DEFENDING CANADA:
CANADIAN MILITARY PREPAREDNESS, 1867-1902

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*Not present at defense*
Abstract

There has been an impression created by scholars that Canadian politico-military actions were taken to benefit Great Britain and fulfill the needs of the Empire. This thesis contends that decisions surrounding military preparedness, defense spending and the militia made by the Canadian government were designed primarily to protect and foster Canadian state interests that slowly evolved over the three decades before the Boer War in 1899: in the first phase, continued military solidarity with the British was demonstrated, especially during the Red River Rebellion (1869-1870); in the second phase, new threats and armed deployments showed an obstinate desire for autonomy at the expense of military Imperial-Canadian cooperation, demonstrated by the purely Canadian operation in the Northwest (1885) and of outright refusal to engage in overseas endeavours (Nile Expedition 1884-85); the last phase saw an amalgamation of the previous phenomena of imperial solidarity and colonial autonomy – that is to say, Canada attempted to decide for itself which military ventures in which it would engage, but Canadian leaders operated in a political world and they had to satisfy, at times, certain segments of the Canadian population that continued to have strong ties to the Empire. This transition from reliance, to obstinacy, and finally to reluctant cooperation, demonstrates that Canada attempted to become more autonomous as the decades passed, a stage that was later reached during the First World War. In brief, then, Canada attempted to act in its own interests, rather than in those of Great Britain in the last third of the 19th century.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Historiography and Imperial Defence in Canada

Would Canada’s military after Confederation exist to serve the interests of the British Empire, or to defend the domestic interests and sovereignty of the new Dominion? Such is the question surrounding Canada’s military preparedness in the three decades following Confederation. It is suggested here that Dominion state interests were the primary objective of Canadian military preparedness, and had as its overarching goal the defence of Canada and domestic considerations. Although military preparedness never seemed to galvanize the Canadian public or the Canadian state after 1867, the resources devoted to them nonetheless improved continuously, albeit slowly, so that territorial claims could be properly maintained. Defensive preparations were effected for the ultimate purpose of consolidating Canadian state interests and, for the period under consideration here, this meant that Canada’s military interests were essentially directed to concerns within the country.

The history of the birth of Canada’s military has been a neglected aspect of the growth of Canada and it has been assumed that Canada’s military objectives have been about serving the British Empire. A body of literature on the later triumphs of the Canadian armed forces, in particular with the emergence of the national myth surrounding the military accomplishment at Vimy Ridge and the coming of age of Canada between 1914 and 1918, already exists.¹ More

¹ As found, for example, in the textbook “Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation 6th Ed.”, p.245 under the heading The Canadian Corps: A Community of Soldiers, by R. D. Francis et
research is needed, however, to provide a better understanding of how the Dominion understood its military obligations within Canada prior to the First World War. It is commonly accepted by scholars such as Carl Berger that the Dominion of Canada, along with New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and other colonies would automatically be brought into a state of war if such were declared by London. Berger and others first argued in the late 1960s that there was no separation between Canadian nationalism and British imperialism. In his view, nationalism and imperialism in Canada could be the same.²

In response to Berger, for example, Douglas Cole argued that there was a fundamental problem in defining imperialism and Canadian nationalism as being two sides to the same coin. Conflating the ideology of “imperialism” for a “developing colonial nationalism” is problematic, to say the least.³ The Canadian imperialist was not interested in creating a Canadian nation – rather, their variety of nationalism was predicated on the idea of a so-called ethnic “Britishness” – a “Britannic nationalism” – that saw a union, or federation, possible between most, if not all (i.e. the United States), localities of English-descent.⁴ Such an understanding of Canadian imperialism stands in contrast to the military policies followed by the Canadian state, which was more interested in the defense of the Canadian nation-state rather than preparing for participation in imperial wars and conflicts. Because this thesis shows that the Canadian military focused on and

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⁴ Ibid., 175.
trained for the defense of Canada and the protection of Canadian territorial integrity, it challenges some of the ideas that Berger presented; it is argued here that Canadian military preparedness was nationalist, not imperialist, in character.

The changes made by the Canadian government in its military establishment throughout the second half of the 19th century were not essentially about Canada’s place in the imperial defensive framework. There is little evidence to suggest that the Dominion of Canada actively planned for participation of its militia in British imperial wars. Indeed if there was planning, it was to see the militia be designed and used solely as an effective auxiliary to British garrisons within Canada. 5 However, Canada’s level of military preparedness – and even the creation of the paramilitary Northwest Mounted Police in 1873 – suggest that the Canadian government was committed to building the capacity to deal with internal matters and domestic defence if the need ever arose. How quickly the military resources were mobilized to pacify the Northwest Territories in 1885 further suggests that the Canadian military had its military forces to support its own autonomy, even if its military commanders were British-trained and British citizens. In fact, it would appear that the ultimate raison d’être of the Canadian military institution was the bolstering of the geographic sovereignty of Canada. It did, however, prepare for one external threat and that was from its American neighbour to the south.

The problem of defining “Imperial Defence” within a Canadian context has remained at the centre of the historical debate on the creation of the Dominion

militia. Richard A. Preston eloquently presents the issue as one of terminology and semantics in his *Canada and “Imperial Defence”*:

Historians of imperial defence have invariably tended... to assume that institutions that were called “imperial” in the sense of being concerned with Britain’s imperial interests were also imperial in the sense of involving the participation of the self-governing colonies [in Britain’s defence organization], even when in fact they were merely British institutions given an imperial label.  

Although Preston wrote his major study more than four decades ago, he revealed the core issue of researching and analyzing the historical significance of the Canadian militia between 1867 and 1902 that remains relevant today. Much of the literature ultimately provides a “centralizing” imperial history that suggests that power lies in Whitehall, and it rarely gives much credence to any notion that there might exist a more natural and inevitable devolution of imperial power to the newly created Dominion of Canada after 1867. It is within Canada, not Great Britain, that the preparedness and importance of the Dominion military can best be seen and explained. Simply put, Canadian military history in this era is best explained by the requirements of Canadian, not imperial, policy.

This is not to say the existing literature is inadequate or irrelevant. Rather, it is incomplete due to the overwhelming tendency of historians to associate Canada’s military preparedness with that of Britain. C. P. Stacey’s *Canada and the British Army* (1963), Norman Penlington’s *Canada and Imperialism* (1965), and Jean-Yves Gravel’s *L’Armée au Québec* (1975) all focus on Canadian military preparedness in an “imperial”, rather than “Canadian”, context. Such an approach ignores Canada’s own defence needs and national interests. Berger

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also suggests that Canadian and imperial interests were aligned. Still, the literature focuses on the relationship between the Imperial and Canadian militaries.

Stacey’s *Canada and the British Army* investigates Canadian defences under the sponsorship of the British. Canadian military history, in the decades before Confederation and until 1871 – when the British withdrew the imperial garrison from Canada – is presented by Stacey as subsidiary to British considerations. In his view, Canada is reacting to imperial developments rather than acting for its own needs. Yet the British authorities understood that with the withdrawal of Britain’s army from Canada, Canadian militia would need to fill the gap. However, Canada’s lack of attention to military matters was a perennial irritation to British authorities, and a frequent source of frustration to those British officers who presided over Canada’s neglected militia. The emphasis throughout Stacey’s work is on what Canadian military developments meant for Britain, rather than for Canada. Such an approach inevitably leads his discussion away from the fact that Canada’s elected officials were interested in applying its military tools for self-interested national reasons and frequently acted as the British hoped they would. There is a danger in seeking Canadian military and political policy as always being implemented with the firm intent of aiding Great Britain. Such is not the case, at least it is never solely the case and Stacey recognizes this fact in some of his own works. In his monumental two-volume history of Canadian foreign policy after 1867, he points out that, while John A. Macdonald

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recognized the subordinate position of Canada within the Empire, he hoped the relationship would change over time and the colonial system would be "less a case of dependence on our part, and of over-ruling protection of the part of the Mother Country, and more a case of healthy and cordial alliance. Instead of looking upon us as a merely dependent colony, England will have in us," Macdonald hoped, "a friendly nation, a subordinate but still a powerful people to stand by her in North America in peace or in war."\(^8\) Macdonald clearly saw Canada’s role as one limited to North America and he did not see Canada as participating in imperial campaigns around the world.

Penlington convincingly argues that Canada’s civilian infrastructure – the railways – and political expansion to British-Columbia were in fact in the imperial interest as well as the Canadian interest.\(^9\) Canada would act as a gateway, with the Canadian railways providing a route of communication between the heart of the Empire and its colonies and mercantile interests in the Far East. Yet, Macdonald and the Canadian government never promoted the transcontinental railway as an imperial project, but rather as a national trade route that was paramount to the development and integrity of Canada, even if there were subsidized steamship lines between Canada’s west coast and the Australasian colonies.\(^10\) The railway project should be seen as a Canadian one. Canada’s policies may have benefitted the Empire, but the implementation of such policies was merely a happy side effect of Canadian efforts at elevating itself to a

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stronger autonomous status – though certainly not yet claiming control over its own external affairs. The role of the Canadian military was the pacification of the central regions, without which intra-coastal communication could not have been possible. Whereas Penlington is focused on seeing Canada’s nation-building initiatives as primarily designed to promote imperial causes, the interpretation offered in this paper suggests that nation-building was pursued for Canadian benefits, to safeguard Canada’s half of the continent and legitimize its claim to colonial autonomy in making use of its military.

Macdonald and the early Canadian governments were worried, as Richard Gwyn so ably shows in his recent biographies of Canada’s first prime minister, about possible American expansion into the Canadian west and the overriding need for Canada to settle the “land of hope”.  

Gravel, for his part, similarly states the need to defend against the United States as being the greatest objective of the “système de défense du Canada au XIXe siècle,” though he notes too that despite the historical focus on frontier defences, the militia had a largely domestic, unmilitary, role in enforcing public order. The role of the militia within the Canadian domestic sphere also points to the need for a historical spotlight on the internal (rather than external) needs of Canada’s military. After all, as Desmond Morton points out, the militia was called out in aid of civil power at least 120 times between 1867 and 1914. Carmen Miller who has examined the use

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13 Ibid., 111.
14 Morton, Canada and War, 22.
of the Montreal militia concludes that “its chief function was social rather than military.”¹⁵

More recent literature, generally from the mid-1980s onwards, tends to show the complexity of Canada’s military experience. Stephen J. Harris, in *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*, for instance, traces the struggle to create a professional army in Canada and attributes the failure of the government to do so until well into the 20th century to domestic peculiarities and the 19th-century Canadian ideology vis-à-vis the defence establishment – an ideology that was apathetic at the best of times to notions of creating a professional standing army and fearful of such a permanent military establishment at other times. Such a Canadian attitude was imported from Great Britain where the British had a long-standing fear of standing armies, and it was Canadian political failure within the federal government that contributed in large part to the failure of a fully functional defence force. The Militia Myth – the national narrative of a volunteer citizen-soldier institution defending Canada against insurmountable odds such as during the War of 1812 – convinced the junior ranks, the militia officer corps, the politicians, and the public, that no other military institution was needed for Canada’s defence.¹⁶ Harris also points out that Canadian nationalism contributed to a persistent resentment of any British interference in the military affairs of Canada.¹⁷

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argues that the faith of Canadians in the militia and the citizen soldier is of very long standing. “The central myth of Canadian arms,” he writes, “is and always has been that the colonist and citizens provide for their own defence.” Such an attitude helps explain the absence of a true professional military organization in the Canadian defence plan, even when including the dreadfully regarded Permanent Force (the regular full-time troops of Canada formed in a handful of regiments).

Desmond Morton also supports the argument that the Canadian government of the 19th century should be held responsible for its outmoded militia. Without confusing imperial policy for the Canadian one, Morton concludes that the late 19th-century Canadian militia was an un-military institution. Rather than meeting a real threat or preparing for a future defence need, the militia had merely become a “…social and political institution.” The militia had become a bastion of “Britishness” for the ever-loyal Canadian militiamen and public. In this way, the illusion of a present and caring British empire was maintained, but such a view was only superficial and it came at the expense of a truly functioning military establishment. The militia, Morton has written elsewhere, was a powerful lobby in Canada and it frequently thwarted the efforts of the military professionals to create a modern army. By the early 20th century, however, the influence of what he calls the “Parliamentary Colonels” was on the wane.

20 Ibid., 94.
21 Ibid., 96.
While the important literature on Canada’s military informs this study, it should be noted that much of the existing historiography was written by military historians who are highly critical of Canada’s state of defence. They neglect, further, to see beyond the “Imperial” façade of the historical literature, as Preston suggests – though even he glosses over the benefits of Canada’s consolidation of the West. More specifically, that literature often fails to identify the domestic needs of the nation-state. Moreover, it downplays the very real domestic considerations necessary for internal security within Canada, as Morton and Miller have themselves noted about the number of times that the militia was called upon to aid the civil power; and, finally, it fails to account for Canada’s national domestic interests, especially on its Western Frontier.

When taken together, the literature places too much emphasis on operational weaknesses, inherent political misuse of the militia, and the tendency to conflate Canadian with imperial interests; it also minimizes the militia’s genuine contributions to Canadian national interests as they evolved between 1867 and 1902. Many of the books that have addressed the development of the Canadian militia since Confederation have generally concentrated on the Canadian professional officer corps as well as the British officers despatched to Canada to serve as commanders of the Canadian militia with the result that Canadian ideas regarding the militia have been given short-shrift. 23

The literature generally fails to see the purpose of Canada’s military, between Confederation and the end of the Second Boer War, as a distinct

23 The best examples, as noted above, are Morton’s Ministers and Generals and Harris’s Canadian Brass.
subject or theme separate from the context of imperial military preparedness. Separating Canadian from imperial military interests is essentially a nation-focused interpretation rather than an imperial one. When viewed through this lens, a study of Canada’s military preparedness seeks to understand the importance of Canadian needs rather than seeing Canada as being preoccupied with imperial concerns. Only when the lens shifts its focus away from imperial needs is it possible to determine the role played by the young and largely immature military institution, dominated by the well-to-do, loyal, and Canadian-born citizen-soldier. The results that emerge from this approach does not necessarily mean that Berger and others who saw Canadian nationalism and British imperialism as one and the same were misguided but it might mean that the Canadian government and those supporting better military preparedness looked first to consolidate Canada’s control over the land mass that was Canada and looked to protecting British interests periodically and only when in their interests to do so. Even then, as this paper will show, Canadian prime ministers and the Canadian government refused to participate in military operations simply because Britain made a request. However, when it came to defending Canadian sovereignty and Canadian interests, the government never refused in using its military capacity to protect those interests.

Admittedly, the approach to historical research adopted for this thesis is done at the expense of the social history of Canada’s military and in considering the connections between new themes of masculinity, gender and the military. Yet, the approach chosen here will lead to a greater and more precise focus on
the state and institutional dimensions of Canada in the post-Confederation era. This thesis recognizes too that much remains to be understood from the histories of the lower hierarchy of individuals and groups – the militiaman himself, his regiment, his motivations, etc., but that is not the focus in this paper. The thesis aims to, first, explore the imperatives motivating Canada’s military preparedness and not simply see Canadian interests as imperial ones, and, second, demonstrate that the new Dominion saw military preparedness as an obligation to its citizens. It aims lastly to show that there existed a national aspiration to create, maintain, and embrace a citizen-soldier militia.

1.2 Canadian Military History and the Militia, 17th-19th Century

First, to accomplish the thesis’ objectives and in order to fully appreciate the institutional development of the Dominion’s militia system and to show the traditional trust accorded to it, it is important to review briefly Canada’s military history between the 17th and early 19th centuries. There was considerable consistency in the development of Canada’s military policy during this time, as military preparedness itself was first and foremost a domestic (when a colony), and later, a national interest (when a Dominion). To a great extent the Militia Myth dominated the whole period of early Canadian history. For Canadians of French and British origins, it was believed that the citizens were always ready to bear arms against the “invader”, and that these volunteers were more valuable than regular troops. The group of citizen-soldiers fought alongside the regular units of their political masters – either France or Great Britain. To a degree, this
antecedent explains the paradox of Canada’s state of defence after Confederation in 1867: its residents were un-military in outlook, but had on several occasions to bear arms against existential threats to their land – often successfully. George Stanley describes Canadians, both French and English, as generally caring little for their state of defence, owing to the fact that Canada is largely shielded from, if not immune to, most threats of invasion because of its geographic situation.\textsuperscript{24} Despite this, the Canadian militiaman was essential to the early defence of their colony.

The founding of New France in the first half of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century created a new strategic dynamic in North America. The first French settlers found themselves fighting nearby indigenous peoples. First Nations’ raids and early American colonial attacks both justified the need for a defensive arrangement in New France. For decades, the settlers and colony were left to handle their own defenses amidst increasingly deadly and devastating Iroquois attacks. Militarily, the militiaman could no longer be expected to hold his land alone. Only the arrival of the Carignan-Salières regiment in 1665, a regular French military unit, reversed the trend of continuous pressures on the colonial frontier by offering devastating firepower in response to the Iroquois attacks.\textsuperscript{25} The militiaman was also called to fight against the English imperial invader, either locally or on English territory – but always in the interest of safeguarding New France’s territorial integrity. Such was also the case in the several wars of European origin, such as the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the Seven

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{25} Morton, \textit{A Military History of Canada}, 9.
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Years' War (1756-1763). In each of these conflicts, the Canadian (or Canadien) militia was called upon to defend the homeland, sometimes fighting alongside the regulars, sometimes not – but always forming the backbone of the military effort. This often occurred because of the disproportionate numbers between militia and regulars rather than actual fighting quality, but the fact remains in Canadian lore, it was the frontiersman who defended the land.  

The reliance on the militia system continued unimpeded under British rule following the official transfer of New France, now the Province of Quebec, to the British in 1763. Barely a decade later, war again ravaged the continent, and the militia again was once again called into action. The American Revolutionary War saw an invasion of the Province of Quebec in 1775 by the Continental Army. Again, even if slightly less enthusiastically, the Canadian militia marched out to meet a new threat. A similar development occurred in the War of 1812, when the militia was called to service, fighting alongside the British regulars as well as their First Nations allies. The militia assistance was valuable once more for filling the gaps in the colony’s defences, fighting either with the Redcoats at the Battle of Queenston Heights, or holding their own as at the Battle of the Châteauguay. British regular troops, especially in Upper Canada, were in short supply. The war first saw early American advances, followed by British counter-offensives, and ended in general stalemate. Without the local militias – whatever form they

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26 Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers, 84. The small number quoted for French regular soldiers compared to the colonial militia on the American continent in 1759 is perhaps indicative of the hope placed on the hardy settler. Despite this (overestimated) importance on the militia, General Wolfe was not blind and was astute enough to realize that he was not fighting so much an army as he was an armed group.
27 Morton, A Military History of Canada, 43.
28 Ibid., 58 & 63.
29 Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers, 151.
took – British defensive capabilities would surely have been severely reduced and vulnerable.

Militia units also found themselves fighting their countrymen in the Upper and Lower Canada Rebellions of 1837-38, and still at the side of British regulars. Further east, in New Brunswick, the “Aroostook War” between 1839 and 1842 further demonstrated the natural and necessary inclination to calling out militiaman for local defence – in this case, following a rise in tensions along the Maine border. In 1866, the last pre-Confederation hurrah of the militia occurred when renegade American Irish headquartered in the United States launched the Fenian raids for Irish independence. Although the Canadian militia suffered some casualties and met with some defeat, it was ultimately able to repulse the Irish nationalists.

The military value of the militia before Confederation was mixed, though admittedly its role has depended on the particulars of an era and specific campaign being fought. The French-Canadian militiaman before 1665, for example, was the sole source of defence for New France and was expected to defend the frontier. By 1812, the mostly Loyalist Upper Canadian militiaman functioned more as an auxiliary to British regular forces. But nations have a way of twisting history, and the militia has not been immune from historical exaggeration: the historical military success of the Canadian militia is debatable, but its overall strategic importance as a political tool of force is more difficult to

Preston pointed out that the War of 1812, for example, left Canadians with a “false tradition that the militia saved” Canada.\(^\text{32}\) Stephen Harper, in commemorating the 200th anniversary of War in 2012, also ventured to suggest the militia’s efforts were fundamental to “creating Canada’s armed forces,” and implied that it was these early “regiments” that won against the Americans.\(^\text{33}\) As we see, the tendency to attribute Canadian military prowess and capabilities to the militia remains alive. There was a similar Canadian ideal of the militiaman in the late 19th century\(^\text{34}\) and, as James Woods notes in his examination of Canadian popular conceptions of the citizen soldier, Canadians have long understood their role as “an ideal and symbol by which Canadians ordered their understanding of armed conflict and their notions of a citizen’s duty to serve.”\(^\text{35}\) There was clearly a belief developed through Canadian history that a citizen army could flourish.\(^\text{36}\)

**Chapter 2: The Need for Defence**

### 2.1 Changing Imperial Mood

The near continuous military contact with and against the First Nations in the 17th and 18th centuries and the frontier’s effect on the soldier created the notion of a new type of combatant proper to North America. A new style of

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\(^{32}\) Preston, *Canada and "Imperial Defense"*, 38.


\(^{36}\) Ibid.
warfare, and the need to have every colonial male citizen fight for his existence, created the Canadian militiaman. This militarized understanding of the frontier remained popular well into the last half of the 19th century.

At the time of Confederation Canada was part of the British world and imperial policy influenced much that happened in Canada. This is true of the governmental efforts to establish a suitable army. These early national efforts are inextricably linked with Great Britain’s own Victorian-era global military policies, as they necessarily affected the Canadian policy on defence. The shift of British military resources away from the North American theatre of operations to other areas was complete by November 1871 amid a greater reorganization of Britain’s global defence strategy, even if the Royal Navy maintained its bases in Halifax and at Esquimalt.37 This left Canada’s defence almost solely on the shoulders of the Dominion itself. As a result, Canada was forced to develop its own defensive efforts and it often pursued policies that reflected its own needs over those of the Empire. This explains, to a certain extent, the political friction often found between the Canadian militia ministers and the British commanding generals. Morton, in *Ministers and Generals*, concludes that despite such tensions, the Canadian state nonetheless succeeded in developing its “own military institution” and that it came “to accept defence as a legitimate responsibility of self-government.”38 As Wood notes, when the 1895 Venezuelan Crisis developed over a border dispute with British Guiana, the Canadians eagerly responded by participating in militia training and marksmanship clubs in response. Rather than

engage in a potential conflict alongside British imperial forces, militia preparation readied Canada’s defence from possible American attack on Canadian land.\(^{39}\)

Secondly, it is important to note that military cooperation continued to exist between the Dominion and the Empire, and note, too, how Canada responded to British imperial war by either providing or requesting military assistance. In addition to the numerous military scares in Canada involving the Americans or Russians, the important operations involving the Dominion wholly or in part included: the Red River expedition of 1871; the Gordon Relief expedition to the Sudan in 1884-85; the North West Rebellion campaign of 1885; the assertion of Canadian sovereignty in the Yukon in 1898; and the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.

The political psychology of the Empire often impacted how Canada responded to various military campaigns between 1867 and the end of the Boer War in 1902. An “anti-colonial mood” held considerable sway in Great Britain at the time of Confederation and many in the old country had a desire to see some of its colonies mature into semi-autonomous units.\(^{40}\) There was certainly a feeling in London that Canada and the other self-governing colonies should shoulder a great share of the cost of their defence. That was one of the imperatives pushing New Zealand and Canada towards greater self-government in the 1850s and 1860s (followed by Australian federation in 1901 and South African union in 1910). Great Britain no longer had the same economic imperative in maintaining and garrisoning Canada – let alone all of the Empire – as it had done ever since

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\(^{39}\) This point is made in Matthew Trudgen’s Review of Wood’s *Militia Myth, Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (2012).

la Conquête in 1759. The increase in Great Britain’s industrial production capacities, in conjunction with its ability to project force and therefore open new markets, meant that it could forgo its old tariff system and take most measured steps towards reducing its control – and expenditure for – all its colonies around the globe. \(^{41}\) As intimate as the British economic relationship with Canada had been, by mid-century there were new realities that no longer suited the older economic reality. This change also meant that Great Britain saw, in particular, its military obligations to Canada to be an overly costly effort and possibly unproductive expenditure. \(^{42}\) As was recognized equally by both Whitehall and the Canadian government after 1867, the only veritable threat posed to Canada originated from the United States. \(^{43}\) If it was not the Republic itself that threatened Canadian integrity in the West, then it was so-called “lawless individuals,” perhaps referring to some elements of the troublesome Métis. \(^{44}\)

In essence, Great Britain was militarily abandoning Canada. The previous exploits in the War of 1812 had no hope of being repeated in a future war, as the United States’ industrial and military base steadily grew in quality and quantity. Any political altercation between Great Britain and the United States seemed to provoke hostility towards Canada: the perception of Canada as a British possession in North America attracted the indignation of American annexationists. This, in addition to the massive financial burden, encouraged the

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British to gradually reduce its military involvement in North America. 45 Confederation in 1867 only confirmed the British retreat. The British government argued that if Canada wished to claim political freedom, it must also assume “military self-help.” 46 Indeed, as one British official exclaimed: “An army maintained in a country which does not even permit us to govern it... what an anomaly!” 47 The balance of power was shifting in Europe from the 1860s onwards, especially in the form of Prussian military and industrial expansion, and as early as 1869 a new British military policy was developed as some 44,000 regulars were called back from colonial garrisons and repositioned throughout the English Isles to counter threats nearer to home and to help alleviate the growing difficulties in recruitment. 48 The 1867 British North America Act effectively transferred military control to the new federal government and, in 1868, the Militia Act further entrenched the Canadian government’s right to legislate and administer in matters of national defence. 49 This was necessary, given the departure of the British army (with the exceptions of the imperial garrisons at Halifax and Esquimalt, though even these garrisons were not intended to protect Canadian territory, but rather to defend the naval bases for the Royal Navy as strictly imperial possessions (much as was the case with Gibraltar). In the context of Great Britain’s global strategy, the withdrawal from Canada can be understood as a form of retrenchment and it was read in Canada

45 Cain & Hopkins, British Imperialism, 260.
46 Ibid.
48 Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers, 240.
49 Richard A Preston, Canadian Defence Policy and the Development of the Canadian Nation 1867-1917 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1970), 4.
as a clear sign that it now had to take care of its own defense. Military preparedness became a national rather than imperial concern.

2.2 The Militia Bill and George Étienne-Cartier

The Dominion government realistically accepted limitations involved in the event of war in North America. It would be extremely difficult to withstand any assault from the south.\(^50\) British strategy asked for Canada to fight a “delaying action” against the Americans, while the British Royal Navy and Army prepared an amphibious invasion of the United States’ vulnerable coast.\(^51\) In truth, the Canadian militia was not a fully-fledged military force and it could only be used, in these early days after Confederation, to maintain internal order and assist government expansion into Rupert’s Land. There was no suggestion that the Canadian militia would ever be required to fight an imperial action. Rather, it would only fight to protect Canada’s interest and to advance Canada’s own policies.\(^52\) Because of its limited capacity, the Canadian militia lacked the professionalism found in the regular militaries of other western nations and it maintained “the character of a local force.”\(^53\) Given the reality of military preparedness in Canada, the genesis for -- and the eventual development of -- the Canadian military as a real military force strained the relationship between the amateur militia and the Permanent Force. Although amateur in character, much was expected from the militia. The Canadian militia’s first commander,

\(^{50}\) Granatstein & Bercuson, *War and Peacekeeping*, 9.
\(^{51}\) Preston, *Canadian Defence Policy 1867-1917*, 5.
Lieutenant-General Sir E.S. Smyth, stated that: “A nation must maintain a military force to attain three goals. Firstly, it is to defend against external enemies. Secondly, to assist civil authorities when it becomes necessary to enforce the law. Thirdly… [as with any] military force [it] is the prerogative of all States wishing to find a place amongst the nations.” As a military organization, the Canadian militia was expected to carry out what was normally the purview of a professional and regular force.

The 1868 Militia Bill and the Minister of Militia and Defence George-Étienne Cartier’s speech to the House of Commons in March 1868, when the legislation was introduced, suggest a national interest behind the formation of the militia. Though Canada was neither fully independent, nor yet completely dependent, as a nation-state, its early leaders sought to carve out a uniquely Canadian presence in North America through the consolidation of its national authority. As has been the case for millennia, it is the military institution that best guarantees a state’s right to sovereignty. Cartier very deliberately defined Canada’s military obligations and ultimate objective, as his statement paraphrased by Hansard demonstrates: “But, behind all, the military element still remained necessary for the completion of national greatness.” Cartier was not naïve. He saw the role that a military could play in the establishment of a great nation, desiring also to see Canada expand westwards to the Pacific coast. The American experience in their Indian Wars, during the expansion of their own frontier, must have left a lasting impression on Cartier and his views on the need

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54 Translated from Gravel, L’Armée au Québec, 18.
for a Canadian military force. He had been a major proponent of Canada’s purchase of Rupert’s Land in 1869 and had played a major role in extending Canada’s control of the Northwest. The potential violence that might await Canada’s territorial expansion and a militia to deal with it was not lost on Cartier, and he understood the link between the two. If perhaps obliquely, Cartier clearly implied that the formation of the militia and the planned annexation of the North-West Territories went hand-in-hand – he was as “desirous” as any to see the western lands, including British Columbia, join Canada.56

The Militia Bill was a product of both overreliance on the volunteer citizen-army doctrine and a determination to limit expenditure. After all, Canada was a child among the world’s nations with few resources to spare. Cartier’s military policy required maximum strength at minimal cost and the 1868 Bill embodied this requirement. The “…Bill divided the Militia Force into Active and Reserve militias…” whereby the Active was composed of volunteers and the Reserve a manpower pool that could be conscripted.57 The expectation was “that the number of trained men within the Dominion should not be less than 40,000.”58 Provisions were made, by way of the Reserve, that extra men be enrolled by a ballot system to ensure the target of 40,000 was always maintained.59 It appeared that numbers alone, at least on paper, would ensure adequate defence in Canada. The militiamen would be “armed, clothed and equipped at public

58 Ibid.
59 Though the ballot system was available, it was never used – such a move would have been politically unpopular.
expense and drilled from eight to sixteen days a year.⁶⁰ The country would be divided into nine military districts, whose role would be the drilling and recruitment of militiamen.⁶¹ There seemed to be an overestimation of Canada’s potential military capabilities owing to the mere fact that it could field, in theory, large numbers of men. Cartier suggested as much when he explained to the House that,

Looking at the way in which the four millions of Southern whites were furnishing 400,000 fighting men who defended their country for four years against twenty-four millions of the North who had put into the field during the war 2,600,000 men [sic]. If it should be our misfortune to face an invasion even from the American nation, we would be in a far better position to meet the difficulty than the Southerners, for we would have 700,000⁶² of our own fit to bear arms besides having the whole power of England at our back…⁶³

This excerpt is revealing for two reasons. First, it speaks to Cartier’s, and ultimately his political master, John A. Macdonald’s view that Canada was in need of martial power. The comparison to the Southern States is important, as it compares Canada with a previous enemy of the United States. Even two years later, when Canada was again expecting further Fenian raids, Macdonald was still distrustful of the US and blamed the American government for tolerating these military incursions into Canadian territory.⁶⁴ The Militia Bill provided a military response to “remain[ing] under the British Crown,” and would have went

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⁶¹ Ibid., 13.
⁶² Of note here is the discrepancy between the official target of 40,000 trained militiamen mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the 700,000 of Cartier’s speech: The larger number refers to the maximum potential of enrolling every eligible male Canadian (in effect the potential for a draft).
even further had it not been for the difficult monetary situation.\textsuperscript{65} Second, though Canada’s military preparedness was impressive on paper, it would ultimately be contingent on British military aid. Cartier was no doubt expecting Great Britain to remain militarily engaged in North America for some time. It did not make sense, from his perspective, for British troops to be withdrawn from Canada. They were needed to keep the Americans in check and maintain a distinctly loyalist and imperial connection to England. In this sense, the militia organization was not originally construed as an independent fighting force, but as an auxiliary to Britain’s regulars on Canadian territory. Preston argues as much in \textit{Canada and “Imperial Defense”}: “The departure of the [British] regulars would mean the removal of the staff, the auxiliary services, and the instructors upon whom his new militia system depended.”\textsuperscript{66} Cartier made no mention in his speeches during the Militia Bill that Canada’s militia would be engaged in military exploits beyond the defence of Canada.

\subsection*{2.3 \textit{Canada On Her Own}}

British military withdrawal from North America should not have come as a surprise to Macdonald’s government. London had been especially clear on several occasions that Canada represented the weak link in imperial defense, and that the two British Conservative ministries between 1866 and 1868 were keen on leaving the Dominion on its own.\textsuperscript{67} British opinion seemed adamant that

\begin{flushright}
\cite{Morton, Ministers and Generals, 7.}
\cite{Preston, Canada and “Imperial Defense”, 63.}
\cite{Stacey, Canada and the British Army, 198-199.}
\end{flushright}
a self-governing colony had an obligation to see to its own defense. As one British Liberal MP explained:

If we were to increase our effective force it must be done by making the colonies pay for their own troops. It was an extraordinary thing that some colonies paid so largely for the number they had in comparison with the payments made by other colonies. He did not see how our interests could be served by our maintaining 12,000 men in Canada. The military courage of the Canadians would be more readily developed if we did not allow it to remain dormant by quartering our troops in the colony.\(^68\)

Many in Great Britain shared this opinion, seeing that a shift in finances and the balance of power in Europe would necessarily affect imperial defenses in North America. Only a few months after the 1868 Militia Act, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli ordered “two more battalions home from Canada.”\(^69\)

The Secretary of State for War, Edward Cardwell, denounced the weakening tendencies that imperial garrisons caused in the colonies but he believed that Canada should take on its own burden of defence. It was stated policy across the Empire to withdraw these regular battalions no matter the local situation, as in the case of New Zealand where, for example, 10,000 regulars were repatriated in the midst of a Maori rebellion.\(^70\) But Confederation had changed the realities of British defense in North America – as did pecuniary considerations. Cardwell was all too willing and enthusiastic to see the policy of withdrawal continue under his auspices, especially as he saw Canada as “…an

\(^{69}\) Stacey, Canada and the British Army, 201.
indefensible line of frontier…”  

Befitting his liberal ideology of fiscal restraint, there was also cold logic to Cardwell’s strategy. In the absence of immediate imperial aid, Canada would be forced to foster a domestic military establishment of its own and prepare its own army for its own defenses:

I do not believe [colonial garrisons strengthen] the Empire. If, instead of calling upon your colonists to exert themselves and to rely on their own resources, you distribute forces among them in small divisions, you will paralyze their efforts without furnishing them with real strength. I believe that Canada, with 30,000 or 40,000 armed men of her own, occupies a stronger and more independent position than she ever did before.  

In the early years of Confederation, as Cardwell demonstrated, Great Britain wanted to avoid all military entanglements in North America, and it adopted a deliberate policy to have Canada help itself. As surely as night follows day, Canada would indeed become self-sufficient in terms of defence if Britain refused to provide that military assistance.

The Canadian mistrust of standing armies guaranteed a virtually militia-only organization. Because of the lack of a military professionalism and ethos in the militia, it is incredibly difficult to speak of a Canadian “military”. It is also challenging to provide a clear figure for the number of citizen-soldiers to be found within the institution. In 1869, the volunteer militia strength stood at 43,541, with the total fluctuating either upwards in times of perceived threats or down in times of economic depression (such as in the late 1870s when the number slumped to nearly 20,000). The Permanent Force, in contrast, would never number more than three regiments until the First World War, the bare minimum that could be

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71 Ibid.  
72 Ibid.  
73 Harris, Canadian Brass, 6-7.  
tolerated. The theory behind the limited Permanent Force can be described allegorically as a skeleton: in the case of an important war, this Force would offer the cadre, or nucleus, of a much larger field army drawn from the citizenry that would coalesce into a cohesive fighting unit.

Canada’s military did not shift towards the professional type until the First World War, however. For Canadians, their past victories such as at Québec (1775), Chateauguay (1813), and more recently during the Patriot Rebellions of 1837-38, vindicated the usefulness of the militia-style army. As a militia captain wrote in 1902: “The supreme test of war proved the practical value of the militia as a defensive force.” Antagonism towards the establishment of regular forces ran deep in Anglo-Saxon tradition. Moreover, many in Canada believed that training for the militia and service in militia units were not only responsibilities of citizenship, but that such activities created within citizens the skills and the values “required of a good “British” citizen (such as loyalty, honesty, hardworking, family-oriented, and Christian, etc.)”.

Samuel Hughes, for example, who would become Minister of Militia and Defence in 1911, was himself an adamant believer in the Militia Myth. He had a long career as a militia officer and was never a friend of standing armies: he

75 Creighton, John A. Macdonald, 410.
76 Wood, Militia Myths, 6.
77 Ibid., 25.
78 Harris, Canadian Brass, 20.
believed in the sanctity of military volunteerism as embodied by the militia.\textsuperscript{80}

Thus, officially and in private, many Canadians, like Hughes, perceived the militia system as the best military construct available. But with a preference for the militia also came its inherent weaknesses, as it remained a barely instructed and trained volunteer force. Even if Canada were willing to provide men for a variety of expeditions, it would almost be more of a liability for the British. The Canadian regular force, the Permanent Force, was a confused creation, as neither politician nor soldier seemed to truly understand its purpose.\textsuperscript{81}

They were too few men in the Permanent Force to fight a modern war and it was hated by the militia. It was kept in existence to provide some semblance of a standing army in Canada. But as a tool of national sovereignty, it proved its worth in 1898 when the Yukon Field Force was created. 203 soldiers were dispatched in response to the gold rush that had erupted in 1896, as the “handful of Mounties at the site” was not enough.\textsuperscript{82} New economic opportunities attracted tens of thousands of newcomers, and it was not lost on the government that some 80% of the current Yukon population was American.\textsuperscript{83} This use of Canadian military force, as Granatstein indicates, “calmed the situation” and maintained the status quo in the region until the Alaska boundary dispute could be settled diplomatically.\textsuperscript{84}

Personality clashes and conflicting views on military preparedness between individuals at the highest levels also played an important part in the

\textsuperscript{80} Harris, Canadian Brass, 86.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{82} Granatstein, Canada’s Army, 35.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 36.
antagonism that developed between the amateur soldier and the professional one. This was in part played out by the mostly reactionary Ministers of Militia and Defence, who were more often than not interested in political patronage, financial considerations, and being elected. The often reformist-minded General Officers Commanding (GOCs), who were invariably officers of the British army, saw the need to overhaul the command and training structure of the militia. The task of leading the militia was not easy for the GOC: they were subordinate to the minister responsible and it was recognized that trust and tact were qualities absolutely necessary for constructive relations. But the divergent interests of both parties often led to infighting. For example, sensible and realistic proposals to professionalize the militia, forwarded by Selby Smyth, were met with widespread condemnation. Encouraging the growth of a standing army, however small, was un-Canadian. Another GOC, Sir Frederick Middleton, drew yet more criticism when he downplayed the role of Canadian militia officers who participated the 1885 Northwest campaign. In response, deputy minister of militia and defence Charles-Eugène Panet suggested “Canadians can fight their own battles without foreign help.” Beyond military reform, even having a British regular at the helm caused controversy within Canada – public and political opinion had it that a Canadian born was much more suited to the task. Attempts at coordinating military defensive plans for Canada with Great Britain were put aside by the Ministry of Militia and Defence in the 1880s and it even failed to take

85 Harris, Canadian Brass, 53.
86 Morton, Ministers and Generals, 30.
87 Ibid., 36.
88 Quoted in Ibid., 84.
89 Ibid., 33.
seriously the completed surveys of Canadian defences.\textsuperscript{90} Attempts at modernizing the force to ensure consistency in training and military education or enforcing standardization of abilities, similarly resulted in very little progress, so that even the Permanent Force was relegated to the role of instructors and seldom were they allowed to even train themselves due to budgetary constraints.\textsuperscript{91}

Great Britain expected that in the eventuality of a full-scale war that threatened its own security, Canada would participate wholeheartedly as an auxiliary.\textsuperscript{92} This explains why the organization of the Canadian militia was the same as that previously used in the Province of Canada in the decades before Confederation: this choice “shows that [Minister George-Étienne Cartier] expected that Britain would maintain the British garrison as a first-line defence force.”\textsuperscript{93} This analysis helps explain, in conjunction with the Militia Myth, the initial creation of the military force along militia lines. John A. Macdonald’s proud nationalist, though also pro-British, stance concerning the militia laid the framework of Canadian policy until the Boer War. Just as Canada would demonstrate that its military could deal with internal conflict on its own, it also expected that Great Britain allow the Dominion to decide on overseas commitments.\textsuperscript{94} There was an important distinction to be made, Prime Minister

\begin{footnotes}
\item[90] Harris, \textit{Canadian Brass}, 52-53.
\item[91] Wood, Militia Myths, 26.
\item[92] \textit{The Old Chieftain}, 411.
\item[93] \textit{Canadian Defence Policy}, 5.
\item[94] \textit{The Old Chieftain}, 411.
\end{footnotes}
Macdonald argued, between small local “disturbances” in distant corners of the Empire and military threats to the integrity of the British Empire.95

However, just as the British were forced by public and financial pressure to call back their garrisons from the far-flung outposts of its Empire in the 1860s and 1870s, by the 1880s and 1890s Britain would reverse this policy and start demanding greater participation of its semi-autonomous dominions in armed conflicts throughout the world. A show of imperial solidarity became necessary for Great Britain as it slowly saw its relative global hegemony eroded by market competition from the United States and military threats closer to home in the shape of Prussian expansionism.96 The British Empire’s standing amongst the other superpowers relied just as much on its illusory strength as real military power. For this reason, it was in Britain’s interest to demonstrate that it could draw on the strength of its dominions and imperial unity to bolster its military prestige and military power. Some in the Empire promoted imperial union as a way of institutionalizing military cooperation between Great Britain and its white semi-autonomous colonies and establishing formal links in global planning — the main example being Imperial Federation (whereby the Empire would be organized as a single federal state).97 Unfortunately for the die-hard imperialists, such cooperation would never see the light of day and was never taken too seriously. But as Carl Berger has argued, there was a the growing sense of imperialism in Canada through the 1890s, which meant that Canada would likely

97 Ibid.
express some support for imperial defence, even if the Canadian state often shunned such notions.

Chapter 3: A Canadian Military for Canadian Interests

3.1 Threats and Scares

The formative years of Canada saw the personal policies of its first political leaders truly shape Dominion military strategy. Canadian defence policy took on the character of its leaders, and this was especially true with John A. Macdonald, in office from 1867-73 and again from 1878-91. His lengthy tenure helps explain Canada's relatively consistent military-imperial policies from 1867 to the end of the 19th century, as the groundwork was laid out at the onset of Confederation. Macdonald did not believe Imperial Federation to be an advantageous option for Canada, and therefore ensured that the militia would for decades be used exclusively for Canadian purposes.98 The Dominion was too young and still too focused on the development of its economy and infrastructure requirements to be advocating for such a great transformation in imperial political organization. Instead, Macdonald argued, Canada should be one among equals. Better yet, there ought to be an “alliance of Great Britain and the 'auxiliary kingdoms' of Canada and Australia.”99 When it came to imperial military questions, Macdonald was a soft isolationist. He intended for Canada to focus its human, natural, and industrial resources towards national development. He

98 The Old Chieftain, 348.
99 Ibid., 410.
perceived imperial affairs in the Sudan, for example, to concern only the British army, and not Canada (it was an admittedly different situation for the Australasian colonies that had different geopolitical considerations in play).\footnote{Ibid., 411.} Macdonald made the distinction between regional conflicts and “general war”. Moreover, Macdonald was a pragmatist and he would prove his commitment to pragmatism with his handling of the North-West Rebellion, the first real military campaign of his administration. He made a point not to request assistance from the British army: it would be a purely internal affair for the Dominion’s militia and the North West Mounted Police (NWMP). Over the course of his career, Macdonald never officially committed Canadian military resources to a British war.

Military cooperation between Canada and Great Britain was mostly an improvised affair. As there was no definitive policy of defence between the self-governing colony and Great Britain, changes to operations and strategy were on an ad hoc basis, depending on the current state of affairs. Such was especially evident when the military had to prepare for possible action such as during the Fenian raids, the Russian scare of 1878, and the Venezuela crisis of 1895-96. Though Canada’s policy dictated that it would not be restricted by any formal defence plan with Great Britain, the Dominion would nonetheless be slowly taken into the imperial military orbit by a resurgence in jingoist imperialism throughout the British empire, backed by strong support for military volunteerism.

First, the Fenian attacks in the late 1860s delayed Great Britain’s decision to withdraw its regulars from Canada, and in fact the British even increased the
garrison numbers during the years after the American Civil War and in the period immediately before Confederation. The Fenian society had hoped to hold Canada hostage in return for Irish independence. In effect, Canada was being used as a pawn in imperial affairs without having any say; it was paying a price for Great Britain’s world politics. Sir Alexander Campbell, as postmaster general of Canada, would even argue to the British Colonial Secretary in 1870 that the Empire had an obligation to assist materially or financially in Canadian defence because the Fenian aggression was “not of Canadian making.” Leaving the Dominion to defend itself was unfair given that it was being directly threatened by Great Britain’s enemies, and not its own. This set precedent for a common theme throughout post-Confederation history. The Fenian raids justified Canadian concerns with foreign aggression because it was linked to Britain. However, if the outcome of these same raids was any indicator, no permanent changes to defence strategy were necessary. Canadian and British success at repulsing foreign invasions or raids only further justified the use of the militia as a delaying force to allow time for reinforcements from British regulars.

Similarly, in 1878 a new threat emerged, not across the American border, but rather on the open seas. Great Britain was contemplating joining the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 against the Russians, which by extension would open the Empire’s maritime shipping, naval force, and by extension the Canadian coast, to potential attack by Russian vessels. The Royal Navy never responded to cries of appeal to defend the Canadian coast

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101 Morton, A military History of Canada, 89.
102 Preston, Canada and “Imperial Defense”, 64.
should the two superpowers come to blows, despite a request for British cruisers. In fact, there was no established defence plan and Great Britain recognized that its overseas ports were largely undefended and vulnerable to attack. Given that the modern coal-fuelled navy required restocking outposts and docking stations, this was a worrying prospect for an Empire whose strength was entrusted to naval power. Though a scare of this magnitude would not be repeated until 1914, no firm actions were undertaken by the Canadian government to correct this weak link in the imperial defence. For Canada, it wanted the crisis done with and did not use the occasion to demand some form of imperial defence. This suggests that for the Canadian state, its military interests were not outside of Canada.

Great Britain, for its part, saw how the Russian scare revealed military weaknesses in its sprawling empire – including Canada. As a response, in 1879, came the Royal Commission on the Defence of British Possessions and Commerce Abroad. Speaking at the commission, Macdonald was determined that Canadian military preparedness be kept an internal matter for the Dominion, and only be discussed when truly relevant. He was not willing to commit or integrate the Dominion’s militia into a larger imperial framework, despite the tangible threat of the Russian navy and its privateers. Even the current serving GOC, Selby Smyth, sided with the Canadian government in his response to a separate British proposal, forwarded by the Halifax garrison commander Sir

104 Morton, Canada and War, 29.
106 Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, 41.
107 Morton, Canada and War, 29.
Patrick McDougall to the War Office, suggesting that a separate Canadian division of 10,000 men be raised and lead by McDougall.\textsuperscript{108} The GOC’s “reaction to [the proposal] to lead [Canadian] troops to a British war was to think of Canada’s own borders.”\textsuperscript{109} Not surprisingly, Smyth’s local concerns won him the trust and collaboration of successive ministers in Liberal and Conservative governments.\textsuperscript{110} The 1878 crisis lasted barely long enough for Canada to effectuate any notable improvement in coastal defences. The minimal response of “a few [new] guns mounted in Esquimalt…, a contingent of [drilling] British Columbia militia” and the establishment of a Permanent Force artillery regiment on the west coast was all that Canada would do.\textsuperscript{111} Anything more was too expensive.\textsuperscript{112}

The third and final major scare before the Boer War involved a well-known antagonist, the United States. The Venezuelan Crisis of 1895-96 began innocuously enough as a border dispute between Venezuela and Great Britain’s South American colony of British Guyana. The allure of gold resources on the border necessitated arbitration.\textsuperscript{113} The United States, loosely bound by the Monroe Doctrine, saw its duty to limit European imperial advances in its hemisphere, and was called upon by Venezuela to help defend its interests against perceived British encroachment. The United States’ diplomatic dispatch to Great Britain alleged, among other things, that a union between a European

\textsuperscript{108} Morton, Ministers and Generals, 46.
\textsuperscript{109} Morton, Ministers and Generals, 48.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Morton, \textit{Canada and War}, 29.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{113} Penlington, \textit{Canada and Imperialism}, 27.
and American state was “unnatural and inexpedient”.\textsuperscript{114} Though the dispute was over a South American border, the implications for Canada were hardly hidden. The American Congress voted for a commission to determine the boundary that "would be drawn by force if necessary."\textsuperscript{115} The American public and media did not necessarily reflect the jingoism of its government, and the stock market crashed upon the news.\textsuperscript{116} Meanwhile, Britons, more anxious about recent events in South Africa and the German Kaiser’s implied support for the Boers, paid little attention to the American dispute.\textsuperscript{117} With much of its focus elsewhere, it was not a shock when Great Britain relinquished its arbitration rights and transferred the powers to Washington.\textsuperscript{118} The Empire had diplomatically surrendered to the United States. Though the British Empire remained strong, it was beginning to lose relative ground not only to the United States, but also to other great powers beginning to acquire blue-water navies. In addition, the balance of power on the European continent remained of primary concern to Great Britain. These distractions left Canada much on its own with little hope of being militarily defendable.

In mid-December 1895, American President Grover Cleveland “made what amounted to a direct threat of war”\textsuperscript{119} against Great Britain, and fears of invasion of Canada were seemingly confirmed by the American General Commanding when he said that “by the time these [British transport] vessels

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, 49.
\end{flushleft}
could go back for reinforcements and return there would probably be no British
troops in Canada to be reinforced…”\textsuperscript{120} Interestingly enough, this comment
ignored the presence of the Canadian militia. This, in addition to the official
American stance that it was unnatural for American colonies to be linked to
European powers, provoked a political response from Ottawa along with the
usual patriotic cry that the militia was strong enough, ready, and willing to face
any invasion.

In the 1896 parliamentary session, a new commitment was made to
defending the Dominion and the Empire in general (though again no formal plans
were made).\textsuperscript{121} If anything, this crisis only reinforced the notion that Canada’s
defences were in good hands with the militia, in addition to also pushing the
young country closer into the imperial arms of Great Britain, as would soon be
demonstrated in South Africa. The only caveat, however, was that Great Britain
failed to notify Canada that it no longer realistically conceived of being at war with
the United States, being “diplomatically [and] militarily impossible.”\textsuperscript{122} The
aggressive rhetoric from American statesmen heightened Canadian patriotism
and a belief in the virtues of the Empire, with the 1896 speech from the throne
“expressing loyalty to British institutions…”\textsuperscript{123} It did not, again, call for any form of
imperial defence in which Canada would be an active player. Interestingly,
though, it did reinforce the Canadian commitment to national defence, with the

\textsuperscript{120} Penlington, \textit{Canada and Imperialism}, 30.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{122} Morton, \textit{Canada and War}, 35.
\textsuperscript{123} Penlington, \textit{Canada and Imperialism}, 32.
government using the event as further confirmation that the Americans were still their military priority and to prioritize a modernization of militia equipment.¹²⁴

These three political crises describe situations where British global hegemony directly affected the security of Canada. The Fenian raids required Canadian military action, but on the whole Great Britain fought its own international battles without any help from Canada. When it came to minor wars, Canada took a pragmatic approach to judging its level of participation within the Empire. Sometimes, however, Canada was also forced into its own conflicts and it relied on its own military units.

### 3.2 Resistance in the Northwest Territories

The first test of Canada’s ability to deal with a military crisis came in the Red River Rebellion in 1870. When unrest swept through the Red River colony beginning in late 1869, the Colonial Secretary in London had “promised a one-year delay in the withdrawal of British troops.”¹²⁵ In the early years of Confederation, Great Britain was obviously willing to take into consideration Canada’s military weakness. This represented another troublesome “exception” in Cardwell’s view, but it was a necessary one to ensure that the union of the British North American colonies was given a chance to survive. It would indeed be the last time, though, that British regulars would ever march under the war banner on Canadian territory. By extension, the Red River expedition was certainly a vital test of strength for the Canadian military and the new country as

¹²⁴ Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, 48-49.
the acquisition of the western territories lay at the heart of Macdonald’s dream of uniting the northern half of North America under Canadian government from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The venerable Honourable Joseph Howe rather prophetically spoke in late 1867 of the need for a military force if Canada was to become strong.126

Despite ongoing attempts at a diplomatic and negotiated resolution to the crisis in Red River, a military response against Riel and his administration was also organized. However, before the Red River Expedition had even been sent, there were doubts in the Canadian Parliament as to its utility, or even its composition. In an attempt at clarification, one Member of Parliament asked, “…what was the nature, object and scope of the expedition, and under what policy was it to be sent?”127 This question strikes at the heart of the need for Canadian military preparedness, especially with regard to the Western frontier. The land between British Columbia and Ontario needed to be incorporated into the federation one way or another for practical and nationalistic reasons. First, the railway was a necessity to ensure the fidelity of the most western province; secondly, the expansion and protection of the British domain was paramount to Canadian success and sovereignty. The settlement of the west was simply a logical step in nation-building, but first the region needed to be pacified and consolidated, and this burden fell on military shoulders. A constant fear of American expansionism in the west also sparked Dominion enthusiasts into

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action. *The Globe*, for example, printed in March 1870 a “Consular Despatch” from an American diplomat in Winnipeg, sent to the White House. It is a damning document that outlines Canada’s weakness in the West, and the unfriendly tendencies of most of the Red River inhabitants towards the Dominion’s authority.\(^\text{128}\) Even the Minister of Finance, Sir Francis Hincks, in support of Cartier, drew attention to the need to keep the Americans on their toes by adopting a joint Imperial-Canadian military approach to the crisis:

…we should have the prestige of the Imperial Government in getting up and sending an expedition there, to establish the Queen’s authority, instead of leaving Canada to commence the war with that people on its own account and on its own responsibility, thereby inviting filibusters and sympathizers from the neighbouring States to come in and join [the rebels]…\(^\text{129}\)

The Canadian military, then, was to be used in combination with imperial military units to dissuade American influences and to subjugate those domestic threats that sought insurgency as a means to an end. Cartier argued adamantly that the military expedition was to restore law and order to a territory that was to be governed rightfully by the Dominion. Any Canadian military effort to the Red River was thus for the “acquisition of the Territory”, i.e. Canadian expansion.\(^\text{130}\) In the same spirit, The throne speech of May 1870 lauded the forthcoming efforts of the military expedition in securing government rule in that land: “Her Majesty’s troops go forth on an errand of peace, and will serve as an assurance to the


inhabitants… of the Red River Settlement… [that they] may rely upon the impartial protection of the British Sceptre.”

Macdonald acquiesced to London’s order that Canadian militia be included in the expeditionary force along with British regulars. The idea was to demonstrate solidarity between the Dominion and Great Britain in the face of American expansionist aspirations and anyone else doubting the sincerity of the bond between the Dominion and the old country. The commander for the Red River expedition was Colonel Garnet Wolseley, the same officer who would later lead the expedition to Khartoum in 1884-85. The troops’ arrival was enough to chase Louis Riel, the Métis leader, from power and into the United States. There was no armed resistance to the military expedition, and the British troops left within days of their arrival. Canada had managed to send, with Great Britain's help, a nearly 1,100 strong force across the Great Lakes, through the dense forests of Ontario, and ultimately into Manitoba's open plains without casualties. That no fighting took place is irrelevant to this story: Canada had demonstrated its willingness to protect its national interests, though its military resources were stretched to the breaking point. At the very least, it demonstrated to the United States that Canada's control of the Western Frontier would be fought for if necessary, and that Canada would protect its claim to the territory. The Dominion’s desire to stretch its sovereignty westwards required a legitimate

134 Ibid., 149.
135 Morton, A Military History of Canada, 92.
projection of force that would deter any other (i.e. American and insurgent) interests in the region.

Though the red embers of insurgency had cooled down after the establishment of the Province of Manitoba in the summer of 1870, it yet remained for the federal government to ensure the region, including the North-West Territories, remained pacified and within Canada’s jurisdiction. To act as a policing garrison, of sorts, a few hundred militia volunteers were left behind in the newly acquired lands. Initially, two battalions were maintained over the first winter of 1870-71, and there followed a rotation afterwards until 1875. But these militiamen would soon be replaced, as an entirely new paramilitary force would be raised and sent to the West with the sole purpose of offering a militarized form of policing. The North-West Mounted Police was not an official military unit and its duties differed in theory to the garrisoned militia of Manitoba. The organization was expected to continue and expand on the role played by the military. In this sense, the NWMP was an important component of Canada’s post-Confederate military preparedness to protect national sovereignty. Its strategic purpose was such that it was an indispensable asset to Canadian expansionist policies in the West, and appropriately would even serve alongside the militia itself in 1885 to assert Canadian control over the region.

Macdonald founded the NWMP to avoid war between First Nations and the Canadian state in the West, and to avoid the violence that had happened in the American West. As early as May 1870, even before the official creation of Manitoba, Macdonald stated the need “…to have a body of mounted rifles to

136 Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers, 239.
protect the people from the chance of an Indian war,” using the bloodshed that was seen in the United States as a grave warning to be heeded. Macdonald also defined the nature of the force in question to be

...a small but active force of cavalry to act as mounted police, so that they could move rapidly along the frontier to repress disturbances... They would be drilled as cavalry, or rather as mounted riflemen, and be disciplined as a military body, but act as constabulary. Such a force would be... enough to secure order.

The early days on the Canadian frontier offered only a fine line indeed between military and police activities. National interests required action to be taken to avoid further politico-military disturbances in this far-flung region. The peaceful and prosperous settlement of the central plains, along with the construction of the railway, relied on such a policy, but the dream of “mounted rifles” patrolling the rolling plains took some years to materialize. Still in April 1873, there was debate in the House of Commons where Macdonald defended their future practical use. The Conservative government was adamant that a military garrison was still needed to “…give confidence to the people,” a rather euphemistic way of describing the military’s effect on the region in keeping the “Indians” in check.

Still, it was more expedient to dispatch a smaller, more mobile cavalry force that “…would supply the place of the present military force.” Macdonald, acting as the Minister of Justice, first presented the vividly named Administration of Justice and Establishment of a Police Force Bill to the House in early May 1873. It

138 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
received royal assent on May 23.\textsuperscript{141} By 1874, there were 300 constables patrolling the region, tasked with the enforcement of Canadian law and to prove to the United States that the Dominion would maintain an armed presence in the region.\textsuperscript{142}

When world markets entered an economic slump in the 1870s\textsuperscript{143} and the Canadian government had to exercise fiscal restraint, it reacted as many governments had before and since, and slashed budgets in perceived non-essential institutions. The militia endured a substantial cut to its budget as it collapsed from a high of “…$1,562,023 in 1871 to $1,013,943 in 1875 and to $550,451 in 1876.”\textsuperscript{144} It is not surprising that training opportunities for the militia were reduced or cut completely in the late 1870s. Throughout the depression the government was able to justify the lower costs of the military-style “constabulary” force on the frontier rather than provide greater resources to the militia because the former served the national interest as would the militia, but at a lower cost. Canada’s military preparedness and its state of defence, though dramatically hit by the economic cuts, were maintained at a tolerable level for some years and much of its efforts were devoted to keeping the West in Canada’s orbit. Still, it is the NWMP’s work that most noticeably ensured that Canada’s claims in the Territories did not go unnoticed by disgruntled First Nations, Métis settlers, or American smugglers and annexationists.

\textsuperscript{142} Morton, A Military History of Canada, 98.
\textsuperscript{143} Creighton, John A. Macdonald, 182.
\textsuperscript{144} Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers, 243.
As noted above, the NWMP came to play a military role alongside the militia. The North West Rebellion erupted in 1885 when Louis Riel returned from exile in the United States and formed a provisional government centered at Batoche “in an attempt to force the Canadian Government to enter into negotiations for a redress of grievances.”\textsuperscript{145} This time, the Métis offered armed resistance, as opposed to the 1870 Red River Rebellion. The Dominion once more forwarded a military response, but on strictly Canadian terms: Prime Minister Macdonald did not request British military aid in suppressing the uprising.\textsuperscript{146} In other words, Canada was well on the path towards providing for its own defence and avoided handing domestic sovereignty back to imperial agents that wanted nothing more to do with North American diversions anyway. The Canadian take-over of the West would remain a Dominion affair, just as imperial adventures elsewhere in the world, such as Egypt and the Sudan, were British ones. \textsuperscript{147} Besides, new Canadian infrastructure, particularly the railway, guaranteed an easier trek for its military: the railway was finally available for quicker and safer transportation of Canada’s first real national expedition.\textsuperscript{148} Commercial and colonial interests lay at the heart of the building of the railway, but recent wars in central Europe and in the United States had shown the importance of having available the necessary military logistical capacities for rapid response. This explains the relatively rapid and safe arrival of the militiamen: by early April, mere days after the start of the insurgency, the first

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 251.
\textsuperscript{146} Creighton, \textit{John A. Macdonald}, 411.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 418.
elements of the Canadian military force reached Winnipeg. The Minister of Militia and Defence, Adolphe-Philippe Caron had the utmost confidence in the militia. General Frederick Middleton commanded the three-pronged advance of militia units from Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia together with western units, which together provided 5,400 men for an assault on the Métis position. The force suffered a first defeat at the Battle of Fish Creek. However, afterwards, the momentum of the larger Canadian force was unstoppable, as it was better supplied and staffed than the Métis, who were themselves but a few hundred fighters that ran out of ammunition at the final engagement at Batoche. The collapse of Métis resistance was announced on May 13.

The insurgency on the plains was problematic because it not only signalled violent discontent from Métis with the federal government, but also stalled efforts at western development and colonization. The Liberals pointed out on the day of the rebellion’s outbreak that the conflict would “…injure the country to a considerable extent, by preventing people from Europe emigrating to that country…”\textsuperscript{149} Whether for the government or the official opposition, it was a non-partisan issue that the North-West Rebellion had to be silenced to continue the Canadian project. Of course, it fell to the Canadian military to enforce authority – the government’s preferred policy was the sending of troops “…to overawe [the rebels] with a superior force.”\textsuperscript{150} Similarly, Minister Caron stated in April that


Canadian territory ought to be protected from “any disorder.” The defining role of Canada’s military institution became clearer with each conflict.

The whole North West Rebellion episode might be disregarded as a mere domestic matter for Canada without consequence on the world stage. However, the opposite must be argued. Here was a young, semi-autonomous colony that proved capable of effectuating a military expedition over difficult terrain on its own. The militia, with help from the NWMP, enforced the federal government’s sovereignty and eliminated armed resistance to ensure Dominion control. There certainly existed dissenting views as to the (arguably careless) handling of the uprising, especially as exclaimed by the Liberal leader Edward Blake and propagated largely by *The Globe* throughout 1885. But the fact remained that the Conservative government resorted to a military response of Canadian militia units. Macdonald showed that Canada was willing to undertake its own defence without outside interference from Great Britain. By doing so, the Dominion was enforcing its desire for a limited form of independence. Canada did not call upon Britain for troops as it had during the days leading to Confederation and the Fenian scare. If Canada could come to rely on its own military abilities, it would be sovereign in respects of defence. If it could provide for its own military

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152 Many articles supporting and repeating the words of Mr. Blake may be found on the modern Globe and Mail’s online repository for the year 1885. In general, the articles are very critical of Macdonald’s handling of the Métis’ demands, and often accuse him of purposely seeking war. An example of this can be found under the title *The North-West Debate*, published July 8, 1885. (Available: http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.uregina.ca:2048/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1537139239/96FC94E7A7884B98PQ/9?accountid=13480).
security, Canada could more easily avoid being coerced into military servitude to the Empire.

This form of withdrawal from imperial affairs, for example, was effectively demonstrated during the 1884-85 Nile Expedition to rescue British General Charles Gordon and his detachment besieged in Khartoum in the Sudan, when Macdonald outright refused official Canadian participation, though several hundred voyageurs acted as voluntary civilian river guides.\textsuperscript{153} General Wolseley, the same commander who led the Red River expedition, was tasked with relieving Khartoum before it fell. It was on his initiative that Canadian river guides joined the expedition, but as civilians rather than military personnel (though with Macdonald’s blessing).\textsuperscript{154} They served with distinction, but General Wolseley’s column arrived too late: General Gordon and his garrison were killed when their stronghold was stormed. With British arms in such a precarious situation, Macdonald still refused to commit or offer any Canadian military resource to assist in the upcoming Sudan campaign, as he did not believe this to be in the Canadian interest.\textsuperscript{155} Still after the events of the Nile Expedition and the Northwest Rebellion, Macdonald was unyielding in his conviction that Canada’s military preparedness must and should remain focused on domestic needs when he refused to show any interest in an “imperial system of defence,” – he did not even attend the First Colonial Conference in 1887!\textsuperscript{156} If there ever were to be military commitment to small Imperial wars, it would be on a case-by-case basis

\textsuperscript{153} Page, \textit{The Boer War and Canadian Imperialism}, 3.
\textsuperscript{154} Raymond Blake et al., \textit{Narrating a Nation: Canadian History Post-Confederation} (Canada: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2011), 80.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
and based on their individual merits. Macdonald was clear, and perhaps a little prophetic, when he said “I think if war were imminent, the spirit of the people themselves would force on the Legislature and the Government of the day the necessity for taking an active part in it.” As things stood, however, military preparedness was directed towards domestic security and the national project of territorial aggrandizement. This stance was again maintained by the Conservative government in 1894, for example, when the GOC was able to convince the Minister of Militia and Defence to send an offer of a Canadian garrison for Hong Kong – but without consulting the cabinet first. The government was incensed at the proposal, but now had no choice but to await a response the imperial authorities. As hoped for, they would indeed receive a refusal to the offer.  

Chapter 4: Canadian Empire-building

4.1 The Return to Imperialism and Canada’s Response

Macdonald had remained content with his policy of non-involvement in imperial military affairs, but the growing imperialist sentiment in Britain and throughout the world would change through the 1890s and particularly after his death in 1891. For a variety of social, religious and political reasons, some elements of Canada’s English-speaking population was espousing British imperialism to a greater extent than ever before, in association with their brethren.

157 Quoted in Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict, 41.
158 Morton, Ministers and Generals, 109.
across the Atlantic. Robert Page, in *The Boer War and Canadian Imperialism*, comments on the growing interest in missionary work, the relative power of England on the international stage, and the euphoria of the 1897 Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria as some reasons for this outburst.\textsuperscript{159} Even the Liberal and French-speaking Canadian Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier could not escape the feelings of the time.\textsuperscript{160} A general wave of enthusiasm had gripped the largest empire of the world, and the Liberal-leaning *Globe* acknowledged in a September 1899 article that the people and the presses were surrounded by “the fire of jingoism on the one hand and of Boer hatred on the other…”\textsuperscript{161} Regardless of the reasons, this outpouring of imperial support had an impact on how the Canadian militia might be used. With Canada in full control of the prairie region and, policed as it was by the able NWMP, the militia could now conceivably be utilized elsewhere.

There was also a resurging apprehension amongst Canadians with regards to the United States. An open letter in 1895 to the Minister of Militia and Defence James Patterson that appeared in *The Globe*, for example, is representative of growing concern with the Canadian military’s weakness in the presence of any annexationist tendencies that the Americans might continue to harbour. The letter stated that Canada’s main and only real enemy was still the United States; that Canada has too often “fallen asleep”; that Canada must

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\textsuperscript{159} Page, *The Boer War and Canadian Imperialism*, 5.
\textsuperscript{160} Wood, *Militia Myths*, 52.
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improve its own defences with its own resources: the “…desire [is] to preserve the country from the horrors of war by timely preparation and… by being perfectly prepared against attack…”\textsuperscript{162} It could be said that (perceived) tensions between Canada and the United States had not been so high since before the signing of the Treaty of Washington in 1871. Unfortunately, the state of the militia had not necessarily improved between 1867 and the 1890s, so that the organization, training, and equipment of the men was obsolete by many standards – the British regulars who had left were certainly not replaced with Canadian ones!\textsuperscript{163} There were practical attempts by the mid-1890s at modernization, spurred on by threats either across the border or an ocean away. The Conservative government proposed in April 1896 that defence preparations be taken more seriously:

> It was felt by the Government... [and] I am quite sure it is the unanimous feeling of men of military instincts - that there is a necessity for placing the militia of this country, so far as arms and equipment for the defence of the country are concerned in a better position than they have been in.\textsuperscript{164}

The new Liberal government elected first in 1896 adopted those policies and funded new rifle ranges, a medical service, and even purchased modern rifles.\textsuperscript{165} Obliquely, the government also supported the arming and training of Canadian men in marksmanship skills by boosting “financial support for rifle associations, encourage[ing] the cadet movement, and invest[ing] in domestic ammunition and


\textsuperscript{163} Wood, \textit{Militia Myths}, 27.


\textsuperscript{165} Morton, \textit{A Military History of Canada}, 113.
firearm industries. The militia’s historical and domestic mission of defence would nonetheless continue, but with notable opposition. Although nowhere near attaining the professionalism and ethos of a regular standing army, the militia experienced an increase in efficiency and morale by 1899 when the 2nd Anglo-Boer war began.

4.2 The Canadian Response to the Boer War

Pressure was already building on the Laurier government to become involved in some practical way in response to the build-up of tension in South Africa. The Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal were accused of denying basic citizen rights to the uitlanders, mostly British settlers brought to the region by recent discoveries of gold and diamond deposits. That British subjects were treated in such a way was an affront to the dignity of the Empire. On the ground itself, the balance of forces was entirely one-sided, but the Boers had once been able to repulse a similar offensive in the First Boer War, fought between 1880-81. The Second Boer War was blatant British aggression for the sake of mineral wealth and the expansion of British hegemony in this strategic geographic location. Despite this, imperialistic, and consequently English-Canadian media portrayed the war to be a defence of freedom and a war against oppression. The propaganda was undeniable and

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167 J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army*, 36.
managed to stir considerable Canadian public support: the Boers were portrayed as an oppressive people, unwilling to compromise with the British Empire, and subjecting British citizens to injustices. Accordingly, the war was presented as an inherently defensive one. Such a discourse also made Canadian participation that much easier to justify, as the Canadian government was pushed in some quarters “to act in support of the empire.” As Berger points out, it was Canadian imperialists who “pressed most fiercely for Canada’s participation in the Boer War.”

Though Laurier, like Macdonald before him, truly believed in the sanctity and unity of the empire, he was not willing to set a precedent by offering Canadian troops for imperial causes outside of Canada. In July 1899, for example, Laurier was still hopeful that the Boers would reach a diplomatic compromise with the British. In this hope, he also wished to avoid being militarily entangled in a foreign war: “I sincerely hope that no opportunity will arise for Queensland or any other part of the British Empire to send troops to the mother country to meet difficulties in South Africa.” The Conservatives, now led by Sir Charles Tupper, had said in response to Laurier’s statement that no government desires to send men abroad, but it insisted that it was important to maintain a united front against the common Boer foe. Under Macdonald the Conservatives had adamantly refused to despatch Canadian aid to the British

\[170\] Ibid.
\[173\] Ibid.
forces but the Conservatives, perhaps realizing a political opportunity, now warned Laurier not to be so careless with his stated policy. The Conservatives were moving towards military cooperation with the British rather than insisting that the Canadian military be used to defend Canada. The future of the militia lay overseas in the view of the Conservatives, but Laurier followed the position that Macdonald himself had embraced after 1867.

War finally erupted on October 11, 1899, pitting the British against the two small Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Laurier could not ignore the calls for Canada’s military participation, but he, nevertheless, refused to commit Canadian troops. As an effective politician he sought a compromise that avoided official militia participation and setting a precedent for the Canadian state being involved in overseas adventures. Earlier, in July of 1899, Parliament “endorsed” Great Britain’s policy in South Africa. Parliament did not, however, commit to militarily aiding any future conflict that may arise in the region. The resolution itself simply noted the perceived injustices suffered by British subject in the Boer republics, while extolling the political successes of the Dominion in peaceably granting equal political power to all segments of its population. Parliament was content with this response. Then came October.

On October 3, 1899, a telegram sent from the colonial secretary in London “thanking Canada for its offer of a contingent” was published in the Military

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175 Hillmer & Granatstein, Empire to Umpire, 16.
176 Hillmer & Granatstein, Empire to Umpire, 17.
Interestingly, no such “offer” had ever been on the table, let alone agreed to. In short, the text expressed “high appreciation” for Canada’s offer to serve in South Africa, and went on to outline the military formations (infantry, cavalry, and artillery) required of the Dominion. It is true that Major-General Edward Hutton, commanding general of the militia, had secretly drafted plans for “the dispatch of a Canadian contingent” of some 1,200 men in case of war in South Africa. Even Lord Minto, Governor General of Canada, was pushing the colonial secretary for Canadian participation in the coming conflict. But the Canadian government itself, led by Laurier, had never been consulted, nor would it agree to the state being pulled into the conflict. Simply put, Laurier refused to see the country’s militia dragged into a peripheral war that did not serve the domestic interest of defence preparations.

On the very same day that the colonial secretary’s telegram appeared in Canadian media, Laurier issued a statement through The Globe clarifying his position:

As I understand the militia act…, our volunteers are enrolled to be used in the defence of the Dominion. They are Canadian troops, to be used to fight for Canada’s defences. Perhaps the most widespread misapprehension is that they cannot be sent out of Canada… There is no menace to Canada [from the South African Republic]… There is no doubt as to the attitude of the Government on all questions that mean menace to British interests, but in this present case our limitations are very clearly defined.

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180 Gwynne Dyer & Tina Viljoen, The Defence of Canada: In the Arms of the Empire (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 159.
181 Ibid.
Laurier rests his case on the understanding that the militia is a Canadian institution charged with Canadian – not imperial – defence. As much as there were real and strong imperial ideological forces at work pushing for military participation, the Canadian government remained firm on the policy of keeping its militia at home.

When the reality of war did hit on October 11, Laurier did not back down, but sought a compromise as politicians are often forced to make. The Prime Minister was just as unenthused with the prospect of war and its potential effects on dividing the country along ethnic lines as Macdonald had been in the 1880s with the Métis uprising. Such political and social factors played no part in Major-General Hutton’s considerations, nor did Lord Minto think it outweighed the need for imperial solidarity. Laurier, as leader of a majority in the House of Commons and prime minister, better understood the nuances of using Canadian militia for political means and the divisive effects between French and English Canadians that might result from such a policy. Macdonald’s precedent of refusing participation in the Sudan War also weighed heavily in the balance.

But refusing every call for Canadian arms in South Africa, whether directly from Great Britain or from popular Anglo-Canadian clamour, was tantamount to political suicide. In conciliatory fashion, Laurier worked out a compromise: 1,000 volunteers would be levied, equipped, and transported by Canada to South

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Africa, where they would be taken under the charge of the imperial army. As Parliament was not sitting at the start of the war, the government passed an Order in Council allowing for this course of action. The text makes note of the “desire of a great many Canadians who are ready to take service” thereby allowing for an outlet of imperial patriotism, whilst at the same time declaring that this cannot serve as a precedent. Laurier demonstrated a firm political desire to see Canadian military policy disassociated from imperial ventures by asserting Canadian independence and advocating a policy to “consider, reflect, think, [and] weigh” each cause of conflict.

Most importantly, the actual attestation form for Canadians serving in South Africa read “I am willing to serve… under the provision of the Militia Act of Canada… until landed in South Africa, and after disembarkation to serve in Her Majesty’s Regular Forces…” Canadians willing to volunteer in the name of the Empire would not be refrained from doing so, but only within the organization of the British military. As a matter of token contribution, Canada would only send its militia as far as the South African coast. Laurier again reinforced his point in February 1900 to the House, stating: “we did not apply the Militia Act… The moment [the volunteers] landed in South Africa they became British soldiers,

184 Hillmer & Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire*, 18.
186 Ibid.
187 Reid, *Our Little Army in the Field*, 23.
they did not go as part of the Canadian militia, but they went as full British soldiers…”\(^{188}\)

Several thousand more in addition to the original 1,000 would in the end volunteer to fight in South Africa until 1902, under the same administrative and financial arrangement as earlier agreed upon with London. The most important aspect of this war was not the size or military worth of Canada’s contribution, but rather that it participated at all. Laurier was adamant that this would not set a precedent.\(^{189}\) Jingoist, patriotic, and imperialist Anglo-Canadians had pressured the government into a soft form of participation, and perhaps it could do so again. However, the Liberal government had done much to maintain the distinction between the uses of Canadian militia as an institution of national defence, and of volunteers going overseas to fight for Great Britain. Despite this, the British Colonial Office relished the chance to show the world the solidarity of the empire and the usefulness of calling on overseas manpower resources. Laurier and his Liberals were willing to play along with this narrative, with their February 1900 response to the throne speech proclaiming for example that the war “has given to the world the spectacle of the colonies standing behind the mother country to support her. […] The world will behold a united British Empire.”\(^{190}\) Yet Canada’s military policy at the start and during the Boer War was decidedly in favour of maintaining Canadian separateness from imperial concerns. There is perhaps no


\(^{189}\) Hillmer & Granatstein, Empire to Umpire, 18.

surprise, then, that Canadian military preparedness focused once again on an
“improbable war with the United States” following the commitments in South
Africa rather than training for participation in British conflicts around the world.\textsuperscript{191}

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Canadian Military Autonomy

Canada was born onto the world stage as a dependent, semi-autonomous
colony within the British Empire in 1867. The Dominion’s military preparedness in
the ensuring years was never a primary concern of the post-Confederate political
leaders, but the military’s usefulness was not necessarily disregarded. Naturally
and understandably, there was a reliance on British aid within Canada in the
early years of the Dominion’s existence, especially with regards to fighting the
Fenians and despatching a force to the Red River in 1870. However, as early as
1885, the country was no longer willing to ask for direct military assistance from
the empire – indeed, Macdonald believed that Canada’s problems were its own,
and it should not have to rely on outside help. In the same way, he protected
Canada from overseas obligations in imperial defence by outright refusing
Canadian participation in colonial adventures. By 1899, Canada found itself in a
different and difficult position, however: because Great Britain was now
threatened by an external threat (or so the Anglophone and imperialist media
announced), there was justification for military involvement in South Africa.
Though Canadian volunteers would be permitted to participate in the overseas

\textsuperscript{191} Desmond Morton, “Canada’s First Expeditionary Force: The Canadian Contingent in South
Africa, 1899-1900,” in \textit{Canadian Military History: Selected Readings}. Edited by Marc Milner,
military operations, the Canadian government itself refused to commit its military, even if it did provide the cost of transportation to get those Canadian volunteers to South Africa.

It can be said without exaggeration that Canada remained incredibly weak militarily between 1867 and 1902, but just strong enough to maintain a satisfactory level of independence from Great Britain and to properly absorb into the Canadian body politic the recently acquired western territories. A state policy was developed and maintained by successive governments, whereby Canada’s military preparedness was geared towards remaining militarily independent of Great Britain. Canada’s military preparedness largely created a domestic force that facilitated the extension of Dominion sovereignty, and focused on the defence of the state as was demonstrated in the Northwest Uprising in 1885. In the 35 years between Confederation and the end of the Boer War, Canada’s military standing evolved from one of dependency on British arms in the 1870s, to self-sufficiency through the 1880s, and taking tentative steps toward autonomy and independence in the late 1890s. This last instance of combat between 1899-1902 did not see the Canadian militia fight in any of the British imperial wars, but rather it saw Canadian volunteers join with the British Regular Forces outside Canada. From Confederation to the Boer War, the militia remained solely an enforcer of the peace in Canada and an instrument of domestic nation building.

Indeed if Canada’s military preparedness took the shape that it did, it is due in no small part to the intrinsic societal value given to the militia as a tool of war. Bearing in mind Canada’s early deficiency in manpower, relatively weak
finances, and lack of war material, it is also perhaps a matter of good fortune that so much emphasis was placed on the militiaman. The Canadian attitude towards the militia was predicated upon a long history of local colonial wars, a history that was somewhat misinformed, exaggerated, and ultimately became the Militia Myth. Nevertheless, it was the militiaman who was given the difficult task of defending Canada from coast to coast even if some of them wanted to fight for the Empire elsewhere during the Boer War. When they did join other imperial forces, they did so as Canadian volunteers because the Canadian government refused to despatch its militia units overseas to join any British forays into questionable foreign entanglements. It is not an exaggeration to say then, as this thesis argues, military preparations, weak as they were, guaranteed Canadian territorial and political interests and were paramount to the creation of today’s Atlantic-to-Pacific geographic unity. Canadian state policy on its militia, as espoused most ardently by Macdonald and later Laurier, ensured that military capabilities were consistently kept at home and focused on domestic duties, even though some volunteers would serve in the British regular forces. In this way, the militia officially stood for the defence of Canada, not the British Empire.
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