

Defence policy review consultation
Views and Keypoints
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From Canada first to Canada integrated

A defence policy review presents an opportunity for the Canadian Government to update the 2008 Canada First Defence Policy, which was instituted when Canada was still active in the Afghanistan conflict, an ‘out of area’ NATO military mandate. While it may be argued that Afghanistan still represents a current strategic problem for the West, Canada’s defence policy is now over a half decade out of date. Meanwhile, we have entered an era of new challenges, many of them familiar to our previous security environments.

Canada’s security: Challenges and Responses

Canada’s national defence interests remain, as they have since the end of World War II, primarily threefold: the defence of Canada, cooperative defence of North America in conjunction with the United States, and a contribution to international peace and security. These three represent the significant responsibilities of our defence mandate: national security, bilateral cooperation, and international support of allies. Of these, the most significant changes are taking place in the latter, a turbulent global environment.

It is important to situate Canada’s security in the context of its wider foreign policy interests. As a trade dependent state, Canada’s foreign policy is primarily foreign economic policy. Canada’s economy is based on production surpluses, directed to export markets. Exports are a necessity, as our domestic population cannot consume the entirety of Canada’s production of goods and services, certainly not to the level that would support the world’s eighth largest economy. In the industrialized world, Canada is one of the most dependent on foreign trade, and notably reliant on a single major market – the United States.

Almost everything that informs Canada’s foreign policy, from international development aid to the promotion of health to peaceful economic development, serves the basic national interest of sustaining the Canadian economy, and its export markets. And defence policy should be seen as an aspect of foreign policy.

Perhaps most closely connected to the modern persona of Canada’s military identity is peacekeeping. Now encompassing a wider spectrum of peace support efforts, stabilization, reconstruction, and even peace enforcement, peace operations present a most obvious way to reconnect Canada’s armed forces with international organizations such as the United Nations, and to provide support for global peace and security operations. The end of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan means the bulk of Canada’s army (as well as significant aspects of its air force and navy) are no longer part of the

ISAF mandate, and may be redeployed to broader military security operations, including UN peacekeeping missions.

The fight against terrorism, and efforts to reduce or circumvent it, remain a core component of the defence of Canada and support of allies. Terrorism has become more disaggregated, with the increasingly prevalent examples of ‘lone actor’ attacks, but also more network-driven, as groups such as – Islamic State, and the remnants of the Taliban and other groups continue in a globalized fashion. Other troubling developments of modern terrorism – and the related response to it – include links to organized crime, potential uses of weapons of mass destruction, and cyber terrorism. Different than other forms of violent terrorism, cyber terrorism presents an immediate threat to Canada’s security. Canada has a vast network of cyber security infrastructure, from research groups, to agencies and enterprises, which could support defence of Canada’s cyber networks. And on the threat of WMD use by terrorist groups, non-proliferation and arms control efforts should once again be at the forefront of Canada’s security policy.

Canada has long neglected its geographical home in the Americas. Yet some of the greatest challenges to Canada’s security interests (narcotics trafficking, narco-terrorism, turbulent economic markets, civil-political unrest, illicit arms trading, human smuggling and indentured servitude, human rights abuses, and the risk of failed states, to name a few) are growing in the hemisphere. On the other hand, potential benefits to Canada could emerge from this region, were political, military, and economic disruptions mitigated. Defence diplomacy – military attaches, non-proliferation efforts, high level relations, training exercises, and consultations such as the Halifax Forum present opportunities for an enhanced role for Canada in the region.

Previous defence reviews and white papers (1964, 1971, 1987, 1994) came at significant periods of change in Canadian defence relations and obligations, yet most of them did not directly connect to Canada’s security policy, or even foreign policy. Though short lived, the 2005 International Policy Statement did what previous papers and reviews did not, joining defence concerns to security and foreign policies. A policy review at this time would allow for a return to an integrated policy, one that ties the operational aspects of defence to the broader mandate of Canadian security policy (broadly understood as its national interest), and placed in the context of Canada’s wider foreign policy.