

Defence Policy Review Roundtable
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Subject: The role of gender in security and defence

Context: Several events and initiatives have highlighted the importance of taking gender dynamics into account for the practice of security and defence. This topic is wide in scope and includes: the integration of women in the armed forces, the incorporation of a gender perspective in operations, addressing gender-based violence as a war tactic (e.g. understanding the motivations of female insurgents and terrorists in the context of irregular warfare).

Argument: The consideration of gender in the realm of security and defence is often very segmented. My main policy recommendation would be to develop a comprehensive strategy to incorporate gender into Canadian defence policy, one that highlights how gender impacts the day-to-day work of DND and CAF professionals. A comprehensive approach addresses the following questions:

- Military organizational culture: which strategies are deployed by the organization to support healthy gender dynamics? Do women and men benefit from the same opportunities and treatment? What is the typical model of leadership in the organization?
- Defence policymaking: how is gender analysis applied during the assessment of policy options? Is it done systematically or is it the result of individual initiative and expertise?
- Operational planning: How will the role of gender advisors be implemented in operational planning and execution? How will gender expertise be diffused across ranks? How will gender be incorporated at the strategic, operational and tactical levels?

To illustrate the necessity of the above approach, one can point to the gap in implementation between the gender norms adopted in the context of the United Nations (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-on resolutions) and national action plans; or the NATO Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the national reporting requirements. These exercises are jargon-laden and impose excessive reporting metrics that do little to relate the gender perspective to the daily work of security and defence professionals, on both the civilian and military sides. Another example is linked to the often-cited view that once bullets start flying, gender is irrelevant. Although more common, the gender

perspective of adversarial tactics is still misunderstood and has led to important blind spots, notably with the role women play in insurgencies and terrorist organizations.

Policy prescription: There is an opportunity for Canada to play a leadership role in military training and education, focused on gender. Canada already benefits from an enviable reputation because it was among the first countries to remove professional barriers for women in the armed forces. Therefore, Canada can present itself as a credible actor in this field. However, in the last two decades, Canada was outpaced by Scandinavian countries, which have continuously updated gender training, as opposed to considering it a “fait accompli”. With a new government, Canada could take a renewed leadership role and be a norm setter when it comes to gender in security and defence, to show how it can improve policymaking and operational planning, tailored to the needs of specific organizations. This would require:

- Regularly updating gender training and gender analysis tools.
- Developing a mechanism for exchanging best practices internationally (but especially with ABCA countries).
- Involve external experts to independently review training approaches and curriculum so that they remain at the cutting edge of research.

To summarize, this submission advocates for a gender approach which is comprehensive in scope. This means that gender is considered as a key variable in security and defence work, as opposed to being treated either as an HR issue (equity policies) or as an operational issue (gender annex in operational plans). To develop the skill of gender analysis, it has to be “mainstreamed” meaning that it is taken into account for all tasks, from the most benign to the most dangerous. This requires better training and clear organizational buy-in, especially from civilian and military leaders.