

AFAC POSITION PAPER 01/2007

Issue: Continuance of the Snowbirds

Background

- The Snowbirds have been an icon of the Canadian Forces since 1971 and perpetuate a long tradition of air demonstration teams in Canada. The nine-plane precision formation team, with its red and white Tutor aircraft, is a familiar sight to almost all Canadians and enjoys an exceptional level of recognition by everyone. Last summer the team members were recognized as guests of the Prime Minister in Parliament. Commemorative stamps and coins celebrating the 35th Anniversary of the Snowbirds were issued during the same period.
- The Tutor aircraft was built in Canada and served as a pilot trainer from 1964 to 2000. The aging aircraft was replaced through the transition to the NATO Flying Training in Canada program. The remaining Tutor fleet is now dedicated to support the Snowbirds. With continued maintenance and some upgrades to exploit newer technologies, it could last until about 2020.
- The skill and precision of the demonstration team are impressive, but the aircraft does not represent a current CF fleet. While this may not make much of a difference to many members of the general public, it is a departure from past teams which have been composed of operational (to include training) aircraft and which could be represented as such. Operating an 'orphan' fleet presents also some problems. In addition to having to qualify pilots in a 'new' aircraft, there are potential support issues in operating the small, aging and unique Tutor fleet.

AFAC Position

- The Snowbirds are an important feature of public awareness of the Canadian Forces. They are a world-class demonstration team that represents the air force and the CF admirably in Canada and abroad. In addition to their flying displays, the team members are recognized for the many events in which they participate and the positive image they portray of the military in Canada. Moreover, they represent an important contribution to the recruitment efforts of the CF and contribute to the preservation of a ceremonial role in the military.
- While the Tutor has proven to be a very capable aircraft, it no longer represents the aircraft flown by the air force. Also, it is more than 40 years old and must be updated to ensure that it can continue to operate



successfully beyond 2010. Even with this additional investment and careful management of the fatigue life of the reserve of aircraft, consideration should be given to the need to replace the fleet.

- It would make the most sense to employ a demonstration aircraft that is representative of the operational air force. Moreover, to maintain the effect of the demonstration, it is considered important that the aircraft be propelled by a jet-, as opposed to a turboprop-engine.
- While it is recognized that DND will continue to provide pilots and some ground crew for the Snowbirds, there is no compelling need for the department to purchase the aircraft outright or to provide all of the maintenance and support required. If a lease-of-aircraft and a contracted-maintenance arrangement is felt to be advantageous, it should be considered, recognizing that uniformed ground crew have been an important element of the team since its beginning.
- More importantly, the funding to provide the fleet should not have to compete with other military requirements. With limited resources, DND has difficulty assigning a high priority to a Snowbird replacement when there are so many needs related to operational combat capabilities. The Government should provide funding over and above the DND budget for this purpose, which is, after all, more of a nation-building initiative than a military capability.

Messages

- The Snowbirds are valuable ambassadors of the Canadian Forces and a recognized national icon. Consideration needs to be given to a new aircraft if they are going to be able to continue over the longer term.
- The Government should commit to the continuation of the Team through the acquisition of a new aircraft to replace the aging Tutors. The replacement aircraft should be representative of a fleet currently in service.
- Funding for this initiative should be provided over and above the current and projected Defence budget, so as not to compete for resources with those needed for the combat capabilities of the CF.

Developed by: Aviation Affairs Committee

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