

Text of presentation to the
Senate Standing Committee On National Security and Defence
29 November 2004

Senators, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Although many in Kingston are thinking ahead to the upcoming holiday season, your visit today caused me to think back a few weeks to Remembrance Day.

I firmly believe that a soldier's grave is the greatest preacher of peace. We live in a world that is a diverse and beautiful place, filled with wonders, and with people who wish to dominate us. A soldier's grave, or the white caps that mark the graves of sailors, therefore, also reminds us that sometimes we must fight, and indeed die, to ensure that what we cherish continues to thrive.

Many people have dreams of living in a world without hate and war, and I count myself among them. Eliminating war, however, does not eliminate hate. A country ill prepared to defend itself does not offer a shining beacon of hope to the world. Rather, it offers itself as a sacrifice.

Senators, you posed the question, "What vulnerabilities does Canada face?" My answer is direct; our greatest vulnerability is our complacency.

We are a secular, liberal-democratic state in the Western tradition, and as such, we stand for everything that groups like Al-Qaeda hate. We are part of a particular civilization and tradition, which is in the gun sights of a small and determined group of very angry people. Even these people, however are not the most immediate threat to Canada's sovereignty. Again, I say it is our complacency, especially in defence matters, which is the greatest threat.

When compared to other NATO countries, Canada has always been below average in the percentage of GDP we spend on defence—we presently outrank only Luxembourg and Iceland (whose defence expenditure is zero). Whether we like it or not, the rent for space on the world stage is the ability to act credibly and independently in the international battle space.

We have become too used to binding heavy burdens, and placing them on the backs of our allies. Canadians, and our government, seem to aspire to a global role, but we also seem steadfastly unwilling to pay for it. This lack of will has left the door open to our allies to start taking advantage of us.

Both the United States and Denmark are openly and loudly challenging our sovereignty along our northern boarder. We stand complacently by; filing diplomatic protests as warships sail unopposed through the Northwest Passage, and troops raise foreign flags on our territory.

You asked of opportunities missed. Our inability to exercise sovereignty over our Northern territory and seas loses us the opportunity of controlling the harvesting of oil and other resources in the region. This is far more than an economic issue.

If we lose our sovereign rights in the north, we lose the ability to enforce the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, and all of our other environmental legislation. This could ultimately have a devastating effect on the wildlife in the region, and the people whose lives depend upon it.

Further south there are Canadians who feel that Americans are ignorant when it comes to Canada, its people and its culture, but US policy makers are incredibly cunning, and intellectually acute. Canadians should not fool themselves by thinking that they can complacently stand aside and listen, and in some cases even cheer the anti-American rhetoric that comes from Ottawa without feeling the consequences elsewhere. Just ask prairie beef farmers, and Canadian pulp wood and steel workers.

Those that wish to distance Canada from our closest neighbour, and largest trading partner, make the mistake of believing the best way to do this is to adopt a contrarian's attitude to the United States. We maintain our independence, not by opposing everything American, but by maintaining the ability to exercise our sovereignty when and where we want to.

Adequate security and defence are not ends in themselves. They are what is required if a state wishes to remain sovereign. They are what is required if we as Canadians wish to demonstrate not only domestic political supremacy, but also actual independence from outside authority when venturing abroad in the pursuit of our foreign policy goals. As a trading nation, it is those foreign policy goals that will impact, either positively or negatively, our economy and therefore the daily life, standard of living, and employment of all Canadians.

As Canada's military continues to lose its ability to act alone in operations, Canada loses its ability to speak alone on the world stage. This directly impacts our ability to positively affect and leverage our trading relationships. Since the Canadian economy is so highly reliant on trade, a weakening of these relationships will have a dramatic negative impact on our economy. With a declining economy comes declining tax revenues, and a loss of ability to pay for social programs like health care, and education that we cherish so highly as part of our identity.

Equally strong in the Canadian identity is our dedication to humanitarian support. We must be aware that a viable defence force is what allows us to participate in humanitarian missions, directly and indirectly. The value of the Canadian Forces in this regard has been consistently underrated during the last decade or so. We must let no one underrate the energies, the potentialities, and the abiding power for good that comes from the fountainhead of every member of the Canadian Forces, and, hence, the abiding power for good that the Canadian Forces provides to our country, and to our world. Only by leveraging this strategic power on the international stage, will we continue to have the economic power required to maintain our health care, education, and cultural agencies in the medium and long term.

The haemorrhaging of Canada's defence capabilities will lead directly to the bleeding out of our health care, education, and cultural support systems. In short, without a vibrant, credible and viable defence capability, Canada will not have a vibrant, viable, and admired culture, economy, or society.

As Tip O'Neal is famous for saying, "All politics are local," therefore talking to Canadians — who are preoccupied with health care, education, and crumbling municipal infrastructure — about amorphous global threats is not likely to capture our imagination, or interest. Even the feel good role of peacekeeping has lost the lustre it had in the early days.

If we are to save our country, we must talk to Canadians about the link between the world economy and our local economy, and the impact our defence forces, or lack there of, have on both. We must eliminate the false dichotomy of asking if we should spend money on health care or defence, and recognize that we must spend money on both.

Today we seem to be studying everything scientifically, but how many of us are studying ourselves? Too often we let passion and party blind us, but if we are to improve our species, we must take no dogmas for granted, nor satisfy our doubts by ceasing to think. We may have the Internet, and spacecraft landing on Mars, but human nature is, I imagine, much the same this moment, as it was some five thousand years ago when Scorpion first united Upper Egypt. Whether we are in this world as a state of probation for another, or whether we cease altogether when we exhale our last breath, we have duties to perform; duties to our fellow humans, to our friends, and to ourselves.

Fulfilling our duties has never been easy. The upcoming winter solstice, no matter what your tradition, marks a time of enlightenment and rebirth. I passionately hope that my fellow citizens, and our government, will take this time to reawaken our national enlightenment, and reverse the sovereignty suicide we have been engaging in for too many years.