

Workshop on Security Issues

Key Themes

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Dominance of National Security Perspectives

Participants agreed that in a more threatening global environment, where the security umbrella of the United States is increasingly uncertain, Canadian foreign policy will clearly prioritise national security and defense.

However, as outlined in the 2005 UN summit, there will be no security without development. There are risks to high-income countries, such as Canada, abandoning fragile and conflict affected states. The risks include escalating migration, humanitarian crises, conflict spill-over into regional countries, and fragile states becoming havens for insurgency and terrorism. It is less costly to prevent conflict than address the consequences of conflict.

Participants stressed that an increased defence budget has opportunity costs, including limits to official development assistance and diplomatic resources. These opportunity costs need to be clearly articulated. We cannot let security and defense be our only foreign policy focus for these regions – we must continue to press for initiatives that address humanitarian needs and bring stability.

Moreover, the increase in defence budget provides Canada with additional resources. It is unrealistic to assume that the Canadian security establishment will not be called upon to engage in some manner in contexts of fragility and conflict. With planning and foresight, Canada could use this moment to ensure that the security sector – from policy makers to soldiers – are appropriately trained to engage effectively in these environments.

Fragile and Conflict-Affected States

Participants emphasised that Canadian foreign policy lacks coherence, clarity, and direction, and provides little direction for Canadian policy in contexts of fragility and conflict. (Canada's National Security Strategy is 21 years old.)

In most conflict affected contexts, Canada lacks clear political objectives and a meaningful diplomatic, military or development presence. Canadian foreign policy needs to articulate our interests and objectives in fragile and conflict affected contexts. Without such clarity, decision makers lack a 'sense function' to define where, how, and when to

engage in fragility and crises. Personnel in the field need to have the experience and expertise – the competence - to effectively engage with key stakeholders, assess the environment and identify Canada’s current/potential role, provide advice back to headquarters, and implement policy decisions.

One participant asked if Canada can be serious about policy engagement in contexts of fragility without a military that is deployed in some capacity in these settings. Military personnel and leadership need to understand these operational environments, including the challenges of IHL, the types of actors active in these settings, and communication and coordination mechanisms.

This lack of engagement in conflict affected contexts not only impacts on our reputation globally, but it also undermines the government’s understanding of contexts of fragility. For example, one participant referenced the laws limiting contact with groups designated as terrorist organisations, and the challenges this poses for humanitarian organisations working in specific contexts.

However, participants cautioned that Canada’s ability to engage in contexts of fragility and conflict is limited, both from a diplomatic and security sector perspective. Canada will not be able to engage everywhere, and we will need to act in concert with other actors – multilateral, regional, like-minded countries, and national actors. Moreover, foreign engagement poses real risks and is expensive. Will the government and Canadians accept these risks? Participants noted that the public perception of interventions in fragile contexts has been impacted by the legacy of Afghanistan.

Canadian military forces, at some point, will likely be deployed in some capacity within fragile and conflict affected settings. The lack of a clear policy framework will cause strategic ambiguity, while a poor understanding of these operational environments will result in poor coordination among security and development actors. Participants remarked that in the past, the security and development sector worked well together when objectives of a mission are clearly established, and each side is aware of and respects the operational mandate of the other.

Current CAF Priorities

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are being pushed in two directions. First, the CAF is taking on a more robust role in Europe. And second, the CAF is increasing its defensive capability, particularly in the Arctic. In addition, the CAF is being tasked with the response to national emergencies (wildfires, floods, etc.), and the necessity of adapting to hybrid warfare, including information/cyber operations.

Given these operational priorities, the CAF is shifting to more conventional, Cold War tactics. (In addition to having to recruit a significant number of soldiers and speed up the

procurement of equipment.). The capacity of the CAF to engage in contexts of fragility and conflict is minimal, particularly given current troop levels. The level of global deployments in the military is the lowest it has been for decades (since before World War Two?).

Given these operational priorities and capacity limitations, training Canadian forces to engage in fragile and conflict affected settings is not part of current scenario planning. Nor is CAF leadership integrating the operational environment of fragile and conflict affected settings, including engagement with humanitarian and development actors into training or strategies.

Participants noted that from a military standpoint, missions in fragile and conflict settings are extremely challenging. The security situation is complex, the missions are never sufficiently resourced, and dynamics with local communities pose challenges.

Despite these constraints, one participant asked if Canada could have a policy framework for engagement in conflict affected places without the involvement of the security sector? And asked if Canada should have a security sector that is unaware of the challenges of these contexts?

Opportunities for Canada

Canada as a thought leader on the ‘security-development’ space: In the 1990s and 2000s, Canada funded implementation research in areas related to its human security agenda, including the protection of civilians, security sector reform, and peacebuilding. This research engaged the police and military, diplomats, as well as the humanitarian sector to identify gaps in knowledge, in best practices and norms, institutional capacity at the national, regional, and global levels, as well as in implementation.

Canada could fund research and collaborations on the current challenges within the ‘security-development’ space. Humanitarian and development actors refer to this space as ‘the triple nexus’ – namely the intersections among humanitarian action, development action, and efforts to contribute to peace. The importance and challenges of safeguarding civilian protection in these environments should be a focus on any effort to examine the security-development interface.

Given the research funds available to DND, it could bring together the humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, and security communities to develop a position paper or operational strategy. Such an exercise could facilitate understanding of the challenges and opportunities for collaboration within these settings. Canadian security and development collaboration in Ukraine could be examined for best practices. But the exercise should also go beyond Ukraine, to examine the challenges of other operational environments, including internationalised conflicts, urban warfare, gang violence, etc.

Canada has long discussed undertaking mediation efforts in conflict affected settings. Mediation is low cost with the possibility of high rewards. Canada could strengthen our existing mediation capacity by funding mediation research and training, provide funding and support to national and regional mediation efforts, and facilitate Canadian involvement these efforts.

Third Country Training Operations for Security Sector Reform: Canada's value added in police and military training is well established. Canada currently trains Ukrainian soldiers in third countries – Latvia, Poland, and the United Kingdom - minimising the risks to CAF of undertaking that training in Ukraine. In collaboration with like-minded allies, Canada could expand its security sector training to engage other countries.

Cyberwarfare, Information Warfare and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Canada has a strong cyber and AI capacity, with experience countering information operations - foreign interference – targeting our democratic institutions. Canada could provide capacity building for countries in information warfare, through inter alia, 'white hat' ICT engagement to help countries detect risks.

Limited and Targeted Natural Disaster Deployments: Canada could provide limited and targeted deployments of CAF to respond to natural disasters or humanitarian emergencies (a lower cost alternative to the DART). Given that CAF members will be involved in emergency response operations in Canada, such deployments would provide them with additional experience in emergency response.