

Defense Policy Review

Roundtable Talking Points

Kamran Bokhari

Canada's national security strategy is long overdue for an overhaul. Our country can no longer afford to play the junior role in international security that it has been for decades. We continue to have policies that were relevant in an era long gone by. Therefore, I congratulate the Trudeau government for embarking upon this long overdue process of bringing our national defense strategy with the current global geopolitical conditions.

We face a world in which state authority is eroding and non-state actors (terrorist organizations, insurgents movements, etc.) are seeking to fill this void. While this is most obvious in the case of the Middle East, the slow motion weakening of the European Union, Russia and China will further amplify this trend. The next major region to erupt in crisis will mostly likely Central Asia where autocratic regimes led by a geriatric leadership are fast approaching an impasse. Eurasia and the entire western hemisphere in the throes of crisis, which North America, despite its stability, must be prepared for.

Canada has long relied on our southern neighbor to do the heavy lifting in terms of maintaining international security. The magnitude of global problems far outstrips the ability of the United States to manage. We can no longer simply leave it to our American allies to handle. What this means is that we must stop punching below our weight and play a much bigger role than we have thus far.

This cannot happen unless we increase the size of our military. Having less than 70,000 active duty personnel is totally out of synch with our status as a G-8 country. This number worked well in the period of relative peace following the end of World War II and more so recently after the end of the Cold War. Canadian forces could pursue their historic role of being engaged in humanitarian, reconstruction and development activities. Anymore, we live in an increasingly dangerous world where we cannot shy away from the need to engage in combat operations in coordination with our allies on both sides of the Atlantic.

If we are to reverse the trend of state meltdown around the world, especially in the Middle East we will need to help those countries rebuild their militaries. Building Afghanistan's military forces since the fall of the Taliban regime has been a major challenge in this regard. The same will have to be done in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and other places in years and decades to come. We must have the resources to contribute to this massive international undertaking.

Having a larger and more robust military is also a need because we are a country of immigrants who come from many conflict zones. In order to ensure that immigration does not lead to a degradation of security at home we must be far better informed of the

conditions in the countries from where our future citizens will be coming from. It is thus unacceptable that we do not have a dedicated foreign intelligence service. In addition to such an entity, the Canadian military must upgrade its own intelligence capabilities.