

DND: Military's 'values' shape 'Canada's identity'

Defence analysts say changed role in annual report reflects Conservative 'rebranding effort.'

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An annual report from the Department of National Defence says Canadians should appreciate that their values are shaped in part by their military.

That represents a shift from past annual departmental reports that said departmental activities were informed by Canadian interests and values. Now it's the other way around.

On Nov. 17, the department's 2010-11 departmental performance report was released, altering a section that deals with ceremonies, youth programs and military history by introducing a new program activity called "Canadian identity."

The report says that the results of this activity should be that "Canadians are aware of, understand, and appreciate the history, proficiency, and values of the Canadian military as part of Canada's identity."

This flips the source of these "values" from previous performance reports. In 2009-10, for example, the report said that this program activity aimed to "contribute to Canadian government, society and international community in accordance with Canadian interests and values."

Stretching back to 2006-07, the department has always addressed the issue of "Canadian identity" in its performance reports, although the undertaking has been wrapped up in a larger expected outcome called "Good governance, Canadian identity and influence in the global community," or a variation on that phrase.

This year, however, the phrases "good governance" and "influence in the global community" aren't included in the report, and "Canadian identity" is instead given its own profile.

The new report's activity says 87 per cent of Canadians "feel that the [Canadian Forces] is a source of pride," meaning it considers the activity's expected outcome to be "mostly met."

The report says the department spent \$353.6 million on this activity and directed 661 military and civilian staff members to carry it out. It indicates the money was spent, in part, on the 100-year anniversary of naval service in Canada, including local, national and international events that looked at the Navy's missions—as well as fleet reviews attended by the Queen.

"These activities served to celebrate our naval heritage while reaffirming to Canadians the effect and importance of joint operations in projecting Canadian influence and values," reads the report.

The money was also spent on inspecting a third of the 69 Canadian Forces museums, the Canadian Cadet Program and the Junior Canadian Rangers.

'Good thing' or 'wrongheaded'?

Defence analysts argued the move demonstrated the Harper government was re-defining the Canadian image with traditionally conservative imagery.

"I see this new section as part of the Conservative effort to refashion the Canadian identity along the lines of conservative values," said Walter Dorn, associate professor at the Canadian Forces College and the Royal Military College of Canada.

"The new wording seems directly linked with the Conservative government's efforts to recast Canadian identity through previously marginalized institutions," said Philippe Lagassé, an assistant professor of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa.

"To my mind, this is part of the government's larger national rebranding effort."

J.L. Granatstein, a senior research fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, said the shift by the department was explicitly a "good thing."

"It seems to me that that, quite properly, should be a goal of the department, to solidify its place in the public mind, not just today but also in the past," he said.

"The problem is that Canadians have an anti-military attitude. We're not very good about recognizing our military historically, it seems to me, except in wartime. And obviously that rubs this government the wrong way. And obviously it rubs the military the wrong way. And it seems to me quite a good idea to try to enhance the place of the military in society."

But another analyst saw the issue as an example of a "dangerous" militarization in Canadian society.

Michael Fellman, professor emeritus of history at Simon Fraser University, first spoke out against the notion of militarization after it was reported in July that Citizenship and Immigration Canada was encouraging a more prominent role for members of the military at citizenship ceremonies.

Mr. Fellman told Embassy he saw the new phrasing in DND's annual report to be a further reflection of this "wrongheaded" process, because it promotes a "pro-military attitude" that he says is leading the government to spend billions on equipment purchases that are not necessarily the best choice for Canada.

For example, it is this attitude that has led the government to promise billions of dollars for F-35 stealth fighter jets, he argued.

"I'm terribly sorry if it hurts their feelings, but [the F-35s] should be up for debate," he said.

The department and the Prime Minister's Office was contacted but did not respond in time for publication.