

Canada's Defence Policy: Comments for Discussion in DND Public Consultation Forum, Toronto, May 20, 2016

By: Oded Haklai, Associate Professor, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University

Any defence policy needs to begin by clearly identifying objectives: What do we mean by "defence" and what are we trying to achieve?

Typically, identified defence policy objectives are premised on two factors: (1) norms and values and (2) national interests. Thus, to determine policy objectives, it is important to first clarify our guiding values, clearly identify our interests, and try to pinpoint how these two interact to yield the defence policy objective.

The second step is to formulate the defence policy. The defence policy should be guided by two factors: (1) the identified objectives, and (2) constraints and opportunities. The guiding question is how best to achieve the identified defence policy objectives given the existing structures of opportunities and constraints.

Thus, the policy consultation ought to begin by aiming to articulate the objectives of Canada's defence policy. We need to clearly and explicitly state our defence policy guiding values as well as our national interests. These are not always self-evident. Are we guided by human-rights promotion? Is democracy-promotion a guiding value? To which side of the spectrum do we lean, internationalism or isolationism? Do we identify our national interest in narrow and more immediate terms, for example, the immediate security of Canadian citizens at home, or do we take a broader view of national security to include the well-being of people in other parts of the world?

On these grounds, we can ask: What are the main challenges facing our national defence as we understand it: Is a Daesh attack in Europe a security threat to Canada? (the answer would depend on how we answer the questions above) Does Canada's withdrawal from the coalition's airstrikes on Daesh contribute or hinder our national security? (again the answer would depend on how the previous questions are answered)

In short, identifying the main challenges to Canada's security and the appropriate defence policy would require first clarifying the key issues mentioned above.