



## First Things First

Defence is a tool for International Security

BY LINDA WOLSTENCROFT

Congratulations go to our government for initiating the Defence Policy Review (DPR). This is not an easy task; the issues are complex.

But, the very fact that the review is being conducted is heartening. The results from this review will build on the good work conducted previously by government, stakeholders, associations and other interested parties. Plus, the review process is structured such that innovative ideas can be brought forward.

What is clear too is that there is already a firm basis to start from; Canada's defence capability is alive and well participating in improving international security and promoting Canadian values. The story is told by the publications that have been prepared and distributed on the DPR web page. The 2016-17 Report on Plans and Priorities states that, "The overarching goal of Defence is to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are equipped and prepared to protect Canadian sovereignty, defend North America, and contribute to international peace and security, including through a renewed commitment to United Nations (UN) led conflict prevention and peace support. In support of this goal, Defence will conduct an open and transparent review of the security environment, existing capabilities, and policies, forming the basis for a new strategic defence policy document for Canada."

This clear strategic statement defines the overall envelope of the matter and provides a sound basis for the review.

### The DPR discusses three fundamental areas:

1. The main challenges to Canada's security
2. The role of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in addressing current threats and challenges
3. The resources and capabilities needed to carry out the CAF mandate

Clearly, the first question needs to be answered before the second, and the third can only be answered once the first and second are defined. Because without identifying what the main challenges to Canada's security are, one cannot study what the role of the CAF should be in addressing them. And without knowing what the role of the CAF is, one cannot determine the resources and capability to carry out the CAF mandate.

But, as it stands, rather than asking only the first question and then conducting a review based on the result of that question, the three questions are being tabled in order to bring in many different ideas. The result from answering the first question will be that we know what our security threats are, and their priority. Obviously we should also risk-mitigate these in case we are wrong. We should be prudent and direct our limited resources to where they are needed. We are predicting the future but this is absolutely necessary. We need to follow a "top down" approach in order to answer questions 2 and 3.

In the DPR, views of the Canadian public are being sought, in addition to opinions from defence experts, government experts and Canada's closest allies. While it is nice to give everyone a voice, and while it may be politically useful in the future for the government to claim that every Canadian was given the opportunity to engage, the quality of the information that comes from John/Jane Q. Public should be assessed. What we do know from Views of the Canadian Armed Forces: 2014 Tracking Study is that "the limited familiarity that Canadians have with the CAF is reflected in the fact that only a minority of respondents were able to freely recall something about the military—roughly one third (34%) recalled reading, seeing or hearing anything about the CAF."

### WHY PUBLIC CONSULTATION?

This begs the question of why the consultation is public. It doesn't make sense to glean information from individual Canadians who may not have knowledge of the issues of the CAF and international security. Surveys and reviews that don't qualify the respondents are rarely accurate.

But all in all, from a public engagement perspective, to satisfy the voting population, conducting a Defence Review has merit. After all, what about the (publicly perceived) poor deal on the submarines, the scuttled ship procurements, the debate in the media over what ships to buy, the next generation fighter capability? There is enough evidence to say that we could do better. And there is indeed opportunity to do so.

There are a total of ten questions being proposed for the DPR consultations, and each one of them is complex. They are the type of question that study, analysis and experts will answer. For example, the first question is, "Are there any threats to Canada's security that are not being addressed adequately?" This is certainly a question for the experts – not the public.

At this writing in early June, there are many inputs to the defence review and more coming. Canada's industry associations, academics and interested experts are coming forward with positions; there is a dearth of good advice from people who are experienced and well-versed in these subjects.

A next step after the DPR will be using the opportunity of defence procurement to foster innovation and for economic benefits to Canada. Perhaps these will be follow-on subjects, or perhaps the initiatives already in place will be used, such as the Defence Procurement Strategy and the several government programs in place that help companies and academia advance innovation.

Let's keep the momentum going, and let's keep asking the right questions.

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