



The Canadian Defence Policy Review

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Defence in the Absence of Military Threats

The promised public consultations on Canadian defence policy are now underway. They are intended to contribute to the development of a “new” defence policy for Canada, to be released in early 2017.¹ The process will engage Canadians beyond officialdom and the established “defence community,” and the outcome will have important implications for the kinds of key defence decisions that every Canadian Government faces – including major procurement projects and the deployment of forces overseas.

The following and subsequent briefings are offered as a contribution to the public debate. This first offering addresses the broad security context and its implications for current defence planning. Subsequent briefings will focus on defence at home, contributions to international peace and security, and key procurement and program decisions.

Any review of defence policy obviously needs to include a frank assessment of the threats and security challenges faced and likely to be faced – hence the opening section below on “threat assessments.” While all security environments face challenges, for Canada these are significantly mitigated by the good fortune of being part of an unusually stable region – the subject of the next section, “Canada in a cooperative security community.” A basic understanding of the foundations of durable security, at home and beyond our borders, is also key and is explored in the section on “National security as human security.” Some significant levels of consensus regarding the foundations of security and current challenges to them are necessary for setting out clear roles for the Canadian Armed Forces in advancing security and the funding levels required to sustain them (the subject of the final two sections of this report: “defence as aid to civilian authorities – at home and abroad,” and “funding security”).

Threat assessments

Official threat assessments over the past two and a half decades, the post-Cold War era, have been markedly consistent – invariably concluding that Canada faces no current or foreseeable military threat. That is not to say there are no threats to public safety and thus to Canadian security, but there is nevertheless a broad understanding that there is no *military* threat to Canada. No other state has an intention or interest in mounting a military challenge to Canada’s sovereignty or territorial integrity. Where Canadian sovereignty is challenged, and where boundary disagreements emerge or persist, they are not backed by military threats.

Already in the first post-Cold War decade, the Government of the day concluded in 1995 that “direct threats to Canada’s territory are diminished,” and then it noted that future challenges to Canadian security would “likely be of a nonmilitary nature, economic, environmental and demographic.”² That same basic assumption prevailed in the 2005 defence policy statement, in which the threats of terrorism and failed and failing states received the top billing.³ For the “Canada First” Defence Strategy of the next Government, the key threats continued to be global uncertainty, threats of terrorism, and failed and failing states with spillover effects on Canada. It characterized “challenges on the home front” in non-military terms, like natural disasters, terrorism, human and drug trafficking, and other public safety issues.⁴

In other words, a key feature of the Canadian security context is the long-term consensus that there is no current or foreseeable direct military threat to Canada⁵ – and it stands to reason that the *absence* of imminent military threats would inform defence planning, just as the *presence* of such threats obviously would.

The same applies in the Arctic. While it has become routine to warn of Russia’s growing assertiveness and military build-up in the Arctic, the Defence Public Consultation Document (DPCD), prepared by the Department of National Defence for the current Defence Policy Review,⁶ reflects a broad international consensus when it defines Arctic defence and security challenges also in non-military terms – the possibility of natural and human-made disasters, illegal dumping, a likely increase in espionage, and expanding demands on search and rescue. Potential military confrontation is not part of the equation.

Canada in a cooperative security community

That core security reality – the absence of military threats – means of course that Canada enjoys the considerable benefits of being part of a cooperative regional security community – that is, a community of states among which there exists the reliable expectation that they will not resort to war or military attacks to prosecute their disputes. Scholars define a “pluralistic security community ... [as] a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change.”⁷ Not only does that characterization apply to North American states, it is a widely affirmed expectation for the Arctic region,⁸ and, by the way, for the North Atlantic.

Of course, states in the Arctic and the wider North Atlantic continue to prepare for war by maintaining formidable military, including nuclear, arsenals. And they continue to view their Cold War adversaries with shifting levels of suspicion. Arctic states are also expanding their military capacities in the North.⁹ Military preparedness across the NATO/Russia divide is real and much of it is dangerous (notably nuclear arsenals, substantial portions of which the US and Russia recklessly insist on keeping at high alert), and it calls for new initiatives towards mutual force reductions and heightened political engagement.

But the point of much of the more localized conventional “remilitarization” in the Arctic is not so much a “competitive military build-up” that undermines the growing expectation that change will be peaceful, as it is a response to the growing public safety needs in the region. Given agreements for regional cross-border cooperation in search and rescue and oil spill recovery, along with other obligations to enhance domestic and cross-border support to civil authorities, much of the current military development in the Arctic is, and should be, designed to build credible capacities for emergency response, surveillance, and monitoring – and thus to help advance regional cooperation.

It has been the testimony of the Arctic states themselves that the threats they face in the North are non-military and not amenable to being suppressed or eliminated by military means. Canada’s statement of requirements for its planned Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships, for example, refers to five “security challenges to Canada at sea”: illegal attempts to exploit renewable and non-renewable natural resources such as oil and gas, fish, and minerals; pollution; criminal activities such as smuggling of narcotics and illegal immigrants; unauthorized transits and/or presence by foreign ships; and piracy and terrorist threats to maritime traffic.”¹⁰ None of these is a military threat, and while the Department of National Defence does have a role in responding to these security challenges, in no case does it have the primary responsibility.

All five Arctic Ocean states (Canada, Greenland/Denmark, Norway, Russia, United States)¹¹ now see cooperation and the stability it brings as being in their interests. Although, it is also to be noted that in the absence of any institutional or established security architecture or framework with the mandate and capacity

to consolidate and facilitate an overall climate of cooperation, inclinations toward mutuality may be resting on a less than firm foundation. But that still does not challenge the basic consensus that Canada does not face a military threat at home and that it is part of an enduring international security community.

At the same time, this is not something to be taken for granted. Which is why calls for constructive re-engagement with Russia are critically important.¹² Russia is obviously the dominant presence in the Arctic, not only by virtue of geography, but also because of its advanced infrastructure (much of it courtesy of its armed forces). Improving infrastructure in other states, including along Canada's Arctic sea routes, becomes increasingly important, and building a political/security institutional framework to facilitate and bolster inter-state cooperation in the constabulary and military roles undertaken by national security forces also needs to be championed. Reinforcing regional cooperation in the Arctic is essential to the well-being or security of Arctic communities. Cooperation is not only an option; it is a practical imperative.

Canadian security also depends on the ability to engage with the world far beyond the relatively benign environs of the country's immediate security community. Canadian well-being is substantially linked to peace and security well beyond its borders – to a world that is rules based and respects Canadian sovereignty – which is why the promotion of international cooperation beyond our own neighborhood is also a significant Canadian security imperative. Canada's security, like its economy, is heavily dependent on conditions and events far beyond our borders, so our security interests require us to do as much as we can to prevent chaos and to build international institutions of cooperation and predictability.

National security as human security

Defence policy must be understood in the context of security policy, and security policy is ultimately about the safety and well-being of citizens. Protection from challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Canada are critically important to the well-being of Canadians, but that is only part of building a secure Canada. Any country, and Canada is no exception, can be regarded as secure only to the extent that its people are safe, their basic needs are reliably met, and their well-being promoted, regardless of where they live or their ancestry. For many Canadians, that kind of safety is still not available.

The doctrine of "human security," the idea that security is about the safety and well-being of people, is not somehow in competition with national or state security. Canada has in the recent past been an important champion of human security because highlighting the "human" in security is a reminder that defence and security are ultimately about the welfare of people – the safety and well-being of people in their homes and communities. Human security is the object and ultimate measure of national security.

Any national security policy worthy of the name thus has to attend to the particular ways in which people and communities experience insecurity. And the most prominent experiences of insecurity of people around the world, and certainly in Canada, are not threats of attacks by foreign armed forces, but are unmet needs, manifest in the realities of economic marginalization, debilitating poverty, inadequate health care, and the absence of reliable educational opportunities. Added to that are the insecurities that stem from political isolation or exclusion and from the denial of basic rights. All of these are inevitably attended by creeping social and political disintegration, including the loss of confidence in the public institutions that are supposed to serve the interests and well-being of the people, and by growing violence.

We are all accustomed to the idea that there are places in other parts of the world where such conditions prevail and where, all too often, they are accompanied by escalating criminal and political violence, growing instability, and in too many cases, war. We seem less sensitive to such conditions in Canada, where, in some tragic cases, the consequential violence is self-directed.

Canadian security policy is therefore less about defending ourselves against foreign threats and more about advancing public safety – at home as well as in those places beyond our borders where we are called to assist in the advancement of peace and security. In other words, security policy is obviously much more than defence policy, and a focus on human security helps us understand why the Canadian Armed Forces are in practice heavily oriented toward aiding the civil authorities that have the lead responsibilities for advancing public safety. The CAF play supportive but essential roles in meeting the policing challenges faced in terrorism detection, prevention, and response. While civilian agencies have primary responsibility for responding to natural disasters, the only way they can offer Canadians reasonable assurances that, in the face of major emergencies, the Government of Canada will have the means of coming to their aid is because the CAF are specifically tasked to do that. When other disasters strike, say, on a ship at sea, for an Arctic hunting party, or for wilderness back packers, it is with CAF support that civilian government authorities are able to muster credible search and rescue capabilities to come to the aid of those in distress. Canadian Forces require skill, dedication, an ethic of service, and the right equipment and training to be effective in their assigned roles, but, for the most part, these are not the same skills and equipment needed for combat missions against other state military forces.

Defence as aid to civilian authorities

Peacekeeping and constabulary-type roles in support of civilian regulatory, policing, and emergency response agencies are sometimes regarded as “not real soldiering,”¹³ but that is nevertheless the direction in which Canadian forces are moving – not because Canada is unwilling to spend what is needed for combat operations, but because constabulary roles contribute most directly to ensuring security and public safety at home and to multilateral peace support operations overseas. The Canadian defence academic and analyst, Dan Middlemiss, predicted in 2003, following Canada’s decision against direct involvement in the American-led coalition attack on Iraq, that if Canada “conclude[s] that the scope for using its forces in support of foreign policy has significantly narrowed..., then the transformation of the CF into a purely constabulary force may not be far behind.”¹⁴

There is in fact increasing recognition that the prime utility of armed forces of a middle power like Canada is not to add muscle to foreign policy demands, or in combat operations to defeat a particularly adversary, but in aiding civilian authorities, within Canada and abroad, in addressing the insecurities that confront people in their own communities. To be sure, it is a slow learning process. Canada’s explicit decision against direct involvement in George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq was followed by escalating military engagement in Afghanistan, the bombing campaign in Libya, and more recently the anti-ISIS bombing in Iraq and Syria. The effectiveness of each of these efforts has of course been widely questioned and the new Government has declared an intention to shift the focus of Canadian expeditionary engagements to UN peace support operations. And when or if it participates in coalitions of the willing that are not UN commanded (but should be UN authorized), the stated intention is to focus more on training and humanitarian support, rather than on direct combat roles.

One basic question that the current policy review is expected to answer is whether the roles and tasks assigned to the CAF require military capabilities “across the full spectrum of operations” (DPCD p. 23). Canada has a significant military force, on average only about 15 countries worldwide surpass Canada in military spending. In 2014 Canada was sixteenth highest, out of the world’s more than 190 countries, in absolute military spending¹⁵ - placing it within the top ten percent of the world’s military forces. Even so, Canadian military capabilities are obviously dwarfed by those of the major powers, and even by some not so major powers like Brazil and South Korea, so it is at least intuitively obvious that there are many capabilities that Canada will never develop. As a matter of course, Canada will enter into international military operations only

along-side like-minded partners, and thus “Canada has accepted,” as the Government’s own background document puts it, “that it does not need every capability available to modern militaries” (DPCD p. 6). According to the discussion document, there is still a commitment to maintaining a “multi-purpose capability that allows Canada to contribute across the spectrum of operations” (DPCD p. 6), but with the acknowledgement that there are operational elements within that spectrum that are not within Canadian capability. Maximizing combat capabilities is not the primary focus of Canadian forces.

The Prime Minister’s mandate letter to the Minister of National Defence¹⁶ clearly refers to some defence roles that require combat capabilities, but traditional combat capabilities, understood as armed forces designed to engage advanced military forces of adversary states, are not nearly as prominent as surveillance and enforcement roles – “to protect Canadian sovereignty, defend North America, provide disaster relief, conduct search and rescue, support United Nations peace operations, and contribute to the security of our allies and to allied and coalition operations abroad.”

The mandate letter in fact highlights roles that de-emphasize direct combat. In the North American context, there is to be a renewed “focus on surveillance and control of Canadian territory and approaches, particularly our Arctic regions.” Control obviously implies some enforcement and combat capabilities, but in the Canadian context, in which Canada faces no military threat, the focus is on surveillance and assistance to civilian regulatory authorities, law enforcement, and emergency response agencies (like the Coast Guard, the RCMP, Border Services, and Transport Canada). Again, this points to non-combat roles, not because successive governments have refused to fund combat roles, but because it is not a capability for high-intensity combat that brings most to national security and public safety.

In the Arctic, where, the consultation document acknowledges, the priority is to be cooperative rather than confrontational (DPCD, p. 10). Equipment priorities are related more to managing an extreme environment and meeting the special communications, surveillance, and transportation challenges, than to accumulating combat capabilities.

For military operations overseas, the Prime Minister’s mandate letter highlights a renewed “commitment to United Nations peace operations.” While complex UN peace operations do regularly involve combat elements, they are not traditional war-fighting scenarios against technically advanced armed forces of another state but depend much more on surveillance and monitoring and enforcement operations against spoilers. It has been a prevailing assumption that, while domestic military operations can be carried out without extensive combat capabilities, expeditionary forces need much more robust combat capabilities, but if the focus shifts to peace support operations, the military capabilities developed for domestic purposes are likely to be much more applicable to overseas operations. The places beyond Canada’s borders where Canada has both an interest and a capability to get involved are not in those places where political disintegration has led to full-scale civil war, but where governments are still in place, or newly established, but struggling to maintain basic order in the face of political instability and active spoilers – places where UN peace support operations pursue political, economic, and military remedies to low-intensity armed conflict.

In coalition operations, like the anti-ISIS¹⁷ bombing campaigns in Iraq and Syria, Canada is set to de-emphasize combat roles in favor of a new focus on “training of local forces and humanitarian support.” There is no direct statement that all future participation in coalition operations will be confined to training and humanitarian support, but that is certainly the direction and emphasis identified.

Ultimately, a long-term commitment to aiding civil authorities at home and engagement in peace support operations, humanitarian assistance, and training in overseas operations must help to shape the way in which Canadian forces are equipped. The emerging force structure should come to reflect the central reality of

Canadian security – namely, that Canada does not face military threats and that Canadian Armed Forces operations within Canada and in international peace support missions, they are primarily tasked to aid civil authorities in the service of public safety.

Funding Security

Of course, it is important to hasten to add that the responsibility of defence planners is not just to respond to the present and the known, but to also prepare for a future that is unknown, one in which military threats might quickly emerge. That requires the acquisition of military capabilities beyond the purely constabulary, but that does not challenge the basic principle that the level of military preparedness pursued by any country should be informed by the level of threat. Just as surely as the presence of imminent military threats is expected to affect military planning and preparedness, so should the absence of threat. States not facing significant military threats should logically choose to spend less on defence preparedness than do states under considerable and imminent threat.

There is a sense in which military needs are actually limitless. There are no limits on the unexpected, so preparing for it also has few limits, except for those that are politically and financially imposed. There will always be pressure to spend a little bit, or a lot, more, but need must finally be tempered by the capacity to pay (or borrow), and it must especially yield to competing priorities.

No doubt, current consultations on Canadian defence policies will include frequent calls on Canada to honor NATO's 2006 proposal that member states lift defence expenditures to a minimum of 2 percent of gross domestic product. For Canada that would be a 100 percent increase in defence spending – the current \$20 billion budget amounting to roughly 1 percent of GDP. A parallel spending target is the UN's 1970 proposal that the world's more prosperous states raise their official development assistance (ODA) to at least .7 percent of GDP. That would mean a tripling of the current ODA budget of roughly \$5 billion – current spending being .25 percent of GDP.

Linking defence and ODA spending levels to national wealth or income obviously invokes an ability-to-pay principle, and while that makes good sense when it comes to development assistance, there is little logic in linking defence spending to national wealth. Why the difference?

Inasmuch as development assistance is a wealth transfer mechanism somewhat analogous to Canada's inter-provincial equalization payments, the link to GDP makes eminent sense. Relative national wealth is a credible, concrete way to measure a state's financial obligations to the rest of the world. With the enormous benefits of wealth come obligations, and the UN General Assembly action in 1970 confirmed a broad global consensus around the .7 percent ODA target. On the other hand, national defence spending obligations are logically tied to security requirements, not to wealth and the ability to pay. No state's national defence requirements rise because their GDP has risen. Canada has a range of enduring defence responsibilities, but these are in no way conditioned by the size of our GDP. Monitoring Canadian frontiers and approaches to Canadian air, sea, and land spaces for unauthorized intrusions is an ongoing obligation, but the job doesn't get bigger or smaller, or more or less expensive, just because our GDP rises or, very occasionally, declines. The same goes for the military's responsibility to aid civil authorities in search and rescue and disaster response.

There is of course an obligation on all states to contribute to peace and security beyond their own borders, and high income states should be more forthcoming than those with more limited means, but a direct link between military expenditures and GDP is still illogical on two counts. First, only a small portion of a state's military capacity is intended and available for meeting international obligations. Second, direct military engagement is not the only, and often not the most effective, way to contribute to international peace and

security. Indeed, two inescapable realities point toward greater concentration of spending on security measures that reach beyond fixations on military capacity: increasing acknowledgement of the need to address and ameliorate the roots of armed conflict; and an almost universal acknowledgement that deeply rooted political conflicts like those now devastating Iraq and Syria and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa do not ultimately have military solutions.

While there will inevitably be military dimensions to confronting the kind of extremism manifest in ISIS, the economic, social, and political drivers of conflict and non-military dimensions of conflict resolution and prevention demand the kinds of peace building and war prevention initiatives that have been sorely neglected and chronically underfunded in comparison with military preparedness. Heightened attention to economic development (the focus of ODA), diplomacy, effective and accountable governance, and arms control is key to ending and preventing armed conflict – so if peace and security spending was to be guided by the ability-to-pay principle, those four dimensions should obviously be prominently included in the calculations.

When the Cold War ended there was genuine hope that the world would be paid significant peace dividends. And, indeed, there have been some. Military spending relative to GDP has certainly declined in Canada and some wealthy European countries in response to reduced threats and tensions. And to their credit, countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and Germany, continue to ignore NATO's 2 percent formula and set their defence spending at around .9 to 1.2 percent of GDP – with Canada toward the middle of that range at 1 percent. Norway is slightly above that range, but well below the NATO target, at 1.5 percent of GDP.

Notably, some of those countries have put their peace dividend to good use – especially Norway, with foreign aid contributions raised to just over 1 percent of GDP and well above the UN development assistance target. The Netherlands and Denmark both meet the .7 percent development assistance target, as has the United Kingdom (the only permanent member of the Security Council to do so). Canada is a laggard. We have demonstrably not steered any of our peace dividend toward increased development assistance – which languishes at .25 percent of GDP. Put another way, we're not making those legitimately expected global equalization payments.

A thorough review of Canadian defence policy is a welcome development. It will be important to insist that any changes to spending be linked to clear assessments of defence needs. It will be especially important not to get side-tracked by military spending formulas that not only ignore threat levels and actual defence needs, but also neglect the myriad of proven non-military ways of helping to build international peace and security.

Notes

¹ Minister's Message, Government of Canada, Department of National Defence, "Defence Policy Review: Public Consultation Document 2016. Subsequent references will be to the DPCD (the Defence Public Consultation Document), with the page number.

² As summarized by Prof. Joel Sokolsky of Royal Military College: Joel J. Sokolsky, "Canada, Getting it Right This Time: The 1994 Defence White Paper," 31 May 1995.

³ Government of Canada, "Defence: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World," Canada's International Policy Statement, 2005.

⁴ Government of Canada, Canada First Defence Strategy.

⁵ Paul Robinson, "Canada's Military: A Solution in Search of a Problem," CIPSBLOG, Centre for International Policy Studies, 29 May 2012. <http://cips.uottawa.ca>

⁶ Government of Canada, Department of National Defence, "Defence Policy Review: Public Consultation Document 2016. Subsequent references will be to the DPCD (the Defence Public Consultation Document), with the page number.

⁷ These definitions are taken from Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in South East Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 18–21. Acharya's definition is, of course, an elaboration of Karl Deutch's foundational discussion of "security communities."

⁸ The Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 is a commitment by Arctic states to settle disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law in general and the Law of the Sea in particular. [The Ilulissat Declaration, Arctic Ocean Conference Ilulissat, Greenland, 27–29 May 2008. http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf]

⁹ "[Circumpolar Military Facilities of the Arctic Five](#)" prepared by Ernie Regehr and Anni-Claudine Buelles, The Simons Foundation. Updated: 20 June 2014.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence Statement of Requirements (SOR, P. 6/52) – no longer available on DND website.

¹¹ The Ilulissat Declaration, 2008.

¹² See, for example, Chris Westdal, "A Way Ahead With Russia," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, April 2016. <http://www.cgai.ca>

¹³ A Walter Dorn, "Canadian Peacekeeping: Proud Tradition, Strong Future?," *Canadian Foreign Policy*, Vol. 12 (Fall 2005), pp.7-32.

¹⁴ Dan Middlemiss, "A Military in Support of Canadian Foreign Policy: Some Fundamental Considerations," Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, n.d. (2003).

¹⁵ *Military Balance 2015*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, p. 484f.

¹⁶ <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-national-defence-mandate-letter>

¹⁷ ISIS is variously referred to as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State, and Daesh, the acronym for one of its names in Arabic.