

# John Robson: All I Want for Christmas Is a Capable Canadian Military

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A Canadian military Griffon helicopter flies along the shoreline of Baffin Island as it moves personnel between Operation Nanook and Iqaluit, on Aug. 26, 2014. The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld



By John Robson

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## Commentary

In just a few weeks, Santa and his reindeer will cross the North Pole and fly through the Canadian Arctic. And they may well not be alone, though the Canadian Armed Forces proudly tracking the sleigh could easily miss the other stuff. So at the risk of asking that more be loaded into his sack than can reasonably be delivered, I request a working military for Christmas.



Some people may of course dismiss the jolly old elf as, shall we say, a somewhat romanticized version of the spirit of Christmas. Or disparage the latter entirely. But the other intruders, especially those serving the Kremlin, not Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men, are no invention. Nor is our complete incapacity to do anything about them.

Indeed, from Blacklock's Reporter [we hear that](#) "Canada's military is unprepared to defend the Arctic with few soldiers on deployment, few airfields fit for use by the Air Force and little winter training of combat forces, says a Department of National Defence audit. The largest beneficiaries of annual training exercises are private contractors, said auditors."

Not what you were hoping to unwrap, is it? (Unlike those contractors.) But there it sits. And while we might be able to rewrap it and forward it to the politicians with a card lacking seasonal warmth, it won't do to pretend it didn't arrive.

True, if you enjoy bleak humour, this report might prompt a wry Grinchy smile because it's as bad as a surly satirist's imagination could contrive. For instance, we have "only 46 active North Warning System radar sites across all of Canada's North which accounts for 40 percent of Canada's land mass," which might not matter anyway given there are just 308 regular force personnel and 2,021 reservists up there in case anything was spotted.

OK, we have over 100 airfields at which to land our largely non-existent airplanes carrying our largely non-existent reinforcements. But less than half could accommodate a CC-130 Hercules in case we

had some plausible reason for sending one and some capacity to insert it in the face of a challenge. And only one in eight could land a CC-177 Globemaster, since in playing the numbers game, not the rearmament game, our government counts short gravel runways as military assets.

Speaking of the numbers game, the Department of National Defence spends \$10 million annually on Arctic exercises, somewhat patronizingly called Operation Nanook. But it holds them in summer so as to check boxes, not operational capacities, in a famously cold region. And two-thirds of the money in question goes to contractors, who may not be ready aye ready if the Russians come calling.

Nor will it surprise anyone not distracted by public-sector sugar plums dancing in their wallets from our all-year-round, all-weather defence procurement follies that over a third of our Arctic military buildings date to Trudeau Sr.'s first term or before.

Of course, one habitual solution here is denial. As the Blacklock's story adds, "Arctic Operations found 'minimal consensus' by military commanders on whether Canada faced any foreign threat in the Arctic." And you don't accumulate brass in our military by telling politicians what they need to hear. Although "it was noted Russia does have military capabilities in the Arctic that it could employ against Canadian Arctic targets." Just in case that nice Mr. Putin ever showed signs of attacking neighbours directly or indirectly.

The drawback to chucking the thing behind the couch and pretending you never got it is that reality, per Philip K. Dick, is that which, when you stop believing in it, it doesn't go away. So a better solution would be to grimace and admit that we have no current capacity to defend our nation, alone or even in concert with our allies. If you think our personnel and equipment situation is bad, just imagine how quickly we'd run out of ammunition in a real fight. It would literally be a matter of days, which is not true of potential aggressors.

Unfortunately, the venerable Plan B here is to agree that there's a problem, then **boast that we're finally fixing it** with exactly the same combination of underspending and overconfidence that created it

over the last six decades. But if you believe that one, don't scoff at milk and cookies on the mantelpiece.

My own preference would be to regift this report to the politicians with a stern demand that they rebuild our defences, and a staunch pledge to tolerate rearrangements in our budget that take away some of our goodies to fund it.

Leave it to Santa to slip undetected over our rooftops, bringing gifts we don't deserve, and insist that Caesar protect the house from bears and other predators.

*Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*

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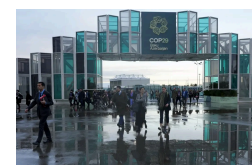
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