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A Response to Defence Minister John McCallum's Recent Speech "Embracing Reallocation, Embracing Change"

by

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Canadian army commander, Lieutenant General Rick Hillier and Defence Minister John McCallum recently have brought funding and organization of the Canadian Forces to the public eye. The inconsistency in their points of view is worrisome.

On October 22nd, the Minister addressed the Canadian Defence Industries Association on a committee report "Embracing Reallocation, Embracing Change" which proposes administrative savings of \$128 million. While this amount helps close a \$200 million gap in defence funding, even McCallum concedes it is a tiny fraction of his \$13 billion budget. But it is a start and the committee rightly has focused their efforts on saving money without harming defence capability.

More importantly, the committee proposed and McCallum endorsed changes to the leadership style within National Defence. To quote the Minister, "decision making must be more strategic and less transactional, more decisive and less consensual, more top-down and less bottom-up." How strange that a former university professor is giving such direction to professional military officers. Canadians should be grateful that McCallum has taken the bull by the horns.

The Minister's comments might have been more credible had they not been preceded by reports of an inflammatory, if not insubordinate, memo from Lieutenant General Rick Hillier to his boss, Chief of Defence Staff General Ray Hennault, proposing that naval and air forces be stripped of their overseas capabilities in favour of a stronger army. Hillier suggested that in any future war, a US-led coalition would handle air and naval activities.

Hillier, who has served with US forces, is being disingenuous. He must understand that the US does not "need" the contribution of any of Canada's forces. What they want is for their closest friends to make a serious and continuing commitment to our own and collective defence by maintaining the best, balanced, combat capable armed forces we can afford. Hillier must also be aware of the complex, hostile environment in which naval and air forces operate. To use one example, even the security of our 200 mile maritime exclusion zone would be in doubt without a blue water navy.

Fortunately, the Minister has a better idea of Canada's defence needs than Hillier. Although accused of being "army-centric" because of an entirely logical decision to acquire more armoured vehicles, McCallum's other priorities are replacing the Sea King, modernizing fighter and transport aircraft, and new replenishment ships. Items Canada can do without, such as a permanent strategic airlift, have been taken off the wish list. McCallum's priorities, unlike Hillier's, are consistent with the government's most recent White Paper.

If the Minister can "walk the talk" on defence spending even crusty retired officers will have difficulty finding cause for complaint. However, he must get his house in order and implement "top-down" decision making from the top. McCallum must demand that all senior officers, including Hillier, actively support and implement his policies.

President Theodore Roosevelt

2 December 1902

Second Annual Message to Congress.

A powerful Navy we have always regarded as our proper and natural means of defense;[sic]and it has always been of defense that we have thought, never of aggression or of conquest. But who shall tell us now what sort of Navy to build? We shall take leave to be strong upon the seas, in the future as in the past; and there will be no thought of offense or provocation in that. Our ships are our natural bulwarks."

Editor's note:

It is too bad that this concept seems to have been "lost" on the current government of Canada.