THE SIMONS FOUNDATION CANADA

ARCTIC SECURITY BRIEFING PAPERS

Prepared by Ernie Regehr, O.C., Senior Fellow in Arctic Security and Defence

May 10, 2023

From War Preparation to War Prevention: Submission to DND defence policy update

The Department of National Defence (DND) is updating its 2017 defence policy statement, "Strong, Secure, Engaged" (SSE),[1] pointing to a changed "geopolitical landscape" in which threats from that time "have intensified and accelerated…at an unprecedented rate."[2] Among those rising threats, the Defence Department includes "rapidly accelerating climate change, more sophisticated cyber threats, Russia and China's increasing military modernization, and Russia's further invasion of Ukraine." DND invited submissions to address a series of questions posed on its online "feedback" mechanism. The following submission of April 27 responds (with some additional edits) to selected questions.

"Who are DND/CAF's critical partners in this area [re continental and Arctic defences]? How should they be engaged?"

Partners and Neighbours

The United States is clearly Canada's primary partner in continental and Arctic defence. It is a partnership from which Canada benefits, and which will endure for the foreseeable future, yet there are three additional points to emphasize. First, the Canada/US partnership requires careful management in the interests of respecting Canadian sovereignty and preserving in Canada the capacity to pursue independent threat assessments and develop Canadian-defined security and foreign policies. Second, continental and Arctic security require that Canada and the United States engage not only with partners but also with neighbours, including adversaries. Third, North American security should be increasingly understood as a shared interest and shared mission involving Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

While Canada has long understood that Canadian prosperity and security are deeply entwined with that of the United States, it is also clear that our prosperity benefits from cooperation with Mexico as we manage economic and trade relations with the United States. The same must increasingly become the norm in continental security. Continental situation awareness, surveillance and control of sea and air approaches to North America, and arms control and disarmament are all key to effective continental security and more formalized cooperation with Mexico on all these fronts should be explored.

Security partners/interlocutors in the Arctic

Business-as-usual engagement with Russia is not possible nor advisable as long as it continues its illegal and brutal assault on Ukraine. At the same time, engagement with adversaries is a necessary reality of international relations, especially in times of crisis, and is essential to advancing international peace and security. Engagement is not a synonym for acquiescence, and engagement with Russia in the Arctic context requires the dual pursuit of accountability and Arctic security stability. Simply importing or duplicating in the North the Russia/NATO standoff that dominates European-centred security arrangements is counter-productive. Escalating military tensions in the Arctic will not aid accountability efforts or advance the pursuit of a just peace in Ukraine. The current escalation of provocative military exercises and strategic patrols raises tensions without any security benefits (e.g. by NATO in the Barents sea within Russia's exclusive economic zone – EEZ, by Russia within Norway's EEZ and in the United

States EEZ in the Gulf of Alaska, and by both sides in the Aleutian Basin). The diplomatic challenge is to advance an Arctic security agenda that seeks to avoid escalating regional tensions and instead promotes shared interests and responsibilities in support of public safety, climate and environmental imperatives, a responsible maritime code of conduct, and de-escalation of strategic challenges in the region. A major part of that diplomatic challenge is the imperative to conduct Arctic relations in such a way that they do not undermine essential international accountability initiatives – pan-Arctic cooperation, including with Russia, is essential, but without implicitly releasing Russia from accountability for its aggression against Ukraine.

NATO and the Arctic

While Canada has traditionally, and wisely, not encouraged a direct role for NATO in Arctic security, the Secretary-General chose a visit to Canada to promote such a role for the alliance: "NATO has a clear interest in preserving security, stability and co-operation in the High North."[3] That combined with a visit to the Arctic while in Canada signalled not only the interests of NATO headquarters in expanding an operational presence in the Arctic, but also a significant shift in Canadian policy.

Obviously, all states other than Russia are NATO members or partners (as of late-April, Sweden's membership in NATO was not yet confirmed), but it is not in the interests of any Arctic states to make the East-West, Russia-NATO dynamic a centre piece for Arctic security arrangements. For Canada to cooperate with Arctic neighbours that are also linked to NATO is obviously appropriate and happens, but engagement with Russia is also essential to keep tensions in check, to ensure that military exercises and patrols avoid direct encounters, and to promote the regional stability that serves the interests of all in the region.

Much of Arctic military preparedness, including in Russia, is related to aiding civilian authorities with lead responsibility for things like maritime law enforcement and regulatory compliance, improved maritime situation awareness, to enhance public safety mechanisms like search and rescue, and to support states in their civilian roles in border patrols, sovereignty reinforcement, and public safety. Russia's Kola Peninsula forces involve some of the same roles but are clearly and predominantly oriented toward its global strategic interests. Russia's Kola-based Northern Fleet has notably become more active in pressing southward into the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic GIUK gap (the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap), indeed, Kola-based naval and infantry forces are active in the war on Ukraine. These operations raise serious questions for military strategists regarding European security and the reliability of the sea-lanes of communication between North America and Europe in times of crisis, and in turn prompts NATO states to increase and coordinate anti-submarine patrols in the North Atlantic – but that does not translate into a need for NATO coordinated operations in the North American Arctic. And, given NATO-Russia polarization, NATO should not become the institution or mechanism through which Arctic states engage Russia on Arctic security matters.

Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)

BMD is also basically a partnership question, and Canada has been right to exclude missile defence from continental security cooperation. Through NORAD, Canada participates in early warning of intercontinental ballistic missile launches, but Canada does not participate in missile defence interception operations. While the United States has for decades sought to develop ICBM interception capabilities, the main achievement has been to confirm that no reliable defence against nuclear attack by intercontinental ballistic missiles is possible. Technology has led to a capability to "intercept a bullet with a bullet," but it has not led to a capacity to intercept a massed attack of such "bullets." Indeed, the more persistent the effort to go beyond an interception capability against limited attack, to the pursuit of the capacity to protect the US population from all-out nuclear attack, the more vulnerable the population becomes. It's the classic security dilemma in which one side's effort to enhance its military capabilities prompts reciprocal moves on the other side with the escalating moves reducing the security of both sides – the result also being heightened strategic instability. Russia and China both have the demonstrated capacity to overwhelm any missile defence by sheer volume of their attack forces, and they have

in addition worked to develop systems like hypersonic weapons and cruise missiles against which BMD does not have even a limited capability. Even North Korea, the current focus of the US-based BMD system, is busily demonstrating that it too can and will expand its attack capacity beyond BMD's limited interception capabilities. Tellingly, a recent essay in *Foreign Policy* explores a variety of potential options available to the United States to address the building North Korean nuclear threat without any reference to ballistic missile defence.[4]

Canada must not alter its policy of non-participation in the US ground-based midcourse missile defence system (GMD) system. That system cannot protect the North American population from attack by ballistic, cruise, or hypersonic missiles, and the effort to mount a defence incentivises adversaries to expand their offensive capabilities and, in the process, undermines arms control and strategic stability – the only safe, durable solution to the existential nuclear threat being arms control.

Arms control and the limits of defence

SSE declared Canada's commitment to strengthening the ability to deter and defeat aerospace threats. Aerospace threats include ICBMs, long-range cruise missiles, and hypersonic missiles, and the ability to defeat those threats is currently extremely limited and the capacity to intercept massed attacks will remain impossible. Technology has created weapons systems against which there is literally no defence and, as noted above, has also created defensive systems that serve primarily to incentivise adversaries to increase their offensive forces. US analysts have posited a defence posture against cruise missiles, for example, that acknowledges that defeating a massed attack of cruise missiles is not feasible, and thus they conclude that what is required is a focus on the archer rather than the arrow – in other words, a capacity to destroy a launch platform before individual missiles are fired. That is a strategy of pre-emptive attack (the opposite of war prevention). A situation of high strategic tension would be made exponentially more dangerous if both sides viewed their adversary as assuming that it would be to their advantage to attack first, pre-emptively. The posture that is needed in highly militarised situations of high tensions is one in which both sides understand that they would gain no advantage from striking pre-emptively (in the knowledge that pre-emption would trigger a deadly counter-attack against which there is no defence).

The strategic response to missile threats must be arms control designed to limit offensive capacity – including controls over cruise and hypersonic missile arsenals, just as there are currently limits on US and Russian ICBMs. The usual current response to arms control proposals is to claim that in the present strategic environment there are few prospects for constructive arms control. There is, unfortunately, truth in that, but what is an even deeper truth is that the present technological and strategic environments mean that there is no credible prospect for effective defence against those systems. The assertion that science and technology will "develop technological solutions" to "emerging threats"[5] is dangerously naïve. The prospects for diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions, temper hostilities, and reach mutually beneficial arms control agreements are much greater than are prospects for defence in an environment of escalating hostility and tension. The technological environment promises that offense will continue to trump defence, and that when both offensive and defensive forces enter combat (when deterrence and prevention fail), the consequences are guaranteed to spell unmitigated global disaster.

"What role should Canada play in Arctic Security? What is Canada's optimal role in Arctic security?"

Canada's primary security responsibilities in the Arctic include ensuring that Canadian sovereignty is respected, that approaches to Canadian territory are monitored and controlled, and that Canadians in the Arctic receive government services, including public safety services.

Canada currently does not have the capacity to monitor and control approaches to all Canadian territory of the northern archipelago, a deficiency that is to be addressed through modernization of what is now the North Warning System. Similarly, the provision of public safety services is impeded by the lack of search and rescue services based in the Arctic (those services are now based in southern Canada).

At a more strategic level, participation in NORAD in early warning contributes to strategic stability, but as noted above, efforts to develop assured and comprehensive defences against strategic threats (nuclear or conventional) to North America (ICBMs, long-range cruise missiles, hypersonic missile) will prove to be counter-productive.

In its day-to-day operations, though defined as a joint Canada/US "command," NORAD functions largely as a joint surveillance and early warning arrangement, with defence or control operations carried out under national command within each country's jurisdiction. That separation of surveillance/early warning from defence/control operations is the formal arrangement for the maritime domain, as well as for missile defence. The same arrangement should be formalized for air defence as well.

The optimal role for Canada in support of Arctic regional stability and security is to ensure that Canada's north is effectively managed and governed, that Canada continues to make constructive contributions to regional governance, and that Canadian territory and approaches to it are well monitored and controlled. Canada should encourage regional diplomacy and defence engagement that includes outreach to Russia in the interests of Arctic cooperation and the prevention of military encounters that could lead to escalation.

"How can the people living in the region contribute to improving our defence and security posture?"

Residents, and especially indigenous residents, of the north possess technical and traditional knowledge, from which Canadian security is already benefiting. Multiple Indigenous organizations work jointly with the federal government, for example in the Enhanced Maritime Situational Awareness initiative. There are many additional ways in which indigenous individuals and groups contribute to situational awareness, search and rescue, fisheries management and so on. Involving local populations contributes to the reinforcement of Canadian sovereignty over Canada's northern waters and Islands.

The Canadian Rangers have important roles in surveillance, sovereignty patrols, search and rescue, disaster relief, and training of regular forces in Arctic survival. But there are concerns about chronic underfunding, insufficient consultation on Arctic security affairs, and lack of training that would better integrate them into the CAF Joint Task Force North operations and thus allow JTFN to better benefit from the knowledge and operational skills that the Rangers represent.

"How should DND/CAF, working with other Government of Canada partners, pursue procurement needs?"

The first consideration for any procurement strategy is to understand or define the primary purposes of the CAF. Consider, for example, that there is now broad understanding that the purpose of nuclear weapons cannot be to fight to try to win nuclear wars. The major nuclear powers now repeatedly reiterate the understanding that "a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought." The experience of conventional warfare since the end of the Cold War should be bringing military planners to a similar realization about conventional forces. Indeed, toward the end of the Cold War, Mikhail Gorbachev articulated the logical conclusion – the purpose of contemporary armed forces must be to prevent rather than fight wars[6] (a truth his current successor would have been well-advised to heed). Conventional wars are also highly destructive, they rarely yield a clear winner, and thus a primary security priority should be to avoid fighting them. In a sense, NATO allies have come to that basic understanding in the context of Russia's attack on Ukraine, inasmuch as they have properly made prevention of the spread of war a top priority while also supporting Ukraine's defence against aggression.

The purpose of the CAF, in addition to reinforcing sovereignty, defending approaches to national territory, and aiding civilian authorities to meet their responsibilities for public safety and sovereignty protection, must increasingly be oriented to preventing military conflict at home and abroad – and when prevention fails, to help to bring the fighting to an early ceasefire. As a general objective that is unlikely to be controversial, but its practical

implementation demands new avenues of planning and research. The CAF have in fact traditionally emphasized capabilities that are designed to enhance stability and thus war prevention: situation awareness, sea and air frontier surveillance and control, and supporting improved public safety capabilities, such as search and rescue – particularly in the Arctic, all serve war prevention objectives.

War prevention is nevertheless a serious objective that is admittedly more easily asserted than achieved. Internationally, certain activities are specifically designed for pursuing such ends, notably, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and peace diplomacy (the latter meaning war termination initiatives). These should be primary Canadian security objectives and operational priorities, at home and abroad, with CAF personnel training and equipment shaped by those objectives. Peacebuilding is a war prevention strategy which, while primarily a civilian undertaking, is aided by armed forces in much the same way that Canadian armed forces at home aid civilian authorities in actions that range from emergency and humanitarian assistance to law enforcement. Strategic and local or tactical transportation aids peacebuilding, and military and police forces deployed internationally are also in a position to contribute to training for these roles.

Peacekeeping remains a key multilateral tool for promoting international peace and security, and while Canada was once a major contributor, we have inexplicably retreated in a major way from supporting vital UN peacekeeping operations. The needs remain, and the skills and equipment needed are again similar to those the CAF need for their domestic operations, including monitoring and surveillance of approaches to Canadian territory. Peace support operations involve the deployment of military forces in support of war termination efforts and support for law enforcement. When there is no peace to keep, the restoration of order, in coordination with peacebuilding and diplomatic measures are key. And this requires robust capabilities, but Canada is failing to provide such things as the rapid reaction capability it once promised. Such capabilities are needed, not to fight on one side of a local war, but to ensure mission security in a hostile environment.

And as professionals in peacekeeping have pointed out, beyond capabilities and the right equipment, peacekeeping and peace support operations require experience. Ongoing engagement in such operations is essential to build the competence required, but, again, Canada is failing in that regard. Experience cannot be gained when total peacekeeping personnel numbers are in the low dozens. Training and experience in peacekeeping require standing forces in substantial numbers maintained for those purposes.

“What are Canada’s security Challenges? What adversaries and/or threats should drive our investment?”

The climate crisis, recurring pandemics, regional armed conflict and population displacement, food insecurity, and nuclear weapons are the chief and most direct threats faced now by Canada. And a primary feature of all of these threats is that responses to them are chronically underfunded and they are not amenable to military solutions. In some cases, defence policy and military forces can make important contributions to easing even non-military threats. Canada must also be alert to military threats, even if Canada does not now face direct, active military threats.

The full range of threats should be driving Canadian “human security” spending. There has been some welcome action on climate change, though much, much more is needed. The COVID pandemic has taught us that national health care and research require major infusions of new investment into the national health system. Regional conflict and the resulting population displacement require investments and policy commitments for Canadian participation in international peace support operations, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding – as well as investment in related military capacity, conflict diplomacy, official development and humanitarian assistance, and policy of welcome toward asylum seekers in accordance with our international obligations under the UN Refugee Convention.

The potential military threats faced by Canada require investment in effective situation awareness, early warning, and for maintaining control over approaches to Canadian land, sea, and air territory. Effective situational awareness is needed to be able to confirm that there are not immediate threats to Canadian sovereignty, but the uncomfortable truth is that many potential military threats are also not amenable to military solutions (as noted, nuclear threats as well as conventionally armed ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and hypersonic missiles cannot be defended against).

Russia and China are threatening not because Canada and its allies are militarily weak. Annual military spending by NATO and its partners is well over four times that spent by Russia and China combined. East-west tensions that could descend into war are dangerous because the combined military firepower of east and west guarantees that any east/west armed conflict would visit unimaginable destruction on the planet and its people, even if nuclear weapons were not used (witness the destruction visited on Ukraine). A primary security imperative facing security planners is the prevention of conventional and nuclear war, avoidance of arms races, and the reassertion of diplomacy to manage strategic relations. Much is understood about the requirements for war prevention, but much more needs to be learned. It is urgent that a key dimension of security planning and research become the search for the means to enhance war prevention strategy and the operational requirements for such a strategy.

Security planning that prepares to fight in the hopes of winning wars between strategic peer states is in reality planning for mass destruction. The focus on war winning also undervalues and thus underfunds diplomacy and conflict management. Central to attention to war prevention strategies is the need to reconceive the West's relations with Russia and China in pursuit of strategic stability and ultimately cooperation.

Notes

[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-defence-policy.html

[2] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-defence-policy/we-want-to-hear-from-you.html

[3] Jens Stoltenberg, "In the face of Russian aggression, NATO is beefing up Arctic security," *Globe and Mail*, 24 August 2022. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-in-the-face-of-russian-aggression-nato-is-beefing-up-arctic-security/

[4] Doug Bandow, "The U.S. Needs to Talk to North Korea Any Way It Can," *Foreign Policy*, 26 April 2023. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/26/biden-yoon-washington-summit-south-north-korea-nuclear/

[5] DND, Procurement of Capabilities. https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/departmental-plans/departmental-plan-2023-24/planned-results/procurement-of-capabilities.html

[6] F. Stephen Larrabee, "Gorbachev and the Soviet Military," *Foreign Policy*, 01 Jube 1988. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1988-06-01/gorbachev-and-soviet-military