

Minister  
of National Defence



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de la Défense nationale

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K2

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Mr. John E. Melbourne  
National Vice President  
Air Force Association of Canada  
PO Box 2460, Station D  
Ottawa ON K1P 5W6

Dear Mr. Melbourne:

Thank you for your letter of 24 July 2006 and the position paper entitled "Canadian Forces Manned Strategic Surveillance Capability." I regret the delay in replying.

The messages advanced in your position paper emphasize key airborne surveillance aims and impart a constructive assessment of the future role of the modernized CP-140 Aurora. I wish to reassure the Air Force Association of Canada that the concerns expressed in the paper regarding the structural longevity of the Aurora are shared by many in the department. As a result, departmental force developers are exploiting a range of expert resources in the domain of surveillance and reconnaissance to develop an understanding of future requirements and the required associated capabilities. This is not meant to suggest that an ideal solution regarding a mix of manned and uninhabited surveillance platforms will be arrived at easily. In fact, the diversity of expert opinion, including that of the Aviation Affairs Committee, is prompting a comprehensive Canadian Forces surveillance requirements review through extensive consultation with maritime, land, and air forces, and other governmental department stakeholders.

As the position paper aptly points out, the Aurora avionics modernization program is a significant investment. As you are aware, this large incremental project is preventing severe mission systems deficiencies that would have unsatisfactorily degraded operations well before the end of the Aurora's current structural life. While the Aurora remains Canada's principal strategic airborne surveillance platform, its evolving role is intertwined with other compatible capabilities and, obviously, cannot be assessed in isolation. Consequently, further investment proposed by the Aurora structural upgrade to extend its service life must be balanced and rationalized within the broader context of future Canadian Forces surveillance requirements.

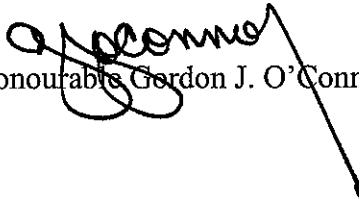
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I have confidence that an effective and affordable surveillance platform mix can be achieved through proactive internal and external interchange, including knowledgeable organizations such as the Aviation Affairs Committee of the Air Force Association of Canada.

Thank you once again for writing. I appreciate the efforts of the Aviation Affairs Committee of the Air Force Association of Canada in drafting the position paper on strategic surveillance capability requirements for the Canadian Forces.

Sincerely,

  
The Honourable Gordon J. O'Connor, PC, MP