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Security

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POINTS OF VIEW

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OF FIREPROOF HOUSES: CANADA'S SECURITY

by Geoffrey Pearson

> "We live in a fireproof house,
> far from inflammable materials."
>
> — Senator Raoul Dandurand,
> before the Assembly of the
> League of Nations, 1924.

Throughout most of recorded history the security of groups, tribes, nations and states has been associated with the capacity to use force in self-defence. The stronger this capacity, it has been assumed, the greater the security. On the face of it, this assumption makes sense. Weak states have often been victims of stronger neighbours, and there is little doubt that arms and influence go together. But historians have had difficulty in establishing that powerful states enjoy any greater degree of security — the history of Russia is a case in point. It may be, on the contrary, that the greater the degree of national military power, the more likely will it arouse the resistance of others. The usual result has been war. Nevertheless, the assumption that strong armed forces bring security has continued to prevail.

There are examples of nation-states which have disregarded this view. The three nations of North America-Mexico, the United States and Canada — by the accident of geography and the fortunes of history, found little need to keep large armed forces after they gained independence, although in Canada's case the relationship with Britain created special circumstances. The US view of security changed after 1941, and, in the early years of the century, Mexico endured a long civil war which led to new roles for the armed forces, although these remained small. Canada, to this day, has never been able to perceive the threats to its security which would justify the keeping of large armed forces in peacetime.

Moreover, the advent of nuclear weapons and the missiles to carry them have appeared to challenge traditional assumptions about security. It is now commonly declared by East and West alike that a nuclear war cannot be won. The logical inference is that everyone would lose. Yet these same governments plan to use nuclear weapons in certain circumstances, explaining that such plans will "deter" their use by others and therefore prevent war. At the same time conventional forces remain ready to fight as if nuclear weapons were non-existent. Indeed, global spending on military security continues to climb in most of the world, fuelled by great power rivalries in the North, the costs of modern technology, and by the multitude of new (and some old) states in the South that proudly wear the mantle of sovereignty (and the concomitant garments of national defence) which Europeans, who have long set the example, are now beginning to discard. But a number of factors may begin to reverse this steady rise in military spending.

The first is a new willingness in both East and West to challenge the assumptions of the Cold War, a willingness defined by Mr. Gorbachev as "new thinking," by Mr. Reagan as "trust but verify," and by many others as "common security." "Universal human values have the priority in our age," Mr. Gorbachev has said. Whatever this may mean, there is no mistaking the signs of change in Soviet policies, including the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the change of course on the INF treaty, the desire to settle regional disputes, and a new respect for the United Nations. Indeed, the Soviet Union now appears to be taking the lead at the United Nations in efforts to reinvigorate the functions of the Security Council in keeping the peace. This is a striking departure from past Soviet

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attitudes, the implications of which for the United States could be very significant.

Perhaps most important of all, however, is the greater importance attached to verification and inspection. Who would have predicted a year ago the visit by a US Secretary of Defense to the factory producing the latest Soviet bomber? For if trust is built up through verification of both treaties and military deployments (provided the latter are found to be defensive) a way towards mutual confidence may have opened that was not there before.

Two major tests lie ahead for the establishment of such confidence. The first is the reduction of strategic arms, now a first priority for both Moscow and Washington. The prospects for this agreement are clouded by two major uncertainties: the goal of such reductions, and the future of cruise missiles. As to the first uncertainty, the Reykjavik summit revealed the confusion in Washington about whether to aim for the abolition of strategic ballistic missiles or to construct defences against them. However this uncertainty is resolved, there will remain the temptation to compensate for reductions in ballistic missiles by deploying nuclear cruise missiles, the numbers of which are difficult to verify, especially at sea.

The second major test for the establishment of real confidence will be the negotiations on reducing conventional forces in Europe. Here the obstacles to agreement may be greater in Moscow than in the West, for while the pressure of Western public opinion tends to be exerted in favour of reductions, Soviet (and Russian) traditions confer legitimacy on large standing armies, and the political risks of Soviet withdrawal from eastern Europe could be significant.

A second factor likely to slow the growth of military spending is the rising opportunity costs of such spending. New threats to public health and the natural environment create demands for preventive measures in all countries; rates of population growth plunge many poor countries deeper into debt, while at the same time the costs of modern weapons impose severe restraints on public treasuries; and perhaps most important of all, the expected rewards of military spending have largely failed to justify the effort, either because the use of armed force undermines "security" — e.g., Lebanon and Sri Lanka —or because wars can no longer be "won" in the old sense — e.g., Iran/Iraq and Afghanistan — and they kill mostly civilians.

Thus a third factor influencing our understanding of "national security" is a rise in popular awareness of the notion of "common security." The UN has begun to make this term a familiar if rather murky concept, as in the Final Document of the 1987 Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development: "Security is an overriding priority of all nations. It is also fundamental for both disarmament and development. Security consists of not only military, but also political, economic, social, humanitarian and human rights, and ecological aspects. Enhanced security can, on the one hand, create conditions conducive to disarmament and, on the other, provide the environment and confidence for the successful pursuit of development."

More recent research into climate change has reinforced the message that, unless states cooperate to meet global threats to security, and indeed begin to give these priority, independence and sovereignty will have little meaning. But global institutions to give order and leadership to such cooperation remain weak, and the most powerful nations do little to strengthen them (the United Nations is not mentioned in the "political declaration" issued at the Toronto summit of the leaders of the top seven industrial nations in June 1988). The habits of behaviour built up over forty years of Cold War as well as the dogmas of post-colonialism — e.g., "one nation, one vote" — will not yield easily to the emerging realities of the "global commons."

Nevertheless, the factors cited above are beginning to influence the policies of states. The search for the peaceful settlements of disputes in Central America, the Persian Gulf, Angola/Namibia and Kampuchea indicate some acknowledgement by great and small powers alike of the costs of the use of force. If Soviet/American relations continue to improve, Western military budgets are likely to level off. Arms continue to pour into the Middle East, but even there one may expect renewed efforts to overcome ancient animosities.

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Debate in Canada on these matters has been vigorous since the dawn of the missile age in the late 1950s exposed vulnerabilities which Canadians had thought non-existent. Defence against bombers had appeared to be feasible provided there was close cooperation with the United States, although the forms of this cooperation, and especially the storage of nuclear warheads in Canada, was a controversial issue. However, the advent of the intercontinental ballistic missile weakened, if it did not destroy, the case for air defence, and Canadian defence priorities came under closer scrutiny. Support for keeping troops in Europe began to waver in the late 1960s given the incredibility of any scenario involving war in Europe which would allow Canada to reinforce her forces there. Many began to wonder if Canada had any significant role to play in the defence of the West, and even UN peacekeeping lost its attraction in the wake of new hostilities in the Middle East and American withdrawal from Vietnam.

Defence policy in the Trudeau years became a holding action, a struggle to balance commitments and capabilities. Both were cut back, but in the end commitments began to outrun capabilities. The revival of cold war tensions after 1979-1980 and a virtual doubling of American defence spending during President Reagan's first term led to reopening the Canadian debate on defence policy which Mr. Trudeau had more or less closed in 1971. The White Paper of 1987 signalled the end of policy patchwork and compromise — Canada would raise the forces and purchase the equipment needed to carry out fully her commitments to NATO and to the defence of North America.

The reactions to the White Paper suggest, however, that Canadian public opinion remains both confused and divided over these commitments (as well as their order of priority), and more generally over the meaning of "security" in a global environment threatened by new challenges to which old commitments may appear irrelevant. These commitments were based on two main assumptions: that the USSR posed the principal direct threat to Canada (or, put more objectively, that a nuclear war between the superpowers represented such a threat), and that the best means of dealing with this threat was strategic deterrence, or the capacity and the will to retaliate if attacked by Soviet forces anywhere in the NATO area. The White Paper was published at a time when new Soviet policies (and tentative American responses) were beginning to suggest the need for re-examining the first assumption, and when the development of the concept of strategic defence (SDI) seemed to contradict the second. Was the post-war era coming to an end just at the time Canada was preparing to play its full part again in the defence structures built to cope with that era?

Most Canadian critics of the White Paper have focussed on the first of these assumptions—the priority given to the Soviet threat. (SDI, they believe, is not feasible, and the attempt to achieve it would increase the risks of inadvertent nuclear war.) They advocate "common security," a concept which has gathered strength since Mr. Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Project Ploughshares, a non-governmental organization specializing in peace and security issues, sums up the implications of this view for Canadian policy as follows: "To maintain peace and enhance international security, Canada should focus increased effort on disarmament and arms control, international cooperation and the peaceful settlement of disputes, and peacekeeping, all in the context of pursuing ethical, developmental and environmental goals" (Working Paper 88-1).

Reflecting on specific policies, the critics make a number of points:

a) *NATO:*

The critics of Canada's NATO policies fall generally into three camps: those who call for withdrawal; those who want Canada to support different policies from within NATO, or to reduce the Canadian military commitments to NATO; and finally those who believe we should do more to sustain these same commitments. The intention announced in the White Paper on Defence to strengthen and concentrate Canada's ground forces in the Federal Republic of Germany and to triple the reserves has satisfied most members of the third group, although some may have misgivings about the total re-equipment package, especially the costs involved in acquiring nuclear submarines. The proponents of withdrawal from NATO appear to remain a small minority of the critics, and the NDP has been obliged to muffle its 1969 pledge to withdraw, by stating that it would not do so immediately if it formed a government. The second group of critics, therefore, represents the mainstream of current opposition to certain aspects of NATO policy.

These critics want Canada to support change in NATO military doctrines and deployments, including the negotiated withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe, a pledge not to use these weapons first in the meantime, and the adoption of a "non-offensive defence" posture. Some would withdraw Canada's forces from Europe, either unilaterally or in exchange for Warsaw Pact reductions.

b) *North America*:

The chief concern is that Canada will be drawn into new plans for the defence of the continent which could further militarize the Arctic and increase the threat of war. Accordingly, Canada should take control of early warning and surveillance facilities in the North, oppose SDI, and if the US refuses to cooperate we should scrap NORAD. In the Arctic, Canada should work with other states to form a cooperative regime for non-military activities. Nuclear submarines are regarded as offensive weapons, contrary to the spirit of the Non-proliferation Treaty, and in any case too expensive. Most of the critics oppose the testing of cruise missiles in Canada.

c) *Peacekeeping*:

Canada should earmark larger forces for peacekeeping under UN auspices.

d) *Military Production*:

Economic arguments in favour of military spending are rejected. Canada should produce what it needs on defence grounds alone, but there is no consensus on what is needed nor how much should be spent. Arms exports would be severely restricted.

COMMENT

Both the government and the critics give more attention to northern security than used to be the case, in part because the Arctic basin has developed a new strategic importance for submarines carrying cruise missiles, and in part because of what might be called a new nationalism which envisages the North as a uniquely Canadian asset. However, the decision to concentrate our European commitments in the Federal Republic of Germany and to abandon the commitment to reinforce Norway in case of need runs counter to this emphasis. Moreover, the decision to reinforce Canadian forces in West Germany up to divisional strength if necessary appears to revert to a World War II scenario, despite the fact that some 4,000 theatre nuclear weapons still remain in Western Europe. In both cases, the "Canada first" views of the critics, allied to a regional cooperation regime in the North, may make more political sense for Canadians, if not for our allies.

That is the rub. The European allies, including Norway and Denmark, are not yet prepared to regard the Soviet Union as a partner, rather than an adversary, for security purposes, whether in the North or anywhere else. They continue to depend on the United States as the guarantor of their military security, and there is little prospect of early change in this dependency relationship. Defence cooperation among the European allies is growing, and a conference on disarmament in Europe may soon begin, but in neither case is it reasonable to expect dramatic results in the near future.

On the other hand, an agreement to reduce significantly the numbers of strategic warheads held by the superpowers (START) can be anticipated in the next year or two, barring unforeseen political changes in the USSR or in Eastern Europe. As already noted, limits on cruise missiles appear to be the main obstacle to agreement, provided a formula can be found to prevent the construction of anti-ballistic missile defences in the next ten years or so. Canada has a major interest in both issues, for on their resolution depends decisions about the kind of military facilities and equipment which may be needed in the North. For example, if Canadian nuclear submarines are required in part to deter Soviet submarines from entering the Canadian Arctic in times of tension or war, would this task have the same importance in circumstances which limited Soviet capacities to launch cruise missiles from submarines deployed in northern waters, or in transit through such waters? In any event, how plausible is a scenario which envisages a Canadian contribution to a "war-fighting" capability in the North or in the Atlantic without the use of nuclear weapons? Would such a contribution help to deter war? Or is the main concern the control of Canadian waters and airspace in peacetime?

Here we face the ongoing dilemma of Canadian "sovereignty" and the role of the Canadian armed forces in peacetime protection and control. If the threat of a Soviet attack or incursion is real, then clearly the combined defence assets of the US and Canada, not to mention other allies, need to be mobilized to meet it. The purpose of an alliance is to share the resources of the allies to deter attack, and to repel it if necessary. In the case of North America, the US obviously provides the bulk of such resources, and in particular the capacity to deter hostile air and naval forces. Why then should Canada invest in equipment, such as submarines, which add little to this capacity? But if the main purpose of Canadian forces in North America is "control" of Canadian maritime areas and airspace, the task becomes virtually unlimited. Few countries have so much space to control if this notion is taken literally.

"Sovereignty" is often a magic formula that tends to defy close scrutiny, but in a world of sovereign states the capacity to know who or what threatens national frontiers is certainly one of its marks. Forming NORAD was a step in the direction of exerting *joint* control of continental airspace and therefore the assertion of Canadian sovereignty, provided it was clearly defensive in nature and not linked to arrangements which appeared to threaten Soviet security. US naval strategy, on the other hand, appears to assume that the Arctic will be an offensive theatre of operations requiring the presence of US submarines in peacetime. The dilemma remains stark. A contribution to the *defence* of North America in the form of nuclear submarines is difficult to justify on these grounds alone. The provision of nuclear submarines as an additional means of asserting *control* of Canadian waters would appear to be partly (perhaps mainly) directed at Canada's principal ally.

Nuclear submarines are only the most dramatic example of a more general dilemma — the priority to be attached to defence expenditures relative to other public expenditures. A clear and present danger to the security of the West, as perceived in the 1950s, provided its own justification for defence expenditures of up to six percent of gross national product. As in Korea in 1950, or in Afghanistan in 1980, the US perceived such a danger and acted accordingly. Canada followed suit in 1950, but not in 1980, and it seems unlikely, with Gorbachev in power, that such a danger can be made persuasive in 1988. Moreover, a Canadian contribution to European defence is no longer a compelling cause for most Canadians, despite general approval for Canadian membership in NATO. Finally, the costs of protection against other threats to individual well-being and to the natural environment are bound to increase for the indefinite future.

Canada can hardly plead poverty as an excuse for cutting defence costs (we have the fifth largest per capita income in the world and the tenth largest gross national product). The problem is not one of absolute costs but rather of costs versus benefits. No Canadian political party could allow our armed forces to "rust out," or to be incapable of defending themselves. The answer rather lies in re-examining commitments which may not be justified in the light of changing circumstances and of competing alternatives, or, at the least, of making such commitments compatible with equipment that is multi-purpose. Tanks, for example, serve no purpose in Canada, and the purchase of a new model for Canadian Forces in Europe can only imply the intention to keep such forces there for several more years.

At the same time we ought to give greater attention to the kinds of measures of demilitarization in the North which are practical and verifiable. The current directions of Soviet policy suggest that such measures are not implausible. The evident pressures on Soviet allies and friends to settle regional disputes and to accept UN supervision of such settlements is striking. The North is of course another matter, given the fact that Soviet (and US) territory is involved, and the obvious difficulties of monitoring submarine movements. Nevertheless, opportunities now exist to take advantage of a pause in the military competition of the superpowers, and perhaps to begin to reverse it. Canada has a natural vocation to take the lead in the one area where we have a dominant interest, the North. The White Paper has perceived this interest and rightly emphasizes it. But the perception assumes that the major threat to Canadian security will remain military confrontation between East and West, justifying investments in military hardware designed primarily for use in conventional warfare. While this assumption is common to Canada's allies as well, none shares Canada's unique strategic situation and therefore incentive to seek new ways of interpreting "security" in the future.

As we look ahead to the twenty-first century, we can be reasonably certain that the main division in the global community will be between a relatively prosperous and stable North and a relatively poor and turbulent South, and that this division will grow, both in numbers of people and in per capita incomes. A major challenge will be finding ways to reorganize the nation-state system in order to mitigate this disparity, both within and between states, so that it will not result in endemic civil conflict, mass refugee movements, and increasing damage to the natural environment. How, for example, can global energy resources be shared in ways which allow ten or more billion people to enjoy basic living standards without, at the same time, contaminating the atmosphere and the oceans beyond repair? How can nuclear technology be controlled so as to prevent its use for explosive purposes by states or groups in desperate circumstances? How are disarmament agreements to be verified? These are the kinds of questions that will more and more influence the allocation of resources to traditional means of defence and security. Armed forces will not and should not disappear, but they will be called upon to perform different tasks, of which UN peacekeeping may be a significant precursor.

If these are some of the main challenges to global security in the future, defence policies will have to change. It is too soon to claim that Soviet defence policies are in fact changing, but the signs are positive. The NATO allies are waiting for things to happen. If they wait too long the temptation to invest in new technology will push them in directions which will be difficult to reverse. The new European fighter, the stealth bomber and the search for anti-ballistic missile defences are current examples. Canadian choices should not be made independently of our allies. But we can begin to redefine these choices by pressing for recognition of our unique situation, and by taking a lead in the alliance on the need to move faster towards a new relationship with the adversary of old, and a new readiness to give priority to the global challenges which threaten the human future.

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