, we still had an arsenal of conventional weapons and supporting equipment which was suited to the type of action involved; a situation which, of course, meant that rearming time was relatively short. Nevertheless, it took an embarrassing amount of time to respond to the call.

This leads me to my first general observation. With a force of 50,000 in 1950 we were not able to respond adequately to a plea for help, even with the relatively unsophisticated weapons and delivery systems of those days. How can we expect to respond today, in a timely fashion

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that might involve us in hostility or combat with a higher level of sophistication, with the weapons and armed delivery systems which we have? Since 1950 Canada has been assuming responsibility for an increasing number of sophisticated defence tasks. This means that an increasing percentage of our military personnel can be expected to be trained for support rather than for front-line roles. It follows that availability of front-line trained personnel out of the purported 80,000 men and women is unlikely to be much better now than was the case in 1950.

Another area of concern relates to equipment. In all too many cases we are still using fighting equipment that was available in World War II and the Korean war days. Why have we not replaced this equipment? Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have had plenty of assurances during the past several years that our forces equipment would be modernized. However, these patronizing assurances always seem to have the same result: a further rundown in personnel, no new equipment, and more assurances that with further reorganization and cutbacks all traditional, plus new commitments will be met because money saved through resultant efficiency will be available to buy new equipment.

We know what happened. The traditional opposition approach, when there is reason to suspect serious mishandling of defence matters, is to resort to what might be called the numbers game; that is, attempting to judge the relative merits and costs in terms of dollars and personnel with respect to re-equipment and modernization. This has proved to be a useful technique but, strangely enough, I have been rather more inclined in recent months to question seriously the intentions of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in this respect. I am pleased to see him in the chamber. I question his intentions for the armed forces today and in the future. I think it is in this direction that Canadians will find some, if not all, of the answers.

Liberal prime ministers during this century, with perhaps one qualified exception, have displayed consistent lack of appreciation of the relationship of national sovereignty and defence responsibility. Prior to World War I, Laurier consistently sought national autonomy while avoiding defence commitments outside Canada's borders. Borden, on the other hand, took an opposite approach while being equally concerned with autonomy. Borden freely accepted defence commitments and consequently was able, primarily because of the magnificent performance in battle of our soldiers, to demand—not beg—a strong, independent voice in international affairs.

Later, in the mid-1930s, under somewhat similar circumstances, Mackenzie King significantly added to the Liberal tradition of an inward-looking if not irresponsible attitude toward defence. With war clouds ominously gathering over Europe, he made it perfectly clear that he did not want Canada to have any related defence commitments. He was agreeable to having armament industrial business for Canada so long as there was no associated Canadian government responsibility for administering contracts. In 1936, when his defence minister proved so unwise as to support a military recommendation for a \$200 million, five-year program, Mr. King expressed his displeasure so vehemently that the defence minister dropped his request.