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Vimy Award Acceptance Speech
by the HONOURABLE WILLIAM C. GRAHAM, P.C., C.M., Q.C.

VIMY SPEECH

Acknowledge:
Chief Justice;
Excellencies;
Minister Brison;
Members of Parliament;
Senators;
C.D.S. Vance and Military;
Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you, Gen. Gosselin, for that kind introduction. I am deeply honoured by this award. As I look around the room and see so many of my predecessors:

Gen. Ray Henault;
Gen. Paul Manson;
Gen. Jonathan Vance;
Hon. Col. Blake Goldring;
Admiral Murray.

I am humbled to be in their company. But I am sure they would agree with me when I say that it is even more humbling to be at this event which brings together so many distinguished Canadians. So many military personnel and civilians who devote their professional competence to the cause of defence and security of our country and its capacity to help bring order and stability to troubled places in this world.

Having served as both Foreign and Defence Ministers of this great country, it is particularly gratifying for me to be the recipient of an award that is associated with that feat of arms that signaled our country's transition from a colonial dependency to a nation capable of shaping world events. Vimy is emblematic of that golden thread that unites the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform with the place of honour that Canada occupies on the global stage.

As my colleague, John McCallum and I often repeated to one another:

"Defence may be derivative of Foreign Policy but Foreign Policy is dependent on defence."

It was, as you pointed out, Sir, my great privilege to serve in the parliament of Canada for some thirteen years.

I don't have the time tonight to review what were at times momentous developments during those years, but perhaps you will allow me to share with you a few reflections about lessons learned and the people I had the privilege to work with.

It was my privilege when I was named Minister to work with many extraordinary people both here in Canada and abroad.

Two people here tonight: Ron Buck and Ward Elcock had a big influence on my career at Defence.

I soon learned when I became Minister that there was no aspect of the life of the department that Admiral Buck was not familiar with. I learned from him the truth of the old aphorism:

Some speak of strategy; professionals speak of logistics.

I also learned from him the sense of comradery that creates such an esprit de corps in the Canadian Forces. At our mess dinners Ron would encourage me to stand up for Hearts of Oak during the marches, much to the disapproval of General Hillier, who expected service neutrality from his Minister.

And Ward Elcock taught me the merits of our unusual system of having a civilian component to the department – virtually unique in the world as an organizational structure but one that allows, particularly when one has a Deputy Minister of Ward's capability and experience, for an enrichment of the intellectual depth of the department and a valuable ally in the ongoing struggle to wrest the necessary resources from a government which always has a host of other pressing political priorities. Renewed financial support was, as everyone knows, the number one enabling priority for the department in 2004 when I became Minister.

I cannot say that I leapt at the idea of leaving Foreign Affairs for Defence when the Prime Minister told me of his decision. But he turned my own words against me by reminding me that I had often complained that our Foreign Policy was long on soft power but lacking in more robust capacity. I had even foolishly quoted Frederick the Great to him to the effect that:

"diplomacy without arms is like an orchestra without instruments".

I also reminded him that his revered predecessor, Lester Pearson, whose reputation is associated in the Canadian psyche with peace, was also a principal architect of NATO. For Pearson, peace could only be achieved when guaranteed by armed preparedness.

Prime Minister Martin freely admitted that he, as Finance Minister, had taken the axe to the department in the lean years and recognized that, if he was to enable Canada to have the more robust Foreign Policy that he had advocated in his leadership campaign speeches, the Canadian Forces had to be provided with the necessary resources. That, of course, would mean money.

In fact, I soon discovered that it was a lot more than just money. As Ray explained to me when I came into the office, the unsustainable operational tempo of recent operations had severely strained all our resources; a full year pause was needed just to catch up.

It also required a rethink, a breaking with the Cold War emphasis on preparation for large-scale conventional hostilities across defined international boundaries and a new focus on addressing security and order in an increasing number of failed or failing states.

The Prime Minister was the first to recognize there was a need to define a coherent foreign policy engaging all constituent elements which would determine the role our forces were to play. To that end the government engaged in a broad foreign policy review engaging all constituent elements: Diplomacy, Defence, Development and Commerce.

Fortunately, when it came time to write the Defence Review we had in Rick Hillier a Chief of Defence Staff who not only had had extensive experience, but also had developed over the years a clear intellectual framework defining the Canadian Forces' role and a transformative modernization plan consistent with the type of operation they would be called upon to execute in this complex new environment.

One point I would like to leave with you tonight is that the credibility of that Review was the essential feature in persuading the government that significant funding was necessary; the quality and rigour of its analysis had to overcome the Finance Department's traditional skepticism. So, while Ralph Goodale was reluctant, fortunately the Prime Minister understood my argument that if the Review was not funded it would be 1988 all over again; there would be no credibility to the exercise and any hope he had of a reinvigorated Foreign Policy would go down in flames with it. In other words, a purely political argument was the necessary supplement to a credible review. The result, as you know, was the largest annual increase in the history of the department - \$12.6 billion.

Scott Brison, who I am pleased to see here tonight, then Minister of Public Works, was supportive. I need hardly add, as President of the Treasury Board today, his political support and guidance will be key to the success of the most recent Review: Strong, Secure, Engaged.

While I am in no way suggesting that the 2005 Review solved all the problems of the Canadian Forces, I think that it is fair to say that for the first time in decades the vision and supporting policy frame expressed in it induced the government to increase spending. It also, I believe, succeeded in connecting the Canadian Forces with Canadians. In the end it was probably mostly about preparing for Afghanistan with incremental growth, augmented Special Forces, improved lift and armour capabilities and a recognition of the need for targeted, focused modernization.

The "Canada First Defence Strategy" of the Harper Government had, in my view, a laudable focus on the Arctic, but it was more domestic-focussed, more "homeland security" both in rhetoric and resource allocation. In the end, the Defence programme it articulated, and the necessary capability modernization was unsustainable without significant new funding which, while talked about, never seemed to materialize.

The result was that when I was honoured to be asked, along with Ray Henault, Louise Arbour, and Margaret Purdy (who is here tonight and who I salute as an all too little-recognized asset of the Department of National Defence), to join Minister Sajjan's Advisory Panel, it seemed like 2005 all over again. DND was under-funded, the defence programme was unsustainable, the capability of modernization unaffordable, and there was no coherent prioritization plan. As a result, the transformation agenda was going nowhere.

The Trudeau Team had spoken little about Defence funding in the election, but it did articulate an ambitious international role for Canada and a commitment to make a significant contribution to the over-stretched security and stability operations of the United Nations.

Internationally, our reputation as a contributor of troops was bleak. Memories were short. Our hard-fought legacy from Afghanistan, the Balkans, Korea – Word War Two was at risk and with it the credibility of our voice on the world stage.

So, there was a lot on the table to challenge the Department. In the end, the reviews of Strong, Secure, Engaged have been largely positive. Any debate over niche-capability versus general purpose combat capability was resolved in favour of the latter. And, while not everything has been resolved, the government is committed to increasing longer term funding with the expectation that the Canadian Forces will continue its transformation agenda.

We should acknowledge that it is not, and could not be, a road map to deliver on every modern capability for Canada; it is, however, a statement of broader political intent that anchors balanced and combat capability effectiveness in an overarching guideline for Canada. A huge accomplishment we all should recognize.

Its success is due to many factors, but firstly it is rooted in the quality of its preparation and credibility of its analysis. Certainly, all of us on the Advisory Panel were really struck with the care and professionalism with which the presentations were prepared. Their sophistication was unprecedented. Credit also must go to those who prepared them. It also must go to the remarkable cooperation we saw between the Deputy Minister side and the Canadian Forces side. The Chief of Defence Staff, then Deputy Minister John Forster, Rear Admiral Hawko, Gordon Venner, Isabelle Desmartif and so many others.

Ultimately it also benefitted from having a Minister who not only has enormous public “street cred” but also the respect among his Caucus and Cabinet colleagues their necessary political support, and, perhaps most importantly, that of the Prime Minister and Finance Minister was the consequence.

As someone who has been there, I can tell you that it's not an easy task in the face of compelling and competing fiscal priorities from other government departments. My hat's off to the Minister and his staff!

Some have criticized it for not having been rooted in an accompanying Foreign Policy Review, but I personally accept the argument that the government's over-arching foreign policy goals were clearly articulated elsewhere.

Certainly, the incredibly talented fellow members of the Minister's Advisory team that I had the privilege of working with, Ray Henault, Louise Arbour and Margaret Purdy, were not bothered by that factor.

Much could be said, but I'd like to pick out a few elements. For myself, I was pleased to see the emphasis on the need for increased capital spending. At the present rate of 17% of the Department of National Defence's budget being consecrated to capital we are destined to rust out and irrelevance in a very few years. The Australians in their recent exercise recognized a need to reach 25% and I do not think this is an unreasonable number in our age of extraordinary technological advance, machine intelligence, cyber, and sophisticated weapons proliferation. Even for basic awareness today we remain too often totally reliant on our American allies when in the field.

Procurement

So, once again an intelligent and effective procurement process is at the core of any successful result.

The good news is, as Admiral Murray advised us, that some 90% of procurement is now relatively streamlined and, while not problem-free, working fairly smoothly. We were also impressed by the department's capacity to support industrial Research and Development and the willingness to work with other partners throughout government.

Unfortunately, the picture is hardly as rosy when we turn to what is the lion's share of the capital cost where the acquisition of aircraft and ships is troubled by issues familiar to all Canadians.

This needs fixing or frankly the exercise will have been of little use. Encouragingly the Government, and certainly the Minister is focused on this, and, while it might be of little comfort to know, when one discusses procurement with any of our allies, their systems all seem to have problems regardless of how much money they spend. Just spend a day at the Pentagon! The Minister himself is also making an effort to educate his colleagues on the very real contribution defence procurement makes to our national economy and the role that industry plays in innovation, research and development – All top priorities of this government.

One of the striking features of Strong, Secure, Engaged is how it begins, not with the usual strategic analysis but rather with the human dimension of the forces, its people and families. This struck some as unusual, but it certainly fits in with my experience that it is the people in the end who make the difference. All the policies, all the strategies, all the money, all the equipment will make no difference if we are not able to recruit and retain highly qualified people and that will only happen when Canadians see themselves reflected in the forces. So, gender-based analysis plus, an emphasis on the role of women and how they enhance our capacities, a recognition that diversity strengthens it, a sensitivity to modern social trends is essential, not only for the creation of a modern force, but also if we are to engage Canadians.

Squeezing the 21st century millennial generation into the structure of the 17th century military structure will be a challenge. This Review recognizes that capital fact.

Veterans

It also recognizes that the credibility of the exercise depends greatly on addressing the problems faced by our veterans. Their suicide rate is a national disgrace; their need to have their injuries addressed is our society's obligation; and their integration into civilian life our nation's responsibility. Their inability to succeed impoverish us all.

One of the most heartening meetings our Advisory Group had was with Walter Natynczyk who made it clear that there were substantial changes taking place in Veterans' Affairs to address these issues. We all wish him and Minister Seamus O'Regan well.

In the end the success of Strong, Secure, Engaged, will come down to getting the needed resources, which, in this case is

some years out. That in turn will depend on the fiscal picture at the time and equally importantly, the state of public opinion. Let's be honest: spending money on Defence has never been a top priority for Canadian Governments: and that in turn is reflective of Canadian public opinion.

This may be, as some have said, because Canadians are innately of the view that the U.S. will assume the protection of us in North America; it is the result of a lot of other factors too.

One that I am particularly conscious of is, that with a few notable exceptions like Calgary, there is a quasi-indifference in most of our educational establishment to issues of defence and security, something I was pleased to see the Review address. And as a politician and as a citizen I have always regretted the lack of depth we have in our public discourse about defence and security issues. I hope that the unprecedented public consultations that were part of this Review will have contributed to that education.

For myself, I have to believe that if the average Canadian had had even a part of the education that I had as a Minister about the quality and professionalism of those who provide us our Defence there would be more support for them as they perform their tasks and those tasks are extraordinary!

Whatever the Review process does to provide the framework for operations, ultimately their success depends on people. It is DND's job to ensure that they are properly trained, properly equipped and given the right rules of engagement to perform their task. But they have to do it, and they do it in a way that I wish more Canadians were familiar with.

Historians tell us that Vimy's troops were superbly trained and led. Because of their qualities they successfully achieved a task that had eluded others. Their courage, determination and sacrifice brought that incredible result.

Today's operations, as you know, are often as dangerous, but they are conducted in highly complex, politically murky environments, sometimes demanding the protection of civilians against undetermined enemies, perhaps even the host government, with the use of highly sophisticated and difficult to counter weapons, like drones or IED's, often in the midst of an internecine civil war or insurrection.

The commander's role is tricky.

As put by General Dallaire:

"the era of the general who only knows how to fight is gone. A general must know how to be a diplomat and a humanist. Generals who argue that we only go in with clear mandates and time frames – sorry. We're in an era of complexity and ambiguity, and if you can't operate in ambiguity, you've got a problem."

A legal scholar familiar with the laws of war put it this way:

"In today's asymmetric post-colonial wars, the terrain beneath a soldier's interpretation of what is and is not appropriate is constantly shifting"

I know that every nation believes that their troops are special, but it was my privilege to witness our troops in theatres as varied as Bosnia, Kabul and Kandahar, and I really do believe that they bring a uniquely Canadian approach to their role which in turn reflects our Canadian character.

Like Canadians they bring a certain respect and regard for the other to the job. "Empathy" I call it. And as Louise Arbour has recently observed:

"Empathy is a political asset."

Their bilingual capacity is a huge asset. And today their multicultural composition enables them to reach out with cultural sensitivity in many languages. And women serving alongside men, undertaking the same tasks with equal skill and determination, are an unmeasurable asset when reaching out to and inspiring local women in their theatre. Gay and lesbian troops serving proudly are a beacon of hope to oppressed minorities everywhere.

Chaplaincy

Reflecting this cultural diversity is something little talked about: the unique nature of our chaplaincy where chaplains of all faiths work together to provide moral guidance and support. What a signal that sends to countries where sectarian strife is often at the centre of the conflict we are there to help resolve.

To this special cultural make-up is added the unusual level of expertise and experience of Canadian NGO's whose level of education and training allow them to take leadership roles that would be unheard of in the forces of most of our allies.

I was particularly impressed by this factor when I was talking with some of our special forces where the NGO's achieve a level of expertise and leadership that's inspirational, particularly when one considers their specialized training in ultra-dangerous chemical, nuclear and biological weapons. They, and Suffield where they train, is one of Canada's best hidden resources and it only occasionally leaks out what they are doing when we learn of the dangers they faced in places like Mosul.

Law

And perhaps you will forgive me, as a former law professor, if I take a moment to comment on the role of the Judge Advocate's Division. As I worked with them I appreciated their expertise on several levels. First, was that their highly educated and experienced legal team has the capacity to advise the government on the general application of the principles of international law as it applies to these Missions, something that is of capital importance today. As Professor David Kennedy put it in his book Of War and Law:

"Law has become a mark of legitimacy and legitimacy has become the currency of power."

Equally important, and far more difficult it seems to me, is the role they play in the field, risking their lives as they advise our troops on the conduct of operations in the terrible and uncertain conditions of combat. The legitimacy of these operations is determined by our conduct in accordance with the rules of law, an adherence, not only to our own rules, but to the Rome Statute and the rules of international humanitarian law, a lesson that was brought home to us when we had to deal with the very complex issue of Detainees in Afghanistan.

I personally cannot imagine a more demanding and important, environment within which to practice law. Something I never could have imagined in those simple text book days of the Faculty of Law.

The Reserves

The first time I had the opportunity of seeing our troops in action was in Bosnia, in 1998. It was in Banja Luka that I learned that some 25% of the force deployed there were from the Reserves. And, as you know, given the size of our regular forces, missions like Bosnia or Afghanistan would have been impossible without that supplement. What most people don't appreciate, however, is the dedication that it takes for the men and women of the Reserves to pursue their vocation in the armed forces, the training or serving time taken away from family on top of a demanding civilian career. My admiration for them has grown over the past eight years that I have had the privilege to serve as the Hon. Col. of a storied `regiment, the Governor General's Horse Guards: Nulli Secundus!

Figuring out how to maximize the use of the talent in our reserve units as we go forward is a challenge. Strong, Secure, Engaged addresses this, not only through a more flexible system for their recruitment and retention, but also by recognizing that their civilian capabilities may well fill in a need for scarce CBRN, cyber, intelligence or linguistic capabilities, something augmented by their multicultural make-up – as Minister Sajjan demonstrated to great effect in Afghanistan.

In the end what struck me most when I had the privilege of seeing our troops was their positive approach to what they were doing and their willingness to reach out to the communities they were charged to protect. In Kabul, I heard from different national commanders their admiration for the willingness of Canadians to "Go the extra mile" well beyond the specific requirements of the Mission. Cathy and I visited with them as they provided protection for a girls' orphanage in their spare time, something no other nation's troops had thought to do.

I heard from Afghan citizens themselves of how they appreciated the fact that Canadian men and women were there to support them, building relations with the local community. And in Kandahar I heard from the local governor and village elders how our troops would go out into the villages and work with them as much as the security situation would allow. Some paid dearly for that experience, such as young Captain Trevor Greene who will spend his life recovering from an axe wound to his head because he chose to sit down and engage the local village elders.

My point is that our troops are superb in combat, but they can also relate to other people; I believe this is a natural consequence of our ability to bring peoples and viewpoints together into an accepting Canadian society. Admiral McFadden, when he was in Northern Ireland, was asked why there were so many Canadians effectively contributing there. His reply was:

"Canadians have a particular expertise in being able always to see the other guy's side of the story. It's a natural fit for the kind of country Canada is."

This "constructive" attitude, this "sense of the other", I suggest, is what contributes to their success in international missions. I know from my Dutch and British Defence Minister colleagues that is why they were drawn to work with us and why our forces are sought for time and again whenever an international crisis arises.

Conclusion

When I look over at the cadets with us tonight, I wish I could say to them this is history, this will not be your lot. Unfortunately, that would not be good advice.

Speaking of the situation in the United States today and our concerns about American leadership in the face of a troubled Europe, an aggressive Russia, a rising China and unstable regions like the Middle East, our Foreign Minister, Chrystia Freeland recently said:

"I think that this is probably the most uncertain moment in international relations since the end of the Second World War." A sentiment seconded by historian Margaret MacMillan speaking at the Trilateral Commission today.

If anything, then, now is the time for a heightened awareness of those dangers and a constant review of our nation's needs and the capabilities we require and maybe we will have to share more of the burden, not less.

The challenge then for these cadets among us tonight and their peers will be great. I can only hope that their generation is served by as professionally competent and devoted men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces that it was my privilege to be associated with in my time in government. And I trust that future governments and our public will realize the need to invest in them and provide the resources they will need to face what will certainly be a highly complex set of security challenges. If those governments, those future forces were to take the conduct of Canadians at Vimy for their example, no-one could ask for more.