

National Defence Policy Review: “A Feminist Defence Policy for Canada?”

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Introduction

The Public Consultation Document guiding the National Defence Policy Review pays only scant attention to gender mainstreaming and the women, peace and security agenda (UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and NATO Directive 40-1). This is an oversight considering the recent CDS Directive for Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions into CAF Planning and Operations (20 January 2016). At a minimum, *gender-based analysis* should be integrated into this Defence Policy Review. The Defence Policy Review offers an opportunity to deepen Canada’s commitment to *gender mainstream* its defence policy and more ambitiously, it provides an opportunity to discuss what an explicitly *feminist defence policy* could look like. It is imperative that Canadian defence policy reflect Canadian values and remain in line with international legal obligations (under the UN and NATO). Moreover, making gender equality a key component of defence policy would reflect Canadian values and allow Canada to play an international leadership role on this important issue impacting global and national security.

Gender mainstreaming defence policy

The defence sector is not only highly gendered in terms of women’s underrepresentation, but defence policies and military operations have disproportionately negative impacts on women. The recent CDS Directive for Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions into CAF Planning and Operations recognizes that women’s and men’s experiences differ and that the same process may have differential outcomes for them. It also recognizes Canada’s international commitments to gender mainstream its defence policy under UNSCR 1325 and the NATO Directive 40-1. Gender mainstreaming consists of assessing gender-specific implications and changing policies and processes in order to avoid gender-discriminatory outcomes. At a minimum, the Defence Policy Review needs to critically engage with and advance the recent CDS Directive.

DND/CAF require robust gender mainstreaming domestically before they can successfully gender mainstream Canada’s international operations and take on an international leadership role in this regard. While progress is being made on responding to the findings of the External Review on Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces (Deschamps Report), the Defence Policy Review should more strongly underline the importance of this ongoing and long-term commitment. The type of military needed to successfully implement and fulfill Canada’s international commitments on women, peace and security is one in which gender discrimination and sexual misconduct are explicitly recognized and addressed on an ongoing basis. Overcoming gender discrimination and sexual misconduct is also an important precondition for improving the health and well-being of all military members and veterans.

Why a feminist defence policy would reflect Canadian values and interests

Building on these recent efforts, an explicitly feminist defence policy would furthermore incorporate *gender equality* as one of its key objectives. This may require recognition that defence policies and military operations tend to exacerbate gender inequalities. Armed forces are male-dominated

organizations that still struggle with gender inclusivity and sexual misconduct. Military conflict often leads to increases in violence against women, including sexual violence. Moreover, defence policy reflects the security and interests of the state and not of women. A feminist defence policy would shift our focus from state to human, in particular women's security, and to non-militarized forms of security such as economic, food, or environmental security. Its aim would be not simply to increase the number of women in the defence sector, but to shift how we define security.

Gender inequalities and sexual violence have been recognized by many states and international organizations as major threats to international peace and security. International conflict often exacerbates gender inequalities, making women vulnerable to violence and discrimination even as some women are participants in conflict. In line with Canadian values such as gender equality and human rights, the government has shown commitment to gender equality through gender parity in the current cabinet. The government has also committed to re-engaging with the UN, which calls for a fuller implementation of UN policy around women, peace and security. Successful implementation of the Canadian Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (C-NAP) would elevate Canada's international position and thus serve Canadian interests. Canada could potentially take on a leadership role in the global implementation of UNSCR 1325, which would also support Canada's bid for a UN Security Council seat for 2021.

How to develop a feminist defence policy for Canada

Development of a feminist defence policy requires greater gender expertise within DND/CAF. In addition to current efforts to conduct gender-based analysis, establish gender advisors (GENADs), and offer gender, peace and security workshop, DND should set aside resources for the broader development of gender expertise. This would support DND/CAF to successfully implement Operation Honour, fulfill Canada's international commitments, and consider the development of a feminist defence policy for Canada. Engagement with civil society (in particular with women's NGOs) and feminist researchers is an important tool in achieving these goals. Real change can only occur through genuine engagement of DND/CAF with these actors. Developing and implementing a feminist defence policy will require not only rhetorical commitment to the women, peace and security agenda, but also the necessary resources to back up these commitments. While the argument has been made that gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of women can be useful for operational effectiveness, a commitment to gender equality in defence policy needs to go beyond a purely instrumental use of gender.

Conclusion

Is Canada ready to commit to gender mainstreaming its defence policy? More ambitiously, is Canada ready to consider what a feminist defence policy might look like? Even if Canada is not ready for a feminist defence policy, at a minimum this Defence Policy Review needs to more strongly address how we plan to fulfill our international obligations under UNSCR 1325 and NATO Directive 40-1. The recent efforts by DND/CAF to integrate a gender perspective are at risk if they are not supported and guided by meaningful and informed inclusion into this Defence Policy Review and into the development of future defence policy.