

## **AFAC POSITION PAPER 02/2008**

### **Issue: Air Power and Canada's Expeditionary Capability**

#### **Background**

- The air force has considerable capabilities which can be used in an expeditionary role, which for the purposes here will mean to be deployed internationally, or in response to some unplanned domestic requirement. Although the focus of such missions is often that which can be provided by land forces, other capabilities should not be overlooked for the needed support or for force projection.
- The air force has contributed to the Afghanistan mission since the beginning. Camp Mirage, the Middle East support base, is manned predominantly by air force personnel and has been an essential airhead for theatre operational support, for both tactical airlift using C130 Hercules aircraft, and strategic airlift with the Airbus A310 and now the C17. During the earlier days of the campaign, it also hosted deployments of the Aurora maritime patrol aircraft in support of operations in the Gulf. Deployments of ships to the region have included Sea King helicopters in support of naval task force missions.
- In Afghanistan itself, the air force has provided Hercules transport and air drop capabilities. Also, air force personnel have been predominant in operations and support of the Sperwer uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV) fleet, which has provided invaluable surveillance and intelligence information, albeit limited. Moreover, many of the support personnel at the Kandahar base are drawn from air force resources, given the continuing high demand placed on their army counterparts.
- These deployments are just the most recent examples in a long list of others – CF18 support to the first Gulf War and later to the Kosovo campaign; Aurora surveillance of Mediterranean approaches; and tactical helicopter deployments to Central America, Bosnia, Haiti, etc. The air force experience is replete with operations conducted in many very different theatres.
- These same capabilities are often just what are needed for domestic contingencies. Strategic and tactical airlift, manned and unmanned surveillance, tactical aviation support, and fighter protective cover missions have all been employed in recent years in response to natural disasters, vital point protection, or to address the terrorist threat. And, due to the size of Canada, these have often been domestic deployments over strategic distances.



## **AFAC Position**

- There are many options for air force personnel and units to contribute to a larger Canadian joint task force, or operate independently. While the air force suffers some of the same pressures of the army and navy with regard to personnel and funding, it has extensive untapped capabilities for deployed missions. These capabilities apply not only to international missions to conflict areas, but also in response to domestic crises.
- Airlift. Any deployed mission is likely to require both tactical and strategic airlift. Although the pressure on the Hercules fleet is significant, it should be part of any solution for intra-theatre support, including continuation of the current basing in Afghanistan. The C17 can augment this support but is always best employed for strategic missions and larger loads. The Airbus A310 also provides a passenger and palletized cargo capability.
- Helicopter Support. Airlift of troops and equipment by helicopter is frequently a key requirement. The DND project to procure a fleet of Chinook helicopters will address this need for the future, but will be some time in coming. An interim capability could be provided by employing Griffon aircraft, which are less than ideal in this environment, or some other type of helicopter. Regardless of the fleet used, Canadian tactical aviation personnel are well-equipped for deployed operations, having served in many locations over the years. Wherever the Griffon is employed, the provision of an appropriate sensor will enhance its surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.
- UAV Operations. The expertise for UAV operations, outside the very small ones which are tactically deployed, rests predominantly with the air force. This includes the provision of airworthiness certification, airspace control and the necessary support. Whether directly supporting other Canadian units or not, this capability provides considerable operational value to forces engaged in an area where situational awareness is critical. Close coordination with supported forces, be they land or maritime, is essential for full exploitation of the benefits.
- Manned Surveillance. The Aurora maritime patrol aircraft has significant surveillance capabilities which can be effectively employed over land as well as over water. The aircraft also possesses broad airborne command and control capabilities. While the number of aircraft available is limited due to ongoing modernization work, they could be made available in support of Canadian or coalition forces almost anywhere.



- Air-to-Air Refueling. Canada possesses a modest air-to-air refueling capability in both Hercules and the Airbus A310 aircraft. These could be provided for common use in support of theatre air operations, if the aircraft are not otherwise committed to airlift operations.
- Fighter Operations. CF18 fighters protect Canadian sovereignty and participate in countering threats through our NORAD commitment. The fleet is being modernized, and updated aircraft are readily available for employment. The current conflict in Afghanistan presents a significant expeditionary opportunity for the effective use of this valuable Canadian resource. This represents a combat capability in support of ground operations and/or in the direct employment of air power on interdiction missions. Indeed, this would enhance a 'balanced', joint force approach if 'packaged' with a land force commitment.
- One should not overlook 'enabling' capabilities as well. These include such things as communications networks, engineering support to facilities and airfields, accessing satellite on-orbit services, ground-based radar surveillance and operations centres. Overlaying this is the need for adequate force protection. Military police from all environments possess unique skills to protect personnel and military assets including aircraft, maintenance facilities and combat supplies.
- Defence capability planning actively supports the retention and sustainment of all of these capabilities. Major purchases have been made to improve airlift; modernization projects exist for the Aurora and CF18 fleets; and a medium helicopter project is under development. Having said this, there is room for improvement, such as expanding the Aurora structural upgrade to include all aircraft, providing a modernized short-range air-to-air capability for the CF18, and moving ahead with a high-altitude, long-endurance UAV procurement.
- No one can be certain what capabilities will be required on future expeditionary missions. Prudence mandates the maintenance of broad-spectrum multi-purpose forces. Overall, the range of air force capabilities presents a number of options to the Government as scenarios emerge.

## Messages

- There exist within the air force many capabilities which can be effectively employed in Canadian operations abroad. The types of capabilities which are so often critical to expeditionary missions – airlift, surveillance, in-theatre movement, and fighter support – are equally important for domestic missions as well.



- While many air force capabilities can be deployed independently, they are frequently employed in support of land or maritime forces. Close coordination is needed to fully exploit the benefits of this support.
- There is a need to ensure that these important capabilities are kept viable and improved upon, and employed whenever needed, to ensure Canada maintains the ability to deploy and support an appropriate range of expeditionary forces when necessary. Governments need options. Canadians deserve them.

Developed by the Aviation Affairs Committee – for more information, visit <http://airforce.ca/aac.php3>

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