



Institute for
Research on
Public Policy

Institut de
recherche
en politiques
publiques

For immediate distribution – March 10, 2010

NEWS RELEASE

New study finds national defence accountability works

Author says reforms could weaken principles of responsible government

Montreal – Growing concern over accountability for military affairs in recent months and the controversy over the treatment of Afghan detainees has led to calls for the House of Commons to play a larger role in shaping defence policy. But, according to a new study published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, only minimal changes are needed to improve the ability of parliamentarians to hold the government to account for national defence.

The study, “Accountability for National Defence: Ministerial Responsibility, Military Command and Parliamentary Oversight,” examines the national defence responsibilities of Canada’s Parliament, as well as proposals to strengthen the powers of the House of Commons and parliamentary committees in defence matters.

According to the study, reforms that dilute ministerial responsibility and the adversarial character of Parliament will weaken, not strengthen, defence accountability. Rather than taking responsibility for major defence decisions and being held accountable for them, the government may argue that it is following the will of the House of Commons, as the current Conservative government has done regarding the planned withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2011.

As for the view held by many in the defence community that senior bureaucrats play an inappropriately large role, author Philippe Lagassé maintains that the part played by senior bureaucrats in formulating defence policy and in helping to keep the military accountable to the civilian authority is both necessary and in line with statute law.

“Senior bureaucrats play a vital role in ensuring that the military is accountable to the defence minister and the prime minister,” notes Lagassé.

“Accountability for National Defence: Ministerial Responsibility, Military Command and Parliamentary Oversight,” by Philippe Lagassé, can be downloaded free of charge from the Institute’s Web site (www.irpp.org).

-30-

For more details or to schedule an interview please contact the IRPP.

To receive our monthly bulletin *Thinking Ahead* via e-mail, please subscribe to the IRPP e-distribution service by visiting our Web site.

Media Contact: Kate Shingler Tel: 514-787-0737 Cell: 514-235-8308