

**Field Marshal Wannabes?  
Senior Bureaucrats and National Defence Accountability**

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**FIRST DRAFT**

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In his last speech as Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), General Rick Hillier charged that senior civil servants had acted like "field marshal wannabes" during his tenure as highest ranking officer of the Canadian Forces (CF). Hillier went on to note that "civilian control of the armed forces is not civil service control of the armed forces." These were not merely the bitter words of a disgruntled flag officer. When he made these statements, Hillier was echoing a well-entrenched view that senior bureaucrats play an illegitimate and illegal role in keeping the military accountable to elected leaders, notably the Minister of National Defence (MND), Cabinet, and the Prime Minister (PM). Proponents of this view deny that statute law allows senior bureaucrats to act in elected leaders' stead, or to assist with the exercise of these leaders' responsibilities, in dealings with the CDS and CF. Advocates of this view also hold that senior bureaucrats, such as the Deputy Minister of National Defence and the Clerk of the Privy Council, lack the authority and expertise to challenge the advice the CDS provides to elected leaders. Supporters of this view further contend that civilian bureaucrats, such as the Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy), lack the specialized military knowledge required to offer defence policy advice to the civilian authority, and that only the CDS should be requested to provide such advice. According to those who share these views, the roles of senior bureaucrats should be limited to the financial administering of the Department of National Defence (DND).

Against these contentions, this paper argues that senior bureaucrats play a legitimate and legal role in guaranteeing accountability in matters of national defence. To demonstrate the validity of this argument, the paper relies on Canadian statute law, such as the *Interpretation Act* and *National Defence Act*, government guidelines, including the Privy Council Office document *Accountability in Government*, and studies of Canadian public administration. The argument here is that senior bureaucrats play vital roles in ensuring that the military is accountable to the MND and PM, that civilian defence officials and the MND are accountable to the PM, and that DND and the CF are managed in a manner that reflects governmental concerns and priorities, all while respecting the importance and rightful place of bureaucratic and military advice and expertise.

The paper begins by exploring the defence accountability challenges liberal-democratic government's face. Next, the paper examines how Canada addressed these defence accountability challenges. Thirdly, the paper outlines the responsibilities and lines of accountabilities that exist among Canada's national defence actors, and senior bureaucrats in particular. Finally, the paper concludes by demonstrating how these actors, responsibilities, and lines of accountability interact to produce an effective system of national defence accountability.

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THANK YOU