

Canada's Beleaguered Military Struggles to Stay Alive

TORONTO — U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz was in Canada this week discussing, among other things, the new Progressive Conservative government's electoral pledge to bolster its armed forces. For while Washington has been rebuking its European North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies for failing to boost their conventional forces, Canada has almost completely disarmed with hardly a murmur of U.S. protest.

At the end of World War II, Canada had the world's third-largest navy and almost one million men under arms. In 1962, a still-powerful Canadian navy assumed de-

The Americas by Eric S. Margolis

fense of the North Atlantic, temporarily substituting for U.S. warships blockading Cuba.

Today, Canada's military power is only a distant memory. Its once-proud armed forces now rank on a par with those of Ecuador or the Philippines. This process began 16 years ago when the new Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau set out to reduce U.S. ownership of a major portion of Canada's industry, heighten nationalism and create a Scandinavian-style welfare state. To finance such sweeping programs, Ottawa embarked on massive deficit spending and the relentless diversion of funds away from the military.

The Liberals' programs proved a popular success, at the same time, they drew attention to a dilemma that has long faced Canada: Should the nation field effective armed forces or should it rely for defense on the U.S.?

Before World War II, the British navy helped ensure the protection of Canada; after the war, it was shielded by U.S. power. But recent boosts in Soviet naval,

air and nuclear capabilities, and the current decline in U.S. deterrent potential, are forcing Canada to reassess its defense policies.

Canadian territory is vital to the defense of U.S. airspace and its maritime approaches. And Canadian leaders have long been uncomfortably aware that the U.S. might act to defend Canada if Canadians did not do so themselves. "Unless we defend our own sovereignty," says George Bell, director of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, "we could become a protectorate of the United States."

With this problem in mind, Canadians historically have sought to forge close ties to Europe in order to counterbalance the sometimes-oppressive presence of their giant southern neighbor. This "second option" was the prime motivation of Canada's stationing of one weak brigade group in West Germany and its commitments to help defend northern Norway back in the '60s.

Under Mr. Trudeau, Canadian support of NATO was, at best, fainthearted and largely symbolic. James Schlesinger, former U.S. secretary of defense, relates, "I explained to Trudeau during a trip to Ottawa in 1975 that if Europe were to fail, Canada would find itself isolated on the North American continent with an edgy, nervous U.S." Adds Mr. Schlesinger, "Canada simply must do its fair share of defending the Western alliance."

Unfortunately, Canada has not. It spends just under 2% of gross national product on defense, the lowest amount of any NATO member save tiny Iceland and Luxembourg. There are only 83,000 men and women (in and out of uniform) in Canada's armed forces—this to defend territory larger than the U.S. But even this figure does not tell the full story.

The land component of Canada's unified armed forces can field only about 8,000 combat troops and a paltry 114 tanks. Though highly trained and of excellent

quality, in numbers the army is little more than a gendarmerie.

Canada's air force has some of the world's best pilots but only 150 combat aircraft, half of which are obsolescent or ready for the scrap yard. Despite the air force's purchasing of new F-18 fighters, attrition will leave it by 1987 with no more than 138 warplanes with which to defend Canadian airspace, patrol the Arctic and support NATO.

Canada has one of the world's longest coastlines and is a major exporter. Yet the state of its navy was described recently at a parliamentary committee hearing as "pathetic." The navy's 23 destroyers and frigates have an average age of 23 years; Hall are nearing the end of their service lives; only four have any modern armament. The older ships suffer from chronic boiler troubles and their electronic gear is so ancient that their required vacuum tubes must be purchased from, of all places, the U.S.S.R.

Last January, during a naval review for the defense minister in Halifax, more than half the ships on display broke down. One Canadian admiral puts it simply: "Going to sea in wartime would be suicidal." Nor does Canada have a single mine sweeper to keep its vital ports open during hostilities.

The infrastructure of military power is also lacking. Trained manpower reserves are almost nonexistent; there is no industrial mobilization capacity at all. Should war erupt tomorrow, Canada could not even supply its troops with enough rifles, not to mention all the high-tech equipment of modern war. Canada's once-extensive arms industry has been allowed to wither away by a government that considered it wicked and immoral.

Confirming this alarming state, a recent study by the nonpartisan, blue-ribbon Business Council on National Issues reports that Canada lacks not only the ability to meet its NATO commitments, but even the means of defending itself. These NATO

undertakings, it should be noted, include the defense of North Atlantic sea lanes and North American airspace, as well as reinforcement of the European continent from and Norway in wartime.

Some Canadians are becoming unhappy aware that their nation has been stripped of its defenses. Many, however, still believe the notion promoted by the past government, that the armed forces' prime role was for United Nations peace-keeping missions.

There is a particularly distressing irony here, Pierre Trudeau, by striving to lessen U.S. influence over Canada, may well have made his nation even more dependent on its powerful and sometimes-overbearing neighbor. Mr. Trudeau did manage to slightly reduce American economic influence, but at a price of gutting the military and creating a budget deficit twice its large, per capita, as that of the U.S.

Brian Mulroney's new Conservative government is well aware of Canada's military distress. The defense minister, Robert Coates, has promised to reequip the armed forces to a "significant degree," with priority going to the navy.

During the election campaign, he promised \$190 million more for defense—an amount that represents about five fighter aircraft. Defense, as always, is a very low priority for Canada.

As the navy rusts at its moorings, and as a new generation of Soviet bombers and cruise missiles makes the upgrading of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) imperative, Canada knows it must spend heavily on defense. But such sweeping improvements in the military can come only from the social-welfare budget—the most-sacred cow of Canadian politics. Soviet troops may have to land in Toronto before Canadians agree to cuts in their beloved welfare schemes.

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