

Canadian Defence Consultation Round Table

April 27, 2016

Objectives of the Defence Review

- The main challenges to Canada's security
- The role of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in addressing current threats and challenges
- The resources and capabilities needed to carry out the CAF mandate

My comments draw from over four decades of direct involvement in Canada's relations with Asia and, more immediately, from the work of York University's Dr. David DeWitt and other scholars, who were mandated by DND to map Canada's defence and security relations with the Indo-Pacific countries and regions, and provide recommendations for engagement. DND was provided this report in April.

ANALYSIS

Determining our security and defence interests and relationship in the Indo-Pacific zone are the following realities:

- Canadian security interest in Asia are with regard to: established, active, complex and essential political relations with the many countries of the region, some of which are on opposite sides of potential conflicts; to flows of people – immigrants, tourists, students, business travel, family ties; to our economy – trade, investment, sea lanes, technological development and partnerships, exchange rate stability and fiscal resources; to our national self-image as a positive force in the world;

- we have a close, indeed the closest relationship with the United States, the most powerful military, economic and political actor in the Indo-Pacific zones;

- we have legal if residual responsibilities on the Korean peninsula, arising from the terms of the Armistice Agreement which ended the war but not the conflict; we retain attendant Status of Forces rights;
- we have a reasonably good understanding of the fan of major and immediate security risks in the region – DPRK, US/China in the South China Sea, China/Philippines and China/Vietnam in the Spratlys, Japan/China Senkaku Diaoyutai, India/Pakistan, as well as domestic and international terrorism, which has just claimed a Canadian victim;
- we also know that these traditional threats to regional security are compounded by non-traditional issues that raise tensions between states, man-made sources of conflict such as control of watersheds, the smuggling of goods and people and food scarcity; .
- despite knowing all of these things, Canadian engagement in defense and security planning in the region, as well as dialogues, collaborative initiatives, ideas forums, Mil/Mil exchanges, Ministerial reciprocal visits and so forth has been extremely limited over the last decade; the operating principle appears to have been that, since no overt conflict has occurred, Canadian interests are safe and require no actual or anticipatory protection. The last significant Canadian military engagement in Asia was in the International Commissions for Control and Supervision in Vietnam in 1973, and that lasted less than a year;
- these are the principles of free riders, which Canada has notably exemplified in this region;
- during the past century, the longest period of peace – or absence of concerted, division-sized military conflict – is the current one: the last large-scale military confrontation in the broad region was the Chinese/Vietnamese border conflict of 1979, although others might want to point to border wars since then, between India and Pakistan, India and China, Cambodia and Vietnam, India and Bangladesh, and Thailand and Cambodia.

We may be able to ‘free ride’ for a while, but not forever.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- we should lead with our strengths: we now have a new majority government with the ambition and political staying power to delineate our current and future national interests in peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region: this provides the basis for the establishment of strategic priorities and plans to implement their pursuit; we haven't had these for a decade;
- our greatest asset and most important Indo-Pacific relationship is with the United States: we must revitalize and broaden the bilateral trans-Pacific security agenda, from policy dialogues, to joint planning, military exercises, and possibly basing or accessing US military facilities; our fundamental strategic objectives should draw from US capabilities;
- we have a complex of relations and shared values with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Korea, Singapore and the ASEAN democracies: we must operationalize our security relationships with them in practical areas such as security dialogues and policy development, mil/mil talks and joint activities, PKO, emergency preparedness, conflict management and resolution, intelligence sharing, and so forth;
- we have brain power and we have things to say; we must reclaim our place at those international tables where our credibility can be re-established and our priorities pursued, including ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, the Shangri-La Dialogues;
- security is the most important top-of-government and all-of-government mandate: PCO, GAC, DND, Finance and the subsets of our security infrastructure must develop an architecture of relations to insure that security policy is clear, coherent, responsive and cost-effective. Canadians expect no less.

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