

A Mixed Legacy:
General Hillier and Canadian Defence, 2005-2008

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General Rick Hillier was a remarkable Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS). During his tenure from January 2005 to June 2008, Hillier held a degree of influence rarely wielded by Canada's highest ranking general, and he sought to use this influence to rebuild and reshape the Canadian Forces (CF). As part of this effort, he assumed a prominent role in the formulation of Canadian defence policy. Hillier was also a widely recognized public figure, achieving near celebrity status in a country that is usually uninterested in defence and military matters. For Canadians accustomed to 'silent soldiers and sailors', Hillier's three years as CDS were, if nothing else, notable for the degree of attention garnered by Canadian military's top officer.

Hillier's time as CDS was equally noteworthy for the adulation he received from the defence community, media outlets, and several pundits.¹ Though a few commentators expressed misgivings about his worldview and frank language, critical assessments of Hillier were in the minority.² There was an especially strong consensus surrounding Hillier's impact on the CF and Canadian defence capabilities. Hillier was widely praised for rehabilitating the military and honing Canada's defence posture. Under his direction, it is commonly held, both the CF and Canadian defence issues began an overdue ascent from neglect to respect. According to this prevailing account, Hillier's presence at the head of the Canadian military represented a high point for the CF and Canadian defence policy and politics. Indeed, when contemplating his inevitable departure as CDS, Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang lamented that there were "Too few Hilliers" to fill the void he would leave.³

This decidedly positive interpretation of Hillier's legacy merits a re-examination. While there is little doubt that Hillier was instrumental in securing needed funds for the defence department and increasing public esteem of the CF, the outcome of his program innovations were more ambiguous. Of note, Hillier's efforts to 'transform' the CF command and force structure produced questionable results. Hillier's term as CDS, moreover, was marred by a significant failure. When he was given an opportunity to improve the military's position in Canada's traditionally imbalanced civil-military relationship, Hillier repeatedly overstepped his bounds, compelling the civilian authority to reduce the military's input into defence policy. While

¹ Examples of such adulation included Lewis Mackenzie, "Rick Hillier's right, so back off," *Globe and Mail*, 1 August 2005; Paul Manson, "He's our man," *Globe and Mail*, 25 August 2006; Marcus Gee, "Rick Hillier gave the military its voice – don't shut him up," *Globe and Mail*, 2 November 2007; J.L. Granatstein, "The Defender of Truth," *Ottawa Citizen*, 16 April 2008.

² Examples of these rarer critical views included Lawrence Martin, "The perilous charms of Rick Hillier," *Globe and Mail*, 10 August 2006; Richard French, "Not so fast, General, leave policy to politicians," *Globe and Mail*, 20 November 2007; and Linda McQuaid, *Holding the Bully's Coat: Canada and the U.S. Empire* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007), 70-76.

³ Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, "Too Few Hilliers," *The Walrus Magazine*, 22 November 2008.

identifying Hillier's failure and ambiguous achievements does not detract from his accomplishments, it suggests, at the very least, that his legacy is mixed.

The aim of this article is to reassess General Hillier's legacy as Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff. In so doing, the article seeks to spark a wider academic debate about the impact of this noteworthy military leader on Canada's defence policy and politics. The article begins with an analysis of Hillier's successes. Next, the article discusses the former CDS's ambiguous policy achievements. Lastly, the article examines Hillier's failure in the realm of civil-military relations.

Successes: Political Effectiveness and Public Support

When evaluating General Hillier's legacy, two successes stand out. First, Hillier played an important role in securing multi-year budget increases for the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Forces (CF). From the perspective of the military as a bureaucratic organization, an ability to protect existing budgets and secure budget increases is the mark of a strong, politically effective leader. By this measure, Hillier's political effectiveness counts as one of his successes. Secondly, Hillier grew the public's support, trust, and admiration of the military. Taking the military's point of view, this boost in public esteem is the sign of a successful leader. By raising Canadians' esteem of the military, moreover, Hillier lifted the CF's morale, bringing the force out of the difficult years that military personnel had endured since the end of the Cold War.

In their seminal work on military effectiveness, Arthur R. Millet, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman noted that military effectiveness must be assessed at several levels. In addition to the tactical, operational, and strategic levels that are typically employed to gauge military effectiveness, these authors argued that militaries must strive to be politically effective. Millet, Murray, and Watman define political effectiveness as follows:

For a military organization to act strategically, operationally, or tactically, it must consistently secure the resources required to maintain, expand, and reconstitute itself. Almost always, this requires the military to obtain the cooperation of the national political elite. Hence, the effort to obtain resources for military activity and the proficiency in acquiring those resources constitute political effectiveness.⁴

Using this definition, it can be said that a politically effective defence or military leader is able to acquire funds that a military organization estimates it requires to fulfill its missions. This type of effectiveness is particularly important in a Canadian context. Given that Canada faces few direct

⁴ Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," in Allan R. Millet and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness, Volume I: The First World War* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 4.

threats, the necessity of spending public funds on the military is not self-evident to Canadian politicians or the general public. Moreover, in Canada's system of cabinet government, line department ministers regularly compete for a larger share of the federal budget, and central agencies routinely challenge the budgetary requests of these departments. Given the absence of an evident need for a robust defence posture and Cabinet's contentious funding allocation process, defence and military leaders who petition for higher expenditures face formidable obstacles. As a result, Canadian defence and military leaders must be especially politically effective to win approval for defence spending increases. An examination of Hillier's record as CDS shows a notable degree of political effectiveness in being able to convince Cabinet and the central agencies to increase Canadian defence spending.

Soon after he became Prime Minister in December 2003, Paul Martin hinted that defence expenditures would increase during his ministry. Martin, however, did not rush to fulfil this expectation. Months passed without any announcement that defence expenditures would rise. Following the June 2004 federal election that re-elected the Martin Liberals as a minority government, the Prime Minister named a new Minister of National Defence, Bill Graham, who was determined to see an increase in the defence budget. Yet Graham knew that DND would have to produce an innovative defence policy to get a spending increase past the central agencies and through Cabinet; more of the same from DND would not suffice. Those civilian officials responsible for formulating Canadian defence policy, however, were hesitant to produce a bold defence policy statement until Cabinet indicated how much new money DND would receive. In their mind, it was illogical to write a new defence policy without first knowing the future size of the defence budget.

Graham was dissatisfied with this answer. He was certain that a new policy was needed to sell Cabinet on a defence budget increase. Believing that he had to circumvent his civilian officials to get the policy he needed, Graham turned to Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier, then the Chief of the Land Staff. Hillier was known to hold controversial, but imaginative, ideas about how to change the CF and Canadian defence policy. When he presented his vision to Graham, the Minister believed he had found the innovative policy he was seeking. Prime Minister Martin was equally impressed with Hillier's plans. Martin named Hillier as CDS shortly after meeting him, and the General was charged with directing the languishing defence policy review.⁵ As Graham had hoped, under Hillier's guidance the defence department quickly produced a novel defence policy statement. With this novel policy statement in hand, and Hillier by his side, Graham was then able to convince Cabinet and the central agencies to approve a defence spending increase of nearly \$13 billion over five years. Though the Minister is owed as much credit as the CDS for securing this infusion of new funds, it was Hillier who armed Graham with the confidence and

⁵ An account of why Hillier was chosen as CDS is provided in Janis Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War* (Toronto: Viking, 2007), Chapter 8.

ideas that concretized the Martin government's vacillating intention to invest more in the military.

Hillier's political effectiveness served the CF's budgetary interests well throughout the remainder of the Martin government. As his popularity grew among Canadians, Hillier was able to shield the promised defence spending increases from any significant criticism or scepticism. In his speeches and public statements, the CDS implied that the planned defence spending increases were necessary to provide the CF with essential equipment and resources the military needed to fulfil its missions. Past CDSs had made similar points but they largely fell on deaf, or perhaps indifferent, ears. Hillier's message, on the other hand, resonated with political elites. When Canadians returned to the polls in January 2006, all the major federal political parties, including the social democratic New Democratic Party and Bloc Québécois, explicitly or tacitly endorsed the \$13 billion increase in defence spending. Arguably, Hillier had made it political risky to question the planned boost in defence expenditures.

A second success that marked Hillier's tenure as CDS was the rise of public support and esteem for the CF. The years that followed the end of Cold War were difficult for the Canadian military. When the ideological confrontation that had characterized international politics since Second World War came to an end, first the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney, then the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, opted to cut the defence budget. These budgetary contractions pushed many members of the military to leave the force. Those who stayed on grew disillusioned as they saw their institution atrophy while overseas deployments expanded. Politicians, it appeared, had no qualms about asking the CF to do more with less.

In 1993, two members of the Canadian Airborne Regiment on mission in Somalia murdered a local youth who infiltrated their camp. When news of the incident surfaced, public perceptions of the CF soured; the affair tarnished the public reputation of the entire military. An inquiry setup by the Chrétien government in 1994 further sullied the CF's reputation, dragging military morale ever lower. As the decade went on, the military experienced additional slights. Though the CF was deployed on intensive and dangerous peace enforcement operations in the Balkans, the Chrétien government seemed intent on telling Canadians that their military was conducting 'peacekeeping' operations, a term that conjured images of benign interventions involving little, if any, violence. This rhetoric, furthermore, fuelled the notion that the CF was essentially a peacekeeping force, a military that eschewed combat and killing. This view, in turn, left the military with the impression that Canadians misunderstood the nature of their profession, the hardships they faced, and the sacrifices they made. Simply put, many members of the CF sensed that they were misunderstood and underappreciated.⁶ General Hillier captured the military's mood well when he stated that the 1990s were a 'decade of darkness' for the CF.

⁶ The impact of the Chrétien era on CF morale is summarized in Douglas Bland, "Hillier and the New Generation of Generals: The CDS, the Policy and the Troops," *Policy Options* (March 2008).

Reversing the effects of the ‘dark decade’ was a high priority for Hillier. He was determined to better inform Canadians about their military and its roles, as well as build public support for members of the CF and the military as an institution. Attaining these goals was necessary to effectively rebuild military morale. Shortly after he was named CDS, Hillier famously stated that the Canadian military was in Afghanistan to combat terrorist ‘scumbags’. Determined to belie the CF’s popular image as a peacekeeping military, Hillier also stressed that ‘we are the Canadian Forces and our job is to kill people’. To build support for the CF among Canadians, Hillier initiated a country-wide public affairs campaign labelled Operation Connection.⁷ The campaign was comprised of several efforts, including Red Shirt Days, Support our Troops rallies, Canadian Forces days at sporting events, and personal appearances by Hillier on the popular *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcast. The CF, previously a marginal presence in the lives of most Canadians, became a focal point of national attention.

Operation Connection produced the effect sought by Hillier. Opinion polls showed that Canadians increasingly held the CF in high esteem.⁸ Two years after the public awareness campaign began, a Strategic Counsel poll showed that the military was seen as Canada’s most trusted and admired public institution.⁹ Ribbons declaring support for the troops proliferated, adorning private and government vehicles alike. In 2007, the Ontario government renamed a stretch of Highway 401 running from Trenton to Toronto the ‘Highway of Heroes’. Though the CF’s mission and casualties in Afghanistan helped fuel this outpouring of support, Operation Connection amplified the public’s growing interest and admiration in the CF. By channelling Canadians’ respect of the military around concrete symbols and carefully crafted media events, Hillier and his public affairs team ensured that personal sentiments of care and concern about the CF were mobilized into a national movement expressing solidarity with the military.

Hillier’s efforts to convince Canadians that the CF were first and foremost war-fighters faced greater resistance. A poll commissioned by DND in 2008 indicated that a majority of the public still saw peacekeeping as their military’s primary international role.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Hillier’s blunt talk removed any lingering hesitancy about highlighting the CF’s combat focus. In the past, for instance, CF recruitment ads had downplayed the military’s combat role. Starting under

⁷ For an overview of this public affairs campaign, its objectives, and initial successes, see Brian Stewart, “Selling the Forces,” *The National*, CBC, 18 September 2007, <http://www.cbc.ca/national/>.

⁸ Paul Koring, “Canadians split on mission, but strongly support troops,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 February 2007. This positive view of the CF was found in Quebec as well, where support for the Afghan mission was lowest. See Violaine Ballivy, “Pour les soldats, contre leur mission,” *La Presse*, 9 February 2009.

⁹ “Trusted Canadian Institutions, Afghanistan, and Foreign Ownership,” The Strategic Council, 18 May 2007.

¹⁰ “Canadians still view troops as peacekeepers: DND poll,” *Canadian Press*, 5 September 2008.

Hillier, recruitment advertisements asked Canadians to ‘Fight with the Canadian Forces’. Of course, the fact that the CF began fighting a counterinsurgency war in southern Afghanistan in 2005 made the military’s combat role evident and incontestable. But Hillier worked to ensure that the military’s combat mission was recognized as a normal rather than exceptional. For a country that had recently erected a peacekeeping monument and honoured the lightly-armed peacekeeper on its ten dollar bill, the shift in attitude was palpable. And while he may not have turned public opinion regarding the military’s war-fighting essence, Hillier’s message appeared to have had a positive impact on CF morale. Christie Blatchford, a journalist who spent several weeks with the CF in Kandahar, noted that for many members of the military, Hillier “made it respectable to be a soldier again.”¹¹ Though based on anecdotal evidence, Blatchford’s observation suggested that, for a number of soldiers and sailors at least, Hillier was instrumental in taking the CF out of the ‘decade of darkness’.

All told, Hillier’s political effectiveness, marshalling of public support for the CF, and lifting of military morale are conspicuous achievements of his legacy as CDS. While Bill Graham played a key role in securing additional funds for the military and the deployment to Kandahar was significant factor behind the public support of the CF and the recognition of the military’s war-fighting role, Hillier’s contribution to these developments was vital. From an organizational perspective, his involvement in advancing the CF’s interests can therefore be counted among his successes.

Ambiguous: CF Transformation

When he was named CDS, Hillier began implementing a plan to ‘transform’ the Canadian Forces. Meant to make the CF a more relevant, operationally-oriented force, these transformational initiatives represented the intellectual mark that Hillier left on the Canadian military. In judging his legacy, the value of these transformational policies must be assessed. An examination of these policies reveals that, to date, they have produced few concrete benefits or tangible results. While the true value of these policies may eventually emerge, the current state of affairs suggests that Hillier’s record on the transformation of the CF remains ambiguous.

Hillier’s transformational agenda was presented in the 2005 *Defence Policy Statement (DPS)*, which set out an initial round of transformation initiatives that aimed to restructure CF units and expand the military’s expeditionary capabilities. Transformation sought to create units capable of performing integrated operations --that is, operations bringing together and linking the CF’s land, maritime, air, and special forces. Commonly called ‘joint’ operations, this aspect of Hillier’s transformational agenda promised to make the CF a more efficient, effective, relevant, and

¹¹ Christie Blatchford, “How General Hillier has made it respectable to be a soldier again,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 November 2007.

responsive armed force.¹² These traits were deemed particularly important considering the complexity of the international security environment and Canada's still relatively constrained defence budget.

The DPS declared that three joint units would be formed: a Special Operations Group (SOG); a Standing Contingency Task Force (SCTF); and a Mission Specific Task Force (MSTF). The latter two merit special attention. These units were meant to act as the backbone of a transformed CF. The SCTF was conceived to respond to international crises. It would be deployable within ten days and sustainable until long-term units arrived, giving the Canadian government a vital means of acting on unanticipated incidents across the globe. For its part, the MSTF was conceived to take on long-term missions, such as protracted peace enforcement, counterinsurgency, or war-fighting operations. To permit the SCTF and MSTF to fulfil their roles, the DPS also announced plans to procure two key platforms: three elaborate, multi-purpose support ships and a fleet of wheeled, direct fire Mobile Gun Systems (MGS) to replace the CF's aging main battle tanks. Whereas the MGS would make the land forces lighter and more flexible, the multi-purpose support ships would allow the SCTF and MSTF to conduct littoral operations, and maintain sea-based headquarters and sea-borne air assets, such as medium-lift helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles. Together, the SCTF, MSTF, MGS, and multi-purpose support ships formed the core of Hillier's planned transformation of the CF's force structure.

Neither the SCTF, MSTF, MGS, or multi-purpose support ships materialized while Hillier was CDS. Following more than a year of conceptual planning, the idea of an SCTF and MSTF disintegrated. Hillier's arguments in favour of these joint units were insufficient to bring them to fruition. The MGS suffered a similar demise. In 2006, the Chief of the Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, and Gordon O'Connor, Minister of National Defence under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, decided that the Canadian army should acquire new main battle tanks to replace its existing Leopard C1s. Here again, Hillier's transformational vision failed to sway stakeholders. Plans to acquire the three multi-purpose support ships fared only slightly better. As the support ships made their way through the initial stages of the procurement process, their envisioned capacities were gradually paired down. By the time firms were invited to submit proposals to build them, the statement of requirements for the ships outlined far fewer capabilities than the DPS had suggested. Notwithstanding this capability reduction, however, no defence contractor was willing to build the ships for the price the government was ready to pay. DND had grossly underestimated how much these ships would cost. As a result, the support ship procurement process was put on hold and Hillier retired as CDS before a contract to build the ships was signed. At the time of this writing, the future of the support ships remains in doubt.

¹² Canada, Department of National Defence, *Defence Policy Statement* (Ottawa: 2005), 12.

Three factors could account for the collapse of Hillier's transformation of the CF force structure. First, Hillier may have misunderstood the resistance his vision would encounter, particularly from the environmental services (Army, Navy, and Air Force). Second, the Harper Conservatives may have been disinclined to back a transformational agenda that had been enunciated in their Liberal predecessors' defence policy statement, leaving Hillier's ideas without the political backing they needed to break DND's inertial tendencies. Thirdly, the force structure Hillier devised may not have been well thought out, or indeed realistic or wise, in the first place. Either way, the fact remains that Hillier's restructuring of the CF was stillborn, a reality that calls the success of his transformational agenda into question.

Hillier's second set of transformational policies aimed to reorganize the CF command structure. As with his proposed force structure changes, the transformation of the military's commands was meant to make the CF a more joint and operationally-focused armed force. Hillier proposed to transfer responsibility for operations from the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (DCDS) to four new commands. By 1 February 2006, the office of DCDS was gone and all four of these new commands had been stood-up. Canada Command was given responsibility for all CF operations in Canada and North America. Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command (CEFCOM) was given responsibility for all operations outside of North America, with the exception of special forces operations. That particular responsibility was given to the third new command, Canadian Special Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). The fourth command, Canadian Operational Support Command (CANOSCOM), was charged with commanding all combat service and combat service support operations. With the standing-up of these commands, it appeared that Hillier had fulfilled one of his significant transformational objectives.

Unfortunately, problems associated with the transformational commands surfaced soon after they were created. In December 2006, the Chief of Review Services (CRS), the defence department's internal auditing body, observed that the commands had produced redundancies in some areas and shortfalls in others. The CRS noted that DND's civilian executives and the CF's senior military leaders were "feeling stretched too thin due to the transfer of resources [to the new commands], as fewer remain to produce the same results." In addition, these civilian executives and senior officers "acknowledge[d] potential duplication of services/efforts in delivering support to the new Command structure." What was more, the CRS reported that "[p]ersonnel resource allocation is having a major impact on the ability of [civilian executives and military leaders] to provide support to the new CF Command structure," and that they were "now required to serve four entities, rather than one."¹³ This negative assessment of the new commands was echoed in 2008 by Senator Colin Kenny, Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence. Kenny noted that each of the commands "built up its own sizable bureaucracy, draining the Forces of senior personnel needed for training and

¹³ "Evaluation of Functional Responsibilities in Support of CF Transformation," Department of National Defence, Chief of Review Services, 2006, iii-iv.

commanding troops,” and that the commands should be “blown up” once the CF’s mission in Afghanistan ends.¹⁴

Inefficiencies, redundancies, and overextensions linked with Hillier’s transformational commands may have been justified if Canada Command, CEFCOM, CANOSCOM, and CANSOFCOM had markedly improved the environmental services’ ability and willingness to conduct joint operations. Regrettably, there has been little evidence that the commands accomplished this feat. The absence of such evidence arguably represents a further indictment of the decision to stand them up. Writing in March 2007, one year after the commands were stood-up, the CRS warned that:

Joint operational doctrine, which in turn represents the vital bridge between military-strategic and Environmental operational/tactical doctrine, is severely deficient and in need of attention...the individual Environments have been left to unilaterally develop doctrine for a number of new capabilities, thereby potentially putting jointness and interoperability at risk.¹⁵

In fairness to Hillier, it may be too early to judge the value of his transformational commands. As the former CDS’s webpage argued, “The transformation process is evolutionary and has no definable end state...Transformation is an iterative and continuous process, and its success is easy to see only in hindsight.”¹⁶ Perhaps DND and the CF will address the inefficiencies, redundancies, and overextensions the transformational commands have engendered. It is also possible that the new commands will eventually compel the environmental services to strengthen their ability to conduct joint operations. In the meantime, when coupled with the collapse of his force structure changes, the critiques of his new commands suggest that CF transformation remains an ambiguous legacy of Hillier’s tenure as CDS.

Failure: Civil-Military Relations

During Hillier’s first year as CDS, it appeared that his appointment had strengthened the military’s input into defence policy. His influence over the policymaking process balanced a civil-military relationship that, according to observers, had been unduly tipped in the civilians’ favour. In his last two years as CDS, however, Hillier continually clashed with his civilian masters, compelling the Harper government to reduce the military’s power and influence in the civil-military relationship. Hillier, in effect, squandered the opportunity he had been given to

¹⁴ Colin Kenny, “Our military badly needs repair,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 June 2008.

¹⁵ “Evaluation of the Maintenance and Currency of CF Doctrine,” Department of National Defence, Chief of Review Services, March 2007, 27.

¹⁶ “CF Transformation – From Vision to Mission,” Canadian Forces, Chief of the Defence Staff.

secure a stronger role for future military leaders in defence policymaking.¹⁷ When analyzing Hillier's legacy, this outcome counts as a failure.

From the mid-1960s to the turn of the twenty-first century, successive Canadian governments kept a tight control over the military. Suspicious of what they saw as senior officers' tendency to undermine defence policies that did not serve the parochial interests of the CF, Canadian politicians and their senior bureaucrats maintained a system of civilian control that circumscribed the military's ability to shape defence policy. While this system of strict control preserved civilians' ultimate 'right to be wrong' about all matters of national defence,¹⁸ critics noted that the quality of Canada's defences as a result. In the aftermath of the Cold War, in particular, critics argued that the fragile state of the armed forces called for a greater degree of deference to the military's professional expertise.¹⁹ Until the formation of Paul Martin's second government, however, these calls went unheeded.

Bill Graham, Minister of National Defence in the second Martin ministry, accepted the idea that the CF leadership merited more influence over defence policy. Greater respect of military expertise, he believed, was needed to ensure that the CF was properly restructured and deployed to increase Canada's international profile, battle extremists, and address the problem of failed and fragile states. As noted above, Graham was also compelled to elevate the military's role in defence policymaking in light of his dissatisfaction with the creativity of DND's civilian officials. The Minister's views meant that when Hillier was named CDS in early 2005, he was in a unique position to reshape Canadian civil-military relations. Graham not only wanted the new CDS to help formulate a novel set of defence policies, the Minister was willing to grant Hillier a degree of control over the policymaking process that a senior military officer had not possessed since the late 1960s. Hillier gladly accepted the offer. As with many officers of his generation, Hillier had been frustrated by the tendency of civilian politicians and bureaucrats to discount military advice and expertise.²⁰ He was determined to end the senior CF leadership's status as 'marginal men'.²¹

¹⁷ The idea that liberal democratic civil-military relations essentially revolves around the question of the military's ability to influence policy is drawn from S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975), 77.

¹⁸ The notion that civilians always retain the 'right to be wrong' about defence matters is taken from Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁹ Douglas L. Bland, "Finding National Defence Policy in 2004," *Canadian Military Journal* 4 (Winter 2003-2004): 7-8.

²⁰ Bland, "Hillier and the New Generation of Generals," 58.

²¹ Douglas Bland, *The Administration of Defence Policy in Canada, 1947 to 1985* (Kingston: Roland P. Frye & Co., 1987), Chapter 6.

In the past, the Minister's decision to empower the CDS would likely have been opposed by the civilian Deputy Minister (DM) of National Defence. DMs were typically protective of the civilian defence officials' role as the principal defence policy advisors to the Minister. However, Graham's DM, Ward Elcock, shared the Minister's belief that the military should play a larger role in defence policymaking. Indeed, rather than guarding the longstanding system of strict civilian control, Elcock felt that his function was to assist with the rebalancing of the civil-military relationship and to facilitate Hillier's efforts to develop and enact his transformational policies. With Graham's backing and Elcock's support, Hillier was blessed with an ideal environment to strengthen the CF's power and influence.

Hillier wasted no time in asserting the authority he had been granted. In January 2005, he and a team of select senior officers and civilian officials took over the direction of the defence department's stalled policy review. Within a few months the review was complete, and as noted, the department's official policy document, the *Defence Policy Statement* (DPS), contained Hillier's transformational initiatives and reflected his understanding of the international security environment. As sought by Martin and Graham, the military's input into the policymaking process was enhanced.

Once the review was over, Hillier undertook further efforts to strengthen the military's influence. Going beyond the provision of professional military advice, Hillier began offering foreign policy advice. Despite the Prime Minister's initial hesitation, Hillier was able to convince Martin to deploy the CF to Kandahar, Afghanistan, arguing that the mission would build Canada's international reputation. No CDS had ever played such a prominent role in promoting an international deployment. Breaking with the past practice of keeping senior officers relatively silent, furthermore, Hillier chose to act as the primary spokesperson for the Kandahar mission and its objectives. Coupled with Hillier's campaign to grow the public's support and understanding of the military, these efforts built military leaders' strength within National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) and the CF's stature as a political force in Ottawa generally.²²

Hillier's rebalancing of the civil-military relationship was accepted while the Martin Liberals formed the government. This was unsurprising given that Martin and Graham had initiated and encouraged this alteration of the civil-military dynamic.²³ When the Conservative party of Stephen Harper was elected in February 2006, however, Hillier was confronted with a less accommodating government. Following the election, Gordon O'Connor, the newly named

²² For an alternative assessment of the military's influence at this time, see Danford W. Middlemiss and Denis Stairs, "Is the Defence Establishment Driving Canada's Foreign Policy?" in Jean Daudelin and Daniel Schwanen, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2007: What Room for Manoeuvre?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 66-90.

²³ For a detailed description of the 'civil-military dynamic', see Thomas J. Ring, "Civil-Military Relations in Canada: A 'Cluster Theory' Explanation," (M.A. thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 2009).

Minister of National Defence, began tabling defence proposals that differed from those outlined in the DPS. While the new Minister accepted aspects of the DPS, O'Connor understandably wanted to pursue initiatives that the Conservatives could uphold as their own. Unfortunately, abandoning elements of the DPS implied abandoning aspects of Hillier's vision. The CDS thus had a critical decision to make at this juncture. On the one hand, Hillier could have accepted O'Connor's right to set defence policy, while using his considerable influence to stress the value of his vision to the Minister. On the other hand, Hillier could have resisted the Minister's authority and worked to undermine O'Connor's policies. In the end, the CDS chose the latter. Rather than using his influence to assist with the development of policies that both accorded with his Minister's wishes and protected the CF's interests, as he had under the Martin government, Hillier opted to use his influence to frustrate O'Connor's attempt to reformulate certain aspects of Canada's defence posture.

Over the next year and a half, the Minister and CDS fought over a number of issues, including procurement priorities and homeland defence. Of note, Hillier and O'Connor clashed over the Conservatives' promise to create new homeland defence units and to purchase four C-17 strategic lift aircraft. Hillier believed the new homeland defence units would drain the CF's expeditionary capabilities and he felt that the acquisition of tactical lift aircraft should take priority over the procurement of the C-17s. On a few occasions, these disagreements spilled into the public arena, much to the news media's glee and the Conservative's unease. By the summer of 2007, the clash between the Minister and the CDS was prompting commentators to wonder whether the principles of civilian control had been eroded.²⁴ Hillier had made the situation untenable. However, due to the CDS's popularity with the Forces and the public, terminating his tenure as CDS would have been politically costly for the Harper government. Finally, in August 2007, after repeated mishandlings of the controversial Afghan detainee file, O'Connor was moved out of the defence portfolio and named Minister of National Revenue.

While Hillier may have outlasted his rival, the Harper government was in no mood to suffer another standoff between the CDS and the new Minister of National Defence, Peter McKay. In thinking that the logic of his vision allowed him to resist the Minister's ultimate 'right to be wrong', Hillier reaffirmed a longstanding civilian suspicion that the CF becomes overambitious and less accepting of civilian prerogatives when military leaders are granted too much influence over defence policy. Accordingly, in the fall of 2007, the Harper government took steps to rein in the higher degree of influence Hillier and senior military leaders had enjoyed since 2005.

Likely due to Hillier's popularity with the public and the Forces, the Harper government was careful to not openly chastise the CDS. Instead, the Conservatives opted to quietly reduce Hillier's influence within NDHQ. In October 2007, Robert Fonberg was appointed Deputy Minister of National Defence, replacing Ward Elcock. The two men held markedly contrasting

²⁴ Eugene Lang, "Commander in chief?," *Globe and Mail*, 3 August 2007.

views of the office's functions. Unlike Elcock, Fonberg did not believe that the DM's role was to help the CDS assert his influence or strengthen the military's input into the policymaking process. Rather, Fonberg held a more traditional view of the DM's functions: he believed that he was appointed to run an efficient and cost-effective department, to check and monitor military excess when required, and to serve the interests of his Minister and the Prime Minister above those of the CF. To fulfil these functions, Fonberg and his bureaucratic superior, Kevin Lynch, the Clerk of the Privy Council, understood that he needed to reassert the DM's customary powers. Following Fonberg's appointment, the DM and the civilian Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy) reaffirmed their mandated roles as the government's principal defence policy advisors, leaving the CDS as Cabinet's principal military advisor alone. Notably, the CDS and senior military leaders were asked to play only a minor role in preparing the final draft of the Conservative's *Canada First Defence Strategy*. Fonberg, furthermore, heavily scrutinized the military's expenditures, including those the CF leaders argued were operationally required. By the end of 2007, the additional degree of influence the CDS and other military leaders had wielded since 2005 had been ground back down. Within the halls of NDHQ, a stricter system of civilian control was returning.²⁵ Evidence of this power shift was provided by Hillier himself. During his farewell speech, the outgoing CDS bitterly noted that senior bureaucrats had acted like 'field marshal wannabes'.

A diminishment of Hillier's importance as an agenda-setter may have also contributed to his declining influence within the government. In late 2007 the Harper government appointed an independent commission to recommend a future course of action for Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. Chaired by former Liberal minister John Manley, the independent commission's report advised that Canada accept an indeterminate, long-term commitment to Afghanistan, provided Canadian forces in Kandahar province were reinforced with at least one thousand allied troops and that new equipment was acquired to better protect CF personnel. The report's conclusions fit well with Hillier's view on the Afghan mission. He had repeatedly stressed that arbitrary withdrawal dates undermined the mission and that Canada should be prepared to stay in Afghanistan for a decade or more. Hillier continued to air these views after the Manley report was released in early 2008, even going so far as to imply that Members of Parliament were endangering the lives of Canadian soldiers by setting an arbitrary withdrawal date.²⁶ By this point, however, Hillier's pronouncements on Afghanistan no longer carried the weight they held in the first years of the CF's deployment to Kandahar. Growing casualty lists and a sense that the mission was misguided led an increasing number of Canadians to doubt the value of the Kandahar deployment. Hence, while international pressure compelled decisionmakers to extend the CF's mission, MPs from across the ideological spectrum recognized that declaring an end

²⁵ The information presented here was gathered from several confidential interviews.

²⁶ Rick Hillier, "Address to the Conference of Defence Associations' 71st Annual General Meeting," 2008 Annual General Meeting of the Conference of Defence Associations, Ottawa, 21 February 2008.

date for the mission would be politically advantageous. Accordingly, against Hillier's urgings and the recommendations of the Manley report, the Conservative government and Liberal opposition agreed that the CF's mission in Kandahar would end in 2011. Hillier was free to express his opinions, but political expediency trumped his expertise.

When Hillier retired as CDS on 1 July 2008, Canadian civil-military relations completed their return to the traditional form of strict civilian control that he had sought to rebalance. Hillier's successor, General Walt Natynczyk, abandoned Hillier's outspoken style, opting to accept the longstanding Canadian norm of 'silent soldiers and sailors'. Within NDHQ, Robert Fonberg further cemented the civilians' predominance in the formulation of defence policy. He also took steps to remind his military counterparts that he and his senior civilian officials were prepared to keep the military in line if the CF leadership sought to frustrate the implementation of government policy. In the fall of 2008, for example, Fonberg appointed Jill Sinclair as Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy). Sinclair had learned to grapple with the military on policy issues during her tenure as the Director of the Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Her appointment signalled that the CF would contend with an ADM (Policy) who was used to viewing military advice with a critical eye. At the political level, meanwhile, the Harper Conservatives made it clear that the defence minister and Prime Minister were the principal spokesmen of the government's defence policy.

Each of these developments indicated that Hillier failed to preserve or protect the influence and power in the civil-military relationship he had been granted by the Martin government. Indeed, his battles with the Harper government directly contributed to the revival of a strict system of civilian control. This outcome was not preordained. Had he been less confrontational in his dealings with Gordon O'Connor, had he not confirmed civilian suspicions about the consequences of giving the military more influence and power, Hillier might have left future CF leaders with a greater degree of strength and clout in the civil-military relationship. Instead, he left the military in the same position he found it in when he was appointed CDS. Given the opportunity he had to reshape Canadian civil-military relations for the long-term, this outcome counts as a failure.

Conclusion

General Rick Hillier shook the pillars of Canada's defence politics during his three and a half years as CDS. Appointed at an opportune moment when the Martin Liberals were seeking to revitalize the Canadian military and Canada's defence policies, Hillier leveraged this favourable environment to help secure a defence budget increase, lift the military's morale, and build public support for the CF. Though these goals could not have been achieved without the support of the Martin government, Hillier, a politically effective military leader, was nonetheless instrumental attaining these objectives. When analyzing Hillier's time as CDS, his vital role in securing more funds for the military and taking the CF out of the 'dark decade' must count as successes.

Hillier skills as a military planner were less impressive. While he managed to reorganize the CF's command structure, the value of his new 'transformational' commands has yet to be shown. As well, critics have noted that the new commands failed to improve CF 'jointness'. Instead, they merely created wasteful redundancies and other inefficiencies. Meanwhile, Hillier's efforts to transform the CF force structure floundered. His force structure initiatives languished at the conceptual stage; for all their promise, the SCTF and MSTF never emerged. Whatever the actual value of his ideas, CF transformation thus stands as one of Hillier's ambiguous achievements.

Under the Martin Liberals, Hillier enjoyed a considerable degree of influence over Canadian defence policy. In fact, during his first year as CDS, Hillier was granted a unique opportunity to lift the military's standing in the Canadian civil-military relationship. When the Harper Conservatives were elected, however, Hillier faced a political leadership that was determined to repackage Canadian defence policy. When it became clear that the Conservatives' and Hillier's defence priorities differed, the CDS was left with a difficult choice: he could either accept the new government's right to set their own defence priorities while trying to indirectly influence their choices, or he could obstruct the Conservatives' efforts to pursue alternative defence options. Hillier chose the latter. In so doing, Hillier confirmed a longstanding suspicion that the military leaders will become overzealous and less deferential to civilians when the CF has too much influence over defence matters. Thereafter, the Harper Conservative began sapping Hillier's power and influence within NDHQ. By the time Hillier retired in June 2008, the Conservatives had succeeded in reducing the CDS's influence and reinstating a stricter system of civilian control over the military. Given the opportunity he had been given to rebalance the civil-military relationship, this results ranks as a failure of Hillier's tenure as CDS.

All told, though Hillier is often praised as a highly successful CDS, this analysis suggests that this view merits a re-examination. While Hillier was successful in some respects, his time as Canada's top military officer was also marked by ambiguous achievements and failures. This implies that Hillier's legacy was, in fact, mixed.