

## Canadian Sovereignty and the Defence Review

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Canada's new government has launched a public consultation on the future of our defence policy. In asking Canadians for their input, the government suggests that it is essential to strike a balance between three distinct policy objectives: defence of Canada, defence of Canadians, and global peace and security. Just as Canadians' safety is subjected to new threats brought about by global warming and terrorism, and as coalitions and peace operations are redefined by statehood crises and geopolitical reconfigurations, so too the defence of Canadian sovereignty faces unprecedented challenges and new threats. Of course, the traditional dimension of territorial sovereignty, with the imperative to guard our borders and defend the land, air and sea we call our own must be considered carefully in the defence policy review. But we cannot forget other dimensions of modern sovereignty including our capabilities to protect data, capital and markets, trade, and culture. These too require sophisticated defence planning.

Canada's relative position in the world has changed since the heyday of Pearsonian internationalism, and not for the better. Many states can aspire to the status of middling power, and not just the usual suspects. Korea, Mexico, Indonesia and many others carry increasing political and economic weight. If after a decade or more of diminishment we want to be "back" on the world stage, we need a defence policy – integrated with foreign and development assistance policies – that is focused and attentive to the real, not imagined, assets that we bring to bear on global issues.

According to a recent study by Greenhill and McQuillam, Canada is lagging behind our peers in spending on defence. NATO's agreed target for spending on defence is 2% of GDP. Canada's spending currently stands at half that amount, dead last amongst all G-7 countries, but also below obvious comparators such as Australia, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands – countries that share many values and cannot be accused of militarism.

Meanwhile, the US is still the only global superpower, but is fading in relation to other growing powers, especially China. With all its remaining might, the US simply cannot dictate the terms of the global order. We live in a world where many countries are important, with relevant coalitions being defined on an issue-by-issue basis. Canada's connection to the US is still an inestimable asset, but can't be our defining feature.

Canada's military tradition, our experience in two world wars, in Korea, Afghanistan, and as peace-keepers or peace-makers in conflict zones such as Bosnia, East Timor and Haiti is a major asset. However, there is a crying need to better define Canada's current aspirations for the military. Pearson would have known that we are neither exclusively warriors nor peace-keepers. We have to set priorities that reflect our need for border security, and for protection

of other forms of sovereignty like trade relationships, market access and data, our desire to be constructive contributors to addressing global threats, and our willingness to pay.

After identifying our assets, we need to connect those assets to the projection of both interests and values. In a world where more and more Canadians are connected beyond our borders in value-based environmental, religious, or human rights networks, and where devastating events that take place half way around the world are known immediately, it is no longer plausible to argue that nations have only economic or other material interests. One picture of a little Syrian boy dead on a Turkish beach forced a Canadian response. Our foreign and defence policy calculations are not only rational, but emotional as well, rooted in shared perceptions of 'who we are' as Canadians and increasingly by who we define as allies, partners and even 'friends.'

Canadians are committed to democratic government, the rule of law and human rights. Poll after poll reveals that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is widely seen as a precious legacy, connected to our traditions of social inclusion and pluralism. These values mean that Canadians can and should help where we can to promote the same rights and freedoms for people around the world. That was why we fought the Second World War and the Korean War. In large measure, it justified our disproportionate engagement in Afghanistan. But the latter case also shows why we should *promote* democratic values, rather than imagine that we can impose them. Military action will always be a last, worst option.

Foreign policy, including defence policy, must always be flexible enough to respond to events. Security threats can arise unexpectedly, and in surprising places. Five years ago, there was little talk of Islamic State. That is partly why the world's response has been so fragmented and tentative. Canada could choose to build a much stronger capacity for rapid response, always working with allies, but capable of early action. Our position with allies in the fight against Islamic State would be more comfortable if we had been able to announce an alternative to our air-combat deployment far faster. If we had been able to offer to work closely with France in North and West Africa, deploying special forces and anti-terrorist training personnel to aid the G5 Sahel countries (Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Chad), for example, the entire fracas over the Canadian role against Islamic State in Iraq could have been avoided. I suspect that we simply weren't capable of making such an offer.

Our military and security services' primary purpose is to create as safe a setting for Canadians as possible. That implies first and foremost a strong capacity to police and defend our land, sea and ice borders. This is a necessity. To do that, however, may also require some 'forward' capacity, the ability to work in partnership with close allies to identify and prevent threats before they reach Canadian soil. And there are times when to be credible as an ally, Canada also has to commit resources to the defeat of common enemies and threats. Historically, Canada has also been favourably disposed to working through the UN system with partners that are not close allies. These partnerships were once framed as 'peace-keeping,' but today what is often required is far more aggressive peace making: intervention in civil wars; stabilization in post-conflict societies; and protection of countries against aggressors.

Canada is not a major power. It is now one of quite a few countries with an ability to help shape events. We must avoid nostalgia for a lost time of outsized impact, because nostalgia can lead to foolish commitments that we will not sustain, and to resentment of allies when we pull back. Canada must conduct an honest assessment of our assets, interests and values as we understand the new meaning of “sovereignty” beyond the defence of borders. Let’s make sure that being “back” internationally means looking forward, dealing with the world as it is, and making a real difference where we can.