



Canadians split on potential military spending cuts: Poll

BY JULIET O'NEILL, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE MARCH 10, 2010



Canadians appear divided on whether the government should reduce military spending to shrink the federal deficit when the Afghanistan mission is over, according to the findings of a poll conducted for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.

Photograph by: Matthew Fisher, Canwest News Service

OTTAWA — Canadians appear divided on whether the government should reduce military spending to shrink the federal deficit when the Afghanistan mission is over, according to the findings of a poll conducted for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.

The poll by Innovative Research Group Inc., found nearly five in 10 people think military spending should not be cut, even if that means reducing other services to shrink the deficit.

By contrast, four in 10 think military spending should be reduced, with Quebecers most likely (52 per cent) to have that opinion and Atlantic residents least likely (25 per cent).

The online survey of 1,339 people was conducted March 2-3. That was the eve of announcement of a federal budget plan to slow the rate of growth in military spending after the scheduled withdrawal of

troops from Afghanistan in 2011.

The Canadian Forces, which costs about \$20 billion this year, would receive \$2.5 billion less between 2012 and 2015 than the government forecast in the past.

Institute representative Elinor Sloan cited the "remarkable" level of support for military spending in a commentary asserting the government "missed this prevailing sentiment" in its budget decision.

"Critical gaps in army, air force and especially navy capabilities will appear in the second half of this decade," she wrote.

Among investments the government has not yet arranged, she cited offshore patrol vessels and aircraft, replacement of aged naval destroyers, supply ships and fighter aircraft.

"With a minimum of four years (longer for ships) between contract award and platform delivery, cuts to previously planned spending beginning in 2011/12 will be the worst of timing."

The poll found 57 per cent of Canadians see both a military and humanitarian role for the armed forces and 58 per cent agreed "we should spend what the military needs" to sustain the war against terrorism as in Afghanistan, humanitarian missions, such as the one in Haiti and defence at home, such as security for the Olympics.

One-third said the government is spending the right amount on the military; another third said it is too little; and 17 per cent said it is too much.

Twenty-two per cent agreed, "we should cut military spending to provide more funds for requirements such as health care, education and First Nations."

"More than ever, the military is part of the average Canadian's interest and thoughts," Sloan wrote. "There appears to be a renewed desire for Canada to play a leadership role in the world — one that goes well beyond the soft power words of yesterday, to concrete action that truly makes a difference."

Pollster Greg Lyle said there is no margin of error in online polls because there are no randomly selected respondents. Online panels are recruited to be representative of age, gender, region and language.

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