

“Refocusing Continental Defence and Security”

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My thanks for this opportunity to contribute to the review process. This is a welcome return to past practices of engagement with academic experts and stakeholders, and I hope it will carry over into future decisions on routine consultation, exchange programs, practical and financial support for research, and support for student training.

Today I will make the case for a refocusing of attention and resources with respect to continental defence and security. The DPR consultation paper caused a bit of a stir by raising again the question of ballistic missile defence, without actually going beyond the raising of the question itself. This is an important question, but it is not an especially **urgent** one. We can imagine scenarios in which we might be threatened by hostile states’ ballistic missiles, but none of them are very plausible in the short- to medium-term. In the meantime, we aren’t going to spend what we would need to spend to make a substantive contribution to the US system, so we aren’t going to be included in its command structure. Rehashing the missile defence debates of the mid-2000s now might be a little less divisive than it was then, but it would be similarly unproductive, and would distract us from difficult continental defence and security choices that actually need to be made, right now.

These are exactly the sort of questions that are likely to fall through the cracks in a defence policy review, because: 1. they are on the margins of what we normally think of as “defence” problems, and involve coordination with civilian departments and non-government actors; 2. they are not particularly “sexy” (e.g., they don’t involve a lot of big-ticket hardware); 3. they are all things that can be waved off as “already taken care of,” because structures have already been put in place to deal with them, and the challenge now is to upgrade and maintain those structures; and, finally, 4. the process of upgrading what’s in place now is mostly a matter of slowly, painstakingly untying a series of complicated legal and administrative knots.

My remarks are organized around three domains—air, maritime, and land—and some notes on how they might be connected. I’m supportive of closer cooperation across and within borders on these issues, but this isn’t an argument for an across-the-board, fully-integrated binational command structure. We should refine and build on the existing framework of overlapping binational, bilateral, and national command structures, rationalized around the management specific problems, and have them coordinate and share information as seamlessly as possible.

Air: The air domain is relatively straightforward, but may become slightly more complicated with recent legal and technological developments. 9/11 gave NORAD a new lease on life as a binational command focused on continental air warning and control, and it adapted quickly and effectively to this “narrower” mission. (It still has an important aerospace early warning and tracking mission, of course, but it has been partially displaced by Canada’s non-involvement in US missile defence and military space programs.) NORAD does a good job of tracking aircraft, but is now confronted with a new layer of complexity in the rapid proliferation of privately-operated drones, and the lack of rules and enforcement mechanisms to regulate them.

Moreover, recent diplomatic developments (entry-exit data sharing) and technological changes (private-sector stakeholders' capacity to collect, process, and share huge amounts of relevant data) open the door to going beyond centralized real-time tracking of aircraft to centralized real-time tracking of individual travelers and cargo shipments. This raises difficult questions about how to measure the ostensible security benefits of such a system and how to weigh those against the attendant privacy, cost, and administrative-complexity challenges.

Maritime: The rationale for more effective coordination of maritime domain awareness (MDA) is clear, but in practice it is enormously complex and presents intractable political, legal, and technical obstacles. These efforts might be improved through the acquisition of new patrol aircraft and various types of drones (air, surface, or subsurface), but the foundation for future MDA will continue to be a network of remote sensors—including the evolving RADARSAT system, surface radar stations, and ocean sensors—and the political and technological structures to process, share, and make decisions about how to respond to the data that is collected.

Significant progress has been made over the last decade in building a common operating picture among military services through the respective national command structures and their supporting regional centres. And a system has been put in place for information to be shared and integrated between Canada and the US through NORAD. However there are still questions about the timeliness and utility of information-sharing and analysis (i.e., advisories) provided through the “maritime NORAD” structure, particularly given the extent of pre-existing information-sharing arrangements between the two navies. Inter-service rivalries and skepticism about the structure itself undermine NORAD’s capacity to build trust and establish itself as a real hub for information-sharing and (informal) coordination of operations.

These administrative difficulties are compounded by the growing importance of “unconventional” security challenges and the need to work closely with civilian agencies and non-government stakeholders. A lot of the original impetus for the post-9/11 push for more integrated MDA came from concern about missiles fired from ships near the coast or bombs hidden in shipping containers, and there is still work to be done to strengthen our capacity to detect and respond to those threats. But we also need to be prepared for—and will likely be more often called on to deal with—maritime security challenges that don’t involve things blowing up, including undocumented migration and human trafficking, marine safety and environmental threats associated with resource extraction (esp. oil and gas), search and rescue, extreme weather events and natural disasters. There is therefore an ongoing need to invest more in the Marine Security Operations Centres (MSOCs), as information-fusion hubs which can effectively support civilian agencies involved in these areas, and to require those agencies to make greater contributions and exercise greater operational control. And these regional fusion centres will have to be more integrated with international intelligence operations (e.g., CSIS, RCMP) to track these transnational flows back at their places of origin abroad.

Land: Since 9/11, Canada and the US have gradually built an elaborate structure for monitoring and policing cross-border flows, with minimum disruption to trade and tourism. This is a structure managed by civilian security and law enforcement agencies, and that is as it should be. But the CAF makes important contributions to various aspects of continental and “homeland” security, including routine collection and sharing of remotely-sensed data, security planning and provision for “mega-events” like the Olympics or G8/G20 summits, and support to civilian authorities in responding to industrial accidents, natural disasters, and extreme weather events. Close coordination with the US is

essential, in the south and in the north. To the south, Canada's population and industry are clustered along the border, so most complex emergencies take place at or across the border, requiring quick and seamless coordination among various government players, at all levels, within and between governments. In the far north, jurisdictional questions are still in play, but the problem isn't the number of players, and here the practical challenge is less about managing complexity than it is about finding the resources to operate in a vast and challenging environment (e.g., ecological disruptions, search and rescue). Political and legal limits on the military's domestic operations were created for good reasons, and must be maintained and in some areas reinforced and tightened. But there are ways in which the process of requesting and approving military assistance in an emergency could be much more streamlined, and legal and logistical experts should be hard at work—through a long-term working group process—on making the existing protocols clearer, quicker, and better-known among policy-makers.

There are good reasons to be concerned about airspace incursions by Russian bombers, or North Korean missile tests, and we ought to include these in our long-term planning for continental defence and security. But right now we are still struggling to anticipate, prevent, and contain a variety of "unconventional" threats, which might seem more mundane, but are no less complex. And we have to do this using the institutional structure and government resources that we have inherited, after several decades of accretion and adjustment. Since 9/11, a more or less "complete" continental structure has been put in place, but there is still a huge amount of politically- and technically-difficult work to do in order to re-engineer and fine-tune that structure, to make it more effective, more efficient, and more responsive.