



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CANADA**

# **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN FORCES**

## **Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence**

**The Hon. Maxime Bernier, P.C., M.P.  
Chair**

**MARCH 2010**

**40th PARLIAMENT, 3rd SESSION**



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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE**

has the honour to present its

## **SECOND REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied recruitment and retention in the Canadian Forces and has agreed to report the following:

Given the high rate of operational tempo and the stresses faced by the men and women of the Canadian Forces (CF) in the past several years, your Committee thought it important to determine whether or not recruitment and retention were matters for concern. We remain convinced that if the CF is to continue to effectively do all that is asked of it, then it will need not only an appropriate level of personnel, but individuals who are well trained and who possess the requisite skills.

We are in full agreement with the sentiments expressed by the Chief of Military Personnel, Major General Semianiw, to the effect that "...the personnel of the Canadian Forces are the most valuable component of national defence and are, in fact, a defence capability – the key capability in defence mission success."<sup>1</sup> It is therefore imperative that we have a system in place that will attract the best and brightest and provide them with the challenges and opportunities that will convince them to remain with the CF.

Your Committee is also reminded that the CF has gone through some difficult times with regard to personnel issues. Significant force reductions during the 1990's, a time of deficit reduction and fiscal restraint, resulted in a situation whereby the CF's total strength went down to approximately 55,000 in 1999; this at a time when operational requirements were on the rise and increasing "burdens" were placed on our military.<sup>2</sup> Since then matters have improved considerably. Initially in Budget 2005 - 2006, the government announced intentions to increase the size of the Canadian Forces by 13,000 Regular Force and additional 10,000 Reserve Force personnel. These increases, whose targets were first set in 2004, would have resulted in an end state of approximately 75,000 Regular Force personnel and 35,000 Primary Reserves (paid strength). However, the government subsequently adjusted these commitments. The expansion was re-profiled in fiscal year 2006 – 2007 with slightly more modest expansion goals targeted for achievement by fiscal year 2011 – 2012. For that year, the goal would now be a Regular Force of 68,000 and a Primary Reserve Force (paid strength) of 26,000.<sup>3</sup> In 2008, the government's *Canada First Defence Strategy* committed to increase the number of Canadian Forces personnel to 70,000 Regular

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<sup>1</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication (CJFP) 1.0 Military Personnel Management Doctrine* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, June 2008), p. V.

<sup>2</sup> Major General Senianiw, *Recruiting, Attrition and Retention in the Regular Force*, Opening Comments, House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence, November 26, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Department of National Defence, *Departmental Performance Report 2006-2007*, p. 13.

Forces and 30,000 Reserve Forces by fiscal year 2027 – 2028. This will give the Canadian Forces a total strength of 100,000.<sup>4</sup>

In his testimony before our Committee, General Semianiw informed members that CF recruiting goals were on target to achieving the goal of 68,000 regular force personnel. The current strength stands at 67,350. Helping matters is the fact that the voluntary attrition rate has declined by nearly two percentage points to 5.1%. Needless to say, this reduction in attrition has had a positive effect on the recruiting and training systems; there is less pressure to recruit greater numbers and new members are not leaving during the training period to the extent they were before.

While the economic downturn may have dissuaded some from leaving the CF, your Committee believes it has at least as much, if not more, to do with the programs put in place by the CF. We therefore welcome the implementation of a CF-wide retention strategy. Changes in training, including methods to help young recruits to minimize the initial shock of military life have shown promise. According to General Semianiw, the CF is also “...encouraging longer term personnel to stay by addressing those issues perceived as dissatisfiers to service life, such as personal recognition, terms of service, work/life balance and military family support.” There has also been considerably more success in recruiting for specialized trades.<sup>5</sup>

While significant strides have been made, there remain long term structural challenges that will prove difficult to overcome. As noted by Mr. Karol Wenek, Director General Military Personnel, the demographic profile of the Canadian Forces makes senior level management loss of particular concern. The CF has a large cohort of young people, a large cohort of long-service people and a very small one of mid-career members. It is from the latter that future leadership will be drawn. It is therefore imperative that attrition here be kept as low as possible. Mr. Wenek also pointed to the fact that in today’s reality dual income families are the norm not the exception. Given that military families must often move it becomes difficult for spouses to find or hold employment. This is especially problematic for CF personnel in their mid-career when they often have children in school and a spouse wanting to pursue a career of their own. It is people in mid-career that become future leaders and who are crucial for the long-

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<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> General Simianiw, Opening Comments, November 26, 2009.



term well-being of the CF.<sup>6</sup> In response, the CF is trying to develop regional career profiles which would allow people to remain most of their careers in the same region. This is an effort our Committee very much welcomes.

Our study of “recruitment and retention” in the Canadian Forces has led us to conclude that, in general, things are going well and that important and progressive improvements have been made. We also recognize that challenges will remain and new ones emerge. It is therefore important that the CF continue in its efforts to put effective and innovative practices in place. For our part, we as a Committee will continue to monitor matters on a regular basis to ensure that this will prove to be the case.

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<sup>6</sup> Evidence, November 26, 2009, (0925)

# APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

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Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b><u>40th Parliament, 2nd Session</u></b>		
<b>Department of National Defence</b>	2009/11/26	41
Cmdre Daniel MacKeigan, Commander, Canadian Forces Recruiting Group		
MGen W. Semianiw, Chief of Military Personnel		
Karol Wenek, Director General, Military Personnel		
<b>Réserve 2000 Québec</b>	2009/12/01	42
MGen (Retired) Marcel Belleau, Vice-President		
Col (Retired) Frédéric Mariage, President		

# APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

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## Organizations and Individuals

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### 40th Parliament, 2nd Session

Department of National Defence

Réserve 2000 Québec

# REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings (*40th Parliament, 3rd Session: [Meeting No. 5](#); 40th Parliament, 2nd Session: [Meetings Nos. 41 and 42](#)*) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Maxime Bernier, P.C., M.P.  
Chair