

Establishing a single point of accountability will improve defence procurement process

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In his opinion regarding Canada's defence industry report on defence procurement, "Fixing defence procurement: here we go again," (*The Hill Times*, March 22, p. 23), Pierre Lagueux argues against creating one point of accountability for defence procurement. I have the exact opposite view. In my opinion, unless and until taxpayers can hold one minister accountable, defence procurement will always be burdened with inefficiencies and unnecessary delays and costs. In my book "Reinventing Canadian Defence Procurement: A View From The Inside", I analyzed the implications of the overlap and duplication between the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC). I showed that not only were there lengthy processing delays as a result of having to obtain approvals through two separate departmental process but that significant resource savings could be achieved through the merging of PWGSC's contracting resources (devoted to DND specific acquisitions) and DND's procurement resources. This resource issue is particularly critical as both departments suffer from a lack of sufficient resources - a limitation that obviously restricts the ability to deliver procurement programs. Through the merging of the organizations, not only would there be sufficient resources to do the job, but there would even be resources surplus to the needs.

All of us should take great pride as to how we do things here in Canada. I would match our people and our results with those in any other country. That does not mean however that we should not strive for improvement. In my experience, a basic tenet in management is clear accountability. As long as one minister can blame another there is no way to force through the process the improvements that are possible.

As I point out in my book, creating such an organization is not difficult legislatively nor do I believe it is difficult culturally. Why then is there such a stark difference between the views of defence lobbyists and consultants and those of Canada's defence industry? Why are defence lobbyists and consultants so against a single point of accountability while Canada's defence industry see its merit? The answer, I believe, is quite simple. The business of defence lobbyists and consultants is to influence the government's awarding of defence contracts. To do so, they need to maximize their points of entry into the defence procurement process. If you want to influence a decision to favour your client you want to be able to speak to a minister involved in the process. If there are two or three involved, you have a greater chance of meeting with one of them. If there is only one minister accountable, then "all your eggs are in one basket". Clearly, it is in their best interest to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, my experience over ten years listening to Canada's defence industry is that while they all want to win contracts they are equally passionate about being assured of a fair, open and transparent process. Holding one minister accountable aids their cause.

Therefore, the question facing the government is who to side with - Canada's defence industry or Canada's defence lobbyists and consultants. The government's inaction to date plays into the hands of the lobbyists and consultants. However, I do not believe that this is the basis for the government's maintaining the status quo. Rather, it is that there is no political imperative for the

government to effect a change. Reorganization is not a big vote getter. Nevertheless, by not acting the government is, by default, undermining the integrity of the process and increasing the government's vulnerability to be influenced by defence lobbyists and consultants.

I am, however, an optimist. At the end of the day, establishing a single point of accountability will improve the process and therefore benefit our men and women in the military. They deserve the best and we ought to be willing to deliver the best. This government came into power with the mantra of demanding increased accountability. Allowing billions of dollars to be spent without being able to hold someone accountable undermines this commitment. I look forward to the Prime Minister standing up and saying "make it happen".

Alan Williams

In 2005, Mr. Williams retired after enjoying a 33-year career in the federal public service. Mr. Williams spent the last ten years of his career in the business of defence procurement, five years as ADM Supply Operations Service in PWGSC followed by five years as ADM Materiel at DND. He is now President of The Williams Group, providing expertise in the areas of policy, programs and procurement. In 2006, Mr. Williams authored "Reinventing Canadian Defence Procurement: A View From the Inside". He can be reached at williamsgroup@rogers.com.