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## Conclusion

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### *Denis Stairs*

The subject of the 1998 Canada-UK Colloquium was encapsulated in its title: “Security, Strategy and the Global Economics of Defence Production.” At the end of the proceedings, the topic itself may not have been completely exhausted, but certainly its dimensions had been fully canvassed. So had the background factors. These included:

- the general uncertainty of the strategic environment in the post-Cold War period;
- the impact of modern technology, especially *information* technology, on warfare and military procurement;
- the effect of globalization on the practices and behaviours of the components of the defence industrial base, and on government policies in response;
- the interaction between technological change and defence procurement on the one hand, and strategic doctrine (or, defence policy) on the other;
- the consequences of political and fiscal constraints for government spending; and
- the looming presence, as a kind of “immovable object,” of the United States as a hegemonic power — a power to which everyone else, in one way or another, is forced to accommodate.

In this concluding chapter, I take these background factors in turn, seeking not to recapitulate the argument of the various chapters, but rather to provide the reader with the flavour of the discussion that they generated, when they were initially presented as papers at the Colloquium.

## THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The first of the contextual realities became very evident in the paper presented by Fen Hampson, which supplied a vivid account of the variety and complexity of the conflicts that seem now to plague the world community. It was impossible to absorb his analysis without acquiring a renewed sense of what might be called the “inevitability of eclecticism” in the international politics of our time.

This awareness carries with it a recognition of the difficulty of knowing which particular manifestation of human perversity in politics is going to reveal itself next on the international conflict agenda. And herein lies the policymaker’s daunting dilemma. The Cold War, as one participant, Bruce George,<sup>1</sup> pointed out, had at least had the advantage of imparting a certain stability to the international political environment. This had made it possible to identify, with a reasonable measure of assurance, what the defence problems really were. On Hampson’s assessment, however, everyone is left at sea, with little by way of a system of navigation from which to divine a course. It need hardly be said that this is not Hampson’s fault; it is “reality,” not Hampson’s analysis, that is out of joint. And the consequence of that reality, as noted in another of George’s observations, is that prudence, in an uncertain environment, requires the preservation of a significant capability for using force.

This view was reiterated, in different ways, by the two government ministers who spoke at lunch on the meeting’s first day, 6 November 1998. In particular, Canadian Minister of National Defence Art Eggleton, observed that we now face an even greater variety of security threats than ever before, and that the problem is being gravely compounded by the escalating costs of rapidly changing military technology. UK Minister of State for the Armed Forces Douglas Henderson, made much the same point in the context of expressing his concern over the lack of public understanding of what the maintenance of security in the current international environment actually requires. In the follow-up discussion, Eggleton reported that the same lack of public recognition of the problem could be found in the Canadian context, as well. Among other things, it was reflected in a widespread reluctance to support expenditures on the Canadian Forces — a point that was reiterated later in the proceedings with particular reference to the role played in Canadian defence policy debates by the press.

In short, there seemed to be a general recognition that the world is still a violent place, that military interventions, however unhappily, will therefore be recurrent requirements in the future, that these interventions will take many different forms, and that this is a difficult message to convey convincingly to the public (especially, perhaps, in Canada, but also in the United Kingdom).

## THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON WARFARE AND PROCUREMENT

The impact of technology on warfare and procurement was a theme that not only pervaded the session on the so-called “revolution in military affairs” (or RMA), but also ran through the entire conference. With respect specifically to the RMA discussion, however, it was difficult not to conclude at the end that *all* arguments on the impact of technology on warfare and the armed forces are *partly* true, but that none of the arguments is true for every case or in every context. Once again, eclecticism appeared to be inevitable, and once again, the realities were shown to be untidy.

There can be little doubt that information technology affects almost everything that people in uniform do. This is hardly surprising. It is affecting everything that academics do, too! On the other hand, Neil MacFarlane’s deep reservations about overstating the RMA case, and Thierry Gongora’s cautious emphasis on the inherent incrementalism of the processes of technological change and on the consequent need to avoid making the final judgement on the implications too soon, both seemed to be very well taken. The more enthusiastic converts to “arcade”-style perceptions of the Gulf War and its “lessons” often appear, it must be said, alarmingly reminiscent of the McNamara “whiz kids” of some 30 years ago, with their complacent predictions of how the mightiest state in the history of human-kind could use its superior technology to make short work of a remote peasant community in Indo-China. In the event, they were tragically disappointed, and there may be a case now for remembering the lessons of their experience.

One of those lessons is that war is ultimately about *politics* and about the attempt to influence political behaviour in a context in which the target is firmly committed to resist. That being so, “surgical strikes” may have a chance of doing the job in a few very limited cases, but not in most. Another is the lesson of the “paradox of power,” to which MacFarlane’s analysis implicitly alluded. In the real world, the “weak” are often surprisingly adept at defeating the “strong.”

Whether, in short, “going high-tech” really helps, and if so, by how much, depends on what one is trying to accomplish, against whom, under what conditions, and for how long. None of those who were present for the discussion could have come away from it thinking that they had canvassed a simple problem, much less that they had uncovered simple answers.

## THE EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL BASE

The impact of globalization on the operations of the defence industrial base again ran recurrently, both explicitly and implicitly, throughout the entire proceedings, and the “outsiders” at the table were rewarded with some fascinating glimpses of how the process works, and how the fault-line between what Claire Turenne Sjolander called the “political space” and the “economic space” is actually joined. Academic though she claimed her preoccupations to be, she put the observations of both the captains of industry and the architects of government in clear and telling perspective. But on this question, as on others, a final conclusion could not be discerned, and it remained unclear how the contest between the two spaces would be resolved in the end, and on what terms.

Among political scientists, of course, the entire question of the role, even the survivability, of the state in a globalizing world is currently a subject of hot debate. Some think that an entirely new structure of “regimes” is now under visible and rapid development, and that the days of the so-called Westphalian state system are clearly numbered. It will be replaced, on this account, by a much more complex array of problem-solving institutions, operating in layered webs and overlapping mosaics. In this evolution, the distinction between “public” and “private” will become increasingly blurred, while the connection between communal identity and sovereign polity gradually falls into decay. Because the defence function is so central to the most basic purpose of the state, and because it rests so firmly on the sovereignty principle, the problem of reconciling it with the globalizing “transnationalism” of the major commercial enterprises in the defence field represents a test case *par excellence*. There is an argument for watching its progress very closely, because it may be where the battle turns out to be most transparently joined. Its outcome, in other words, may tell us a great deal about where we, and the state system, are really going. The captains of the defence industrial establishment may not normally think of their enterprises as historical bellwethers, but in the present context, this could very well be what they are.

## THE INTERACTION BETWEEN DEFENCE PROCUREMENT AND STRATEGIC DOCTRINE

On the question of the interaction between technological change and defence procurement on the one hand, and strategic doctrine on the other, it appeared at the outset that the Canadian and UK cases were very different, and that this difference was a function of power and scale. In essence, Canadian policy seemed to be driven by hardware, while British policy was driven by strategic calculus. That

picture became less tidy, however, as the discussion unfolded, and by the end it appeared that the differences might be matters more of degree than of kind. They were *important* differences, no doubt, but not qualitatively so significant as initial inspection might suggest. Just as there is no escaping eclecticism in international affairs on matters of this kind, so there is no escaping the fact that almost everything interacts with almost everything else. Procurement decisions and strategic decisions, even for the greater powers, are components of a feedback loop.

Having said that, at least one point of contrast between the Canadian and UK cases seemed to come through “loud and clear.” Specifically, in the field of defence procurement, Canada may well have been the first of the “globalizers.” Canada has *never*, in fact, regarded the maintenance of a national defence industrial base as part of its *defence* policy. This has been a consequence of its relatively small size, when taken in combination with its secure geopolitical circumstances — circumstances that David Haglund was especially careful to highlight. Historically, Canada has always known that it would be protected, in the end, by someone else — by the British first, and then by the Americans.

There was a time, a brief time, when it actually produced, albeit selectively, complete major weapons platforms. It did so, for example, in World War II, when the task was economically feasible (given the technology of the day), and when it was a contribution to the conduct of the hostilities that Canadian politicians were particularly happy to make. It did so, as well, in the early period of the Cold War, when the undertaking seemed like good economic policy, good research and development (R&D) policy, and good “vanity politics.” But when the escalating costs of military technology finally spent Ottawa out of the game, it simply stopped trying, and concentrated instead (as several of the participants pointed out) on the production of components, “bits and pieces,” rather than entire systems.

This is a well-known tale, but one of its most interesting features is that no one in Canada has ever felt any less secure because of it. On the contrary, the easy acceptance of such necessities went back at least as far as the Hyde Park Agreement of World War II, and the Defence Production and Defence Development Sharing Arrangements with the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Canadians were eager to negotiate these facilities; indeed, they initiated them. And for the most part (there was a brief period of controversy during the Vietnam War), they have warmly cherished the jobs, the profits, and the economies of scale that have ensued. Only with the Avro Arrow did they fleetingly flirt with a defence-procurement *politique de grandeur*. But even then there was not a single trace of Gaullist aspiration in either their ambitions, or in the *angst* that followed upon the Arrow’s cancellation. It was, rather, the prestige of high-tech aero-engineering, along with the economic spin-offs that they hoped it would entail, that tickled their fancies most.

In the United Kingdom, by contrast, the discussion seemed to suggest that there were still traces, gradually fading though they might be, of the autarchic premise at work, at least where defence procurement is concerned. The capacity to “go it alone” is there thought to be itself a prerequisite of security, or at least a significant contributor to it. The thought of having to depend on other countries for the acquisition of military systems creates unease, as a kind of discomfiting by-product of economic interdependence. Perhaps this is one of the indicators of great power status. By contrast, middle powers resign themselves to their position and make the (economic) best of it.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONSTRAINTS ON GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The consequences of fiscal stress were clearly evident in the presentations of both of the government ministers, but they were reflected as well in the observations of many of the other participants. Both countries, in short, are acutely aware of their budgetary limitations.

Again, however, there was reason at the end to conclude that there is a step-order difference in the *scale* of the problem in the two cases. It was hard not to conclude that the expenditure run-down in Canada — especially in the case of the forces on the ground and in the air — has put the Canadians at the extreme margins of operational viability. The discussion effectively echoed the dark humour of Canadian army colonels, who have been known, with what they think is only slight exaggeration, to question their ability to put down a hockey riot in a medium-sized Canadian city! As Rear-Admiral D.E. Miller pointed out in the final session, the units of Maritime Command are somewhat better off, and they are now working closely with other sea-going fleets in the government apparatus to amplify their capabilities. But elsewhere the picture is a melancholy one, which is precisely what the level of Canada’s annual defence expenditures (currently reported in the range of 1.2 percent of GDP) would lead the properly informed to expect.

This phenomenon is ultimately rooted in the widespread perception that Canada fundamentally lacks a genuine defence problem of its own, and that its principal capacity for making a meaningful contribution to international security comes by way of peacekeeping. Increasingly, moreover, the peacekeeping that Canadians have in mind is a process given over as much to an elaborate form of social work as to the direct containment of violence *per se*.

There was some indication in the discussion that the British defence establishment is now facing similar pressures. In the United Kingdom, however, there is a



“great power” tradition — and with it a still-salient combination of memories, assumptions, and expectations — upon which the government can construct an effective political case for the maintenance of a significant military capability. By contrast, in the case of Canada, the prevalence of program cuts in other important areas of public policy (health and education among them), when combined with a certain Methodist thrust in the Canadian foreign policy culture, makes this a much harder sell.

The consequences for Canada’s capabilities abroad are clear, and in the final session William Hopkinson (ever so gently ... but more than once!) reminded the Colloquium of some of their embarrassing implications for the effectiveness of Canadian diplomacy abroad. His point was reiterated with equal amiability by Bruce George.

This, of course, was the point at which the diplomatic niceties of the occasion gave way for a brief moment to the real differences of circumstance and perspective that confront the two countries. Given the audience, it seems reasonable to conclude that the remonstrations were being delivered, in the main, to the converted. For those on the Canadian side who were defensively inclined, however, it was possible to ask an obvious question: Would Canada’s diplomatic influence increase if the defence expenditures went up? On this point, the historical evidence is mixed, which is one of the reasons why sceptics in Canada often seem so hard to convince. Interests, in short, will “out,” even among friends.

## THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT

On this final matter, there was a certain similarity in the Canadian and UK responses to the American hegemonic fact. It might be possible to sum it up in a simple commandment: “Don’t resist. Instead, cozy up, or — occasionally — go around!”

It is possible, although unpopular, to argue that in Canada this commandment represents the single geopolitically driven imperative governing the conduct of Canadian foreign policy. Except for the naïve, the deluded, or the suicidal, obeying it is not a matter of choice. It is a question less of preference, and more of necessity — though the convenience of the first usually helps in practice to conceal the inconvenience of the second.

In the case of the UK, however, there is obviously more room for manoeuvre, much of it now coming from the connection with Europe. The desire to work closely with the United States thus has a more voluntarist flavour in the British context. It is a question less of necessity, and more of preference.

## SUMMING IT UP

The foregoing comments could well be regarded as more glibly provocative than finely tuned. Hence, the time has probably come to bring to an end this brief caricature of what was, in fact, a highly sophisticated array of carefully nuanced exchanges. Ending it will also relieve me of the obligation to deal with a seventh theme than ran through at least part of the Colloquium, particularly on the second day. It had to do with the problem of morality and statecraft in general, and with the ethical dilemmas confronting the armaments industry in particular. From so demanding a subject I am delighted to beat a full retreat, leaving the Rights and Wrongs to make their company with Beauty — in the eye of the beholder.

The discussion over the course of the two days was extraordinarily rich, engagingly candid, and impressively detailed. There could be no doubt that “old country” folk and “new country” folk still know how to talk to one another. They do so with an ease, comfort, and mutual understanding of fundamental premises that is rarely replicated in the “transnational” discourse of other populations. It is now often claimed that the objective indicators of the Canada-United Kingdom connection — trade, migration, postsecondary education, and the like — are in decline (if not absolutely, then relatively). That may be. But in the encounters of *cognoscenti*, the conversations are still infused with a sense of the familiar, and with the recognition that both parties are somehow rooted in the same place.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this conclusion was published as the rapporteur’s report of the Colloquium at which this volume’s chapters were first presented. The editors have chosen to leave intact some of the references made in this conclusion, which rather than being devoted to the volume’s contents, were reflective of the Colloquium’s discussion.

1. Bruce George is a Labour MP and chairman of the House Select Committee on Defence.