

Luncheon Keynote Address

**“Addressing Defence Issues in a One Party Democracy”**

Royal Kingston United Services Institute

*\*Check against delivery*

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Fort Frontenac Officers' Mess

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The problem with a democratic system where only one party has the potential of forming a government is that what we have in effect, is a one party non-competitive democracy. I do not blame the Liberal party of Canada for this state of affairs. It is not their job to assist the opposition parties in coordinating or coalescing their efforts. The opposition parties are responsible for this non-competitive one party framework. That being said, the not partisan issue here is how we deal with the challenges facing Canadians in terms of the quality of public policy and the public policy agenda as a result of this non competitive democracy.

Three of the leading challenges are:

- A. Internal leadership struggles within the governing party replace competitive elections as places where differing agendas and competing ideas engage. So, leadership struggles become the only real place and time for policy advocates to engage.
- B. Bureaucracies tend to slow down and freeze before elections – awaiting a sense of where the public is headed – which is not necessarily a bad thing. We now face a potential 24-26 month freeze, anticipating both a leadership change and then the subsequent election. Beginning in August, 2002 and continuing till perhaps as long as fall 2004, we could face almost half an existing government's term with the public service in neutral, at least in terms of expeditious policy change.
- C. There tends to be a clustering of issues, people, money and intellectual reserves – around the permanent governing party.

At the IRPP, we are not in the business of predicting election outcomes or partisan fortunes, which we leave to the public opinion pollsters and columnists who are better able to do this. So, it may very well be that perceived excessive self-absolution by the party in power, fresh and determined policy coherence by any of the parties in opposition could change the established wisdom in terms of the competitive nature of our present day politics. Be that as it may, it is important to our democracy that opposition parties, on the right or the left, do not abdicate all policy initiatives to the governing party. The partisan source of public policy ideas in the marketplace is less important than the existence for Canadians of more than one set of ideas and genuine policy options from which to choose.

Let me focus on one issue about which the IRPP has done some research, namely national security and military interoperability with our allies.

Clearly, by any measure, we do not as a society spend sufficiently to adequately support our existing force requirements. Nor do we spend enough to meaningfully invest in the kit modernization, force restructuring, forward placement, enhanced mobility and rapid multi-task deployments the asymmetric nature of the new threats we and our allies now face require.

Yet, perhaps for the first time since World War II, various polling organizations have reported a compelling national consensus on the need for new military spending. Mr. Pratt, the Liberal chairman of the parliamentary standing committee, the opposition defence critics from all parties, a list of NGOs from the right centre and left, and even the more left wing policy forces in the Liberal party – such as former Trudeau Chief of Staff, Tom Axworthy – have all argued in favour of more spending. Now, the Minister of Defence has also agreed with this consensus and has undertaken to seek substantial new funding. All of which, in a competitive democracy, could make one seriously optimistic. But, in a one party democracy, it is the Prime Minister and the Minister of

Finance who will decide. Mr. Manley's predecessor, Mr. Martin, was no friend of our Armed Forces – and his silence in the context of the present multi-party consensus is ominous. I could very well be wrong here, and I hope profoundly that I am.

So, the question here for Canadians is very clear: In the present context of a quasi frozen public service, a governing party in a prolonged period of leadership process, and the opposition parties in a similar circumstances – what can be done to benefit from the pro-defence consensus and advance the case constructively?

A few weeks ago, I visited along with other members of the Atlantic Council, which is NATO's civilian, non-governmental organization across the NATO countries, our new NATO allies in Poland. A twenty strong Canadian delegation met with military leaders, operations officers in the field and with senior staff of the Polish Defence Ministry as well as parliamentary committee on defence. As many of you here will know or may have experienced,\* Polish Forces landed at Dieppe with Canadians, landed at Juno Beach with Canadians, and fought up the spine of Italy to Montecassino with Canadians in the Italian campaign of World War II. When Canada went to the middle east as part of the Suez in the 1950s the Poles served with us in that important and pioneering peace keeping deployment. In more recent times, since Poland entered first, the partnership for peace and then NATO itself, Polish officers have learned their English at the language school at CFB Borden. So there are historic and present day linkages between Canada and Poland, which are important and very constructive.

We can learn different things from each other; they are trying to move from a conscript force to a more predominately professional force. Both forces have kit modernization challenges etc.

One thing we can learn from the Poles is the way their parliament (the SEM) approached what is now a multi-party non-partisan position on defence spending. They have agreed, across all parties, that spending on defence will equal no less than 1.95% of their gross domestic product. This represents a significant increase on present levels – levels that are higher than the less than 1.2% of the GDP Canada spends on its military.

So the option exists here in Canada for the opposition parties to jointly propose a minimum level of GDP% relative to defence spending for Canada; a number in the 2% range, to be achieved in no less than three years.

This kind of positive non accusatory resolution presented to Parliament before the federal budget on a votable opposition day would allow all MPs from all parties, including the governing party, to express their view in support of the forces and their legitimate requirements going forward. It may very well be that the new sense of voting freedom that has sprouted in the government caucus could well respond to the chance to be realistic about our legitimate defence and security requirements. The Minister of Finance retains, of course, all the traditional prerogatives of the Finance Department relative to the final budget – the contents of which are, of course, a matter of confidence, in the strict parliamentary sense. But, a multi-party-wide formal expression of support and commitment would be of great and lasting policy value. Sadly, the resolution presented by the Conservatives on November 4 of this year was a classic hidebound opposition motion, more focused on blaming the government than actually constructing positive common policy for parliamentarians from all parties going forward. Opposition parties have a duty under our system to

blame governments, but they also have a duty to make constructive policy suggestions that reflect national consensus.

The unanimous position of both the House of Commons Committee on National Defence and the recent Senate committee report speak well to both the bipartisan approach of the members from all parties on both committees and the excellent work of the respective chairs and co-chairs of the House and Senate Committees.

But, these reports do not equal a formal House of Commons vote, on a carefully explicit motion, co-sponsored by more than one political party. The wording of such a motion is quite properly for the parliamentarians in both the Senate and the House to shape and negotiate – as long as it clearly commits, the House of Commons and, the Senate to:

1. A Canadian military capacity that enhanced both our ability to deploy independently and co-operatively with our allies.
2. A spending level equal to 2% of GDP to be achieved over a phase in multi-layered period.
3. A strong multi-partisan call upon the government and Minister of Finance to support our forces to these levels.
4. A strong vote of confidence and support for the men and women in uniform who form the sharp end, the middle and rear echelons and the human architecture of Canada's armed defence forces at home and abroad; it would be a valuable and constructive step ahead for both military morale and the role, influence and impact of parliament and parliamentarians on issues about which Canadians care deeply.

Political leaders come and go. Political fortunes ebb and flow in most countries, even on occasion in Canada – but national defence is a clear and precise federal constitutional responsibility and national priority unlike what many federal and cultural programs do and spend in contested constitutional waters.

Parliament and parliamentarians from all parties have served the nation well on defence priorities and issues, although to date the government elected in 1993 has been less than responsive – no doubt – to be fair to both Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin, because they earnestly believed that other fiscal social priorities deserved higher levels of decision making and allocative attention.

But, whatever the debates about the past, national security and national defence is about the future. Post 9-11, the government and Parliament of Canada give serious new money to CSIS, the RCMP, infrastructure protection, border management and immigration. All of which was necessary and important.

But the core infrastructure of both maximum sovereignty and national security for Canada and our legitimate international interests as served by our NATO and allied activities is our armed forces. Without initiatives on long lift capacity, both air and sea, increased recruitment, kit modernization and enhanced rapid deployment ability, we will be deserting this infrastructure at precisely the point in our nation's history we need it the most.

Not even a one party democracy is an appropriate justification for that kind of abdication. I am delighted to take any questions you might have.