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Canada not ready for disaster or war: report

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Canada does not have a plan — or the resources — to deal with a war or a major natural disaster, says a leading Canadian military historian and analyst.

Jack Granatstein said the Canadian government seems to have learned no lessons from the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. He is co-author, with retired lieutenant-general Charles Belzile, of a report on Canadian Forces reserves prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute of Calgary.

The report looks at the state of Canada's military reserve units and finds them woefully inadequate.

"We have something like 17,000 army reservists, about a third of the people needed to fill the SkyDome (in Toronto) on a good day," said Granatstein in a telephone interview from his office in Ontario. "It's not enough to meet our home defence needs."

By contrast, he said, the country had 50,000 reservists in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War.

He said Canadians seem to think there won't be another major war, and that a large army is unneces-



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sary. "I hope they're right," he said. "Big armies are very expensive. But the reserves are a cheap way to have people who may not be ready today, but they can be ready in a few weeks or a couple of months."

Granatstein said the potential threats to Canadian security are varied, ranging from terrorist attacks to natural disasters, such as floods or ice storms. "We should be prepared for them, but we are not," he said. "The point of having a military is that you prepare for the unexpected."

The recent hurricanes in the southern U.S. illustrate the need for a prepared military, but Canada could not deal with a disaster of that magnitude, he said. "Clearly, we're short of the equipment needed and the means to move it around," he said. "If we had a major earthquake in B.C., we wouldn't be able to move heavy equipment to the coast."

The report notes that the army, navy and air force reserves do not co-operate in planning for domestic operations.

And many Canadians seem to think the Americans will defend Canada in the event of a major attack, he said.

"The Americans are by and large good neighbours, and they would help," said Granatstein, "but what if they were busy with their own crisis? They would go first to their own people."

The Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute is a non-partisan research institute that focuses on Canadian foreign and defence policy and national security.

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