

# **Canada's Close Combat Vehicle**

## **The Need, the Cost, and the Commitment to Defence**

October 2013

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## **Table of Contents**

About the author	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction: maintaining commitment to Canadian Defence	5
Need: the CCV in light of the Army's experience in Afghanistan	6
Aftermath: the complication of the budget	8
Economics: affording another combat vehicle	11
Promise: the CCV for the future of the Army	13
Clarity: the importance of programmatic stability	16



## **About the author**

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## **Acknowledgements**

While a great many people contributed valuable information during my work on this study, I would particularly like to thank three whose contributions were essential:

Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Gasparotto of the Royal Canadian Engineers, for pointing me to important passages in his very helpful memoir of his time in Kandahar.

Professor James Fergusson of the University of Manitoba, for his views of the future of the Canadian Army's equipment program.

Professor Ugurhan Berkok of the Royal Military College and of Queen's University, for insights into the procurement process at the Department of National Defence.

## **Introduction: maintaining commitment to Canadian Defence**

After the Second Battle of Panjwai'i in the summer of 2006, Canadian Army Headquarters formulated a requirement for a supplement to Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) IIIs that equip six of Canada's nine infantry battalions. Built in Ontario by General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS), the LAVs had served well and fought hard in the campaign, but showed some limitations inherent to light armour. A program for 108 larger, more heavily-armed Close Combat Vehicles (CCVs) was launched, cancelled, and launched again. The promise of a large purchase drew bids from GDLS, Nexter, and BAE Systems. By the late spring of 2013, a winner had been chosen—but not announced.

Today, the government seems equivocal about the future of the program. The Canadian Army is dealing with a sharp budget cut, and by one account, its senior officers have expressed concern to the civilian leadership that new vehicles may not be affordable within those financial constraints.

Earlier this year, I was sponsored to examine the importance of the CCV to the Army, even in light of tightening Canadian military spending. After considerable research, I have concluded that the CCV fills an important gap in the Army's capabilities that was laid bare on campaign in Afghanistan. This gap will not be fully closed by ongoing upgrades, as each of the candidate CCVs offer higher payloads for troops, armour, or weapons than even the LAV-UP. While the roughly \$700 million procurement cost is not slight, affording another type of troop carrier for the infantry is affordable for a country as wealthy as Canada.

Finally, maintaining programmatic stability with the CCV is not just a matter of avoiding political inconvenience. It is a matter of maintaining the credibility of the Department of National Defence as a business partner to the best suppliers around the world. Canadian soldiers deserve the best equipment the people of Canada can afford, and the CCV is a strong step in that direction.



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Austin, Texas • October 2013

## Need: the CCV in light of the Army's experience in Afghanistan

To understand the need for the CCV, one begins with the genesis of the requirement, in the mixed performance of the Army's Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) III in Afghanistan. While the LAV III truly served as the Army's workhorse throughout the war, its shortcomings had become apparent as early as the late summer of 2006, during the epic First and Second Battles of Panjwai'i. The first battle, code-named Operation ZAHARA, took place in July and August, when Canadian troops, primarily of the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), cleared Taliban militants from the Panjwai'i District, sixty kilometers south of Kandahar City. The battle was hard-fought, with several Canadian fatalities and the loss of a LAV III to rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire.<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath, the Coalition's troops withdrew, and the Taliban re-infiltrated. This time, thousands of gunmen massed in the area, and dug in for the rematch they knew would come. Second Panjwai'i (Operation MEDUSA) was the very first large-scale land battle fought under the aegis of the NATO alliance, and the largest battle the Canadian Army had fought since the Korean War. This was no counterinsurgent grouse-hunt, but a stand-up fight against thousands of militants. Though the battle ultimately proved a lopsided victory over the Taliban, the advance of the PPCLI and its LAV IIIs repeatedly bogged down in the corn fields and marijuana groves of the district outside Kandahar. As one soldier wrote, "the vines are about six feet high and there are dips—about two feet deep—between the rows; enemy fighters can move freely through them without being seen."<sup>2</sup>

Those ditches and walls prevented easy passage by the LAVs. Indeed, as observed by then-Major Mark Gasparotto, commander of 23 Field Squadron of the Royal Canadian Engineers, the final stretch "from Objective Templar down to our final objective in Pashmul—known as Objective Rugby—was all vineyards."<sup>3</sup> Gasparotto's sappers were frequently called upon to tear holes in the obstacles with both regular and makeshift armoured bulldozers, but even so, the infantry's fighting vehicles suffered problems against heavy fire in that very challenging terrain.<sup>4</sup>

That December, fifteen Leopard 1 tanks of Lord Strathcona's Horse arrived in Kandahar so that the infantry would have the benefit of all-terrain firepower. But in Afghanistan as in other combat zones, firepower was not protection *per se*, so the LAVs and the troops mounted in them continued to suffer through Canada's final withdrawal from the battle. The concept of what became the CCV, with heavier armour and better mobility, began to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Parsons, "The Battle For Panjwai: A Soldier's Story," *Legion Magazine*, 20 August 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Mark Gasparotto, *Clearing the Way: Combat Engineers in Kandahar*, Ardith Publishing, 2010, Kindle locations 649-650. The major has since been promoted to lieutenant colonel.

<sup>4</sup> See Gasparotto, *Clearing the Way*; and Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan*, Dundurn, 2010.

circulate. And as protection tends to restrict mobility, the CCV would need to be much larger and heavier than the extant Light Armoured Vehicles, to carry both the heavier armour and the larger engine required. It is unsurprising that the weight of each of the three candidate CCVs is much greater than that of a LAV III. With no disrespect to those yeoman LAVs, the candidate CCVs would ultimately prove serious vehicles—if not battle tanks themselves, and most of what the Army would need in a serious fight. And while the CCV purchase was never intended for the Afghan War, it became a serious program borne of the experience of a serious campaign.

Perhaps the first formal idea came in August 2008, when the next chief of the land staff, Lieutenant General Andrew Leslie, suggested that a small number of ‘heavy infantry assault vehicles’—old Leopard tanks remanufactured into armoured personnel carriers (APCs)—might be the right answer. This concept was rather an intellectual offspring of the Canadian Army’s Kangaroo APC of the Second World War—a Ram tank with the turret pulled for passenger accommodation.<sup>5</sup> While the idea would have been akin to the Israeli Army’s new Namer and its long-serving Achzarit APCs, it seems not to have progressed very far. It may indeed have proven an overshoot, an actual tank with a tank’s logistics train, when a fighting vehicle would suffice.<sup>6</sup>

Continuing to ponder this problem of protected mobility across challenging terrain, by 2009 the Army Staff had instead conceived the need for another fighting vehicle for the infantry, this one formally termed the Close Combat Vehicle. Envisioned “as a medium armoured capability” of 25 to 45 tonnes, the CCV would “bridge the gap between the current light (5-20 tonnes) and heavy armoured (45 tonnes+) vehicle fleets.” The greater mass would allow for greater survivability, “providing troops with the enhanced protection and mobility of a medium armoured vehicle, allowing them to effectively operate in intimate support of CF tanks in close combat with enemy forces.”<sup>7</sup>

This issue of the tanks has aggrieved some analysts of late. Michael Byers of the University of British Columbia and Stewart Webb of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have notably argued that any vehicle meant to accompany tanks is a product of “outdated Cold War tank doctrine”.<sup>8</sup> But there are three problems with this argument.

The first is that the CCV is hardly outdated. Two of the three candidate vehicles—Nexter’s VBCI and Hägglunds’ CV90—have been adopted and are serving today with

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<sup>5</sup> “[Background–Future Combat Systems: Heavy Infantry Assault Vehicle](#),” *Canadian American Security Review*, undated page.

<sup>6</sup> For the Israeli Army, which never fights more than a short drive from home, this tradeoff is acceptable. For the globally deployable Canadian Army, a manageable logistical footprint is very important.

<sup>7</sup> See DND’s official statement at <http://www.materiel.forces.gc.ca/en/ccvp.page>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, *Stuck in a Rut: Harper government overrides Canadian Army, insists on buying outdated equipment*, Rideau Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, September 2013.

seven European armies, and several took those vehicles to Afghanistan. Without a CCV, Canadians would have some reason to feel slighted. Throughout their time in Afghanistan, Canadian troops fought hard, and in the worst of Taliban country. Partly as a result, during the toughest fighting in 2006 and 2007, Canadians were suffering fatalities at three times the rate of the British, and four times the rate of the Americans.<sup>9</sup>

*Why* the vehicle is up-to-date gets to the second point. Canada's fatalities were disproportionately from blasts: car bombs, suicide bombs, mines, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) accounted for 65 percent of deaths across the entire Afghan campaign.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, little of the Cold War lingers in the experience that has shaped the designers' choices in building any of the three vehicles. In specifying a vehicle concept, DND ranked its candidate vehicles foremost on the basis of protection, then mobility, and finally firepower. That is hardly a holdover, for during the Cold War, the reverse order of priorities would arguably have held. Rather, the CCV initiative incorporates the lessons of modern asymmetrical and counter-insurgent warfare: force protection must be purchased first.

But third, and most poignantly, the ideas that spawned the CCV requirements are hardly 'tank doctrine' *per se*. Of course, the Army cannot predict with certainty that it will never again need to face enemy tanks; some sort of organic anti-tank weapon is essential. But even if this mission were entirely fulfilled with the guided missiles of the Royal Canadian Artillery and the laser-guided bombs of the RCAF, armour would still be required for the infantry. To wit, we may observe that while the French Army is this year disbanding one of its four tank regiments, it plans to retain its full force of VBCIs. And while the Royal Netherlands Army is selling off the last of its Leopard 2 tanks, it is retaining most of its CV90s. Even in the relative absence of tanks, these Afghan-experienced armies have resolved that they need their CCV-equivalents.

### **Aftermath: the complication of the budget**

With the weight of all this argument in favor of a purchase, in July 2009 then-Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay announced that over a billion dollars would be set aside in future budgets for the CCV.<sup>11</sup> Bids were solicited from armoured vehicle manufacturers around the world, but an over-ambitious set of requirements led DND to reject them all as noncompliant with the request.<sup>12</sup> The program was reset, and a second RFP was then issued. Three of the five pre-qualified bidders responded a

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Koring, "[Canadians dying three times as fast as their allies](#)," *Globe & Mail*, 25 August 2007. The newspaper pulled statistics from iCasualties.org, ISAF Headquarters, and the US Defense Department, from 1 February 2006, "when major combat operations began in the south," through 31 July 2007.

<sup>10</sup> According to the [data](#) at iCasualties.org, those causes account for 104 of 158 Canadian deaths.

<sup>11</sup> "[Military to get \\$5B for armoured vehicles](#)," *CBC News*, 7 July 2009.

<sup>12</sup> "[CCV Redux—'Reset' for the Canadian Army's Close Combat Vehicle](#)," *Canadian American Security Review*, May 2012.

second time: General Dynamics Land Systems with its Piranha 5 (a much larger version of the veteran LAV III), Nexter with its *Véhicule Blindé de Combat d'Infanterie* (VBCI), and BAE Systems Hägglunds with its CV90 Mark III. By the spring of 2013, a winner had been selected, but not actually announced. For ominously, the Army was facing a budget reduction of 22 percent, so the program's future seemed uncertain.<sup>13</sup> The CCV was perceived by at least a few officers as a reasonable sacrifice to maintain force structure or other preferred programs, and they were asking reasonable questions.<sup>14</sup>

Further concern rose in July of this year, when in a long-anticipated move, Justice Minister Rob Nicholson swapped portfolios with MacKay, who had held his for nearly six years. As at any staffing change, those with dark views of the government of the day wondered whether the new face was meant to be the hatchet man for executing the next round of reductions. Indeed, back in March, writing in the *National Post*, Lee Berthiaume had lamented that the Canadian Armed Forces may be headed for another 'decade of darkness.'<sup>15</sup> That was the term that former Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier had used to describe the period of budget cutting that the Armed Forces had endured under the Liberals in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

Yet another former Army commander, LGen Peter Devlin, recently echoed that concern under today's Tories, citing that big reduction in his service's budget, and the relatively high proportion of fixed outlays in its short-term cost structure.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the Cabinet has pledged not to reduce the number of combat troops in the Forces, so it is presumed that reductions will fall heavily on the maintenance and training accounts—and thus actual readiness for battle.

So, in August 2012, well in advance of the problem, the department formed a 'Defence Renewal' team, and in February 2013 hired McKinsey & Company in support, to identify possible economies.<sup>18</sup> The recently revealed plans include a wide variety of measures, including reductions in real estate holdings, substitution of videoconferencing for travel, increased use of simulators for training, and the redundancy of over a thousand of the

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<sup>13</sup> David Pugliese, "[Canada Budget Cuts Cleave Deepest in Army](#)," *Defense News*, 30 January 2013.

<sup>14</sup> David Pugliese, "[Army tried to scuttle combat vehicle purchase amid deep cuts](#)," *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 May 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Berthiaume, "[Harper government's defence spending cuts raise spectre of another 'decade of darkness'](#)," *National Post*, 20 March 2013.

<sup>16</sup> General Hillier first used this term in a speech to the Conference of Defence Association Institute in Ottawa on 16 February 2007. See "[Top general calls Liberal rule 'decade of darkness'](#)," *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 February 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, "[The Close Combat Vehicle Debate Continues—Byers and Webb Fire Back](#)," *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 September 2013.

<sup>18</sup> See Daniel Proussaldis, "[Feds to redirect \\$1.2B from Armed Forces' administrative budget to front-line work](#)," *Toronto Sun*, 7 October 2013; and the department's 'Defence Renewal' page at <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/defence-renewal.page>

headquarters staff hired since the beginning of the Afghan War.<sup>19</sup> The goals are worthy: the target is to save some \$1.2 billion annually. They are also a priority: in the Throne Speech itself, the government explicitly signaled its intention to “put front-line capability before back-office bureaucracy”.<sup>20</sup>

But as readiness is an area on which the brass rightfully fears to tread, one can still imagine that some planned equipment procurements could face the axe. The National Shipbuilding Strategy for the RCN was announced by the government with some fanfare, and its commitment to a fighter replacement for the RCAF (whether a Joint Strike Fighter or something else) has been resolute. For the Army, then, raiding the other services’ budgets to protect its own would be a challenging bureaucratic move.

If the Army must choose to de-emphasize some part of its own recapitalization, one or more of its four large programs for buying new armoured vehicles would seem an obvious target. The Force Mobility Enhancement (FME) project is currently acquiring two different types of armoured engineering vehicles, but as it is already well underway, it is not a likely source of savings. The Tactical Armoured Patrol Vehicle (TAPV) is meant to replace its RG-31 blast-resistant vehicles, and the cleverly named Light Armoured Vehicle Upgrade Program (LAV-UP) will make further modifications to the Army’s fleet of some 550 LAV IIIs, to address some of the considerable limitations identified in Afghanistan. In these two programs, though, the Army has already announced its contractor. In June 2012, Textron’s Cadillac-Gage Commando, was chosen as the TAPV; acceptance testing began this past July at the US Army’s Aberdeen Proving Ground, and operational testing began just this month with 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group at CFB Valcartier. In the case of the LAV III, long-serving incumbent GDLS Canada has been chosen again as the sole source.

But while GD, BAE, and Nexter have all submitted bids for the CCV, the winner is not publicly known. Contrary to earlier speculation, the first federal Treasury Board meeting of the autumn passed without an announcement. Thus, the CCV yet rests without an industrial constituency, and for this reason alone, might seem more threatened. Some observers have commented how the two ministers responsible are from ridings in southern Ontario: Nicholson represents Niagara Falls, and Diane Finley at Public Works represents Haldimand-Norfolk. As such, the argument goes, they may feel the call of constituents in London, where GDLS builds and overhauls LAVs, to leave well enough alone, and focus on the LAV-UP. But neither actually represents that riding, and both ministers have broader responsibilities to Canada as a whole. More so, compared to the

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<sup>19</sup> David Pugliese, “Defence Renewal plan looks to save DND up to \$1.2 billion annually: efficiency savings to be re-invested in operations,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 October 2013

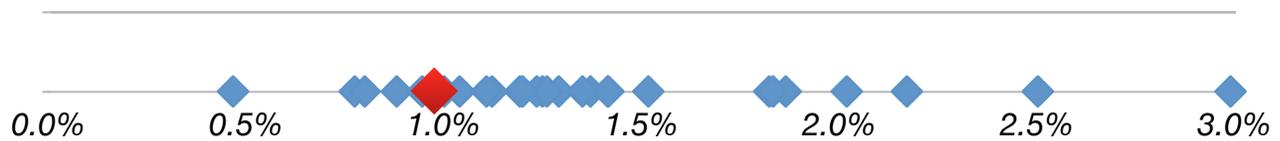
<sup>20</sup> *Seizing Canada’s Moment: Prosperity and Opportunity in an Uncertain World*, Speech from the Throne to open the second session of the forty-first Parliament of Canada, 16 October 2013.

National Shipbuilding Strategy and the F-35 program, the CCV is a modest matter financially and politically.<sup>21</sup>

**Economics: affording another combat vehicle**

Even supposing comparative enthusiasm in the Army for fielding the CCV in just two battalions, there remain concerns that the Treasury cannot make room for it in the budget. Canada does have rather low military spending: the roughly one percent of GDP devoted to DND is somewhat below the non-US NATO average of 1.5 percent, and well below the alliance’s admittedly arbitrary target of two percent in each member state. Across NATO, only Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and economically calamitous Spain failed last year to clear the one percent threshold. Excluding the special and perhaps excessive case of the United States, the graph below shows Canada’s relative

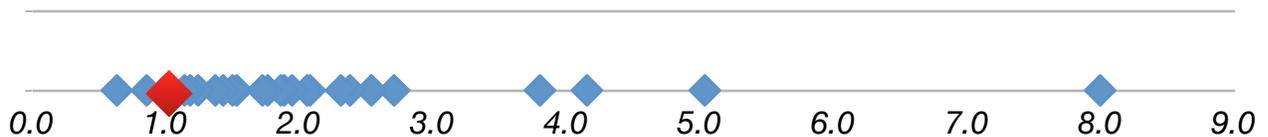
*Percentage of GDP spent on the military (non-US NATO)*



position in financial commitment across the alliance:

The forces that Canada maintains are also small as a fraction of its population. The troops of the Army account for only one Canadian in a thousand. As shown in the graph

*Ground troops per 1000 population (non-US NATO)*

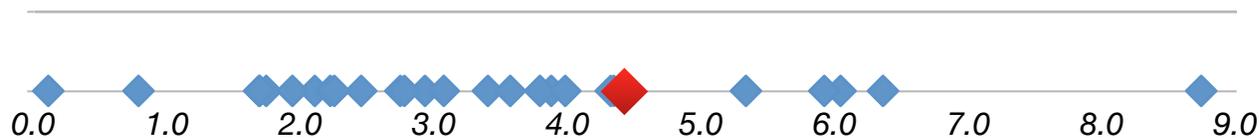


below, across NATO, only Germany (0.9 per thousand) and Latvia (0.6 per thousand) maintain relatively smaller land forces:

Despite this apparent parsimony, Canada does extract surprisingly good value for its money. The Army alone maintains the equivalent of a highly-trained and battle-ready mechanized infantry division. And between its LAV IIIs in the infantry and its LAV II Coyotes in the cavalry, Canada has more fighting vehicles per thousand troops than all

<sup>21</sup> Here, I take note of the priorities suggested by Jordan Press and Lee Berthiaume in “[What Haunts Them Still](#),” *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 October 2013.

## Armored vehicles per 100 troops (non-US NATO)



Canada thus has an admirable recent tradition of hardening its small army, but with the substantial withdrawal of the venerable M113 from the force structure, its devotion to the LAV is complete. As Byers and Webb quote LGen Devlin, Canada has a “LAV-based army” which is “the best in the world fighting [in] that vehicle.”<sup>22</sup>

The question is whether Canada needs another, *heavier* fighting vehicle. Here, the pattern across the alliance and its friends is remarkably consistent, with the procurement of vehicles like

- ◆ Nexter’s VBCI by France,
- ◆ PSM’s Puma by Germany,
- ◆ ARTEC’s Boxer by the Netherlands and Germany,
- ◆ Patria’s AMV by Finland and Poland,
- ◆ GDLS’s ASCOD by Spain and Austria, and
- ◆ BAE’s CV90 by Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

It is also important to note that all of these vehicles have been selected by another customer, and several have considerable combat experience with them. The CV90 fought successfully in Afghanistan, and the VBCI did so in Afghanistan and Mali. The third, GD’s Piranha 5, was once selected as a future infantry fighting vehicle of the British Army. Only a price dispute under tightening budget constraints left Britain’s infantry regiments driving aging Warrior fighting vehicles and blast-resistant trucks.

And while the US Army drives the LAV-based Stryker, it has far more Bradleys (another BAE vehicle roughly analogous to the CV90) across its combat brigades. The US Marines have been considering the VBCI and similar vehicles as its future Marine Personnel Carrier. All these vehicles are heavier and carry more payload, in either armour or troops or weapons, than the *Light* Armoured Vehicle. To summarize, the land forces of thirteen other North American and European countries are today buying or driving vehicles like those bid in the CCV competition. Seventeen or even twenty-five tons, they all say, is not always enough.

With receipt of these new vehicles, the Army will no longer be that LAV-based army, but a force with both heavier and lighter formations. The service’s current “asymmetric”

<sup>22</sup> Byers and Webb, *Stuck in a Rut*, p. 9; citing David Pugliese, “LAV-3 Upgrade Still a Priority for Canada,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 17 July 2011.

fielding plan calls for the three regular brigades to re-role along lines familiar to the US Army, with heavy, medium, and light brigades:

- ◆ Heavy—1st Brigade, with a Leopard regiment, two CCV battalions (CFB Edmonton), and one LAV-UP battalion (CFB Shilo)
- ◆ Medium—5th Brigade, with three battalions of LAV-UPs (CFB Valcartier)
- ◆ Light—2nd Brigade, with two battalions of TAPVs (CFB Petawawa) and one mixed battalion CCV/LAV-UP/TAPV (CFB Gagetown)

This approach supports the idea that the Canadian Army should be capable of military operations in the full spectrum of wars big and small. But note that the organizational scheme features a lesser role for those LAV-UPs. While LAVs currently equip six of the Army's nine infantry battalions, the new plan requires just half of the infantry to be LAV-based.

The rough lines of this table of equipment are important to the question of affordability. As a matter of public choice, CCV program has been decried for its cost: seemingly \$2.1 billion in an annual defence budget of barely \$20 billion. But the phasing of the expenditures is important to note. Of that total, only about \$700 million will be spent buying new CCVs between next year and 2019, when the program should close out. The remaining \$1.3 billion is an estimate of the cost of through-life support of the CCVs over the projected 25-year lifecycle of the vehicles. It is pointedly not a marginal increase in DND's cost of operations. For if CCVs and TAPVs replace a significant portion of the admittedly aging LAVs in the Army, the effect on support costs may be far less.

### **Promise: the CCV for the future of the Army**

Is there any alternative to the CCV? Perhaps there is for those who actually yearn for a constabulary land force, an Army more akin to the RCMP, suited only for peacekeeping and a little guerrilla-hunting. But before choosing, remember that those small wars can be uncertain things. In the words of the on-scene commander of the PPCLI, now BGen Omar Lavoie, Second Panjwai'i may have indeed been "a bit of an anomaly in the history of the counterinsurgency" in Afghanistan. But to chase the Taliban back into the shadows, that pitched battle—the ultimate goal of insurgents themselves, as Mao wrote—was absolutely necessary.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, one should not expect that insurgencies are the only wars worth preparing for. The Afghan War is now effectively over for Canada, so some analysts are openly wondering why the vehicle is still needed, and whether the Canadian Army cannot just

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<sup>23</sup> Mao Zedong, "On Protracted War," speeches to the Yen-an Association for the Study of the War of Resistance Against Japan, May-June 1938.

get back to that familiar and respectable work of training and peacekeeping.<sup>24</sup> As a result of Canada's experience in both the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, there appears to be a general recognition that peacekeeping, while important during the Cold War, is now low on the priority list of tasks for the Canadian Armed Forces. The notion suggested by some that Canada only be involved in peacekeeping is widely recognized as simply not a reasonable political option for a founding member of the Atlantic alliance.

Worse, as evidenced by Hezbollah's performance in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, many of those rogue actors around the world have gotten their hands on powerful weaponry, so even peacekeeping may not be feasibly accomplished with a light touch. As Ambassador Ferry de Kerckhove told the conferees at this past February's Ottawa Conference on Defence and Security, "the world is full of problems and we can't solve all of them, but despite the mess, we have to try."<sup>25</sup> Trying will sometime again mean fighting, and fighting hard.

So is the Close Combat Vehicle not a closed case? To the contrary, Byers and Webb assert that whatever the arguments, "the Canadian Army does not want this \$2 billion program," citing two datums as evidence:<sup>26</sup>

*In May, it was reported in the Ottawa Citizen that the Army itself had made the exact same recommendation to the government... [In late September,] General Rick Hillier told CTV's Power Play: "I actually think, personal opinion, we no longer have a need for the Close Combat Vehicle."*

That is, they are arguing, that whatever its affordability, the Army's leadership itself would prefer to put that money to other uses. But here again, there are three problems with the assertion.

The first is that we do not quite know the opinion of any particular Army officer about this. Byers and Webb's claim of discontent comes from but a single report in the *Citizen*, quoting an anonymous source, which is hardly authoritative.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the second point provides but a second view. General Hillier was was an impressive and sometimes controversial military leader. But as he himself notes, this view is his "personal opinion" a few years after departing office, and before the four-part armoured vehicle modernization program (TAPV, LAV-UP, FME, and CCV) got underway. On this matter,

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, *Stuck in a Rut: Harper government overrides Canadian Army, insists on buying outdated equipment*, Rideau Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, September 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Day, "Canada Is Not a Neutral Country, Conference Told," *Legion Magazine*, 12 May 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Byers and Webb, "The Close Combat Vehicle Debate Continues".

<sup>27</sup> David Pugliese, "Army tried to scuttle combat vehicle purchase amid deep cuts," *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 May 2013. See also David Pugliese, "Canadian Army, Gov't. Dispute Armored Vehicle Buy," *Defense News*, 20 October 2013.

most of us simply do not know the opinions of either LGen Marquis Hainse, the current chief of the Army, or his deputy, MGen Paul Wynnyk. As professional officers, they are supposed to provide their advice to the minister privately, and it appears that they have been hewing rigorously to that confidential approach.

But the third issue is yet more fundamental. While the Army needs some discretion in deciding what is right for the Army, it also needs some guidance in getting what is right for the government and the Crown. The military's bureaucratic autonomy must be balanced with its responsiveness to political objectives.<sup>28</sup> As Francis Fukuyama recently wrote:

*Many failures of modern government are due to a failure to hit this sweet spot. The German and Japanese militaries during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the civilian bureaucracies standing behind them, were famous for their elite training and autonomy. But they were too autonomous: the younger Moltke in 1914 and the Kwantung Army in 1933 essentially began to make German and Japanese foreign policy on their own, with disastrous results.*<sup>29</sup>

While those examples may seem a bit breathless, we have seen what can happen south of the border, where very powerful military services get substantial latitude in deciding what they want, with rather lighter oversight by defense secretaries. Having systematically de-emphasized close air support for decades, the US Air Force is today trying for the umpteenth time to retire its entire A-10 attack aircraft fleet. And as Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said about the US Navy, changing anything there "is like punching a feather bed".<sup>30</sup> He was a former assistant secretary of the Navy, so he spoke with some first-hand knowledge.

The problem may have been most acute with the US Army. That service systematically forgot everything it knew about counterinsurgency after 1973, because it preferred to do so, with very unfortunate results in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Marines remembered a bit more, but within the bounds of their cherished identity politics. Consider the dramatic example of the Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicle program. The Canadian Army was well-equipped in Afghanistan with RG31s, and vehicles of the sort had been available from their South African supplier for at least twenty years. But the US Army and the USMC endured four years of land mines and roadside bombs with only a few hundred MRAPs in Iraq. In May 2007, Defense Secretary Robert Gates had to order those two services to buy thousands of blast-resistant vehicles because they had preferred pet programs—the now-terminated Future Combat Systems and

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Michael Jackson, "[Responsibility versus accountability in the Friedrich-Finer debate](#)," *Journal of Management History*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 66-77.

<sup>29</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "[Mission Orders and Bureaucratic Accountability](#)," *The American Interest*, 8 August 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Marriner S. Eccles, *Beckoning Frontiers: Public and Personal Recollections*. New York: Knopf, 1951, p. 336.

Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle—for unknown future wars at the expense of kit designed from the actual experience of recent combat.

Even now, luminaries such as Admiral Sandy Winnefeld, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, are publicly telling the US Army that the era of long land wars is over.<sup>31</sup> We should all question that: as General David Petraeus argued recently, the era of counterinsurgency is not over, simply because the era of insurgency is not over.<sup>32</sup> Yet more extreme is the position of Byers and Webb, who recommend that the Canadian Army forget anything *but* those long, grinding campaigns, insisting that anything else is ‘Cold War’ thinking, and nostalgia for the “symmetrical wars of the last century.”<sup>33</sup> We can hope that Canadian troops might never again face first-class opponents, but simplistic planning assumptions are at best naive and at worst dangerous.

It is therefore important to realize that the advice the army chief provides to the defence minister is not necessarily the same advice that the defence minister would provide to the prime minister. All advice from the senior command is important, but not all of it can be acted upon for very good budgetary or political reasons. In other words, it is not restrictive. In the interests of civilian control, it must not be. Otherwise, Canada might as well adopt the Russian approach, and simply make the chief of the defence staff the minister as well.

### **Clarity: the importance of programmatic stability**

Ottawa, of course, is hardly Moscow, as war is truly too important to be left to the generals.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps it is also too important to be left to officials. Between themselves, National Defence and Public Works have managed to launch a competition, take bids, cancel that competition, restart it, take more bids, and finally select a contractor. But this pursuit of an in-stock solution to a well-understood problem took four years. Whatever the assertions we have read about the risk of the program henceforth, the entire undertaking should not be difficult. The Army simply got the specifications wrong, and asked for an off-the-shelf solution to a developmental request. This is easy enough to do when stretching the art of the possible. Americans in the Pentagon do that all the time, if with predictable financial results. But it is not workable on modest Canadian budgets, and even a little surprising given the Army’s reputation for frugality and professionalism.

Ottawa should also not be New Delhi. While Canada should be worthy of a better reputation than India for the stability and transparency of its defence program, the

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<sup>31</sup> Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., “VCJCS Winnefeld Tells Army: Forget Long Land Wars,” *Breaking Defense*, 13 September 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Acceptance speech for the Chesney Medal, at the Royal United Services Institution, 10 June 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *Stuck in a Rut*, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> The line was famously that of French Premier Georges Clemenceau during the First World War.

indicators have been unimpressive for years. The ‘decade of darkness’ was followed by some prompt purchasing, but the “positive arbitrariness” of the Harper Government’s wartime expediencies has not fixed the impression that the bureaucratic processes behind Canadian defence procurement are far from smooth.<sup>35</sup> While sole-source contracts can be a reasonable way of purchasing the only kit that will meet a requirement, DND has developed a bad reputation internationally for pursuing sole-source deals under the guise of competition by rigging the requirements in advance.<sup>36</sup>

The on-again, off-again nature of programs has caused problems as well. After the cancellation of the first competition, two of the prequalified bidders—ARTEC and Rheinmetall Landsysteme—dropped out. A second cancellation would resonate negatively with suppliers globally, and DND’s ability to make credible commitments to potential future contractors could decline dramatically. Frankly, retreat now could cement the longstanding status quo, for the armoured vehicle market in Canada has largely been free of competition since the adoption of the LAV in the late 1990s. Over the past fifteen years, General Dynamics Land Systems has received a series of sole-source contracts for vehicles and vehicle upgrades. In this respect, a win by Nexter or BAE Systems Hägglunds, or even the introduction of a new vehicle by GDLS, would result in the transfer of new technologies into Canada, adding to the knowledge base of local industry. And the adoption of another vehicle by any contractor would signal that Canada remains open for business.

Thus, this issue is bigger than just the CCV, or even the Army. It is bigger than a mere matter of political inconvenience. Ultimately, it is an issue of the commercial reliability of the Department of National Defence, and its commitment to the Canadian Army, whose troops deserve the world’s best equipment, whatever its origin.

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas Bland, "Foreward," p. xviii, in Alan Williams, *Reinventing Canadian Defence Procurement: A View from the Inside*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006

<sup>36</sup> Williams is a well-known former assistant deputy minister for materiel at DND. For quite recent insight into the problems this unreliability is causing, see David Pugliese, “[How Real is the Canadian Government’s Search for a New Maritime Helicopter?](#)” *Ottawa Citizen*, 16 October 2013.