

Defence policy review too narrow on cyber, space

By PAUL MEYER (Originally published in the Hill Times, 18 May, 2016)

The defence policy review the government launched last month is picking up tempo, with several consultative roundtables being held across the country. One hopes that these and other means of garnering input will help clarify the government's future course of action and ensure that the eventual policy to emerge is not purely centred on the Department of National Defence.

The public discussion paper that has been released suggests that DND is examining issues from a rather parochial viewpoint that may not serve well the national and global security interests of the government. This danger is inherent in the decision to initiate a defence policy review prior to reviewing the country's foreign and security policy. As former prime minister Pierre Trudeau once remarked: "In such a situation, there is a risk that foreign policy can become the servant of defence policy, which is not the natural order of policy-making."

A nod to "whole of government" is made in a single brief paragraph in the discussion paper, but this seems a ritualized gesture without an elaboration of how the conduct of Canada's defence policy should contribute to broader international security goals. The whole field of nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament, for example, is absent from the discussion paper. DND and the Canadian Armed Forces were closely involved in the development of the arms control agreements addressing forces and weapons in Europe (CFE Treaty, Vienna Document) and transparency measures (Open Skies Treaty), yet there is no reference to these arrangements. This is particularly worrisome at a time when many of these agreements are being degraded under the pressure of deteriorating East-West relations. Does DND see no role for itself in supporting conventional arms control or in buttressing the multilateral agreements against weapons of mass destruction?

It was refreshing to see that the discussion paper addressed the realms of outer space and cyberspace as areas meriting attention in the defence policy review. The discourse in the discussion paper, however, is essentially formulated around threats and military counter-measures, with no attention to other possible steps for addressing the perceived threats.

We are presented with disquieting references to "certain states" being engaged in developing "a range of counter-space or anti-satellite weapons that threaten our collective access to and use of space."

This is followed by the leading question "should Canada develop the means to protect its satellites and space capabilities, and those of its allies, from attack?" Where is there an acknowledgement in this depiction of Canada's long-standing support for the non-

weaponization of outer space? Or the possibility to use new capacity, such as Canada's Sapphire satellite, to support verification of envisaged co-operative security arrangements in the "global commons" of outer space?

The consideration of cyber security is similarly framed as a confrontation between nefarious states and non-state actors mounting increasingly complex threats against Western interests that justifies using similar techniques against these cyber enemies. The attractiveness of employing cyber capabilities "to disrupt threats at their source" with little risk to personnel is expounded. The paper refers to key allies as the U.S. and U.K. developing "both defensive and offensive military activities in cyberspace." The strong inference is that the Canadian Armed Forces would like to emulate these allies in order "to operate effectively in this domain."

What about the effectiveness of not turning cyberspace into a battleground? Has the net benefit to Canada been assessed of promoting responsible state conduct in cyberspace through agreed restraint and confidence-building measures rather than encouraging expanded disruptive and destructive cyber operations? Regrettably there is no indication in the discussion paper that these alternative approaches to supporting the peaceful use of cyberspace are even under consideration. We need more public and political debate before acquiescing in such a militarized vision of cyberspace.

International security policy should reflect a holistic approach that takes into account the various contributions that a country's defence, diplomacy, and development capabilities can make to advance the nation's security interests.

It will be desirable as the defence policy review progresses to ensure that security challenges and the possible responses to them are not rendered exclusively from a military perspective. It will be crucial to integrate other points of view and approaches so that the government and Canadians in general will recognize themselves and their preferences in the defence policy that eventually emerges from the review.

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