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Wednesday, February 25, 2004

NEWS RELEASE

## ***Weak Parliamentary Oversight Detrimental to National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces***

***Limited parliamentary engagement on defence and foreign policies is no longer acceptable, authors conclude.***

***Institute for  
Research on  
Public Policy***

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**Montreal** – In a study released today by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP.org), authors Douglas L. Bland and Roy Rempel conclude that it is high time that MPs pick up the challenge and push the envelope by insisting on real autonomy to review defence and foreign policy.

“A Vigilant Parliament: Building Competence for Effective Parliamentary Oversight of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces” examines post-Cold-War parliamentary deliberations on Canada’s involvement in the Gulf War, Yugoslavia, the Zaire mission, and the Kosovo crisis and war to illustrate Parliament’s weak oversight capabilities.

Bland and Rempel argue that while Canada became engaged in one crisis after another, “there were no serious debates in Parliament to establish clear priorities and a consensus on what the national interest was in making policy choices.”

They characterize question period as “a laborious routine of limited value in producing credible answers to serious questions.” Furthermore, parliamentary committees are usually used by government not as a source of new ideas but to legitimize executive policy decisions. They add that debates seem to carefully choreograph what backbench MPs say. And the annual parliamentary review of spending is a “pure formality,” write Bland and Rempel.

Civilian control of the military is one of the defining concepts of liberal democracy. But, the authors specify, it “involves more than keeping the military out of politics; it demands the control of governments that have authority over national armed forces.”

Bland and Rempel see great potential in strengthening committees within the Senate and the House of Commons.

They caution, however, that specific measures are needed to ensure these committees reach their full potential. Chief among these are to reduce partisanship and party discipline in committee deliberations and recommendations; increase the emphasis on

examining the annual estimates in detail; increase the experience and knowledge of committee members; and appoint qualified military officers of suitable rank to committee work.

“Academics and others can write and talk and make proposals, but parliamentarians can act. And now is the time for them to act together and with purpose to build a sound national defence in an ever more dangerous world,” conclude Bland and Remple.

“A Vigilant Parliament: Building Competence for Effective Parliamentary Oversight of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces” is the latest *Policy Matters* study to be released as part of the IRPP’s National Security and Military Interoperability research initiative. It is now available on line in Adobe (.pdf) format on the Institute’s Web site ([www.irpp.org](http://www.irpp.org)). Please find the summary attached.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact the IRPP.

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