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## Proposal for a New Canadian Security Corps

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For the past forty years, safeguarding Canadian Security has meant maintaining armed defences against the Soviet military. Now, however, environmental disasters are more threatening to Canadians than foreign invasion. Canada is unprepared to deal with these threats. A general who attended the Consultative Group to the Ambassador for Disarmament in January, 1989, spoke of his concerns about these real dangers and said, "we must have a new definition of 'security'."

His words open a whole new way of looking at what is needed to safeguard our country. An accident in a nuclear power plant or a major oil spill or earthquake could effectively destroy the economy and the quality of life of a huge area of Canada. The relative risks that we face must be carefully evaluated and resources allocated to ensure an immediate response that limits the disaster and sets in motion the rescue and clean-up action without delay.

Some disasters cannot be met with a meaningful response. A nuclear war would result in such catastrophic destruction that no organization would be capable of giving aid in the aftermath. We must therefore continue all efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and to diminish international hostilities.

There are, however, other threats that at the present time we are simply not equipped to handle. It is the unprecedented scale of environmental devastation that makes this task so urgent. We are unprepared to respond to an earthquake on the West Coast of Canada, despite the fact that scientists warn us of the inevitability of such an event. American nuclear power plants in Washington State are vulnerable to earthquakes, but Canadians do not know what to do in the event of a radiation accident, whether it occurs there or on one of the nuclear powered vessels that visit Canadian harbours. We learned after the tragedy at Chernobyl that a radiation accident can have international consequences and require intensive international follow-up, response, and cooperation, as well as decades of local clean-up.

Chemical spills present new dangers as the size of storage facilities and the wide range of toxic substances being transported on oceans and highways increase. The training required for those who make the first response is becoming more and more complex. How does a local fireman or ambulance driver know that the substance he is dealing with is so toxic that it requires a massive specialized team to control the contamination? How long does it take to notify the appropriate authorities and get that emergency response, or even identify the substance?

In the past, if a small tanker spilled oil in the ocean, beaches were fouled and some local

marine life was killed, but recovery was possible. Now the super-tanker accidents mean that the survival of some species is threatened, and the fisheries and tourism industries of huge areas can be utterly destroyed. The safety of our marine food supply is now at risk.

At the present time, the army may be called in to help in time of civil disaster, but problems of jurisdiction, lack of preparation and specific training, and inappropriate equipment greatly limit their effectiveness. Many civilians believe that when the local emergency planners cannot deal with a disaster, one can simply call in the army. What is forgotten is that the army is frequently not available because of manoeuvres elsewhere in Canada. They are not prepared to be our final line of civil response. Equipment needed for military manoeuvres is not designed to safeguard the environment and would most likely wreak havoc in vulnerable areas. Furthermore, as one military officer commented, "We are trained to defend our country, not to be garbage men."

## **Emergency Response Corps**

This organization would be a fourth paid service under the Department of Defence, equivalent to the Army, Navy or Air Force. Response to disaster requires very clear lines of authority, highly skilled teams of workers, independent communications systems, specialized equipment and transportation vehicles located at strategic bases, as well as organized reserves of men and women with special skills. The Emergency Response Corps would not be armed; a major distinction between it and the regular military forces.

## **Training Program**

Training would include many of the skills presently taught in the Armed Forces: parachuting, search and rescue, diving, and communications, to mention a few. Many of the skilled trades now taught in the Army would also be needed in this force. For example, electrical workers are needed to restore power after a hurricane or an earthquake, and to provide emergency generators for medical equipment and lights. It should be possible to utilize existing military expertise for training in these overlapping areas. All members would be trained in Advanced Industrial First Aid plus immediate care of crush, blast and burn injuries.

Properly trained and equipped teams must be sent immediately to the scene of industrial or environmental accidents. Negligent companies should be held responsible for the full cost of the emergency response effort ensuring maximum incentive for prevention. The division of financial responsibility between provincial and federal governments must be settled in advance, and official liaison with police, fire departments and coast guard well developed. Lines of authority must be clear from the national level downward so that there is no lag time between the report of the accident and the response of the trained corps.

There would also be medical and paramedical units, with specialized technicians, physicists and chemists trained to deal with nuclear and chemical accidents. Survival skills, including mountain rescue, and undersea-diving should be taught to all recruits. Arctic and wilderness survival should be taught by the native people in bases like Goose Bay, Labrador. Just as fire departments now train firemen in new techniques of dispute resolution, this team should be trained in the new concepts of conflict resolution and mediation. Disasters place incredible stresses on people and irrational behaviour is common.

One of the tasks of this Corps would be to develop links and training programs to utilize volunteers in the most effective way at the time of a disaster. This would mean setting up programs with the civilian sector and establishing strategies to approach an emergency so that the large number of people who volunteer their services can be quickly and

effectively deployed. This coordination is essential to avoid waste of energy, resources and time. There are models of this cooperation in search and rescue organizations already, but the scope and training of volunteers must be greatly augmented. Such advance planning would also reduce costs and involve communities in the responsibility for preparedness.

Terrorists also present new threats to our security. A terrorist can threaten to poison a municipal water supply or food source and nuclear terrorism is now technically possible. There are experts trained in the RCMP to deal with terrorists, but threat of a civil disaster would demand the involvement of the Emergency Response Corps to work in collaboration with those experts.

## **Equipment**

Equipment needed for an effective response is often very specialized. As well as the equipment already in use throughout industry and the military, such as transport aircraft, helicopters, Bailey bridges, cranes, and mobile hospitals, there is a need for specialized equipment to respond to the specific types of accident. Booms to contain ocean spills, oil slicker ships, specialized decontamination equipment, robots to send into radiation zones, and vehicles which minimize damage to the environment are all required. Equipment must be strategically located across the country so that the time required for effective response is minimized.

## **International Response**

One can foresee that a Canadian corps of men and women with the expertise to deal with environmental disasters could be made available through the United Nations, in the same way as our Peacekeeping Forces.

The advantage of this in terms of fostering international cooperation and goodwill is obvious. International mobility will benefit Canada as well: teams responding to a catastrophe in another country may learn better techniques and gain new insights into the problems of rescue and recovery operations which can then be applied back at home in time of crisis.

## **Personnel**

Young people between the ages of 18 and 25 could enlist in the Emergency Response Corps. They could choose to stay in the service as a career, or they could return to civilian life after their initial tour of duty. If they returned to civilian life, they would bring with them a wealth of experience and expertise that would be invaluable to their communities.

Personnel would also be recruited from present emergency services, environmental specialties and the military, to provide the expertise to establish programs and set up organization management and communications.

A Reserve Corps would clearly be needed as the numbers required in an emergency could greatly exceed those on active service. Reserves would regularly update and increase their skills to maintain their competence. In time of need, they could be called up from computer files of people listed by skills and location, and transported to the disaster site immediately.

Young people would be able to join a Reserve Officer Training Program similar to that offered by the Armed Forces at the present time. This would enable them to pursue a

university degree in exchange for serving a given amount of time during their summers and after graduation. Many of these students would undoubtedly be motivated by their experiences to continue education at the graduate level in areas of research directed to new developments in equipment and systems needed by the Emergency Response Corps. (At present Canadian universities do not offer programs related to emergency response services and only one is available in the U.S. at George Washington University.)

High school students would be offered the opportunity to join a Cadet Corps which would provide basic training and experience both during the school year and in the summer.

We are well aware that many young people today are disaffected and despairing of the future of the world.¶ 1¶ Many are turning to drugs and alcohol as they sense the hopelessness of a world headed for disaster. Yet we believe young people are as idealistic and patriotic today as were those who gave their lives in two World Wars to save their country. We believe they would respond with enthusiasm and pride to the opportunity to serve Canada in a way that is meaningful in terms of real dangers to our country and our people. These young men and women would offer outstanding role models to high school students because they would demonstrate the courage, strength and physical fitness of our police, fire and armed forces. But in working to save the environment, they would be more a part of the value system of today's young people.

## **Benefits**

The reason for creating this Corps is the need to respond to real threats to Canadian security, but the benefits of such a corps are broad. It would provide employment and training for young people, and offer them a challenging adventure in the important years of early adulthood. Perhaps the greatest benefit would be the greatly increased peace of mind of all Canadians. Knowing that a highly trained, well equipped and organized force was always ready to respond to natural or man-made catastrophes would surely add to the security of us all.

Prevention is an essential part of emergency preparedness. Members of the Corps would offer specialized training programs to industry, fire and police departments. They would participate in training volunteers, and would integrate their work with the non-governmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, S.P.C.A., and the Provincial Association of Registered Professional Biologists that offer expertise presently untapped.

Canadian surveillance of its offshore waters would be enhanced greatly by the Corps training and exercises added to the existing actions of the Coast Guard, the R.C.M.P. and Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Canada would have an additional presence on our coasts to deter illicit traffic such as drug shipments, illegal fishing and dumping of noxious wastes, as well as to assert Canadian sovereignty.

## **Conclusion**

New threats to Canadian national security increase as the threat of military invasion decreases. These new dangers arise from the potential of environmental disasters occurring from natural or man-made causes. Canada does not have the capability to respond to major disasters rapidly and effectively because there is no national organization with the mandate, the resources, the personnel, the equipment and the training to do the job.

We need a new service in the Department of Defence which would utilize the expertise of military personnel and environmental specialists to establish an Emergency Response Corps. Issues of mandate and jurisdiction must be resolved long before a disaster brings chaos and suffering to situations that require efficient and effective action. The first step

is to examine the weaknesses and problems of our existing emergency response capability. We believe it will then be obvious that there is an urgent need to protect Canada's national security from new and real threats. We should waste no time in creating an organization capable of meaningful response and a model for the rest of the world.

## **Note**

1. Parker, Goldberg, Macdonald et al., *Canada's Youth in the Nuclear Age, 1987*.—a national research survey of Canadian children, sponsored by Canadian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

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