

Troops are going to Afghanistan, but critics say it is only a smokescreen to hide a dilapidated military

Canada's glory days

During the height of the Cold War, we had real influence. What went wrong?

BY SEAN M. MALONEY

Within days of Sept. 11, Ottawa faced the question: what, if anything, would Canada's military contribution to the U.S.-led war on terrorism amount to? The first part of the answer came on Oct. 8, when Defence Minister Art Eggleton announced that five Canadian warships would sail to the Arabian Sea to guard the flanks of U.S. aircraft carriers launching strikes against Taliban forces and Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. But committing ground forces posed a more difficult problem: was Canada's beleaguered military capable of deploying troops to Afghanistan? Last week, after initial reports that Canadian soldiers might be part of a 5,000-strong and mostly European peacekeeping force in Kabul, Eggleton adopted a tougher stance, committing nearly 800

combat-ready soldiers, primarily from the Edmonton-based Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, to duty in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar. There, under U.S. command, they may join in the hunt for remaining Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters and escort trucks carrying relief supplies.

The decision sparked a renewed debate about the state of the Canadian military. Some critics believe the troops, which will have to use equipment cannibalized from other Canadian battalions, are being sent on a dangerous mission for image only—to disguise the fact that, as a result of underfunding, the military is falling apart. Others, like former foreign affairs minister Lloyd Axworthy, complain that the assignment, which is well beyond peacekeeping, will hurt the country's reputation for neutral-

ity. But Sean M. Maloney, a historian who teaches war studies at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ont., argues that only by rebuilding the military and taking on tough combat missions will Canada be able to ensure its own security and regain the influence it once had in the world:

There is much that can be learned from Canada's participation in the Cold War period when the nation wielded global influence and made significant contributions to the security of the West. But what do Canadians think of when asked about the Cold War? Most believe it was something that occurred a long time ago, with little impact on Canada or its history. Some even believe that Canada was neutral from 1945 to the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. This is

not surprising, given the Canadian cultural elite's tendency to downplay our involvement in the long struggle to contain the Soviet Union.

What many do not know is that this year marks the 51st anniversary of the deployment of Canadian soldiers in NATO's Integrated Force in Europe, a commitment that lasted 42 years. The army, air force and navy helped serve as a bulwark against Soviet intimidation and the nuclear threat from Moscow. These Canadian forces, equipped with both conventional and

and Turkish violence (both Greece and Turkey are members of the alliance) on the divided island of Cyprus, a location critical to deterring Soviet moves in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

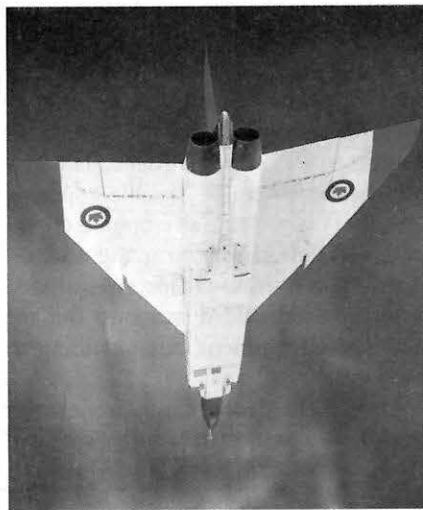
We received a large measure of security—and recognition—by helping keep NATO strong with our military commitment. Even the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize that then-foreign minister Lester B. Pearson received for helping end the Suez Crisis was due in part to the strength of the Canadian army, which allowed it to

and disarmament. These three men took the lead in formulating and influencing alliance strategy, and used Canada's significant military contributions as their entry into those corridors of power. The fact that their efforts were co-ordinated with those of Canada's professional diplomats, specifically Pearson, Robert Ford (ambassador to the Soviet Union) and John Holmes (head of the foreign affairs department's UN division), in an effort to protect Canadian global interests, speaks volumes about the sophisticated outlook Canada had during a time of maximum danger.

Canada would not have had such influence if it weren't for the military, which was backed by an advanced aerospace industry that designed, built and sold F-86 Sabre fighter-jet aircraft to practically every member of NATO. There is simply no comparison today: commuter jets, and propeller aircraft for use in the bush, are not instruments of influence. The CF-105 Avro Arrow affair has even assumed mythic proportions, though many are unaware of the Cold War context in which the program was conceived. Canada wanted to defend herself against a very real nuclear threat, while at the same time bringing something effective to the table to protect Canadian sovereignty in the Norad partnership. But that view was not shared by prime minister John Diefenbaker's Tory government, and in 1959 he suddenly cancelled the program, claiming it was too costly and had run massively over budget.

The loss of the Avro Arrow may have hurt the military's prestige. But nuclear weapons were the currency necessary to wield influence, and the government had a secret program to construct the weapons in Canada if the U.S. denied the nation access to them. But that was not even seriously considered by Washington: as of 1958 American policy was to give Canada virtually unlimited access to whatever weapons the country needed, as declassified American National Security Council records reveal.

And with squadrons of CF-101 Voodoo interceptors equipped with MB-1 Genie nuclear rockets and the controversial surface-to-air Bomarc anti-bomber missile, Canadian sovereignty was assured. Although Diefenbaker also publicly opposed these weapons, the military rightly boasted that it could destroy a Soviet bomber attack and at the same time not turn over control of Canadian airspace to American fighters. Air Marshal Roy Slemon, the



Raising the flag while on peacekeeping assignment in Cyprus, 1964; the Avro Arrow

American-supplied nuclear weapons, provided the basis for unparalleled Canadian global influence that, after the military started its long decline in the 1970s, we have been unable to regain.

During the Cold War, our diplomatic corps took the lead in brokering solutions to global crises. The best-known was the Suez Crisis of 1956, when Canadian-led combat soldiers were deployed to prevent the escalation of the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt into a nuclear conflict. The Soviets threatened to fire nuclear missiles at Paris and London if the Europeans did not leave the country. But the Canadians, operating under the UN flag, kept the competing armies apart, and the crisis passed.

Lesser known was the 1961 Berlin Crisis: Canadian diplomats, with other Allies, convinced the Kennedy administration to pull back from forcing NATO to accept a series of dangerous response options that could have triggered a nuclear exchange over the divided city if the Soviets advanced towards the Allied zone. And in 1964, Canada, the United States and Britain, operating as a team, successfully prevented NATO from collapsing over ethnic Greek

rapidly deploy to Egypt. In fact, the United Nations Emergency Force, which was created in 1956 to intervene in the Suez Crisis, would not have existed without Canada's deep involvement in both NATO and the UN.

What major international crises have Canadian diplomats taken the lead in lately? Why is there any surprise when the Americans become intransigent over softwood-lumber negotiations and fishing rights—after Canada declined to participate effectively in the 1991 Gulf War, where the army was reduced to guarding airfields and Canada's CF-18 fighter jets were used almost exclusively in a defensive capacity? And after Ottawa snubbed NATO in 1993 by withdrawing Canadian soldiers assigned to the alliance in Germany, claiming that with the end of the Cold War the troops were no longer needed?

It is a far cry from the 1950s, when Canadian military leaders were globally respected and wielded significant influence, particularly Gen. Charles Foulkes in NATO circles, Air Marshal Roy Slemon at Norad, and Gen. E. L. M. (Tommy) Burns in the areas of UN peacekeeping