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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Views of the Canadian Forces 2012 Tracking Study**

**Prepared for Department of National Defence**

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***To obtain more information on this study, please email:  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Forces (CF) commissioned Phoenix SPI to conduct the 2012 wave of the department's annual tracking study to explore Canadians' perceptions of the Canadian Forces and related issues. A mixed mode approach was used, one which included both quantitative and qualitative elements.

- The quantitative phase consisted of an RDD telephone survey, including both landline and cellular telephones, of 1,520 Canadian residents, 18 years of age or older. Fieldwork took place February 16 to March 2, 2012.
- The qualitative phase consisted of 10 focus groups held in five locations across the country: Moncton, Montreal, St. Catharines, Calgary and Vancouver. One group per location was conducted with younger participants (18-34 years), the other group with older participants (35-65 years). Fieldwork for the focus groups took place January 30 to February 2, 2012.

The research results represent an important source of information to support decision-making and inform communications activities on the part of DND and the Canadian Forces.

### Views of the Canadian Forces

#### Limited Familiarity with CF

Overall, Canadians hold favourable impressions of the Canadian Forces, though awareness of issues surrounding the Forces is limited. Just under two in five Canadians (38%) have recently seen, read or heard something about the Canadian Forces.<sup>1</sup> This represents a significant decline compared to last year, when 57% could recall having done so, and continues a declining trend from previous years. Since 2008, the proportion of Canadians who recall having seen or heard something about the CF has dropped by almost half.

Canadians who could recall having recently seen, read or heard something about the Canadian Forces (n=626) identified a range of topics or issues. Heading the list, identified by one-third (34%), was CF engagement in foreign missions, including both combat and non-combat roles. Most of this feedback focused on the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, although some addressed its presence elsewhere in the world. Following this was a focus on cost (29%), including issues of military procurement, as well as military spending in general.

The most common *source* of information about the Canadian Forces is television. Television news was cited most often, identified by 41%, followed by 25% who pointed to other television sources (excluding news). This reliance on television has been relatively consistent over time.<sup>2</sup>

The large majority of Canadians (92%) described the degree to which they are informed about the Canadian Forces as moderate at best. Nearly half (46%) claimed to be

<sup>1</sup> The percentage of those who recall coverage of the Canadian Forces excludes those who initially indicated that they had seen, read or heard something about the Forces but could later not identify anything they had read seen or heard. This process of re-coding answers reflects a better measure of recall and has been implemented for all questions dealing with recall of recent media coverage. Recoding has been done for the first time in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> In 2009, 52% cited television news and 18% cited other television sources.



*moderately* informed about the CF, while 36% said they are not very informed and 10% not well informed at all. Only 7% claimed to be *very well* informed about the Forces. These results are similar to 2009, when a similar question was last asked. Then, 93% said they were only moderately familiar at best with the Canadian Forces.

Focus group participants also exhibited limited familiarity with the Canadian Forces. Most characterized themselves as moderately familiar, although a few participants in each group placed themselves at either end of the spectrum, saying they are not familiar at all with the CF and its activities or are very familiar with Canada's military. In general, focus group participants who claimed to have moderate familiarity with the CF tended to have only cursory knowledge of it. This knowledge was based on what they had seen or heard about the CF, typically from the news media, but also (for a few) from friends who serve, or have served, in the military. In terms of the types of things they have recently noticed or paid attention to, the only issues routinely identified were soldiers returning from active duty and related casualties or deaths.

### Positive Impressions of CF

Nine in ten Canadians (90%) have a positive impression of those who serve in the Canadian Forces, with most (59%) characterizing their impression as *very positive*. Only 4% have a negative impression of those who serve in the Forces. This is consistent with findings from previous waves of the survey.

As well, 90% believe that Canada's military is essential, with over half (54%) considering it *very essential*. Similarly, 82% view the military as a source of pride, including almost half (46%) who think it is a source of *great* pride. A significantly smaller majority (54%) consider the Canadian military to be modern (only 11% view it as *very modern*), while one-quarter think of the military as outdated. Since 2009, the proportions who consider Canada's military to be essential, a source of pride, and modern have remained relatively consistent.

Canadians overwhelmingly agree that Canada's military should play a leading role in responding to natural disasters in Canada (96%), that the Canadian Forces are a vital national institution (94%), that the CF are doing a good job performing its duties in Canada (90%), that the CF are respected by Canadians (89%), and that it is important that the Canadian Forces be able to operate seamlessly alongside the forces of the U.S. or other allies (86%).

Similarly, amongst focus group participants, perceptions of the Canadian Forces and the people who serve in it were strongly positive, with participants describing CF personnel as 'brave', 'professional', 'well-educated', and 'well-trained', and using terms like 'pride' and 'admiration' to explain their favourable impressions.

### Funding and Investment in the Canadian Forces

Roughly an equal proportion of Canadians think Canada's military is under-funded (36%) or that it receives about the right amount of funding (35%). Of those who believe the former, 14% think it is *significantly* under-funded. Conversely, 9% think that the military is over-funded (only 4% think it is *significantly* over-funded). These results continue a trend whereby Canadians are less likely to consider the military as under-funded: in 2008, 57% of Canadians thought this, a figure that has been declining steadily ever since.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This trend can be traced even further back: in 2005, 76% of Canadians considered the military to be under-funded, as did 69% in 2006.



Canadians that said Canada's military is under-funded (n=578) most often based this opinion on their perception that military equipment is out of date or in poor condition (35%). Other reasons, also linked to CF equipment, include a sense that the Forces lack proper equipment (26%) and issues of equipment in general (13%). On a related note, 15% cited a lack of adequate military vehicles. Over time, a focus on CF equipment has consistently underpinned Canadians' perceptions that Canada's military is under-funded.

Canadians who think the Forces are over-funded (n=118) most often based this opinion on the belief that funding would be better spent on Canadian priorities, such as healthcare or education (24%). A further 20% said that this funding would be better spent on other priorities in general. The sense that funds would be better spent on other priorities has been a significant reason for Canadians feeling that the military is over-funded over time. However, in previous years, there has been a particular focus on objecting to money being spent on the mission in Afghanistan.

Canadians think, as they have fairly consistently over time, that investment in Canada's military is neither wasteful nor unnecessary. The large majority of Canadians disagreed that military investment is wasteful (82%) and that Canada need not invest in our military as a result of being able to rely on allies to defend our interests (54% and 62% respectively expressed strong disagreement). Canadians who said they were aware of plans to purchase new defence equipment (n=807) were asked to identify what they read, saw or heard. They were most likely to have heard about plans to purchase new aircraft/planes (in general), with 41% identifying this. As well, 34% focused specifically on plans to purchase new F35 fighter jets. Far fewer, 15%, mentioned the purchase of helicopters.

### **Perceptions of Canadian Forces' Domestic Roles**

For the first time since 2008, a larger proportion of Canadians feel that the priority of the Canadian Forces should be domestic (42%) rather than international (37%). In terms of its roles in Canada, Canadians most closely associate the CF with responding to natural disasters. This was identified by 36%. Cited much less often, but still with considerable frequency, was patrolling our borders to defend Canada's sovereignty (22%). No other roles were cited nearly as often. Notably, almost one-quarter of Canadians (24%) were unable to identify any role the Canadian Forces plays in Canada. These results are similar to those of 2009, when 43% identified responding to natural disasters and 25% mentioned defending sovereignty as the top two mentions.

Among focus group participants, unaided awareness of the CF's domestic roles varied significantly across the groups. In most groups, just a few roles were identified. Consistent with the survey results, the role most frequently cited was disaster or emergency relief.

Canadians were asked to rate the level of importance they attribute to various roles played by the Canadian Forces in Canada. Heading the list in terms of perceived importance is responding to natural disasters: 94% rated this as important, including 79% viewing it as *very* important. Following closely is search and rescue (89%), with another strong majority (71%) viewing this as *very* important. Exactly four in five (80%) rated as important providing protection against terrorist threats.<sup>4</sup> In addition, approximately two-

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<sup>4</sup> A split sample was used with this question. Half of the respondents were asked to rate the importance of "Providing protection against terrorist threats" while the other half was read this statement with a qualification: "Providing protection against terrorist threats, including cyber security." Here, the amalgamated results are



thirds attributed importance to assisting civilian police and other partners when needed (68%), helping prevent illegal immigration, including human smuggling (67%), and helping prevent illegal drug smuggling (64%). Patrolling the Arctic was perceived as somewhat less important, with just 58% citing it as at least somewhat important.

Although not at all definitive, focus group participants, like survey respondents, tended to attribute greater importance to the CF's role of responding to natural disasters and lesser importance to patrolling the Arctic.

### **Perceptions of Canadian Forces' International Activities**

Turning to the Canadian Forces' international activities, Canadians are nearly evenly divided over whether a peacekeeping or a peacemaking role is more appropriate for the Canadian Forces. Exactly half expressed support for an international role that includes combat, and 46% a preference for a role that focuses on peacekeeping duties, such as monitoring ceasefires. Opinion on this issue has been divided since 2008, with the balance sliding back and forth marginally over the years. This runs counter to the findings of the qualitative research. Focus group participants were more comfortable with the CF playing a non-combat role when involved in international missions.

Sixty-one percent of Canadians recall seeing, reading or hearing something about CF operations currently taking place in Afghanistan. More than half *clearly* (35%) or *vaguely* (26%) recall such coverage. This represents a significant decline over time. In 2008, 88% of Canadians could recall media coverage of Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan.

Canadians who said they recalled seeing or hearing something about CF operations (n=948) were asked to identify what it was that they had seen or heard. By a wide margin, the most frequently-recalled aspect of the Canadian Forces' current operations in Afghanistan, cited by 54%, related to the Forces non-combat role or the end of its combat role. Still focused on the CF's mission in Afghanistan, 74% are aware that Canada's role has shifted away from combat to one of training Afghan personnel. Awareness of the training mission has increased since last year, when 66% knew Canada was in the process of shifting its role. Nearly four in five (78%) support Canada's training mission in Afghanistan, with 34% expressing *strong* support.

Among focus group participants, awareness of the CF's international activities was quite general. Although most focus group participants had seen or heard something in the last six months about Canadian Forces missions outside of Canada, their knowledge tended to be limited in scope and cursory in nature. A small number of participants in each group pointed to the Afghanistan mission, the CF's humanitarian work abroad, as well as Canada's role as an international peacekeeper. Libya was rarely mentioned.

### **Returning Soldiers**

Just under half (48%) of Canadians recalled having seen, read or heard something about issues faced by returning soldiers and their families or by the families of Canadian soldiers who died in Afghanistan. A further 5% indicated that they might have done so, but were not certain. Perhaps not surprising in light of the CF's changed role in Afghanistan, these results represent a trend of declining awareness of issues faced by returning soldiers

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presented, although there was little difference between Canadians' responses to the two ways this issue was presented to them.



since 2010. Then, 65% of Canadians said they had been or might have been exposed to such coverage, compared with 53% in 2012.

Of Canadians who recalled something (n=830), the issue most often cited was that returning soldiers suffer from mental health issues, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This was identified by 38% of these respondents. An additional 11% identified soldiers suffering from PTSD not being appropriately cared for. A focus on mental health disorders, specifically PTSD, has been a trend over time.

Focus group participants had seen or heard little about issues faced by returning Canadian soldiers and their families, or by the families of Canadian soldiers who died in service. While they readily pointed to issues such as PTSD, reintegration into civilian life, and physical or psychological problems resulting from active duty, most participants just *assumed* that these were issues facing returning soldiers and their families. In other words, they had not specifically heard anything about them, either in the news media or elsewhere.

Slightly less than half of Canadians think the Canadian Forces do a good of looking after returning soldiers. Most of these think they do a *moderately* good job (34%) as opposed to a *very* good job (13%). Conversely, just over one-quarter (27%) think the Forces do a poor job in this regard. Compared with 2010, when the question was last asked, positive assessments have declined slightly, from 51% to 47%. Correspondingly, the proportion who say the CF do a poor job looking after returning soldiers has risen from 20% to 27%.

Respondents who think the Canadian Forces do a good job looking after returning soldiers (n=684) were asked why they think this. The largest proportion (18%) said they think the CF does a good job, but could be doing more and that soldiers need more help. In other words, most offered a reason why they think the Forces does only a moderately good job and not a *very* good job. Interestingly, Canadians who think the Forces do a poor job in this area (n=444) were most likely to base this opinion on the same reason – that is, the belief that the Forces could be doing more and that soldiers need more help (52%). Overall, therefore, 70% of Canadians that were asked why they believe as they do on the subject offered the same feedback - that the CF could be doing more and that soldiers need more help.

Most focus group participants think the CF is doing a reasonably good job looking after returning soldiers and their families, or assumed this to be the case, because they had not heard otherwise. That said, some feel the CF could be doing more to support its members considering the service they provide to Canadians. A small number of other participants were somewhat critical, but not of the CF per se, but rather of the federal government in general, and Veterans Affairs Canada in particular. Few, however, pointed to areas where the CF needed to improve.

### **Historical Legacy<sup>5</sup>**

Few focus group participants were aware that 2012 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of an historical event of significance to Canadians, and even fewer could identify the War of 1812 by name. That said, everyone agreed, albeit to varying degrees, on the importance of Canada's historical legacy, although the importance attributed to commemorating such events was much more moderate among Francophone participants. Despite the general

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<sup>5</sup> This topic and the following one (social media) were only asked about in the focus groups, not in the survey.



consensus that Canada's historical legacy is important, fewer focus group participants could clearly articulate *why* celebrating or marking such events is important. This was particularly true among the youth participants. The reasons offered most often included the following: ensuring that these events remain part of our collective heritage, helping promote our cultural identity and pride as Canadians, recognizing the actions and sacrifices of Canadians, and celebrating the role of Canada's military in important historical events.

Participants pointed to a variety of methods for communicating with Canadians about Canada's military history and heritage, ranging from the use of various media to targeted outreach initiatives directed at school-age youth. Regarding youth, some participants placed special importance on communicating with younger Canadians. In terms of communications messaging, focus group participants pointed to several themes, including pride in the men and women who serve in the CF, peace and freedom, remembrance, and celebrating achievements.

### **Social Media and the Canadian Forces**

Youth focus group participants were far more likely to use social media, and to use them more often, than older participants. Of the three different media asked about, Facebook and YouTube were more popular than Twitter, although those who use Twitter tend to be regular users. Some focus group participants, mostly youth, use social media to connect with different types of organizations, including governments and politicians, charities, non-profit organizations, international NGOs, businesses and media organizations. Facebook tends to be the preferred vehicle when it comes to this type of interaction.

Reaction to various potential uses of social media by the Forces was mixed. In response to the idea of a Canadian Forces Facebook presence, youth would be more likely than older Canadians to visit or subscribe to the page. Older Canadians, on the other hand, expressed a preference for a website where content – narrative and video – could be accessed. Turning to online videos, many participants, approximately half or more in most of the groups, would watch CF videos if the Forces had a YouTube account. Interest notwithstanding, participants offered a number of key qualifications. Caveats included that the videos would need to be interesting, that the footage used should be accurate, real and not contrived, and that the stories must be told by the Canadian Forces not by a news network on their behalf. Most participants who would watch CF videos online expressed an interest in videos of a personal nature, ones that document 'a day in the life' of a soldier, or provide a soldier's point of view on various CF domestic and international activities.

Reaction was mixed to the idea of the CF using social media like Facebook or Twitter to provide Canadians with information during emergency situations. The general consensus to emerge from the groups was that social media could be **one** of a number of methods used to communicate information related to emergency response.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The results of the current wave of this annual tracking study are consistent with previous surveys. That is, while there are some differences in certain areas, the findings as a whole are very much in line with the results of previous years.

Canadians continue to hold positive views about the Canadian Forces, particularly regarding the people who serve in the Forces. Focus group participants describe CF

personnel in strongly positive terms, using words such as ‘brave’, ‘professional’, ‘well-educated’, and ‘well-trained’. In communications efforts, it may prove beneficial to focus on personal elements pertaining to Canadian Forces personnel. This strategy is supported by focus group feedback regarding the potential use of social media by the CF, where participants highlighted that they would like to hear about such things as the stories of local soldiers (i.e. from their community) or pieces that express soldiers’ perspectives on domestic and international work they are doing. Canadians views on organizational issues are sometimes less positive (particularly with regard to the adequacy of military equipment) and interest in these kinds of stories is more muted. That said, Canadians continue to feel strongly that Canada’s military is essential and that it is a vital national institution.

Recall of recent media coverage dealing with the Canadian Forces has declined considerably since last year and continues a declining trend since 2008. Similarly, recall of media coverage of the current mission in Afghanistan has declined, as has recall of coverage dealing with issues faced by returning soldiers and their families. This may partly be a product of Canada’s military not being engaged in a combat role at present, garnering less media coverage.

For the first time since 2008, Canadians are somewhat more likely to think that the military should focus its efforts to the domestic sphere (i.e. in Canada) rather than internationally. That said, awareness of the domestic roles played by Canada’s military is low. The most common role known about is responding to natural disasters. However, when Canadians are prompted with a list of domestic roles, they are inclined to attribute importance, often high importance, to most. These results suggest that Canadians welcome the Canadian Forces playing more of a role in Canada, and should its domestic roles be better understood, one might expect they would be more strongly supported or embraced.

This year witnesses a continuation of a trend whereby Canadians are less likely to consider the military as under-funded than they have been in the past—they are now nearly equally divided between those who consider the military under-funded and those who think it receives about the right amount of funding. While a significant proportion of Canadians express a view that the Forces lack adequate equipment, many also feel that purchases of military equipment are not well planned and that DND does not get good value for money when purchasing military equipment. These results suggest that, while Canadians feel it is important to adequately fund the military, particularly in view of a perceived lack of proper and up-to-date equipment, there is a view that the Forces do not always make the best use of the funding they receive where equipment purchases are concerned.

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