

Canada: The Strategic 'Golden Hinge'

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IT has sometimes been argued that Canada, as a middle power with less than fourteen million people, could not materially influence the decision in any cold or hot war. It is implied that we should remain, for all practical purposes, mere spectators in the grim world struggle currently being waged between the free nations of the West, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and its satellites, on the other. On these assumptions we in Canada have no more part to play in the issues now at stake than say Ecuador or Venezuela.

Neither the facts of geography nor of political economy, still less of modern science and technology (which together provide us with the framework of strategic reference), support any such complacent view. They emphatically deny it.

When Field Marshal Lord Montgomery of Alamein, in 1946, spoke of Canada as the strategic "Golden Hinge" of the free world, he was not indulging in mere rhetoric. He referred in part, to our key physical position on the Arctic flank of the Insular Crescent¹; where Canada holds

one half of the free world's Arctic sector, and where our Canadian Arctic islands jut more deeply into the North Polar Sea than do any lands under Soviet control.

If Canada were to become a weak or hesitant ally of her North Atlantic and Commonwealth partners, it would be next to impossible to maintain lines of communication from the United States to the United Kingdom and Western Europe, on the East, or to Japan and South East Asia, on the West. The already tenuous position of U.S. forces in Alaska, and the still more menaced positions in Greenland, Iceland and Spitzbergen, would become untenable.

Moreover, as an unready or reluctant military power, Canada could no longer serve as a safe shield to the highly vulnerable northern border of the United States. On the contrary, we would only invite seizure by Soviet forces of bases within Canada, from which the American industrial heartland might receive cruel, or even mortal, blows; and by which the Cominform's dream of world conquest would loom as an ultimate, or perhaps imminent, reality. Even a diversionary attack, of sufficient weight, on Canadian territory—unless it could be promptly neutralized and destroyed—would dry up the flow of reinforcements and material to our overseas allies, leaving them to "wither on the vine," like the Japanese

¹ Sir Halford MacKinder's term for the whole string of continents and islands which fringe the Eurasian land mass, including the Americas, the British Isles, Africa south of the Rio de Oro-Nubian desert line, Ceylon, the East Indies, Australasia, and the chain of islands from the Philippines to Japan (in which Formosa remains an indispensable link).

garrisons withered in the South Pacific during World War II.

The indispensable economic links between Canada and the United States; Canada and the United Kingdom; Canada and the raw materials of South East Asia; Australasia and Africa; these are too obvious to need detailed citation. For Canada to consider any casual position, in the North Atlantic Alliance, somewhere between neutrality and full military participation, would be fatal first to our allies and finally to our own security and freedom.

Viscount Montgomery was, however, looking beyond the simple facts of geography in labelling Canada as the "Golden Hinge". Mere numbers, or wealth, are less important in the military equation, as he then pointed out, than a "strong national spirit." Montgomery had witnessed this strong Canadian fighting spirit in two world wars: first, when he was chief of staff to Lord Rawlinson in the Fourth British Army and saw the record achievements of Currie's Canadian Corps at Amiens and other battles in the Last Hundred Days in 1918, and secondly, when Crerar's First Canadian Army served under Montgomery's command in North-West Europe. Moreover, he had watched the large contingent of the Royal Canadian Navy at D-Day in Normandy, plus the strong strategic and tactical air support which allied ground forces had enjoyed, from the RCAF, before and after the invasion. He was further aware of the exceptional economic and munitions assistance which Canada had given to Britain and other allies, in World War II, under the general heading of Mutual Aid.

II

FIVE years ago few, if any, Canadians ever dreamed that we would be as close to a general war as we have reached in the Spring of 1951. At that time the bulk of military planning for defence assumed (as did this writer) that 1956 or 1957 represented the earliest threat of serious danger. The immense effort required to restore the devastated areas of

European Russia, the relative weakness of Soviet science and technology, the war weariness of all combatant nations—these and other considerations seemed to leave us a much greater margin of time to provide for our national security than events have actually allowed.

The equipment of World War II which we brought home in 1946 to hold for training and as a mobilization reserve, was intended to meet most of our requirements for a full decade. This would allow, it was then thought, ample time for new designs to be developed and tested, for Canada to press effectively towards Anglo-American standardization on the best weapon types, and for our own and other industries to tool up for replacement.

These facts and assumptions are cited here to illustrate, in retrospect, the apparent logic of the slow, deliberate build-up of Canadian, and other Western defences that was so rudely interrupted on 25 June 1950, and even more sharply revised when the Red Chinese armies struck in force south of the Yalu River on 22 November.

So great was the general miscalculation of approaching danger that, as late as May 1950, senior spokesmen of the Canadian Government were deprecating haste in implementing civil defence plans for our larger cities, on the ground that "the organization would run stale before it could become of any value."

Not all of our defence efforts, however, have been allowed to fall behind the pace of strategic requirement. There are as many bright spots in our defence pattern as there are dark parts. The Defence Research Board took over intact, in 1946, practically the whole wartime apparatus of development and experimental stations and laboratories. These have been consistently built up with special attention to such vital fields as aeronautical design; arctic and airborne equipment; the new chemical and biological weapons; improved sonar and radar devices for detecting the latest submarines; biophysical studies on the protection of civilian and military personnel from radioactivity and flash-burns in respect of atomic weapons.

Military training, especially of officers,

has reached a new high point in Canada since 1946. A large sector of combat personnel in the three Services has been acclimatised to living, moving and fighting effectively in Arctic and sub-Arctic conditions. The training requirements, in qualifying for rank, of all officers (reserve as well as active) have been substantially raised over those of 1939. Moreover, Canada has built up her own Staff Colleges and National Defence College, which now rate the best in the United Kingdom and the United States. Exchanges and attachments of officers have been carried out on an extensive scale, that will pay off well, whether the present war remains "cold" and localised, or if it should suddenly become general. It should be noted, however, that in the Royal Canadian Navy there is some evidence that basic and technical training of junior officers is not, at present, as high as that of the pre-1939 standard: political pressure for complete separation from the Royal Navy may have contributed to RCN training limitations.

The emphasis has rightly been placed heavily on the RCAF, which has recovered, rather more quickly than the other Services, its wartime effectiveness. Even the reserve RCAF squadrons are steadily increasing in numbers, trained personnel, and combat skill, whereas the majority of Reserve Army units have tended to languish. Some qualification should be made in the case of the Royal Canadian Navy, for all RCN ships in commission are, by definition, ready for combat—e.g., the despatch of three destroyers to Korea in July 1950.

Now we have "higher targets to shoot at" in our Defence Forces—a new ceiling of 115,000 men; 100 naval ships in commission (although anything below the escort, destroyer class is of questionable value under present conditions); 48 active and reserve air squadrons (approximately 4 air groups), with 12 of these earmarked to serve in Western Europe; an implied commitment of one brigade group each (equivalent to a U.S. regimental combat team) for Korea, Western Europe and for North American defence. Moreover, the demobilized machine of military procure-

ment is in process of being restored in the new Department of Defence Production.

III

HOW well do these current and more realistic targets meet the urgent strategic demands of Canada's present position as a North Atlantic Pact partner? In an independent and objective view, they appear still to fall short even of the nearer goals.

Perhaps the best way to assess Canada's cold war needs in defence forces and organization is to visualise our probable role in a full-scale war; and to estimate the economic limits we could attain, and sustain, if the present indirect struggle with Soviet Communism becomes a direct and final test of strength. This does not suggest that a new world war is either inevitable or imminent. It merely accepts the principle that to prevent a general war we must be prepared to fight and win it.

Canada should not fall into the error of equating her military forces, type for type, on some pro-rated basis of the military establishments either of the United States or of the United Kingdom. On the contrary, there are some all-important phases of Atlantic Pact defence organisation to which we need not contribute at all. The Strategic Air Force of the United States is a typical example of the latter. Other than being prepared to provide fighter cover for advanced bases of the U. S. Strategic Air Force, and possibly a part of its long range fighter escort, there seems to be no point in Canada building up a force of long range heavy bombers.

Where Canada can and should contribute substantially, to allied air power, is in transport, fighter, fighter-bomber, coastal command and other types of craft which can support effectively our sea and land roles in the common plan, and—at the same time—provide a local stiffening of air cover for the North American base of operations. It is unfortunate that the term "strategic air power" hitherto has been so narrowly used. This youngest, yet overshadowing, arm of military force

has many indispensable strategic uses other than the planting of atomic or large high-explosive bombs on the industrial centres of an enemy country.

Because of its new logistical mobility, air power of the nature required can be shifted and concentrated more rapidly than any other form of force, at each threatened part of the Eurasian "Marginal Crescent"², where Soviet Russia's interior lines permit a sudden assault.

For these reasons, Canada's air power for a general war, or for a continuance of the present cold war, must take a clear, yet not exclusive, priority over other arms. Instead of 4 groups (of which at least 2 would be non-mobilized reserves) as our airforce target, we might well envisage a wartime requirement of 6 groups earmarked for overseas duty, with another six training groups retained in Canada, partly for North American defence and partly as a reserve pool for overseas reinforcements. As a rough pattern, these might be distributed as follows: *overseas*—3 tactical air groups working with our ground forces (to provide the minimum scale of one air group to one Canadian division), 2 transport groups, and 1 long-range fighter escort group to work with the R.A.F. and U.S.A.F.'s bombers; *in Canada*—3 interceptor fighter groups, 2 tactical air groups, and 1 coastal command group of which 1 wing would work from Pacific Coast bases.

Present shortage of modern aircraft and equipment may well restrict these larger airpower objectives for Canada, but it is wiser to accept them now as a wartime ceiling and to pattern our procurement, recruiting and training thereon, than to try belatedly to expand when the situation becomes more critical and when the means are no longer available.

IV

LET us now look critically at the sort of ground forces Canada could and should sustain in a general war, and how our present nucleus might serve to meet the ultimate possible need. Here we can well take a page out of Canadian history

in World War I and say, as Sir Arthur Currie then did: Canada is not in a position to place and maintain a full field army overseas.

We did so in World War II, but with considerable difficulty and strain. Under the present heavily increased costs of equipping a division, and especially an armoured division, the only realistic objective appears to be in the order of a three division corps overseas, with its normal complement of corps and army troops; and a training establishment in Canada which exactly reflects our overseas commitment. For instance, we could envisage (apart from centres for basic and advanced training of recruits) three clearly defined divisional training areas in Canada, one armoured, and two airborne or airportable; with the Corps headquarters area in some such central place as Camp Borden. Two of these divisions, including the armoured division might be concentrated between Fort St. John, on the Alcan highway, and Shilo, Manitoba. The third division could be concentrated in the Maritime Provinces.

It is well known that Canadian mobilization plans call for a field army of two corps, each of three divisions. The lower objective here put forward appears, however, to accord more with our resources and with over-all strategic requirements.

In the later stages of a new general war, when the enemy is deprived of the initiative and needs only the final *coup de grace*, Canada might well be able to despatch a second corps from this continent to the decisive theatre and leave our share of North American defence to improvised units and formations of older men.

Quite apart from our continental defence needs, the new situation posed by a Soviet bloc of hostile power, renders a mobile reserve more useful and flexible if it is maintained—in the initial stages of a World War III—at North American bases than

² Sir Halford MacKinder's geopolitical term for the continental fringes of the Soviet Russian Heartland: Western Europe (including Western Germany), North Africa, Greece, Turkey, the Arab States of the Middle East, Israel, the Indic Dominions, South-East Asia, South China, and Korea.

if the same reserve were committed to any one section of the Soviet perimeter. It is not generally known that Canada devoted the rough equivalent of a two division effort in more or less static coast defences during World War II. It may have been warranted then; but any such diversion and pinning down of Canadian ground forces in a fixed role would be wasteful folly today. Apart from examination batteries at our major ports, this traditional and costly investment in immobile coast defences would only serve to impair Canada's military effort in other and more vital spheres of usefulness.

Under the conditions of today, our "cold" war army establishment should aim at not less than one division in Western Europe, plus one brigade group in Korea and the nucleus organisation in being for the three active training divisions in Canada, as above defined. A fully integrated Corps headquarters and Corps troop organization should be built up rapidly in Canada so that it could split readily into its overseas and North American components when required to do so.

These are not unreasonable objectives for the Canadian Army. They are quite attainable, if we recall that we maintained in World War II a field Army overseas of two corps, five divisions (two armoured) and two army tank brigades, plus numerous other Army troops; and in Canada three divisions; a top-heavy coast defence system; plus the substance of two Corps organisations (one on each coast).

Moreover, the Reserve Army of Canada is long overdue for complete reorganization, to render it not only capable of subsidiary local defence roles (these would quickly pass to "second" reserve battalions and other units in a general war), but also of fitting effectively and promptly into the divisional and corps patterns overseas, and in North American defense.

Further to release the Canadian Army for its highly specialised combat missions, it is suggested that the whole system of early warning radar defense for the North American area should pass to the R.C.A.F. The R.C.A.F. should also assume responsibility for their own home air station ground defenses (as was the case with the R.A.F.

in the United Kingdom from 1942 onward). In recruiting these air station defence units it is desirable that the R.C.A.F. be limited to men over 35, or to those otherwise disqualified for first-line combat duty.

V

THE Royal Canadian Navy's role has not diminished in importance since 1945. On the contrary it has been extended. As long as Japan remained effectively separated from her Nazi German ally, it was feasible for Canada to concentrate the bulk of her sea power in the North Atlantic. Against the Eurasian land mass of Soviet Russia, however, this is no longer possible. Their vast interior lines enable the authorities of the Kremlin to strike at will anywhere from Murmansk to the Behring Straits, across the North Atlantic and North Pacific sea and air lanes, as well as at many points in between. Canada stands at both extremities of the Soviet military and naval system. Moreover, the sea-power of Russia, though by no means negligible, suffers from an inherent inability to concentrate its surface forces, as could those of Germany, or Japan, in the past. There is no way by which the Soviet Union can bring together her Baltic, White Sea, Black Sea and Far Eastern Fleets. Each, by the fortuitous accident of geography, is obliged to work independently of the other, except for submarine operations.

While Western Europe remains the theatre of paramount strategic importance, Soviet Russia is not compelled to risk a final trial of strength in that area alone. Indeed, the inevitable dispersion of its naval power will maybe force the Kremlin to support its scattered components with local air and ground (including airborne) attacks.

The very size of Soviet territories, plus their relatively weak transportation system therefore preclude the full and effective use of their interior lines. For these reasons the R.C.N. must, in future, envisage a two-ocean role of both convoying and screening, as against its one-ocean role in

World War II. Moreover, it may well be called upon to fight in Arctic or sub-Arctic waters, on both East and West, though this role can be accepted as contingent and subsidiary.

Above all, the R.C.N. needs new and faster vessels to replace the now obsolescent frigates, corvettes and fairmiles of World War II. All vessels must be equipped as soon as possible with the latest sonar devices which are reported to have been employed very effectively in the recent Caribbean manoeuvres of the U.S. Navy. How far a balance can be attained between longer-range coastal aircraft and carrier-based air cover, is a technical matter for inter-Service decision.

VI

WHAT does this summary then represent in terms of manpower? Can the essential nucleus, plus the minimum forces in readiness, be attained out of the new 115,000 ceiling on Canada's active armed forces. Theoretically this could be done if we were to accept the Spartan scales of combat organization, which now prevail in Soviet forces. In practice, it is neither feasible nor desirable that we should adopt any such lean scale in the Canadian Services. Yet, if we dispense with every obsolete and second-rate function (like that of fixed coast defences), it is probable that our cold-war ceiling could be kept well within a total of 140,000 men. Where possible, women's auxiliary forces could and should take over non-combatant military duties in each Service.

In a general war, this base of 140,000 would need to be built up quickly to an establishment of some 500,000 and ultimately, perhaps, of 750,000. Even allowing for the inevitable wastage of a long period of hostilities, such an Armed Services commitment by Canada could be maintained without endangering our economy, or destroying our freedom and viability for the ultimate task of peace and reconstruction. It will be noted that this article does not attempt to deal with the civil defence of Canadian cities and vulnerable points against enemy air attack,

except in so far as this function falls within the role of the Armed Services.

It remains to look briefly at ways and means for reaching both the long-range and the short-range objectives, especially in manpower. If we accept (this writer definitely does *not* accept) that the 115,000 men are all we require to help in preventing a new World War and that we have three years to recruit the additional 50,000 men, then compulsory military service is not now an essential step. The Prime Minister of Canada has, however, made it clear that compulsory service—for overseas as well as home defence duty—will be adopted whenever the need is well established. This means that enforced induction of recruits, at least for the Army and for service anywhere, is assured if and when a general war occurs.

This writer is convinced that, despite the political courage and obvious good faith of the Prime Minister, a compulsory service law is needed *now*: not tomorrow, not next year, but in the Spring of 1951.

The issue of compulsory military service has only been confused by recent discussions in Parliament. The Canadian Legion's proposal for enforced service in the Reserve Army is at fault simply because it does not go far enough. Compulsion for local defence and part-time training is of little or no value, since it fails to provide for a mobile force-in-being, which can be moved rapidly to any threatened point, here or overseas. Moreover, the Legion's proposal fails to earmark each Reserve officer and man for some immediate post in a combat formation. No other system of reserve forces is adequate to meet our current requirements.

The very best that our full-time Armed Services can hope to do, short of a general war, is to provide limited combat forces overseas and to maintain, at home, a strong, highly trained "skeleton" of the formation required for an emergency. The word "nucleus" has been so much abused in recent years, that it no longer implies, as it should, an effective organization that can be brought up promptly to war establishment by the calling of reservists to the colours.

WE now require, in short, a comprehensive National Military Service Act, which leaves to the Executive, on the advice of the Service authorities, the power to call any class or individual to military duty as soon as he may be required. As long as a general war remains doubtful, or distant, these powers may be invoked only sparingly. The existence of a compulsory service law is what matters. The knowledge that any man of military age and category is subject to call, upon proclamation, would provide a powerful stimulus to voluntary recruiting in each Armed Service.

World War II experience indicates that National Registration is an instrument of somewhat doubtful value, simply because it takes too long to sift out and tabulate. In other words, National Registration (while desirable) does not necessarily have to precede the passing, or the enforcement, of a National Military Service Act.

For those who fear that the authority of Parliament may be impaired by so flexible a military service law, as is here proposed, the writer can speak from experience in stating that the Armed Services would be most reluctant to use such a law except to meet very limited and special objectives. They do not wish to be overwhelmed with the task of attesting, training, equipping, housing and moving any more than they can readily absorb in any given month. This monthly maximum is probably not over 8,000 men, even during Spring and Summer; though the acceptable quotas would tend to increase under wartime pressure.

Again it will be argued that such a "selective" system of compulsory service is contrary to the principle of equal sacrifice. Perhaps it is; but in these critical days of danger, we can ill afford to allow precise questions of personal equity to interfere with the more pressing demands of the national safety.

NOT only do our allies depend, more heavily than we imagine, on what is decided and carried out in 1951 by the Government and people of Canada, on how strong and flexible this "Golden Hinge" becomes—but also the whole future and

freedom of the Canadian community are at stake. If we do our full and fair part, in military matters, we can still proceed with the development of our major resources, and with the cultural and spiritual goals that we have set for ourselves. Without a firm and ready pattern of Armed Forces, we place all of our bright hopes and prospects in dire jeopardy.

For the first time in our history as a nation, Canada cannot afford to wait, until general hostilities commence, to decide—as she has always formerly decided—to throw her full weight into the scales of winning a great war. We must decide now that the issue is already joined between our liberties and those of our friends, as opposed to a militant Soviet Communism which is already bent on our destruction by every available means. Each delay, or hesitation, or half-measure—on our part—is but an opportunity for the enemy's gain and he will not miss the chance to exploit it.

General H. D. G. Crerar has put the matter squarely in his Ottawa address* of 8 March 1951:

"Time and space have ceased to be in our favour. Neither the narrow seas, nor the broad oceans, can prevent war reaching, and striking, the shores and interiors of . . . North America, by use of Air Power, at whatever hour the enemy decides.

"The Democracies will be faced with internal political, industrial and economic troubles on a scale never before experienced, and probably now not even imagined.

"The Third World War is *not* a prospective event. It is a tragic fact. In that conflict the Democracies are, as yet, dangerously handicapped. They plainly lack the military power required to support, and to further, their expressed international policies.

"The possibility of the world working its way out of the darkness depends on two things. It requires high and resolute statesmanship by the Governments of the Democracies. It *now* demands a massive mobilization of their military strength."

* The italics here used are General Crerar's.