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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
CANADIAN NATION
1867-1917

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Emergent States and Armed Forces

Mahatma Ghandi once said, "A nation that has no control over her own defence forces and over her external policy is hardly a responsible nation." More recently an Indian civil servant, Nagendra Singh, in his book The Defence Mechanism of the Modern State, argued that from the time of the "birth of the political state" defence has been its very essence. Singh said defence policy is "not only an essential function of government but an unquestionable attribute of sovereignty . . . the sine qua non of independence." These statements from natives of a country more usually associated with pacific philosophies, suggest that continued independence depends upon an ability to use force to preserve internal order and to resist external aggression. The concept of absolute sovereignty on which these Indian views were based was not voided by the creation of the United Nations Organization in 1945. For the Charter accepts the right of national self-defence and also implies that all members have an obligation to contribute defence forces for the maintenance of collective security.

No nation can defend itself by its own unaided endeavours, and every nation, however small, wants armed forces for more than mounting an honour guard or putting on a formal parade on independence day. Military force is needed to back up police in the maintenance of law and order; and a state requires armies and navies to secure its territories and to defend its frontiers and coasts against minor forays or invasion. Many states also possess forces to put at the disposal of the UN or of some regional organization or alliance for the maintenance of peace or for the protection or assertion of mutual interests. A state's international prestige and influence is in some degree proportionate to the size and quality of its defence forces. Since defence capability is regarded as an essential requirement for every modern state, emergent nations seeking full statehood almost invariably strive to free themselves from the unwanted protection of the armies of great powers which they regard as the agents of continued imperialism. New states build up armies which they can sometimes ill afford and which may even be of questionable value except for the preservation of internal order. Impatience for unfettered freedom, and confidence in even very small states that they can walk alone, are paradoxically the result of the modern concept of collective security. The promise of protection in the UN charter, introduced as a formula to keep the peace and sometimes
seen as a step towards a world super-state, has made it feasible for small states to claim full independence and to arm for war.

In contrast with new nations today, when Canadians sought control of their destiny through responsible government in the mid-nineteenth century and moved on to engineer Canadian Confederation, they were loth to see the redcoats depart and to assume responsibility for their own defence. This was not due to superior morality. Nor was it the result of deficient responsibility in realising the need to pay for benefits conferred by the British Empire. It was a consequence of the different circumstances of that day. In 1870, John A. Macdonald was of the opinion that, because of weakness in face of predatory imperial powers, "it will be a century before we are strong enough to walk alone." He believed that "British America must belong either to the American or the British system of government."

Nevertheless, Canada's armed forces developed to meet needs like those which now motivate new states. Aid to the civil power was a reason for maintaining the Canadian Militia: during the middle years of the century hardly a year went by without the troops being called on to keep order or suppress disturbances. Furthermore, although Macdonald decided to impose law in the West and to cover its border by use of a civil-type police force, the North-West Mounted Police, rather than by a cavalry force, the Militia also played an important role, particularly in 1870 and 1885. The Militia was of doubtful value in securing the whole length of the Canada-US border or in protecting seaports, but those tasks were often used to justify its existence. Canada's present status and prestige are in fact an outgrowth from defence policies which have a long history.

Pre-Confederation Defence

In constitutional theory, ultimate responsibility for the defence of British colonies rested with the crown: and before Canada had responsible government this meant in practice with the British cabinet. However, it had always been understood that colonial governments must maintain their own internal security, protect the colony against petty raids by natives, and hold off attacks by more powerful native tribes or even hostile European powers until help could arrive.

In the early nineteenth century British garrisons were stationed in peace-time only where they were considered necessary. The long common border with the United States posed one of the Empire's most difficult land defence problems. After the War of 1812, British Royal Engineers built fortifications at strategic points, like Fort Henry
in Kingston, and dug the strategic Rideau waterway. Threats by insurgent "Patriots" operating from the United States in the thirties, and by supposedly responsible American statesmen and politicians in the forties, caused the British to add more fortifications and to place a small naval force on the Lakes despite the Rush-Bagot Treaty.

There is no tangible evidence that the United States contemplated an offensive campaign at any time between 1814 and 1870, but the British took their responsibility for Canada's defensive role seriously. They kept the garrison large enough to meet any short-term emergency. There is ample evidence that during most of the century many British political and military leaders were aware that in the event of a prolonged war with the United States, or if the United States took advantage of a European war, Britain could not hold Canada. But in order to maintain an overall balance of world power, Britain used Canada to try to keep the United States in check.

When the Province of Canada and other colonies obtained responsible government, many British political leaders thought that this should include greater responsibility for self-defence, but the people of Canada were unable to understand why they must spend money on defence when war seemed remote. Canadian governments felt sure that Canada would not provoke American hostility. They were therefore slow to arm.

Early in the Civil War, when Britain nearly came to blows with the United States over the Trent issue and promptly sent 14,436 reinforcements to Canada, thereby more than trebling the garrison, the Province was induced to consider rebuilding its almost defunct Militia. But Macdonald's government fell in 1862 partly because he had lost some French-Canadian support by proposing to increase the obligations of militia service. As a result, British taxpayers were incensed that, at a time when they were spending huge sums to defend Canada, Canadians shirked their responsibilities.

When the war came to an end, because of a fear that the Union armies might move north or that disbanded Irish veterans might attack Canada to win freedom for Ireland, Canadians were willing to make better provision for defence. Therefore, in 1865, Macdonald, back in office, led a delegation to London to negotiate a defence agreement with Britain. Canadians believed that as the Fenian threat was due solely to Imperial policies Britain should pay for the defence of Canada. But Macdonald's government had begun to spend a million dollars a year on the Militia, a great increase over the two hundred thousand dollars spent before the war, and he agreed to continue to do so. Although the Canadian delegation failed to persuade Britain to put a naval force back on the Lakes, it secured a
British promise to fortify Quebec, the essential gateway to the continent, and a guarantee for a loan to enable Canada to fortify Montreal and places further west. At the same time, partly as a consequence of Canadian concern about possible American intentions, the policy of confederation was approved. Within two years that had been substantially achieved.

Confederation and the Control of Defence Policy

The British North America Act included the first of a series of measures that ensured Canadian control of her own military forces. Section 15 transferred the command of the Militia from the Governor-General, who had held it as “Captain General and Governor-in-chief” in the Province, to the Queen. The Queen was a distant symbol for the authority wielded by the Governor-General-in-Council, that is to say by the Canadian cabinet. In 1868 the Militia Act moved a step further. Although it stated that the command of the Militia was to be exercised by the Queen “personally,” or failing that by the Governor-General as her representative, what was significant was that the Governor-General’s military authority had now come to be based on a Canadian statute rather than, as in pre-Confederation days, on a commission issued in Britain on behalf of the Queen. Furthermore, whereas the clause in the Province’s Act which empowered the minister to administer the Militia came casually and incidentally at the end of the statute, in the Dominion’s 1868 Act it was placed prominently at the beginning as if to stress the fact that the minister controlled the Militia even though it was to be commanded by a British Adjutant-General. The Act stated that the sovereign would exercise the vital function of calling out the Militia in case of need; but in practice this power belonged to the Canadian government. In a war the Militia could be placed under a British general, but troops raised by Canada with money appropriated by Canada would clearly be under ultimate Canadian control. The new dominion was thus in a position to control its own military forces in war as well as in peace.

Macdonald’s chief French-Canadian partner in the making of Confederation, George Etienne Cartier, who could have had any office he wanted, chose the Militia Department. His choice, and his words when he introduced the Militia Bill, show that the government was well aware of the supreme importance of its military functions. He said, “three indispensable elements constitute a nation — population, territory, and the sea. But the crown of the edifice — also indispensable — is military force. No people can lay claim to the title of a nation if it does not possess a military element — the means of defence.” Thus, although he may have chosen the Militia
Department because it gave opportunities for the exercise of widespread, cheap, political patronage, he appreciated the importance of his office for the future development of Canada as a nation.

This did not mean that Cartier believed that Canadians should immediately take over full responsibility for the defence of their country. In fact he may have had the opposite intention, namely to limit the degree of Canadian involvement in defence measures. The structure of the Militia organization which he set up, copied directly from that of the Province of Canada, shows that he expected that Britain would maintain the British garrison as a first-line defence force. The Canadian Militia, as before, would be capable only of supplying auxiliary troops and recruits. In 1870, at the time of the Riel rebellion, it served once again in this way, much as in 1812-14.

The Effect of British Withdrawal

Cartier's assumptions were shattered when the British government withdrew its garrisons from self-governing colonies in 1870-71 to achieve a more economic imperial strategic deployment. The only British troops left in the dominion were those at the naval base at Halifax. (Esquimalt was garrisoned later.) The British still maintained that they would come to Canada's aid if needed; but the dominion must now hold out with its own resources until that help arrived. Furthermore, the uncompleted citadel at Quebec was handed over to Canada along with all other military and naval installations in the interior. Of course, the St. Lawrence had always had disadvantages as a route for reinforcements because it was closed by ice for many months. Canada had thus been liable to be without hope of succour during much of the year. But the British abandonment of Quebec in 1871 shows a new trend in strategic thinking. Halifax was retained less as a port of entry than as a base to enable the Royal navy to operate against the American coast and shipping. British strategy now thus placed more emphasis on naval operations than on the reinforcement of Canada. While Britain attacked sea-borne trade and ports and threatened to invade the United States from the sea, Canada would be expected to fight delaying actions. Even if unsuccessful, these could be useful; and an American invasion of Canada might be prevented by British operations at sea.

The troop withdrawal decision had preceded the negotiation of the Treaty of Washington. Greater reliance on naval action, rather than on reinforcements, had thus been adopted as the proper strategy for defending Canada before the treaty settled most of the outstanding disagreements between Britain and the United States and reduced the need for military preparation. During the negotiations the Canadian
government found that Britain was willing to put Canadian interests aside when they stood in the way of an agreement with the Americans. But despite this sign that Canada’s bargaining position had deteriorated, Canadians welcomed the treaty’s removal of immediate pressures. They believed that with the United States and Britain in harmony, remaining issues, like the fisheries in Canadian waters, could now be settled by diplomacy. There appeared to be less need for force to back up negotiations. It followed that although Canada was now left on its own, Canadians thought military preparation less necessary.

Nonetheless, Canada now depended solely on its Militia for defence against the first wave of any future American attack and there was less expectation of early reinforcement from England. The Militia had topped its proposed establishment of 40,000 in 1870 and had greatly improved its efficiency under the instruction of officers of the British garrison. To meet its new obligations it must improve still further. Instead, shorn of its instructors when the British left, it rapidly declined. The only exceptions to this general deterioration were two schools of gunnery set up in Kingston and Quebec by calling for volunteers from the Militia and by recruiting ex-British regulars to care for the guns and train Militia artillerymen.

The Canadian government was preoccupied with railway construction and western expansion. Macdonald regarded the inter-colonial and transcontinental railways as contributions to defence, as the latter indeed proved to be in the operations in 1885; and the railway also promised future strength by an increasing population in the West. Furthermore, as a departing British commander-in-chief in North America, Sir John Michel, had once told the Canadian prime minister, in a war with the United States the worst thing that could happen to Canada would be “annexation to a free and populous country”; but for Britain war could mean “pecuniary ruin and loss of prestige.” Canadians did not relish the thought of annexation to the United States; but many of them believed that as an American attack would only come as a result of British policy Britain ought still to pay for the defence of Canada.

Mackenzie’s Military Policies

When the Conservative government fell as a result of the railroad financial “scandal,” in 1873, the first subject that Governor-General Lord Dufferin broached with the new Prime Minister, Alexander Mackenzie, was Canada’s defenceless state. The Liberals had campaigned on a platform of economy; and the country was moving into a severe economic depression. When in opposition
many of them had strenuously demanded that Militia estimates should be cut. But Mackenzie had once held a Militia commission and he had served against the Fenians. He believed in the need for military preparedness; and he was a man who stood by his principles. After deep thought he selected one of the several plans which had been suggested to him for the development of Canada’s armed forces. He decided to establish a military college to train young Canadians for military service as regular officers and give them the basic education necessary for high command in later life. So, in 1876 he opened the Military College at Kingston. Modelled on the four-year course at West Point, but largely staffed by British regular officers from the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, it gave a course with a strong engineering bias. Many Militia officers felt that the Military College was established with money that should have gone to make the Militia efficient and ready for more immediate emergency.

Shortly before the College opened, Mackenzie took another step. He appointed a British officer, Major-General Edward Selby Smyth, to be General Officer Commanding the Militia in place of the British colonel who had previously headed it as Adjutant-General. Selby Smyth performed the same functions as his predecessor but his seniority and the implication in his appointment was that he was a commander rather than an administrative officer. Canada thus now had a military chief and a college to produce career officers; but it had no permanent force for these to command. The financial situation, and the prevailing dislike for “standing armies” when there was no enemy in sight, impeded further development.

In 1879 Selby Smyth put Canada’s armed strength on view in a great parade of the Militia in Montreal on Queen Victoria’s birthday. He brought units from Toronto, from the artillery schools, and from the military college. The Militia was not yet organized for operations and the troops were far from fully trained; but the parade fostered Militia morale and also impressed thousands of civilians who watched it. Many American tourists came to see it. They may have been unduly impressed with Canada’s preparedness. They were not qualified to distinguish between the performance of part-time soldiers and of regulars; and a parade does not prove defensive capability. Perhaps a more important immediate result of the Montreal parade was that many Canadians who saw it were confirmed in their belief that no greater military effort was required, especially when Americans had come in so friendly a spirit to share the spectacle.

Influenced by ideas like these, and faced by continued depression, Mackenzie had done nothing more to improve the defences of Canada. In 1876-77 the Militia estimates had reached their lowest
point since Confederation, well below the million dollars a year which it had been understood would be maintained. As there was no regular Canadian army, the graduates of the Military College (called Royal from 1878) had no prospect of career appointments at home. To encourage applications for entry, the British government was persuaded to offer four British commissions each year to RMC graduates. Mackenzie had told the Governor-General in 1878 that his next step would be to set up schools for junior officers and for N.C.O.'s but that the time was not yet ripe. Shortly afterwards he was defeated at the polls and his plans for further military development were halted.

The Russian Scare and Imperial Defence

Some months before this election, events in Eastern Europe provoked a confrontation between Britain and Russia which suggested that the traditional belief that Canadian defence should be mainly concerned with the United States might need revision. As a result of the activity of Russian ships in American ports, it was rumoured that the Russians were preparing to raid shipping and attack colonial ports. The Canadian Militia, scattered in small packets across the dominion, was obviously not designed to meet this situation. The Canadian cabinet, in a panic, cabled for British protection of Atlantic shipping and began to discuss the provision of guns for the defence of Canadian ports. This crisis was soon abated by the Berlin Conference of 1878 and, although British relations with Russia remained strained because of a clash of interest in Afghanistan, tension in Canada subsided. The bombardment bogie had been exaggerated; and it was noted that artillery defence for ports would cost much more than potential damage by Russian raiders. To strengthen their country Canadians therefore turned to Macdonald's "national policy," to the consolidation of their hold on the West, and to their trade and industry. These interests were much more congenial than expenditures on either the Militia or coastal defence.

But the 1878 crisis had led Britain to establish the Carnarvon Commission to inquire into the defences of the Empire. This body was influenced by the revival of the naval doctrine that the defence of a scattered Empire must be undertaken primarily at sea. The Commission members also believed that as the colonies had long drawn dividends from British naval protection they should now be willing to invest in it. The Carnarvon Commission made inquiries about and recommendations for local defences throughout the Empire. It hoped that colonial governments would build and maintain defended ports which the Royal Navy could use, and it wanted to find out what other contributions self-governing colonies would make.
Sir John Macdonald, testifying voluntarily before it, set forward his own views. He said that Canada could not take on more commitments. But he suggested that if the Empire were ever seriously in danger, it would be easy to recruit ten thousand Canadians.

Britain's involvement in Egypt in 1882 spurred proposals for Canadian aid. Within three years the British government had to send a force to attempt to rescue General Gordon in Khartoum. Some Canadian Militia officers offered their own services or even that of their units. Macdonald declared that Canada would not supply troops to help "to get Gladstone and Co. out of the hole," but he was of the opinion that it was legal for Britain to recruit directly in Canada as had been done during the Crimean War. Britain commissioned a number of Canadians including twenty graduates, ex-cadets, and cadets of the Royal Military College in addition to the four already commissioned annually. The Governor-General also recruited "voyageurs" for transport vessels on the Nile and several Militia officers went in charge of them. The men were employed on a civilian-type contract; but the officers were paid as staff officers and wore their military uniforms. Noticeably, however, Canada did not follow the lead of New South Wales and send troops to the Sudan. It did not pay for the voyageurs. Small imperial wars were not Canada's business.

Rebellion in the West

In 1882 Macdonald had approved the reestablishment of the infantry and cavalry schools which had passed out of existence early in the seventies and without which the Militia was fast losing all semblance of a military force. These new schools had barely begun to pump new life into the Militia when it became necessary to send a Militia expeditionary force out West. The acquisition of the West had made Canada potentially a great nation but it had also made the country harder to defend against the United States. The rising in 1885 turned attention from the defenceless state of the coastal ports to the fear that weakness in the heart of the continent might invite an American takeover. Apart from the Mounted Police (who were not organized for military operations) there were no permanent units available for active service. RMC's relatively small output of officers available for service in Canada had been reduced by the extra commissions given by Britain as a result of the crisis overseas. The cadets all volunteered to go on active service but their offer was refused with thanks. Hence, when volunteers from the Militia were called out for duty, instructors from the new schools were posted to staff and officer the expeditionary force. A couple of RMC ex-cadets
who had returned from duty with the British Army were also given staff appointments. The remainder of the force's officers were from the Militia.

This make-shift expeditionary force was green and raw. Its commander, the General Officer Commanding the Militia, General Frederick Middleton, was afraid to set his men hard tasks. In consequence, some of the Militia units impatiently broke the leash and then claimed to have won victories despite the force commander's timidity. The campaign was successful, but only by a narrow margin. Even so, the Militia was highly praised in the Canadian press, thus giving a false impression of its efficiency and of its adequacy for the defence of Canada.

**The General Officer Commanding the Militia**

Every British GOC of the Canadian Militia was in a wellnigh impossible position because he was required to serve two masters. As an officer on the active list, often with ambitions for future promotion, he was subordinate to the British commander-in-chief and therefore to the British government. As an employee of Canada he was under the Minister of Militia. Holding a Queen's commission as well as an appointment in the service of Canada he had to choose between his duty to the Empire and his duty to Canada; and his Canadian masters did not always think that these coincided. Furthermore, it was not easy to separate the GOC's disciplinary authority and command functions from the overall control exercised by the Minister.

The GOCs invariably had a high opinion of themselves and their office. But in view of the political difficulties which they would encounter, and because Canada did not promise prospects of active service and therefore opportunities for further promotion, it was usually difficult to persuade the best type of British soldier to accept an appointment in Canada. Most of the British officers who came to Canada had personal reasons, sometimes a Canadian wife who wanted a tour of duty at home. It is not surprising, therefore, that some GOCs like Luard, although professionally capable, were men of little tact, unable to handle the Canadian part-time soldier. Of eight British officers who held the command, all but one were virtually dismissed. The issues which arose between the GOCs and the Minister included political patronage, the disciplining of Militia officers, and the inadequacy of appropriations for the Militia. Behind these lay the more fundamental question whether Canada was doing as much as was possible and proper for its own security and for the Empire.
Caron Stalls on Imperial Defence

In 1885 as a result of a new show-down with Russia, the Colonial Office, finding it impossible at short notice to obtain inter-departmental cooperation in Britain for Empire defence, had set up the Colonial Defence Committee, a kind of permanent version of the Carnarvon Commission with a permanent secretary, Major George S. Clarke, RE. This Committee included professional service representatives. Its function was to obtain regular reports from the colonies about the state of colonial defences and to advise the Colonial Office about defence measures. The British Colonial Defence Committee wanted a local Canadian committee with which it could cooperate. But before Canada had responded to this request, growing uneasiness about the security of the Empire led to the calling of a Colonial Conference in London in 1887 at which it was suggested that the self-governing colonies should contribute to the Royal Navy.

The Australasian colonies had been discussing naval defence among themselves since 1880. They were now induced to make contributions to a Royal Navy Squadron which would be stationed in Australasian waters for the protection of their shipping. Canada's representatives at the Conference, who acted more like observers than delegates, did not make a similar offer. Although Canada's shipping trade was much larger than that of any other colony, the idea of stationing an extra Royal Navy Squadron in North American waters at Canadian expense was unpalatable to Canadians because it would cause concern in the United States. But all the members of the 1887 Conference, including the Canadians, heard and approved professional military statements about the importance of the standardization of arms and organization throughout the Empire.

In the following years the Colonial Defence Committee sought to encourage Canada to further improve military cooperation. Sir Adolphe Caron, the Minister of Militia, was pressed to set up the proposed permanent Canadian Defence Commission. Imperialist sentiment in Britain influenced many Canadians; but there were differences of opinion about the way in which the Dominion should conform. Furthermore, the absence of any apparent danger to Canada, and concentration on the more absorbing problems of national economic development, took much of the force out of imperial defence propaganda. Caron had been effective when he organized the expedition to the North-West; but he did not do much in the cabinet to press for Militia expansion, reform, or reorganization.

Although Caron had at first worked well with Middleton and had supported him strongly when he was attacked by politically-minded Militia officers, in the end he yielded before popular clamour
about the 1885 expedition and let him resign. The controversies
over Middleton’s conduct of the Western campaign had served to
divert attention from more fundamental defence problems. The Min-
ister attempted to postpone the creation of a Canadian Defence Com-
mittee. In 1884-6 a departmental committee, chaired by the Gov-
ernor’s secretary, Viscount Melgund, had collected all the relevant
documents about the state of Canada’s coastal defence and Canada’s
place in imperial defence strategy and Caron proposed at first to
appoint only another similar investigating committee. In 1888 he
belatedly reported to the House of Commons in reply to a question
for information about the government’s response to British queries
dating back to 1880 (many of which had gone unanswered) and to
more recent requests for the creation of a naval squadron like that
about to be established in Australia. Caron claimed that Canada
had more than lived up to the agreement of 1865 which he alleged
was that Canada would spend from $300,000 to $1,000,000 annually
on the Militia. He declared that the dominion had actually spent
twenty-seven million dollars in twenty years. He asserted that the
only naval defence that Canada needed was its small fisheries pro-
tection service. He admitted, however, that it was necessary to study
new torpedo weapons as a means of protecting Canadian ports
against bombardment by enemy cruisers. He said that this question
would be referred to a new defence committee to consist of the GOC,
the Adjutant-General, the Commandant of RMC, and the Inspector
of Artillery.

Caron would not put the general commanding the British gar-
rison in Halifax on that committee because “Canada is too large and
Halifax is at one end.” He undoubtedly wished to minimize British
participation. When this Canadian defence committee sat early in
1888 it asked for its terms of reference in writing. These were not
forthcoming. It never met again. An explanation given later was
that, as the GOC and the Commandant of RMC were both about
to be replaced, the Minister had thought it necessary to await their
successors. By procrastination, Caron had successfully buried the
question of Canada’s contribution to imperial defence and with it
the means of improving the defences of Canada.

Herbert Organizes the Permanent Force

The main obstacle to a clarification and strengthening of
Canadian defence policy had probably been Macdonald rather than
Caron. After the great prime minister’s death in 1891, a new GOC,
General I. J. C. Herbert, told the Duke of Cambridge that the Old
Chieftain, while holding strongly to the idea of the integrity of
Canada as a part of the British Empire politically, had done little or nothing for the defence of either the dominion or the Empire. Herbert wrote, “He looked upon money voted for Militia purposes only as a means of gaining party ends.” The GOC noted that while the Prime Minister’s honesty had caused him to use Militia appropriations strictly for the purpose for which they were voted, it also led him to cut them down to the lowest possible figure.

But Macdonald had resisted political pressure to appoint a Canadian to succeed Middleton. Herbert, the Duke of Cambridge’s nominee, was a man of great ability. When Macdonald’s death removed the obstacle to reform, and when disputes with the United States about the Canadian tariff and about Bering Sea fisheries attracted attention to the sad state of the Militia, the new GOC was able to make the Militia camps more efficient and to organize the permanent force troops at the schools into regiments. He also exercised the regiment of infantry as a unit and secured the appointment of a British officer as Quartermaster-General. More important still, he negotiated a British agreement with Canada for the garrisoning of Esquimalt. This garrison had been contemplated for fifteen years and discussed for eight. Esquimalt was to be garrisoned by British Royal Marines paid for by Canada.

Herbert would have liked a British force for the whole of Vancouver Island as well as Esquimalt; and he planned to use ceremonials and troop exchanges to bring the Canadian Militia in the East more under British control. His professional aspirations and imperial instincts thus combined to arouse suspicion. He was suspected of working for the defence of the Empire rather than of Canada. Furthermore, although he had strengthened the Canadian active force, his efforts to rationalize the Militia organization had come up against the entrenched privileges of its officers who did not wish to see understrength or unnecessary units reduced. After a protracted leave in Britain it was noticed in Canada that he had not returned to duty. No public explanation was given for his resignation.

The Leach Commission

Shortly afterwards, the Venezuela crisis of 1895-96 served to remind Canadians that they were liable to suffer an American attack as a result of British policies in which they had no say. At the second Colonial Conference in 1897 Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain suggested that an Imperial Council would correct this situation and facilitate colonial contributions to imperial defence. But all the colonial prime ministers, although strongly moved by imperial sentiment, rejected his radical constitutional proposals. Wilfrid Laurier, like his predecessor Macdonald, also resisted pressures for a Canadian contribution to naval defence; but he informally agreed
to permit troop exchanges between the British garrison in Halifax and the Canadian Militia; he said he was willing to accept another British GOC; and he professed to be ready to set up the Canadian Defence Commission.

After some further reminders by the Governor-General, Laurier established this Commission under a British officer, Major-General E. P. Leach, in 1898. Because a decade had passed since the Melgund committee had studied Canadian defence, the Leach commission was designed only to investigate and not to function as the permanent advisory body which Caron had firmly resisted. However, the Leach commission was given more scope than the Melgund committee. It was authorized to travel across the country in order to see the terrain for itself, and also to talk to the men concerned with local defence. It consisted of four British officers who reluctantly accepted two Canadian ministers (of Militia and of Fisheries) as full members. Despite the presence of those ministers, the commission's report severely criticized the condition of the Militia. It outlined proposals for mobilization and deployment against an American attack, but it stated that at present these could not be carried out because of the Militia's inadequacies. But by the time its conclusions were prepared for presentation to the government, Canada was involved in war in South Africa and the report was shelved.

General E. T. H. Hutton, the GOC, had already included many of the Leach Committee's proposals in his annual reports on the Militia. What Hutton had persistently advocated during his tour of duty was that Canada must possess a "national army." Hutton used the phrase "national army" to mean that Canada's military system, which now consisted principally of a part-time Militia with training camps for instruction by Permanent Force troops, should be reorganized to permit the rapid mobilisation of a Canadian operational force that would also include support troops that Canada did not yet possess.

The South African War

Events anticipated him. Canadian participation in the war in South Africa raised not only the vital question about the kind of imperial war in which Canada ought to participate but also the form that that participation should take. The Boer War was not an unquestionable menace to the security of the Empire which Macdonald had said would be the circumstance in which Canadians would volunteer in droves. But Britain wanted colonial participation in South Africa in order to demonstrate to her European enemies that, in the event of a major crisis, the self-governing colonies would not stand
aside. A leak of information about official telegrams inspired by imperialists, forced Laurier to make an official offer of aid; but the condition which he made was that the Canadian infantry should fight as a single unit rather than in small detachments attached to various British units. However, Britain paid all the cost of the Canadian contingents after they arrived in South Africa and also the full cost of raising and transporting some later contingents.

It has been said that Canadian participation in the South African War can be attributed to anti-Americanism aroused by the Alaskan boundary dispute. Although overt anti-Americanism had died away by the time that Canada entered the war, it is suggested that Laurier supported Britain in South Africa because of his need for Britain’s help to get a favorable solution in the diplomatic struggle with the United States about the Alaskan border. That dispute had re-emphasized that Canada was not a sovereign state, a condition that had also been confirmed in tussles between the Minister of Militia, Dr. Frederick Borden, and Hutton about politics in the Militia. The Governor-General had compelled the Minister to give way on political appointments. Patent Canadian military weakness in face of American diplomacy and threats had also been a factor in influencing the government to accept Hutton’s proposals for Militia reform. Where the general and the government had differed was not on the need for reform but about the speed at which reforms could be carried out.

These arguments suggest that the Canadian government had come to understand that military forces were a necessity. Canadian deficiencies in the Boer War, although glossed over by victories hailed by the Canadian press, called for a thorough overhaul of the Militia and the establishment of much-needed technical and service units. Hutton’s “national army” thus came into existence after he had left Canada. Borden was seriously concerned to achieve reform. At his request General Lord Dundonald, a popular commander of colonial cavalry in South Africa, who was appointed GOC in 1902, undertook the task. Dundonald claimed later that Laurier told him that Canada did not need a Militia because it was protected by the Monroe Doctrine. But Borden supported the GOC in his efforts for reform until, like Hutton, Dundonald came into conflict with him over patronage. The unfortunate truth was that the Canadian Militia was still to some extent, as an earlier American observer had noted, a kind of “military Tammany.”

Borden’s experiences with Dundonald helped to convince him that since Canadian soldiers had now gained experience in war, Canada need not necessarily ask Britain for an officer to command the Militia. At the same time, adapting to Canadian ends the War Office Reconstruction Committee’s proposals for British military re-
form, Borden’s new Militia Act set up a Militia Council that included civilians and service officers to advise the Minister; and it suspended the office of General Officer Commanding and substituted a Chief of the General Staff. Canada thus rounded out her military sovereignty by measures that strengthened Canadian control.

Anglo-American Understanding and Canadian Militia Reform

An equally important influence on the development of Canadian defence policy at this time was the rapprochement between Britain and the United States which inevitably affected Canada. Faced by a deteriorating European situation, between 1900 and 1903 Britain settled outstanding issues with the United States including the question of an isthmian canal in Central America and the Alaskan Boundary question. The British West Indies squadron was reduced to a token force in order to concentrate the Royal Navy in home waters. As a result, Britain no longer needed Halifax to restrain the United States. The Committee on Imperial Defence, established to advise the British cabinet on imperial defence problems, suggested that responsibility for garrisoning Halifax should be handed over to Canada. In 1906 the transfer was made. Esquimalt was handed over at the same time. A few years later the naval bases were also handed over with a proviso that the Royal Navy should have the right to use their facilities. Canada was thus now sovereign from sea to sea.

The British understanding with the United States had far-reaching consequences on Canadian defence policy. The possibility that a clash between the two powers might lead to an invasion of Canada was greatly reduced. In the past this fear had been one of the strongest arguments given for a Militia. After the Anglo-American diplomatic understanding, that problem was now obsolescent.

Although it was not yet openly admitted, the Militia was now needed as the nucleus of an overseas expeditionary force. By changing the formula that the Militia could serve “within or without Canada . . . by reason of war, invasion or insurrection” (which had been interpreted to mean across the American border), to the wider formula, “beyond Canada, for the defence thereof,” Borden’s 1904 Militia Act quietly made it legal for the government to send the Militia overseas. The Australian Defence Act passed shortly before this time said that no member of the Commonwealth’s Defence Forces, including the Permanent Force, could be sent abroad unless he volunteered. Canada had thus advanced further towards the possession of military forces that could be used without restriction for the furtherance of Canadian interests, a notable step towards military sovereignty and competence.
Post Boer-War reforms in Britain had set up a General Staff as well as the Defence Committee, and both of these soon became imperial in name as well as in scope of interest. But, unlike Australia and New Zealand, Canada did not fully accept British proposals at Imperial Conferences to establish sections of the Imperial General Staff in the dominions. British General Staff officers posted to Canada were employed at RMC or in the Military Districts and not at Headquarters. The Canadian General Staff preformed the liaison functions which would have been the work of a Canadian Section of the Imperial General Staff. However, Canadian officers did serve at the War Office and from 1912 were in the Dominions Section set up there; but this section had little significance, even for liaison.

Proposals to include dominion representatives on the Committee of Imperial Defence were never implemented. An Australian resolution at the 1907 imperial conference called for representation but was watered down by Britain. Representatives from various dominions attended the committee for particular discussions from time to time; but when dominion representation was confirmed in principle in 1911, no dominion appointed a representative. Then in 1914 Sir Robert Borden nominated a member of his cabinet, Sir George Perley, to be Acting Canadian High Commissioner in London to discuss representation. The war intervened and Perley never attended a full meeting of the committee because it was side-tracked.

Empire military standardization had, nevertheless, been advanced in ways that had not impaired Canada’s control of its armed forces. To foster standardization and efficiency Britain had proposed regular inspection of colonial forces by British Inspectors-General. Canada did not accept this proposal as it stood but instead welcomed occasional inspection by officers of much more senior rank than the British had apparently had in mind. In 1910 one of these officers, General Sir John French, the future Commander-in-Chief in France, found the Canadian Militia not yet fully efficient. He commented favourably only on the artillery and RMC. Noticeably he suggested that the purpose of the Militia was defence against a land attack, an idea which was obsolete. But he added that, as in the South African War, Canadian contingents might defend other parts of the Empire. Three years later another Inspector-General, Sir Ian Hamilton, saw no reason for camouflage or dissimulation. Admitting that an American invasion was unlikely, he declared that, as Canada could expect large reinforcement from the rest of the Empire if she were attacked, so she must be prepared to reciprocate to the best of her ability.

The most valuable Canadian military development of these years was the training of Militia officers to meet an emergency. The well-established nineteenth century Militia tradition in Canada had
already created a part-time, amateur officer corps. In the decade before 1914, its efficiency was improved by staff courses and other forms of training.

Naval Development

Progress towards Canadian national competence at sea was not as rapid as on land. At the 1902 Colonial Conference Australia and New Zealand agreed to extend the geographic limits which they had imposed on the use of the ships that they had added to the Royal Navy by their financial contributions. When Laurier was pressed to make similar contributions, he responded by hinting that Canada would build its own navy; but this promise was not immediately fulfilled. Then in 1907 Australia reversed its position and announced plans to build an Australian navy that would be trained on the same lines as the Royal Navy and would be put under the Admiralty in time of war. The 1909 dreadnought crisis stirred both Australia and New Zealand to offer capital ships to help Britain outbuild Germany. Canadian Conservatives, in opposition, wanted Canada to offer two dreadnoughts. Laurier refused. Instead, he declared that his plan to build a Canadian fleet would now be carried out. French-Canadian nationalists saw this as a concession to imperialism. Many Conservatives who resented Laurier’s failure to give direct naval aid to Britain were even more hostile to his Reciprocity Treaty with the United States. They therefore combined with the French-Canadian nationalists to bring down the Liberal government in 1911.

Laurier’s successor, Sir Robert Borden, immediately announced that he would repeal the Naval Service Act. He then went to England where he was briefed in the Committee of Imperial Defence about the international situation. Returning to Canada, he said that the German threat to the Empire was so serious that Canada should present three battleships to Britain to meet the current peril. He revealed that in return he expected to get a voice in British foreign policy. But Borden’s bill to donate the ships failed to get approval in the Liberal Senate. Although Borden had said in debate that Canada would eventually possess her own navy, his government let the newly-styled “Royal Canadian Navy” atrophy. When war came in 1914 Canada was not ready to make any significant contribution at sea.

When Britain declared war on Germany, Canada, according to the constitutional assumption of that day, was automatically involved, but the extent of the Canadian response was a Canadian decision. Borden believed that the German challenge endangered the whole Empire and therefore Canadian interests. Laurier apparently agreed. Both men spoke in favour of Canada making the fullest possible
effort in what they regarded as a life and death struggle. But the
dominion was not prepared for a great war, especially on the scale
that ensued. Moreover the Canadian government was unwilling to
make full use of powers it already possessed to send the Militia
overseas. When the government decided to send an expeditionary
force to Europe, Sir Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence
called for volunteers. However, the Militia reforms undertaken by
him, and by his predecessor, Sir Frederick Borden, now proved in-
valuable. Very many of the officers commissioned in the Canadian
Expeditionary Force had had Militia experience. Without these it
would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the C.E.F. to reach
the Front when it did, and to fight as well as it did in the early
stages of the war.

The Great War and National Status

The performance of Canadian troops on the Western Front was
so impressive that the Great War marked the emergence of Canada
as a military power. The Canadians’ military organization and train-
ing was sufficiently standardized on British lines to enable them to
operate within British formations, first as a division and later as a
corps. To make up for a deficiency of Canadian senior commanders
and staff officers, British officers were borrowed. As Canadians be-
came experienced these were replaced. The Canadians on the Western
Front thus served with the British Army, but they were not part of it.
The Canadian government strove to ensure that they retained their
own identity and a degree of independence.

Military achievement thus symbolized the emergence of the
nation. It has been suggested that Canada came of age when Canadian
soldiers captured Vimy Ridge on Easter Sunday 1917. International
recognition was won when Canada signed the peace treaties and be-
came a member of the League of Nations. In 1926 the Balfour
Report by which Britain virtually conceded equality of status to the
dominions, and in 1931 the Statute of Westminster which gave this
declaration legal form, were anticlimactic. National status and sover-
eignty had already been created by military development. But in
the years that followed the Great War the fundamental connection
between military strength and national sovereignty was not fully un-
derstood. Mackenzie King’s government increased the establishment
of the Permanent Force and Militia but reduced its appropriation
below the World War I levels. It fostered the Royal Canadian Air
Force, but only because it performed civil duties. It needed a Second
World War, and even the onset of the Cold War, to produce a
revolution in military policy in Canada to fulfill the principle that in
a world of competing independent states well-being is a function of
military strength.
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