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Developing Strategic Lieutenants in the Canadian Army

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ABSTRACT: This Canadian contribution to *Parameters'* Strategic Lieutenant series shows how domestic context creates the conditions for professional military education reform to a greater extent than the global strategic context. The article assesses the junior officer education delivered by Canada's military colleges and analyzes interviews with key stakeholders responsible for the formulation and implementation of reform at the military colleges.

Keywords: education reform, strategic context, leadership, professional military education

The first article in *Parameters'* Strategic Lieutenants series posed the question: “What leads governments to reform entry-level officer professional military education: the global strategic environment or the domestic political environment?” The Canadian answer—associated with post-Cold War reforms to the Canadian officer corps—tends toward the latter.¹ The Canadian contribution to the United Shield Task Force in Somalia in 1992–93 was marred by the shooting of one Somali civilian and the torture and death of another while in Canadian custody, as well as the mishandling of the incidents by Canadian military authorities. In the wake of the Somalia affair, the Canadian public demanded the armed forces reflect societal values. A wide-ranging government inquiry into the affair recommended a restructuring of military culture to preserve the military's self-governance and credibility in society.² These demands in the national and operational environments generated in Ottawa and the court of Canadian public opinion ultimately led to the reformation of the Canadian Forces—renamed the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 2013—officer education program. The CAF had to take charge of reform or be subjected to it. When choosing reform, they included entry-level education for officers as a vital component of long-term change.

Reforms to entry-level officer military education from the end of the Cold War to 2017 were the product of the domestic political environment. Domestic

1. Scott A. Silverstone, “Educating Strategic Lieutenants at West Point,” *Parameters* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2019–20): 65–76. Other works in the series include: An Jacobs, “Educating Strategic Lieutenants at Sandhurst,” *Parameters* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2019–20): 77–90; Dorthe Bach Nyemann and Jørgen Staun, “Denmark's Strategic Lieutenants,” *Parameters* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 91–104; and Carsten F. Roennfeldt, “Norway's Strategic Lieutenants,” *Parameters* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 79–90.

2. See Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, *Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia*, 5 vols. (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2017), <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/70385/publication.html>.

reactions to incidents that occurred in Somalia in 1993 led to a renewed emphasis on post-secondary education. Reforms were shaped by resource constraints, as part of government efforts to economize and reduce debt in response to globalization, and by shifting government priorities. This article summarizes the delivery of entry-level military education in Canada, assesses perceived changes in the global strategic and domestic environments, and shows how reforms result from the domestic environment.

Canada's Military Education System

Military education in Canada is a joint affair based on three sets of specifications: the needs of the CAF, the service (navy, army, and air force), and the individual (based on specific occupation). Canadian military colleges are designed to educate officers, regardless of service or occupation. For the purposes of this article, the term “lieutenant” is inclusive of all CAF junior officers at the officer-1 level, be they 2nd lieutenants (Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Air Force), lieutenants (Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Air Force), acting sub-lieutenants (Royal Canadian Navy), or sub-lieutenants (Royal Canadian Navy). The CAF handles personnel training common to all services, while the army, navy, and air force provide specific service and occupational training during summers and post-graduation. Military college graduates represent 25 to 30 percent of Canada's annual officer intake; the remaining officer slots are either directly recruited university graduates or students attending a civilian university in lieu of military college.³

There are two Canadian military colleges: the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) in Kingston, Ontario, and the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean (CMR) in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. The CMR Saint-Jean, closed in 1994 due to federal budgetary constraints, reopened in 2008 to deliver the Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel—or “general and professional teaching college”—curriculum under Quebec's pre-university system. Upon receiving a university degree after one year, CMR Saint-Jean students join their counterparts at the RMC. The CMR Saint-Jean returned to degree-granting status in 2018, which means some, but not all, students remain at the institution for their degree.

The staffs of the Royal Military College and CMR Saint-Jean are composed of military personnel, civilian and military professors, and civil servants. Programs are based on four pillars or components of the Regular Officer Training Program: academic (degree attainment), military (leadership development), athletics

3. John Scott Cowan, “The Impact of the Withers Report: Initial Implementation, Subsequent Adaptation and Relevance Today” (unpublished manuscript, 2005), 5, Microsoft Word file.

(physical fitness), and bilingualism (proficiency in French). Unlike American service colleges, little service-specific “military training” occurs during the academic year. Service and branch training does not always occur in the summer but may be off cycle or the summer may be dedicated to other activities like French language instruction or on-the-job employment. The program produces “Officers well educated,” meaning fit, bilingual young officers with university degrees and leadership competencies that can be developed further within the context of service and occupation-specific training.⁴ A year after graduation, most officers are assigned junior command or staff positions in their service. The most common aspects of their employment involve training and leading people, as well as mastering specific occupational skills. Canadian junior officers perform tasks and functions similar to officers from other countries.

Sources of Change

The push to reform the Canadian Armed Forces through the RMC arose from several interconnected sources within Canada. The end of the Cold War meant there was less justification for funding a large defense complex, and the absence of a clear outside aggressor led the country to look inward and take stock. As a result of this assessment, Canadian defense spending flatlined in the 1990s. A former chief of defence staff dubbed this period “the decade of darkness.”⁵

Several factors contributed to a decline within the ranks, including overseas base closures and force reductions, a federal pay freeze affecting military members and civil servants, and an increasing operational tempo with new deployments paid from a declining budget. There were also public calls for the CAF to adopt a force structure optimized for peace support operations and humanitarian assistance.⁶ The Canadian military experience until this time had been characterized by stable commitments and training oriented toward preparation for a war with the Warsaw Pact, which never came. An incident of poor Canadian military performance in the early post-Cold War period led to a loss of confidence among the Canadian public in the armed forces.

In 1993, after an earlier deployment to another UN mission was canceled, Canada deployed the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group (CARBG) to Somalia. The ensuing affair threatened the CAF’s reputation for reliability

4. The phrase originates from Major General Eric Tremblay, a former commandant of the Military College, and appears in college briefings during and after his tenure.

5. Ronald G. Haycock, “‘Getting Here from There’: Trauma and Transformation in Canadian Military Education,” *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 32, no. 2 (2004): 43–67; and Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 107–32.

6. Bill Bentley, *Professional Ideology and the Profession of Arms in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2005), 98–100.

in increasingly complex peace missions. Two specific incidents, stemming from attempts to curtail theft of materiel from the CARBG's compound, contributed to the Somalia affair: the shooting of two Somali civilians, one of whom was killed, and the torture and death of another while in military custody. Both incidents became national scandals because the nature of both incidents disturbed the Canadian public and concerns grew about potential cover-ups of the shooting incidents in Ottawa and Somalia.⁷ Outraged by the military's conduct, the Canadian public demanded reform.

An inquiry into the Somalia affair subjected the operation and the command and control of the Canadian Armed Forces to close scrutiny. While the report was far-ranging in scope, its authors most notably urged

... [the] senior leaders of the CF to redefine the characteristics and values of the Canadian military and to establish the capability to monitor the CF on an ongoing basis. In that process it will be critical to confirm those core values without which the health of the military profession in Canada cannot be restored. In the process of this re-assessment, the CF leadership should be guided by the imperative that they must be prepared to conduct operations in peace and war in accordance with Canadian standards, values, laws, and ethics.⁸

The inquiry concluded in 1997, and Lieutenant General Maurice Baril, the chief of the defence staff (CDS), asserted, "It is clear . . . that we need to do business in new ways."⁹ He was not alone in his concern for the future. Canadian military historian David J. Bercuson observed the Minister of National Defence M. Douglas Young was concerned as early as 1996 that the commission, as opposed to the government, might set the future agenda for the Canadian Armed Forces.¹⁰ In effect, the armed forces had a choice—reform themselves or be subjected to reforms by others. One year later, Young issued a report on reforming the leadership and management of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Young report was an action plan for reform, and two parts are especially relevant for understanding education's role in the reform process. First, the report mandated the Canadian Armed Forces include a formal statement of official values and beliefs in all recruiting, training, and professional development activities.¹¹ The mandate was justified by the belief the CAF had not evolved with changes in

7. Commission of Inquiry, *Dishonoured Legacy*, 1:306–11 and 5:1126–44. See also Bernd Horn and Bill Bentley, *Forced to Change: Crisis and Reform in the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2015), 23, 36.

8. Commission of Inquiry, *Dishonoured Legacy*, 5:1450.

9. Anthony Depalma, "Canada Accuses 47 of Misconduct in Bosnia," *New York Times*, January 18, 1997.

10. David J. Bercuson, "Up from the Ashes: The Re-Professionalization of the Canadian Forces after the Somalia Affair," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 3 (2009): 35–36.

11. Government of Canada, *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2009), Chapter 2, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/duty-with-honour-2009.html>.

Canada and the international community.¹² Second, and more importantly, the report mandated all officers not commissioned from the ranks must have degrees. The report also called for a review of officer professional development at all levels, including additional strategically oriented training for general and flag officers. Recommendation 12 contained the following direction:

Begin immediately a thorough review of the undergraduate program at the Royal Military College. This review will ensure for each graduate a broad-based education, well grounded in the sciences and humanities, with special emphasis being placed on the development of values, ethics and the leadership skills needed to prepare officers for responsibilities and service to country.¹³

The combination of the officer corps with degrees, the reshaping of officer professional development, and the reviews of the undergraduate program at RMC were an attempt to leverage education as the engine of reform. The Royal Military College—as well CMR Saint-Jean—played (and continue to play) an important role in the education and socialization of Canadian junior officers, who with additional experience and training could become proficient at drawing connections between strategic and operational-tactical levels.

Recommendation 12 provided the impetus for follow-up efforts like the Withers' Study Group, which focused on how to achieve the requirements and goals outlined in the Young report. In 1997, the group convened to review the undergraduate program at the Royal Military College of Canada and produced a 1998 report with 34 recommendations.¹⁴ First, the group expanded the mandate of recommendation 12 beyond a narrow interpretation of the Young report. In the preface of the Withers report, they stated that examining the academic component to the exclusion of the military, physical fitness, and language components would not meet the intent of developing values, ethics, and leadership skills.¹⁵ The study group explained the strategic context had changed both domestically and internationally, which necessitated changes to education and training. Their logic was straightforward. They first established “the strategic context within which the Canadian Forces would operate in the 21st century.”¹⁶

12. M. Douglas Young, *Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1997), 13–16; see also Bercuson, 34; and Horn and Bentley, 36–37, 99–100.

13. Young, *Report to the Prime Minister*, 17.

14. John Scott Cowan, principal emeritus of the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC), interview by author, August 23, 2018; and Cowan, “Impact of the Withers Report,” 2.

15. R. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board of Governors by the Withers' Study Group: Balanced Excellence Leading Canada's Armed Forces in the New Millennium* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1998), 5.

16. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 4.

They then examined how this new context placed demands on CAF officers and explicitly mentioned both domestic and international pressures contributing to those demands.¹⁷ The study group also examined the gap between the actual training cadets received and the ideal and determined options for addressing the gap. The Withers' Study Group proposed three big new ideas in the report. The first idea was to increase the degree of connection—or “reciprocal commitment”—between the Royal Military College of Canada and the broader Canadian Armed Forces. The second idea was to address issues with recruitment and selection of officers. The third idea was to strengthen the military pillar, under which they noted, “the critical challenge will be to bring about the vital integration of all four pillars to achieve the full synergy available.”¹⁸ The group emphasized the inclusion of military-relevant content in educational activities to create synergy between the academic and military pillars when possible. Reciprocity would require effort and resources from the Canadian Armed Forces, which needed to believe there would be a return on investment.

The public response to the Somalia affair and the political environment following the end of the Cold War led to a reassessment of the Canadian Armed Forces. The conclusions and recommendations made in the Young and Withers reports emphasized the need to focus on reform at the junior officer-level and consequently the approach taken by Canada's military colleges.

Reforms Planned

The Young and Withers reports set the stage for a series of reforms establishing how Canadian military colleges would educate officers. A close examination of the Withers report reveals much about the Royal Military College's role as an engine of reform. Recommendation 3 of the Withers report directly addressed the first big idea recommending a closer relationship between the Royal Military College and the Canadian Armed Forces. The Young report had suggested integrating CAF training and educational institutions under a single umbrella with the mission of stimulating strategic thinking, leadership skills, and ethics. The Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) was created in 2001–02 to serve as a custodian of the profession of arms, provide oversight of joint training and education, and offer steering and direction to three campuses: Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, the Royal Military College of Canada, and the Canadian Forces College (a CAF staff college as opposed to a service-level staff college).¹⁹

17. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 8.

18. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 8–9, 18.

19. “Canadian Defence Academy,” Government of Canada (website), modified November 13, 2020, <https://www.forces.gc.ca/en/training-prof-dev/cda.page>. See also Horn and Bentley, 101–11.

The Royal Military College of Canada created a Division of Continuing Studies to oversee the new policy, with an emphasis on distance learning.

Four recommendations from the Withers report (16, 18, 19, and 21) pertained to how the military should select and post personnel into the Royal Military College of Canada for the training and education of cadets. Recommendation 16 stated all officers serving at the college were role models for future generations of officers and emphasized selecting the best possible officers and NCOs for these positions. Recommendation 18 advised the commandant should be a five-year post for the sake of stability, and recommendation 19 suggested the director of cadets should be a navy colonel or captain as opposed to a lieutenant colonel or commander. Finally, recommendation 21 suggested increasing the number of senior noncommissioned members supporting the military pillar.²⁰

The Withers' Study Group viewed the Royal Military College of Canada and the CMR Saint-Jean as engines of reform for the Canadian officer corps. Evidence of this argument is contained in the fifth recommendation of the Withers Report: "Seek through the MND [minister of national defence] and the Armed Forces Council to increase the percentage of RMC graduates in the CF [Canadian Forces] officer corps from the current 25% to approximately 35-40%."²¹ John Scott Cowan, a member of the study group and principal emeritus of the Royal Military College of Canada, confirmed the intent of increasing the intake was to foster change across the officer corps as a whole, and the study group felt the intake had to be greater than 33 percent.²² The military pillar emphasized teaching young officers how to lead others, with the hope military college graduates would transmit their learning experiences to colleagues commissioned from other sources. These graduates would be agents of socialization post-graduation.

The Withers report, despite its emphasis on the military pillar, also contained several recommendations for institutional reform, including the maintenance of high standards to ensure the Royal Military College maintained its academic credibility, a five-year term for the principal, and a review process for degree programs. Yet, recommendations 13 and 14 were the most germane in regards to the inculcation of strategic-mindedness. Recommendation 13 proposed the Royal Military College develop and implement a "core curriculum" of academic material deemed necessary for officers that would complement the degree programs cadets followed in arts, science, or engineering. Recommendation 14 suggested the first-year curriculum focus on core courses to provide additional structure to the academic pillar and demonstrate education could have greater

20. Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 12-14.

21. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 24.

22. Cowan, interview; and Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 5.

utility in fostering officership.²³ By delivering the core curriculum through courses, academic departments could cultivate an officer corps with the capacity to examine problems through various methods and synthesize solutions creatively. This approach recognized officership must take a multidisciplinary approach to prepare officers for serving in a dynamic and evolving world.

Finally, the Withers report made several recommendations on how the pillars could be made mutually supportive. For example, recommendation 24 suggested to “[u]tilise the ‘core’ curriculum recommended in the academic pillar to bridge the two pillars. Comment: Appropriate military examples for relevant courses given in the academic pillar should be derived from activities taking place in the military pillar.”²⁴ In other words, while reforms were necessary, there might not be a significant influx of additional resources available to carry them out, which made synergies between pillars all the more important. Reforms would need to be as resource efficient as possible. The effect of resource availability on the achievement of goals is a major theme of this article.

Reforms Carried Out

To trace the effects of domestic and international strategic contexts on reforms, it is first necessary to scrutinize the implementation of these reforms. The overall timeframe for the reformation of Canada’s military colleges began in 1999, as stated by the unpublished paper of Cowan, an informed participant in the formulation and implementation of the Withers report circa 2005. Cowan was also appointed the principal of Royal Military College in that year and wrote a paper about the implementation of the Withers report in 2005.

The next reform effort in 2017 came from two sources. In March 2017, the CDS directed a special staff assistance visit (SSAV) to examine RMC’s “overall climate, training environment, culture, and Regular Officer Training Plan (ROTP) programme construct.”²⁵ While some argue the visit was ordered to preempt a report from the parliamentary auditor general due to be published later that year, the findings show a continuity of intent with the Withers report. The office of the auditor general reviewed the Royal Military College to ensure the institution’s value for money and compliance with federal legislation, and

23. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 28–31, 32.

24. Withers et al., *Report of the RMC Board*, 37.

25. G. R. Maddison et al., “Special Staff Assistance Visit – Report on the Climate, Training Environment, Culture and ROTP Programme at the Royal Military College of Canada – Kingston” (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017), <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/special-staff-assistance-visit.html>.

concluded in 2017 that the college was an expensive way to produce officers.²⁶ Focusing on efficiencies and costs, however, obscures the college's role as an engine of reform for the officer corps and fails to realize the value of institutions that foster officership.²⁷

The recommendations of the various reports provide a checklist to measure progress over time. In 2005, Cowan noted the connections between the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Military College had strengthened, the CDS and service leaders frequently visited the college, and college leaders realized the desirability of increased utility to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces.²⁸ Thus, some of the recommended reforms were being implemented at that time.

Nonetheless, the idea of using the RMC as the engine of reform for the Canadian officer corps was never fully realized. Cowan stated this effort was

... the one that got away. It was to go from 25% of officer intake to approximately 35-40%. While events in Saint Jean help take some of the pressure off, ultimately, what we need to understand is the original reasoning. This was essentially cultural. There are 110 universities in Canada, but we only control the culture in one of them. If you want to evolve the culture of the officer corps through an institution at the input end of the spectrum, you need to broaden the flow through that institution.²⁹

While the percentage grew to approximately 28 to 29 percent of the officer intake in 2005, it remained short of the target.³⁰ The SSAV noted the percentage in 2012–13 was approximately 25 to 27 percent of intake, with RMC graduates comprising 55 to 57 percent of the general and flag officers in the Canadian Armed Forces.³¹ This number should not be interpreted as a sign the core curriculum was producing generals. In 2012–13, the majority of the general and flag officers had over 25 years of service, which meant they were commissioned in the mid- to late-1980s. Royal Military College graduates were retained longer or progressed faster than peers commissioned by other means. Exactly why this phenomena occurred is not easily determined.

26. Gordon Stock et al., "Report 6—Royal Military College of Canada—National Defence," in Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *2017 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada* (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2017), https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201711_06_e_42671.html.

27. Stock et al., "Report 6."

28. Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 4.

29. Cowan, interview.

30. Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 5.

31. Maddison et al., *Special Staff Assistance Visit*, "Annex I," 11.

Synergy on RMC's grounds emerged from the reforms. Examples include the creation of the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI) and the *Canadian Military Journal*. The CFLI, a small institute devoted to the study of military leadership and writing of leadership doctrine for the CAF, was moved from the Royal Military College to CDA in 2003 and eliminated in cost cutting in 2013.³² The cost-cutting efforts resulted from measures to reduce the federal deficit and a strategic review within the Department of National Defence. Cowan remarked the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute "was specific and useful—doctrine and training on leadership. This was the case for a decade."³³ By 2017, RMC's military pillar found itself subjected to scrutiny under the special staff assistance visit, which concluded the college's purpose and content were inconsistent.³⁴

Yet, the core curriculum, a significant part of the academic pillar, remained throughout the period. Cowan stated:

The core curriculum before Withers had become very weak. There were 16 or 17 subjects that were seen as useful to officership. This wasn't someone's imagining. We took the Officer General Specification extant at the time and we looked at what the desirable characteristics were and related them to subject areas.³⁵

Elements of the core curriculum later became the basis of the Officer Professional Military Education (OPME) program, which all junior officers were required to pursue regardless of entry scheme and date.³⁶ The program led to more resources for the Royal Military College and favored graduates who completed the requirements as part of their degree. The OPME program proved to be another mechanism to foster change within the officer corps by increasing the amount of education required by officers. In 2013, however, the program was replaced with distance education to reduce completion time and cost and realign it with the Officer General Specifications.³⁷ Junior officers took a smaller set of purely military subjects through distance learning instead of university-level courses. This decision followed the Department of National Defence's strategic review and the Government of Canada's Deficit Reduction Action Plan in the early 2010s.

Even without the additional mandate and resources, the core curriculum was intended to link education and military service. For example, academic courses

32. Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 14.

33. Cowan, interview.

34. Maddison et al., *Special Staff Assistance Visit*, "Annex I."

35. Cowan, interview.

36. Cowan, "Impact of the Withers Report," 11–12.

37. D. A. Paterson, Reply to "Future of the OPME Program/Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about OPME," Canadian Forces Junior Officer Development Programme, Canadian Forces General Messages, November 2, 2012, <https://army.ca/forums/index.php?topic=105553.150>.

were overhauled to include military examples and materials.³⁸ Some of the same ideas would reappear in later years, suggesting the issues with the curriculum were either unresolved or structural. For instance, the SSAV recommended the Royal Military College improve its effectiveness and efficiency by better unifying and synchronizing the delivery of the pillars.³⁹

The SSAV also suggested increasing the staffing of the Training Wing, the military organization responsible for training and mentoring cadets. Many of these recommendations were identical to suggestions provided by the Withers report, especially those pertaining to the desired rank and quality of personnel in the Training Wing.⁴⁰ These incidents show that while the Withers reforms were initiated, a number were not fully realized—appearing again in the SSAV recommendations almost two decades later.

The implementation of reforms depends on the level of resources—funding, personnel, and monitoring efforts—sustained over time. Reform efforts, however, often compete with other priorities for personnel and funding. From 2003–11, the Canadian Armed Forces’ operational tempo focused on commitments in Afghanistan, meaning military staffing priorities favored operational units—which is neither surprising nor a criticism. In 2003, Canada committed a battle group for service in Kabul, Afghanistan, with the International Security Assistance Force. By 2006, Canadian commitments grew to include a battle group, provincial reconstruction teams, and security force capacity-building activities in Kandahar province. Although these combat operations commitments ended in 2011, Canada continued to provide a smaller force of trainers in NATO-led activities in Kabul until 2014. These events show operational priorities took precedence over sustaining reform efforts.

Following 2011, the Canadian government sought to reduce its deficit and conducted a strategic review of the Department of National Defence, which led to unintended consequences for the Royal Military College. First, since staffing priorities were higher for operations than for force generation, military staffing levels declined. Second, around 2011–12, the federal government’s review of priorities and effort to reduce the deficit led to a size reduction of the civilian workforce, including RMC faculty. Both efforts emphasized efficient use of resources in accordance with government priorities, however, their effect on reforms suggests the existence of a recurring pattern in professional military education in Canada. In times with competing priorities for limited resources, military leaders preserve combat capability at the expense of other efforts.⁴¹ While

38. Cowan, “Impact of the Withers Report,” 15.

39. Maddison et al., *Special Staff Assistance Visit*, “Annex L.”

40. Maddison et al., *Special Staff Assistance Visit*, “Annex L”; and Withers et al., 32–37.

41. Horn and Bentley, 121–25. They present a cultural argument for this preference, however.

context certainly matters to reform efforts, the domestic context seems to trump the international context.

While it may be too soon to tell if the reforms were successful, it is possible to draw lessons from the Canadian experience. Military institutions are subject to the priorities established by political and military leadership. Reform efforts require resources and the likelihood of successful reform declines as resources are constrained. Since professional military education is a proverbial long game, it is vulnerable to cuts by decisionmakers seeking easy wins when the pressure is on to reduce government spending.⁴²

Conclusion

Reviewing the two decades, it is hard to argue Canadian military leaders moved quickly to address a major change in the strategic environment through innovative education. Nonetheless, circumstances presented Canadian soldiers with new challenges and some, but not all, lived up to national expectations. While the Young and the Withers reports were clear and insightful on the role precommissioning education could play in professional renewal for the Canadian Armed Forces, they did not address the development of strategic thinkers for a new and evolving world order. By matching the core curriculum of science, social science, and humanities to a general officer specification, the Royal Military College has created a means of finding synergies between the education and military training of future officers.

Reform efforts also provided important contributions to the profession of arms, including expanding critical thinking through a common OPME distance-education curriculum, developing leadership knowledge through Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, and disseminating military knowledge through the *Canadian Military Journal*. The reforms, however, did not constitute a deliberate effort to develop strategic thinking early in the careers of military college graduates. Nor did these institutional aspects last in the face of resource pressures.

More seriously for military college graduates, the changes in the global strategic context since the Cold War—including globalization, America's challenges, China's initiatives, and environmental threats—have not led to a renaissance in professional military education in Canada. The domestic context has eclipsed the global strategic context. The demands of the future are less certain and more fluid than the demands of the past, which has created a need for professional military education throughout an officer's career. The

42. In general, the military has suffered this fate. See Kim Richard Nossal, *Charlie Fox Trot: Fixing Defence Procurement in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2016).

education provided at the entry level is foundational and should prepare future officers for uncertain and fluid situations. This reality means playing the long game, associated with a changing global strategic context, even when reform efforts, faced with resource scarcity, are forced into the short game of an evolving domestic context.

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