

COLUMNISTS



Canadian Forces preparing defence for uncertain future

By Tim Dunne

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There are Canadians who delight in accusing our military leaders of only being able to fight the last war. Our generals and admirals, they tell us, have no foresight and vision and cannot look ahead at the challenges that Canada faces in our uncertain future.

These anti-military advocates fail to understand that our senior military staff are engaged in evaluating global trends and conflicts, assessing their impact on Canadian security, and developing appropriate responses should the Canadian Forces need to become engaged. Our military has admirably represented and defended Canadian interests and values in nearly three dozen peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, and conflicts such as the Gulf War of 1990 and the recent Libyan civil war.

Our Defence Department's Chief of Force Development (CFD) has prepared a comprehensive roadmap to understanding the complexities of the 21st-century's global strategic environment with its paper *The Future Security Environment 2008-2030 (FSE)*.

The document looks at five sets of trends: economic and social; environmental and resource; geopolitical; science and technology; and military and security.

Our interconnected world has to contend not only with the positive effects of globalization, but also the negative effects — economic disparity, overpopulation, disease, poverty and extremism. While not new, these are transformed into global challenges through human migration, diasporas and urbanization which could instigate instability and conflict that might require international intervention.

Urbanization without health and sanitation infrastructure will "accelerate the spread of infectious diseases," and the ease with which we move throughout the world for business and vacation can also facilitate the spread of exotic infections that can become pandemics, much like SARS and several strains of influenza we have had to confront in the past decade.

The FSE paper warns that climate change will exacerbate economic hardships and social stresses that already exist in developing countries, aggravate food and water shortages, and accelerate the search for energy and mineral resources.

Canada, in particular, will have to confront the challenges coming from a melting icecap. As the Northwest Passage becomes navigable for longer periods, more international maritime traffic will increase the stresses on this ecologically fragile region, create challenges to Canadian sovereignty and increase the need for sovereignty patrols and search and rescue operations.

Geopolitically, the nature of conflict has undergone massive change since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. During the Cold War, interstate conflict was the norm. Since the end of the Cold War, there are instances of interstate fighting, but there has been an astronomical increase in intrastate conflict between ethnic populations and political factions, and asymmetrical warfare, where the military resources of belligerents are unequal. The millennium attack on the USS Cole by a small boat full of explosives and al-Qaida's attack on New York's World Trade Center are typical examples.

According to the FSE report, failed and fragile states represent potential sources of humanitarian and stabilization crises, as well as potential safe havens for terrorists and transnational criminals.

Among the most significant sections of this report is a series of descriptions of multilateral organizations that have a current or a potential impact on Canada. These not only include the obvious, such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, but others that do not readily leap to mind: the Organization of American States, Association of South-East Asian Nations, Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation and the Shanghai Co-operation Organization, sometimes referred to as the Asian Warsaw Pact, and others.

New scientific and technological developments will continue to provide innovations using automation, customization and miniaturization. These developments include nanotechnology, computer systems, sensors, energy technologies, and biological enhancements and developments that can improve mechanical and human endurance and productivity. However, these benefits of modern technology will be available to both our defence allies and partners and to our adversaries as well.

While The Future Security Environment is intended to aid civilian employees of the Defence Department and members of the Canadian Forces, it also provides remarkable insight into the impact of globalization on Canadian society as a whole, the impact of changes to the Canadian mosaic, and how this will affect Canadian attitudes concerning humanitarian operations, disaster relief, peace support and peace enforcement operations, and military intervention operations up to and including combat.

It isn't surprising that a comprehensive paper analyzing the future challenges that Canada faces was prepared by Canada's military. So much for only being able to fight the last war, eh?

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