

# Cooper: Bureaucrats shoot holes in military's effectiveness

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Calgary Herald  
October 18, 2011

Last Monday, the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute released a paper called *Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan*. It was written by Canada's best two military historians, Jack Granatstein and David Bercuson, with the assistance of Nancy Pearson-Mackie. It is no secret that the authors are friends of mine, but that happenstance fades into irrelevance beside the significance of the content of their argument and the evidence adduced to support it.

They tell a story of a bureaucratic guerrilla war fought by the striped pants brigade in Foreign Affairs against the military. They detail how NATO is becoming as useless as the UN was a decade ago. They make it clear that no one making decisions in Ottawa had a clue what Canadian soldiers would be facing when they were sent to Kandahar. Those who had noticed, for example, that from the Taliban perspective, there was no border with Pakistan or that the Taliban and the Pakistan intelligence apparatus were intimate, were ignored.

In military terms, the tactical successes of Canadian soldiers were unguided by strategy. The real purpose of the mission was to show our allies that we were no longer free riders. But at the same time that the army was fighting set-piece battles, Canadians were told it was all about human rights and sending girls to school. This is a recipe for defeat because tactical successes without strategy are incoherent and lack political direction.

Bercuson and Granatstein raise important questions and provide useful and commonsensical recommendations. Having written a few pieces aimed at influencing security and military policy, I have often wondered whether anyone reads them, and if so, what difference the reading makes. A few weeks ago, Richard Shimooka and Doug Bland (who, like Bercuson and Granatstein, have written a great deal on security issues) published an assessment of the impact of external reports on defence policy.

The "usual process" by which such reports are received is to berate the impudence of those who challenge the wisdom of National Defence headquarters. That wisdom is firmly lodged between the ears of numerous civilian bureaucrats and not a few uniformed ones. What counts is not the quality of the study, but its "receptiveness," a judgment by the bureaucrats about the motives of the author and how headquarters thinks the analysis and advice will be received by the Prime Minister's Office.

Within headquarters, this attitude reigns triumphant. In contrast, one lonely colonel said of the negative and critical response to one external report, "did they get nothing right?" Why is it "being shot down by the bureaucratic machine?" Maybe, he said, "I just don't get it." This officer was prepared to tell his minister the truth as he saw it. The civilians and the senior officers told the minister the truth they thought he wanted to hear.

This attitude is not confined to National Defence headquarters, but the minister of Defence does not just spend dollars. He also spends lives, and that makes the corrosion and corruption of the advice of the public service much more serious. When the bureaucracy is incapable of offering disinterested advice, only the academic community and the occasional policy-specific non-governmental organizations are left.

This is where the bureaucracy strikes back. When Bland got to talk defence policy with Paul Martin for a couple of hours by himself, one senior bureaucrat went ballistic and threw his notepad around the office. The essential bureaucratic response to Bland's own report of 2003, called *Canada Without Armed Forces?*, was delivered by the deputy minister, Margaret Bloodworth: "Why was \$200K given to Queen's . . . if \$200K has only brought us more criticism?" Why indeed?



The Bloodworth doctrine was operationalized a month ago when the Security and Defence Forum, which was mandated to provide domestic competence in defence and security issues outside National Defence headquarters, was essentially defunded. At a time when the military is debating how to come to terms with (now retired) Lt.-Gen. Andy Leslie's plan to save a billion dollars a year, cutting \$2.5 million was chicken feed. The bureaucratic upside was to silence criticism from the likes of Bland, Bercuson and Granatstein. Once again, the bureaucrats win and the country loses.

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