

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Questionable and Condescending

■ Your spring issue of *Peace & Security* contained a few questionable assessments of recent alternative defence debates. For one, Chris Smith argued in "From Bust to Boom" that "much of the alternative defence de-

bate always appeared in the shape of unreal policies geared to defeat – the idea being to leave a country's borders open to invasion and ensuring that the negative aspects of territorial occupation outweighed the possible gains." But Smith should recognize that this idea of leaving a country's borders open to invasion is unique to the field of civilian-based defence. It is not an idea shared in the field of non-provocative defence or defensive defence where numerous models entail border defence as well as defence in depth.

Moreover, whereas Smith alleges that the use of advanced military technology is downplayed in the work on alternative defence, in fact, many models actually place a premium on the use of light, mobile, precision-guided munitions and sophisticated air defences. Smith applauds the success of the Tornado aircraft and the Patriot missile systems for muting what he describes as this Luddite view. But the Tornado ran into a few troubles (four out of the seven planes lost went down in the first four days of the air war) and Patriot is a defensive system – a success that will inevitably be used to support the case for defensive defence. In short, it appears that Smith hasn't done his homework and his portrayal of a promising field can be seen as a condescending caricature.

Another amazing claim is found in Bernard Wood's "Debating war, peace, morality and order." He writes that "the debate over offensive and defensive roles is irrelevant in any war zone. It is the capabilities of the Canadian aircraft and their crews that shape what they do." Yet surely Wood recognizes the importance of political control and military restraint (even in war zones). Iraq was wise enough to avoid the use of chemical weapons; the Americans wisely avoided the use of nuclear weapons; and Canadian officials could have easily stipulated that the CF-18s were to remain on defensive missions flying combat air patrols over the Gulf.

The CF-18 is capable of both offensive and defensive operations but that doesn't mean it has to be used for both. Moreover, contrary to what Wood writes, it was hardly our aircraft or crews that determined Canada's military response; it was our government. And, as strange as the decision was to begin bombing missions in the last week of the war, few Canadian officials would countenance simply giving free reign to military and technological determinism in the field.

We can expect to hear a range of interpretations on the lessons of this war. Chris Smith's analysis leads to the conclusion that the Gulf War will help to justify business-as-usual and the demand for a wide range of advanced weapons to fight the wars of the future. On this point, Smith may be correct; some governments will resort to the old methods. However, in a recent statement to the Standing Committee on National Defence, Joe Clark wisely noted that the option to this grim scenario will be to promote military restraint, arms transfer restraint and defensive defence at lower cost. The Secretary of State for External Affairs recognizes that the choice is clear.

It may be, as Bernard Wood writes, "that our national debate since the 2 August has done us no credit as a people." Then again, the problem here may be simply one of perspective and perceived relevance. From another perspective, it is now encouraging that only a very few peace and security institutes consider the alternative defence debates to be irrelevant.

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The Role of the Media in International Conflict

■ What did the Gulf War teach us about the power of the media? What was the relationship between journalists and the military? Between journalists and politicians and diplomats? What makes one war news and not another? Are journalists in danger of becoming part of a conflict?

These are some of the questions which will be addressed at a two-day conference sponsored by the Institute featuring many respected speakers from the media, military, government, and academe. Confirmed speakers include:

Aileen McCabe

Southam News

Colin MacKenzie

Globe and Mail

Jim Travers

Southam News

Akiba Cohen

Hebrew University
of Jerusalem

Florian Sauvageau

Université Laval

Joe Schlesinger

CBC

Jean Pelletier

Journal de Montréal

William Solomon

Rutgers University

Jeremy Kinsman

Department of
External Affairs

John Honderich

Toronto Star

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12 and 13 September 1991

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