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# Executive Summary

## Views of the Canadian Forces

**Canadians continue to have a positive impression of the Canadian Forces.** Consistent with previous years, approximately nine in ten Canadians perceive the Canadian Forces as a vital national institution (92%) and have a positive impression of the people who serve in the Forces (87%). A majority of Canadians also perceive the military as essential (93%), a source of pride (85%), and modern (57%); furthermore, comparisons to 2009 show that impressions of Canada's military in all three of these areas have significantly improved over the past year (increases range from 3 to 5 percentage points).

When asked to personify the Canadian Forces, focus group participants describe people (mostly men) who are who are strong "physically and mentally," fit, who can lead and be led. Mental images sometimes include weapons and sometimes include blue helmets/berets. Personal attributes included frequent mentions of the words brave, courageous, patriotic, protector, defender, helper. The few negative associations seemed to stem from one of three sources:

- a view that the Canadian Forces are under-resourced and/or ill-equipped;
- a view that the Canadian Forces are not sufficiently independent from the US Forces; or
- a negative personal experience with a member of the military.

**While Canadians this year are less likely to think the military is under-funded, they are more likely to think it is worthwhile to invest in Canada's military.** Half (50%) of Canadians this year think Canada's military is under-funded, down 6 percentage points from what was reported in 2009. Another 35 percent think the level of military funding is about right and only 7 percent say the military receives too much funding. Views that the military is under-funded mostly stem from perceptions that equipment is outdated or lacking. While the proportion of Canadians who think the military is under-funded has dropped this year, very few (15%) Canadians think it is wasteful to invest in Canada's military; rather, the vast majority (80%) disagree with this statement, representing an increase of 4 percentage points from last year.

Focus groups participants were divided on the issue of whether or not the Canadian Forces are adequately funded. Many participants were strongly of the view that the Forces are under-funded, a perception that they base almost entirely upon reports of lacking or out-dated and even dangerous equipment (Sea King helicopters, no submarines to patrol the Arctic, aged Snowbirds). On the other hand, some participants felt that the issue of under-funding might be attributable to poor prioritization and/or too large a bureaucracy. Several participants felt that they were not in a position to judge. A few participants felt that Canada's military is adequately or even over-funded, a view which they base upon the perception that people in the military are very well-paid or upon first-hand stories they have heard about wasteful expenditures by the military. There was no mention of the recent federal budget.



***There is a lack of awareness regarding the size of the Canadian Forces.*** When asked to estimate the number of people currently serving in the Canadian Forces, only one tenth (12%) of Canadians provide an estimate in the correct range of 75,001 to 100,000. This year's estimates are similar to what has been reported in the past.

***The proportion that has recently seen, read, or heard something about the Canadian Forces is back to former levels.*** Overall, nearly three in four (72%) Canadians this year are able to recall having recently seen, read, or heard something about the Canadian Forces; this is up a significant 9 percentage points from 2009. Among those able to recall recent media coverage, nearly half mention the arrest of Colonel Russell Williams; mentions of Canada's presence in Afghanistan are also common.

### **Role of the Canadian Forces**

***Consistent with previous years, half of Canadians believe that the top focus for the Canadian Forces should be international.*** Overall, half (51%) of Canadians this year say the top priority for the Canadian Forces should be international, compared to one third (33%) that believe its focus should be domestic and about one tenth (13%) that think the Forces should concentrate on the North American continent. These results are consistent with what was reported last year.

***Canadians are nearly unanimous on the role of the Canadian Forces in responding to natural disasters in Canada; nearly two in three agree that patrols in the North should be increased.*** Virtually all (96%) Canadians agree that Canada's military should play a leading role in responding to natural disasters that occur in Canada. While opinion is more divided when it comes to increasing the military's Northern presence, nearly two in three (64%) nonetheless agree that the Canadian Forces should increase its presence in the North by increasing the number and frequency of Arctic patrols. These findings are unchanged from 2009.

***Canadians are nearly unanimous on the importance of the Canadian Forces' involvement in providing humanitarian assistance abroad.*** The vast majority (95%) of Canadians agree that it is important for Canada's military to respond to international situations in order to provide humanitarian assistance. Another 76 percent agree that it is important for Canada's military to play a leadership role abroad when responding to international situations. A more divided view is seen when considering the role of the military in achieving foreign policy goals, with three in five (59%) Canadians agreeing that a significantly stronger military is crucial to achieving our foreign policy goals and advancing our place in the world. Comparisons to past surveys show that the number of Canadians who think the military should play a leadership role abroad when responding to international situations has increased 23 percentage points this year as compared to 2009. There has also been a small increase in the number of Canadians who think the military should provide humanitarian assistance (up 2 percentage points); attitudes towards the military's role in achieving foreign policy goals have not significantly changed over the past year.

***There is a very high level of awareness and pride with regard to the role played by the Canadian Forces in responding to the recent earthquake in Haiti.*** Overall, almost all (94%) of Canadians are aware of the role the Canadian Forces played in responding to the recent earthquake in Haiti. Furthermore, the vast majority (92%) are proud of the fact that the Forces played a role in responding to this earthquake.

***There has been a small decrease in the proportion of Canadians favouring a peacekeeping-only role.*** This year, a small majority (53%) of Canadians think the Canadian Forces should participate in operations around the world that could include security patrols, development assistance, and fighting alongside allied troops to implement peace in an unstable area. By contrast, 44 percent think the Canadian Forces should only participate in operations that involve observation duties or monitoring a ceasefire or truce between two conflicting parties. This year's results represent a shift in public opinion from 2009 when Canadians were more evenly divided on the issue of peacekeeping versus peacemaking.

For participants in the focus groups also the primary role of the Canadian Forces is seen to be defending Canada, with most activity in this regard seen as taking place overseas. Participants in the focus groups often drew parallels between how they perceive the Canadian Forces and their role in the world and how they feel that Canada is perceived on the international stage. While a few participants in the focus groups struggled with just what role Canada's military should be playing on home soil, discussions about the Canadian Forces' role overseas tended to be unified by strong themes:

- Canada's role on the international scene is not especially to advance Canada's own interests, rather it is that of the good citizen of the international community, being the friendly, helpful provider of humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping services – for many, this role is defined in contrast to the perceived role of the American Forces;
- Concern about the perceived shift from peacekeeper to more active combat roles;
- A continuing and perhaps escalating concern about the need for independence (from the U.S.) in Canada's foreign policy and military engagements.

That said, generally speaking participants did see a role, if a lesser one, on home soil. Several mentioned the presence of the military at the Vancouver Olympics to reinforce security as an appropriate role. There were also mentions of the role that the Canadian Forces has played in responding to natural disasters on Canadian soil, such as the snowstorm in Toronto and the ice storm in Eastern Canada. Several participants, particularly in the older groups, brought up the need to defend Canada's borders and natural resources from those who would lay claim to them. This was mostly in the context of the ongoing debate about claims to the Arctic by other countries, particularly Russia and to a lesser extent the USA. A few others mentioned that the Forces should be deployed at home in order to assist with addressing priority issues within Canada such as helping local police forces with crime and safety or having Canadian Forces medical personnel help out in local hospitals. While a few participants did mention the possibility of a terrorist attack in Canada, and saw a role for the Canadian Forces in defending Canada in this regard, most participants did not perceive a threat to Canada from terrorism on home soil.

## The Canadian North

***There has been a slight increase in awareness of Arctic Sovereignty issues; 'claims by other countries' dominate Canadians' recall of specific mentions.*** In total, 44 percent of Canadians this year claim to have recently seen, read, or heard something about Arctic Sovereignty, up 4 percentage points from the last time this question was asked in 2008. Among those able to recently recall seeing, reading, or hearing something about Arctic Sovereignty, nearly half refer to claims made on the Arctic by other countries.

***There is broad support for carrying out patrols and efforts to assert claims over the North.*** Eight in ten (80%) Canadians agree that it is important for Canada to carry out security patrols in the North, while nearly three quarters (73%) agree that Canada should do more to assert its claim over Northern territory. While Canadians demonstrate a more divided view regarding the importance of Arctic Sovereignty and Canada's northern infrastructure, the majority nonetheless agree that these are important issues (69% agree that Arctic Sovereignty is an important issue facing Canada today and 69% agree that Canada should put more infrastructure in place in the North in order to assert its claim over the territory). These results are generally consistent with what was reported in 2008 (the last time the questions on the Canadian North were asked) with one exception; specifically, Canadians this year are less likely to say that Canada should do more to assert its claim over Northern territory (down 3 percentage points).

Several participants in the focus groups, especially in the groups among older Canadians spontaneously mentioned the need for the Canadian Forces to be involved in laying claim to and defending Canada's territory and resources in the North from other countries. Their position was that defending territorial integrity lies at the very heart of the mandate of a country's military. While these participants were adamant about the appropriateness of this role, there was a fair amount of scepticism about whether Canada would in fact be in a position to use military force in this regard, and other participants questioned whether in fact it would be appropriate to use military force to this end.

## Canada's Mission in Afghanistan

***Consistent with previous years, four in five recall seeing, reading, or hearing something about the Afghanistan mission.*** In total, four out of every five (82%) Canadians this year recall having seen, read, or heard something about Canadian Forces operations taking place in Afghanistan, consistent with what was reported in 2009. In terms of what Canadians have seen, read, or heard, the deaths of Canadian soldiers remain the most frequently mentioned aspect of Afghanistan operations although not to the extent seen in 2009.

***Half of Canadians are aware of Canada's investment in education; much lower levels of awareness are noted for Canada's vaccination plans and Dahla Dam project.*** Overall, almost half (46%) of Canadians are able to recall seeing, reading, or hearing about Canada's investment to strengthen education in Afghanistan. Among these respondents, the most commonly recalled information relates to women and girls being allowed to attend school and the construction of schools. In comparison, only 16 percent



of Canadians are able to recall seeing, reading, or hearing about Canada's project to vaccinate Afghan children against polio and 14 percent are aware of Canada's project to repair the Dahla Dam in Afghanistan.

***Peacekeeping and bringing stability are seen as the main objectives of Canada's Afghanistan mission, but one in four indicate there are no objectives.*** On an unprompted basis, one third (35%) of Canadians understand the main objective of the Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan to be peacekeeping and bringing stability/order to the country; this is down from 2009 when roughly half of all Canadians mentioned peacekeeping. Meanwhile, one in four (23%) indicate there are no objectives of the Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan.

***Of the specific objectives tested, the highest levels of awareness are seen for establishing law and order and providing humanitarian assistance.*** Overall, four in five (82%) Canadians are aware that Canada's activities in Afghanistan include establishing law and order by working with and training the Afghan National Security Forces. Relatively high levels of awareness are also seen for providing humanitarian assistance to people in need, including refugees (79%) and building Afghan institutions and supporting democratic processes such as elections (73% aware). In comparison, Canadians are less likely to understand how Canada is helping the Government of Afghanistan deliver core services and promote economic growth (67% aware), enhance the management and security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (62% aware), and contribute to Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts (60% aware).

***The majority of Canadians support Canada's activities in Afghanistan.*** Without being told any specific details of what the Canadian Forces are doing in Afghanistan, three in five (63%) Canadians in the main tracking questionnaire (where the questions were asked after a series of questions about the Canadian Forces and their activities) and over half (56%) in the Afghanistan-only questionnaire say they support Canada's activities in Afghanistan; these results are consistent with what was reported in 2009. Support for Afghanistan increases once respondents are given more information about Canada's activities in the country (rising to 74 percent when asked as part of the main questionnaire and to 75 percent when asked in the Afghanistan-only questionnaire). This trend towards increased support post-communication is consistent with the 2009 survey.

However when participants in the focus groups were asked to write down three words or phrases that come to mind when thinking of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, for the most part, the negative connotation largely outweighed the positives. Mostly, words and feelings used by participants fell into three broad categories:

- Overall sense of hopelessness;
- Frustration in the lack of clear objectives and reason for the mission; and
- Supportive sense of pride in the efforts of the military personnel.

While views of the mission were predominantly negative, there was a sense among participants that there might be more to the mission than they are being told. There was a sense among some participants that they might not be getting the whole story. They feel the media focuses only on the negative and that they would like to be made aware of some of the positive accomplishments and progress, if indeed this does exist.

**After hearing descriptions of key projects Canada is undertaking in Afghanistan, Canadians indicate broad support of all three.** Canadians are most supportive of Canada's polio vaccination program, with nearly nine in ten (86%) supporting Canada's plans to vaccinate more than 7 million Afghan children under the age of 5 against polio by the end of 2011. The vast majority (82%) also support Canada's investment to strengthen education in Afghanistan. In comparison, support for Canada's plans to repair the Dahla Dam is lower (73% support), although still garners the support of nearly three-quarters of Canadians.

**Four in five agree that Canada has done its share, and three in four are proud of the role the Canadian Forces have played in Afghanistan.** Eight in ten (80%) Canadians agree that Canada has done more than its fair share in Afghanistan. The majority (74%) are also proud of the role that the Canadian Forces has played in Afghanistan.

### **After Afghanistan**

**Half of Canadians know there is an end date to the Afghanistan mission, but a plurality do not know when.** Overall, half (52%) of Canadians are aware there is an end date to Canada's commitment to a combat role in Afghanistan. Among these respondents, three out of five (63%) say Canada plans on withdrawing the majority of its military presence from Afghanistan in 2011.

**Four in five Canadians support the withdrawal of military personnel from Afghanistan in July 2011.** Overall, 85 percent of Canadians support Canada's plans to withdraw the majority of its military personnel from Afghanistan in July 2011. Among these respondents, more than one third say that we have been involved long enough and have done our share. Conversely, those who oppose withdrawing in July 2011 feel that the mission is not yet finished and our troops are still needed in Afghanistan.

Few participants in the focus groups were aware of the announced withdrawal date. This was particularly the case among the younger participants. There was scepticism, even among those aware of the date for the withdrawal that the deadline would be respected. This was based for the most part on the perception that the date had been pushed back in the past and that it was a political decision and therefore subject to change. Moreover, many participants who feel that Canada is in Afghanistan at the US's bidding feel it is inevitable that Canada will accede to a likely future request by the US to keep a fighting force in Afghanistan.

That said, in keeping with the generally poor perception of the effectiveness and likely outcome of the mission, most participants felt relieved by the announcement of a firm withdrawal date. For many participants, this relief was tempered with concern about the fate of the people of Afghanistan following the departure of the majority of the troops. Most participants expressed strong doubt about whether the people of Afghanistan were ready to take over responsibility for their own security and governance and felt that any progress made to date would be reversed over time. For some of these participants, leaving before the mission is accomplished would be irresponsible and calls into question the meaning of the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers' lives. However, even among those who felt that it would not be right to leave, many confessed to feeling relieved that a definite end to the mission had been announced.

**Three in five Canadians say they are aware of the issues faced by returning soldiers and their families.** Overall, 58 percent of Canadians recall seeing, reading, or hearing about issues faced by returning Canadian soldiers and their families or by the families of Canadian soldiers who died in Afghanistan. When asked for specific details as to what they could recall, more than one quarter refer to soldiers dying or mention post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Just over half of Canadians indicate the Canadian Forces do a good job of looking after returning soldiers.** Overall, half (51%) of Canadians think the Canadian Forces do a good job looking after returning soldiers, the main reason being the perception that the military looks after their own personnel. Conversely, those who think the Forces are doing a poor job in this regard (20%) say there is more the Canadian Forces can do.

Participants in the focus groups for the most part had very little awareness of any issues that returning soldiers and their families, or the families of soldiers who did not return, might face. Despite a lack of exposure among most focus group participants to issues that returning soldiers and their families are facing, most participants were convinced that counselling was the number one priority for both the soldiers themselves and their families. They suggested that many different types of counselling might be necessary, from post traumatic stress counselling, to marriage and family counselling, to grief counselling, to counselling on how to reintegrate into non-combat duty. A few participants (especially those with direct experience) suggested that for counselling to be most effective, those providing the support and counselling ought themselves to be military and to have experienced combat duty. One participant suggested, and others agreed, that counselling ought in fact to be mandatory.

Many participants also suggested the need for financial support for returning soldiers and their families, providing examples such as help to re-train for future work, and help in finding and securing housing. Another frequent mention was pensions for wounded soldiers or for the families of deceased soldiers. Several participants mentioned help with post-secondary education for returning soldiers or for the children of deceased soldiers.

Awareness of supports offered by the Canadian Forces was extremely low. Rather, participants *hoped* that there were good supports in place.

**Remembering Afghanistan.** Participants in the focus groups were asked about whether Canada ought to do anything to underline the contributions of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and, if so, what form this commemoration ought to take. Most participants felt that it was indeed appropriate to commemorate Canada's participation in Afghanistan. For some participants, the idea of celebrating should be reserved until after the mission is accomplished, which few feel will be the case in July 2011. There were different points of view on whether the soldiers themselves might find the idea of celebrations welcome.

Most felt that rather than marking the contributions of returning soldiers on a separate day, it would be appropriate to do so in the context of annual Remembrance Day services. Their reasoning was that the Remembrance Day ceremonies are meant to commemorate the contributions of Canadian soldiers in all conflicts and that a separate commemoration was thus not necessary and might even diminish Remembrance Day. Indeed, many

participants made the point that adding commemoration of the Afghanistan mission to Remembrance Day activities might make the day more meaningful to younger Canadians.

## **Communications**

**Television dominates Canadians' media habits.** Four in five (81%) watch TV once a day and two in three (64%) watch news on TV at least once a day. Furthermore, nearly half (45%) of Canadians identify the TV as their primary source for news.

**Most Canadians have a favourite news provider, but are less particular when it comes to getting news about the Canadian Forces.** Overall, the large majority (86%) of Canadians have a favourite news provider. Of this, more than one-third (37%) identify a television news channel as their favourite, with CTV leading the pack at 10 percent of all mentions. Canadians are less particular when it comes to news about the Canadian Forces, with only 43 percent saying they have a favourite news provider for this type of news. Again, however, television comes out on top (17%, with CTV garnering 6% of mentions).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

- Canadians are still resoundingly positive about the Canadian Forces.
- For participants in the qualitative research and respondents to the survey it is much more comfortable for the Canadian Forces to be perceived as helpful, humanitarians, who carry shovels as opposed to weapons. Hence the high degree of comfort and pride with regard to the role played by the Canadian Forces in responding to the earthquake in Haiti.
- Participants in the focus groups often drew parallels between how they perceive the Canadian Forces and their role in the world and how they feel that Canada is (or ought to be) perceived on the international stage. Thus the Canadian Forces, an essential and vital national institution, is also a standard bearer of Canadian identity. Canadians seem to want the Canadian Forces to advance the country's reputation as a friendly, helpful provider of humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping services – for many, this role is defined in contrast to the perceived role of the American Forces, for whom, in the words of one participant, the 'armed' in armed forces is a more appropriate role.
- Given how tightly the image of our Canadian Forces is wound into the Canadian psyche, it is hardly surprising that, despite some recognition of a shifting broader environment, and an active combat role in Afghanistan for the last number of years, Canadians hold tightly to the image of the peacekeeper.
- Perceptions that the military are underfunded seem to be diminishing, but the evidence that Canadians use to support their thinking on this issue (Sea Kings, subs and Snow Birds, for example) is very enduring, despite major investments in new equipment that have been announced in the last few years.
- Canadians' views on Arctic Sovereignty have remained very stable since the last sounding in 2008.
- There continues to be confusion about the mission in Afghanistan. The focus group findings point to a near complete lack of clarity about the mission and its

objectives. The survey findings too indicate that while there is certain recognition for the peacekeeping/peacemaking role, other objectives are not well-known. One in four Canadians says there are no objectives for the Afghanistan mission.

- Canadians feel as though they are not getting the whole story on the Afghanistan mission from the media, which focuses mostly on the casualties and destruction. Provision of more information about the mission and its specific objectives as well as detailed information on Canada's key projects in the country raises support levels from 56 percent to 75 percent.
  - Should the Canadian Forces wish to try and convey messages to Canadians, the survey findings on communications confirm that television is the medium of choice for getting across a message to Canadians, both in terms of advertising (it is the most frequently used media) and in terms of earned media (TV is where most Canadians turn for their news).
- While Canadians are strongly supportive of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, they are concerned about the situation that is being left behind. Canadians are thus far not very aware of the planned date for withdrawal from Afghanistan – just half are aware there is a date, and fewer still know what it is. Those who are aware are very sceptical that this date means anything or will be respected.
- While there is some awareness of potential issues faced by returning soldiers and their families, the question has not yet reached a high degree of salience. For the most part, Canadians trust that veterans of Afghanistan and their families are well looked after and have access to the services and supports that they need to help them to reintegrate into non-combat duties.

