



**Communicating Defence and Security Issues to Canadians and the Challenge for the
Conference of Defence Associations and the CDA Institute**

Remarks by Colonel Alain Pellerin, OMM, CD
Conference of Defence Associations
Ottawa, March 4, 2010

Mister Chairman, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Don – Thank you very much for your kind words and for your valued support and advice over the years.

Upon learning that I had been named a recipient of the Canadian International Council Brigadier-General Dr. George G. Bell Shield Award for strategic excellence, I gave some thought to the significance of this prestigious award and reflected upon those past recipients of the Award – Sir Lawrence Freedman, the Award's first recipient in 2008, and Dr. George R. Lindsey, who was honoured with the Award last year. Sir Lawrence, the noted British academic and strategic thinker who wrote extensively on the Revolution in Strategic Affairs and The Transformation of Strategic Affairs, has been Vice Principal (Research) at King's College London since 2003 and a Fellow since 1992. Dr. Lindsey has spent nine years in universities, 41 years in defence, and 22 years in official retirement. He maintains an active interest in the defence and security concerns of Canada... I should be so lucky to maintain my interests in the defence and security concerns of Canada as long as Dr. Lindsey has!

At this time I am gratified to receive the recognition, on behalf of loyal colleagues from the wide community of CDA and the CDA Institute, for the extensive efforts over many years that have been made to promote research in and public awareness of Canada's defence and security interests.

I wish to address my thoughts this evening on the topic of communicating defence and security issues to Canadians and the challenge for the Conference of Defence Associations and the CDA Institute.

During my past 12 years as Executive Director of the Conference of Defence Associations and its Institute I have had the supreme privilege of working with an outstanding group of dedicated Canadians who are concerned with contributing to an informed discussion regarding a subject of vital importance to the security and welfare of this country, namely the development of acceptable defence and security policy and the provision of adequate resources to ensure the safety and security of the nation and its citizens.

The effort has been challenging, to say the least, but in many ways it has been successful if not totally satisfying, for there are many challenges that remain before us. Communicating defence and security issues to Canadians is and will remain a work in progress.

The work of the Conference of Defence Associations, over the past number of years, has been that of advocacy on behalf of the defence community. This community, vital to Canada's security, includes the men and women of this country who understand that freedom is earned and is not without cost. They include those who serve in our Canadian Forces, both Regular and the Reserves, those who have served our country as well as those Canadians who recognize that we are a nation with a tradition of service in the cause of freedom.

The CDA's advocacy has been based on the premise that the Canadian Forces has been a force for good for generations; that they represent the best values of our country under fire and in times of duress at home and abroad. In this vein, the CDA, in association with the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, recognizes journalists annually for their important contribution to the general public's understanding of issues relating to Canada's defence and security with the Ross Munro Media Award.

Since 1991, through the Vimy Award, the CDA Institute annually gives public recognition to a Canadian who has made a significant and outstanding contribution to the defence and security of our nation and the preservation of our democratic values. The latest recipient of the Award, most of you will recall, is Warrant Officer William MacDonald of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

While mentioning some of the successes that the Conference of Defence Associations and the Institute in recent years, I am compelled, also, to highlight before you the challenges that we must deal with head-on.

It is gratifying to witness Canadians acknowledging, these days, the service and sacrifice of the men and women of our Canadian Forces. However, we must also recognize that our citizens are generally poorly informed on matters that have an impact on Canada's defence and security. You may recall the outrage from some quarters following the remarks of our President of the CDA Institute, Dr. John Scott Cowan, following his address not very long ago at a convocation at the Canadian Forces College, where he stated that Canada was not being well served by the public media.

As well, convincing our nation's leaders that the security of Canada and Canadians remains the first and most important responsibility of the government remains a challenge. It need not be if the nation understood that Canada's first national interest is and always should be our security. Government as well as our citizens need to be convinced that security does not begin and end at our coastline. For instance, while there is a reason for which Canada is a member of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan, it seems that our politicians have either forgotten why our troops were sent there or they are not confident that they can convince their electorate that the mission is not over and that Canada will be the poorer for leaving before the mission has been seen through to its successful completion.

While we are grateful that our Canadian Forces has gone past what General Rick Hillier has referred to as the Decade of Darkness, we recognize that our Forces have not yet overcome its loss in capacity as a consequence of the reductions in resource allocations at the time when the Government was eliminating its budget deficits. The Forces' budget may not now be reduced, but without any increase the impact of inflation on defence procurement will reduce the ability of the CF to grow and replace outdated weapons platforms, as happened during that Decade of Darkness. It is clear that the requirement for knowledgeable analysis and informed debate on Canadian defence and security issues remains for us to support and facilitate.

Throughout the period from 9/11 to the present the CDA and the Institute have maintained their 'Voice of Defence' and have taken pains to maintain open ties with the media. As a result of our work we have

established ourselves as a credible and reliable source of informed analysis of defence and security issues of importance to Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, I take extreme pride in being part of this great undertaking to inform Canadians of the defence and security issues that are of vital importance to the welfare of our society. Both the Conference of Defence Associations and the Institute have come a very long way from before 9/11. We have engaged in informed dialogue with Canadians, the benefit and value of which the world can take note.

I have made reference to the Vimy Award where the Institute has given public recognition to outstanding Canadians such as a former Prime Minister, a Chief Justice of Canada, former Chiefs of the Defence Staff, historians and academics, and soldiers who have reflected the outstanding qualities of our servicemen and women in uniform.

Through the Ross Munro Media Award the Conference of Defence Associations has fostered the recognition of journalists for their work in bringing defence issues to the attention of the Canadian public.

We have partnered with the academic community in the production of defence studies that have been acknowledged by the Government of Canada.

We maintain a close liaison with graduate students across Canada and beyond with our annual graduate student symposium that has encouraged a new generation of strategic thinkers with a particular interest in defence and security issues.

The Vimy Papers have made an important contribution to the study of the defence and security issues, including Canada's Arctic, equipment procurement, and security of supplies and energy among other matters, with distribution of their publication on line and in print.

ON TRACK, the Institute's quarterly journal in its 15th year of publication, has become recognized for the quality of its contents, with thanks to the contribution of Canadian and international writers in their respective fields of study.

With the generous assistance of the Chairman, the Institute has hosted a number of roundtable discussion periods – over 24 in the past 12 months – on issues ranging from current operations through to foreign as well as national defence and security subjects. We have hosted a very impressive list of subject experts, including ambassadors, Parliamentarians, academics, journalists, soldiers, diplomats – I could go on...

The Institute will soon release a new study entitled 'Security in an Uncertain World – A Canadian Perspective on NATO's New Strategic Concept', that will outline the most salient challenges and opportunities facing the Alliance.

The project is an effective demonstration of the Institute's success in bringing together a group of some 25 subject experts, mainly members of the Institute's Board of Directors, including a former Minister of National Defence, three former Chiefs of the Defence Staff and a recent Chairman of the Military Committee of NATO, a Clerk of the Privy Council, NATO field commanders, former Ambassadors, public servants and politicians, that has resulted in an outstanding document that reflects the collective opinion of the group.

Finally, we have just concluded the Institute's 26th Annual Seminar and the Conference of Defence Associations' 73rd Annual General Meeting. These two events, combined, constitute Canada's largest and most important defence conference in Canada. The two-day event bringing together some of the prominent speakers in the field of defence and security is covered by the country's major media networks.

Mister Chairman, General Macnamara, I am truly honoured with the presentation this evening of the Canadian International Council Brigadier-General Dr. George G. Bell Shield Award. However, I can state that the recognition I have received here is not for me alone and could not have been achieved without the support of a most dedicated professional body of generous defence stakeholders, including the CDS, the Chairmen – past and present – of the Conference of Defence Associations, as well as that of the Presidents, again past and present, of the CDA Institute, and of the loyal Staff of the National Office.

Thank you.