Canada's Defence and Security Policy: In securing a nation, we must also secure its values

By Zachariah Ezekiel

To Secure a Nation, the recent report of the Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century (CCS 21), seeks to initiate a long overdue review of Canada's defence and security policy.[1] However the report goes beyond this stated objective by arguing, in three of its more well publicised recommendations, that Canada should re-evaluate the costs and benefits of its traditional participation in UN-sponsored peace support operations;[2] re-emphasise and re-invigorate its participation in NATO;[3] and further strengthen its domestic and international security cooperation with the United States.[4] These recommendations, if adopted, would entail a radical and unwarranted departure from Canada's traditional foreign and security policy values.

Policy, at its most basic, is the statement of a problem followed by the steps taken to correct that problem. It is in this that *To Secure a Nation* avoids an essential foundation for any discussion of Canada's existing security relationships: Canada's defence and foreign policies have, to date, been extraordinarily effective in keeping Canada and Canadians safe. Notwithstanding the Canadian lives lost in the September 11, 2001 attacks, the substantial economic price paid and our heartfelt sympathies for the suffering of our American neighbours, Canada is not now, nor has it been since the end of the Cold War, subject to direct, credible threats against its citizens or infrastructure. Moreover, despite an extremely close relationship with the United States, Canada is by and large not associated internationally with the more controversial and unpopular aspects of U.S. foreign policy. Canada has been a partner with the United States in the Gulf War, the subsequent ten year military blockade of Iraq, and has made a dramatically large commitment of forces to the war in Afghanistan. Yet, in spite of this long-standing and substantial support for our American ally, no one seriously expects Canadians to be targets of terrorist attack at home or abroad. Clearly the unique balance we have struck between (a) strong support for our allies while (b) maintaining the right to disagree on important aspects of their foreign policy has translated into tangible security benefits for Canadians.

This begs the question: if our existing military and foreign policies have kept Canadians secure domestically and internationally, what are the problems which a reordering of our alliance priorities are meant to address? *To Secure a Nation* suggests five:

- "a loss of control (and sovereignty) over our own foreign and security policy agenda and priorities;
- a diminishing capacity to maintain flexibility with respect to our policy options;
- a loss of status and respect within the international community;

- a crisis of marginalisation within NATO and NORAD as the EU looks inward for security and the US develops ballistic missile defence; and

- a diminished capacity to afford and sustain the military and alliance commitments that will be thrust upon us in the future."[5]

To Secure a Nation's prescriptions for these ailments involve essentially diverting Canadian commitments from "international efforts led by a flawed UN"[6] to regional security organizations (read NATO and NORAD) operating with or without the endorsement of the UN Security Council. CCS 21 contends that, with three successful Balkan operations under its belt, NATO has shown itself to be the pre-eminent security organization in Europe, and furthermore, "much more relevant to Canadian security concerns."[7]

Contributing to the UN's "expanding list of failures,"[8] CCS 21 argues, is its dependence on the exceedingly fleeting political will of the permanent members of the Security Council. Not acknowledged, however, is that NATO is equally subject to the same institutional failings. Lack of political will made NATO extremely slow to involve itself in the Balkan conflict, not deploying until 1995, three years after the first United Nations soldiers. NATO is also subject to its own paralysing internal squabbles (notably the tensions between the U.S. and France and between Greece and Turkey). Moreover, NATO is far more vulnerable to hijacking by a single state given that any single one of its members can veto an operation (as distinct from the UN, where only the 5 permanent members of the Security Council hold veto power). Finally, being a security arrangement between primarily rich western nations, NATO operations inarguably lack legitimacy among the vast majority of non-NATO states, unless those operations are endorsed by same old, fickle, divided UN Security Council.

CCS 21 effectively acknowledges these weaknesses when it frets that NATO is in danger of being eclipsed by the European Union's emerging common security policy and the creation of a European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF).[9] The ERRF, a child of European frustration with U.S. foot-dragging during the Balkan conflict, is intended to enable willing European states quickly to conduct military operations without U.S. support. Essentially, the establishment of the ERRF is a tacit acknowledgement that NATO is identically subject to the same superpower whims as the UN. Far from conceding the inherent limitations of NATO, the Council bizarrely uses the ERRF to argue for a renewed Canadian investment in NATO infrastructure![10] Also conspicuously absent in the Council's treatment of the ERRF is any discussion of why Canada should be concerned about Europeans taking an increased responsibility for their own security.

This is not to say that NATO is not important to Canada's strategic interests. But one wonders how much more CCS 21 would have us give. Canada has kept a battalion of soldiers in Bosnia under NATO auspices since 1995. We also maintained a battalion in Croatia from 1992 - 1995 which, while not under NATO command, was certainly still making a contribution to European security. During the Kosovo War, Canadian CF-18

fighters took part in almost 700 combat missions (leading roughly half of them) and deployed a battalion to take part in the eventuality – thankfully not realised – of a NATO ground attack. Canadian soldiers helped to keep the peace in Cyprus for 25 years. We took part in the naval blockade of Yugoslavia and we are one of only six NATO states that permanently assign a ship to Standing Naval Force Atlantic. We provide training to NATO pilots, we regularly take part in joint exercises and have a high-level of air and sea interoperability with NATO forces, and we contribute significant numbers of personnel to the AWACS early warning system. Our total contribution to European security has cost more than a dozen soldiers' lives and wounded more than 100 others since the end of the Cold War alone. What is the cost of the 'credibility' that CCS 21 would have us purchase? How many more resources should we devote to the security of an essentially wealthy, prosperous and increasingly stable continent even while, as *To Secure a Nation* itself points out,[11] numerous other regions such as Africa, the Americas and the Pacific scream for attention?

CCS 21 similarly over-emphasises the importance of NORAD to Canadian security. NORAD, it argues, gives Canada access to and influence over US security and defence planning, increases our ability to protect our sovereignty, and gives us important access to U.S. aerospace technology.[12] However, while the NORAD agreement is an important one for Canada, its benefits should not be overstated. Given Canada's institutionalised 'second-in-command' seat at the NORAD table, the extent to which the arrangement allows us to influence U.S. security policy is dwarfed by the control it gives the U.S. over *our* assets. On at least one occasion during the Cuban missile crisis, the NORAD arrangement caused the Canadian airforce to be put on high-alert contrary to the specific orders of then Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Suffice to say, the assertion that a further enmeshing with the U.S. military would enhance our flexibility with regard to security policy is highly suspect.

And what of the impending marginalization of NORAD? In a feat of circular reasoning the Committee argues both that (a) Canada should increase its participation or risk NORAD being marginalized and lose our influence in U.S. security policy making; and (b) that we should participate in the Bush Administration's exceedingly suspect missile defence system because the Americans are going to do it whether we like it or not.[13] One hopes our defence planners are not drunk on all that influence.

However, while CCS 21 fears for the future of NATO and NORAD, it utterly abandons the one institution that *is* in danger of being marginalized in Canadian security policy: the United Nations. This drift in Canadian policy, dating back to our participation in the NATO-led, non-Security Council endorsed Kosovo War of 1999, is disturbing. It is important to recall that Canada's enthusiastic endorsement and participation in the Kosovo War was intended to advance a principle of international security – that of the need to intervene quickly and forcefully against states who murder their own citizens. It was not intended to signal an abandonment of UN-style multilateralism, as CCS 21 purports, although they are right in noting that our participation in a non-UN sanctioned operation was a significant departure.[14] But do we really want to enshrine this departure in a new foreign security policy?

Canada has traditionally been among the strongest contributors to UN peace support operations and, indeed, was the creative force behind the very concept of peacekeeping. While frustration with the UN's failures is understandable, it is unfortunate that policy makers – and CCS 21 – appear to be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. United Nations peace support operations, notwithstanding the well-documented failures, are not without their successes. Even more importantly, the UN Security Council is the only institutional body with the broad-based legitimacy to endorse the use of force to preserve international peace and security. This has been a principle central to Canadian security policy since the end of WWII and it is difficult to see why that should be abandoned in favour of a utilitarian, regionalist approach.

In the preamble of *To Secure a Nation*, Dr. David J. Bercuson acknowledges that a security and defence review would ideally have been conducted as part of a comprehensive review of Canada's foreign policy.[15] He is right to concede this point and, indeed, the report suffers for its dislocation from Canada's foreign policy values. The foreign policy of a nation, and its international security policy by extension, must be a reflection of the values, beliefs and character of its citizens. In the final analysis, the debate over which international institutions we throw our lot in with is inextricably linked to what we believe in, and what we think the world should look like.

Canadians have always been, are now, and always will be there for our allies in times of crisis. But the Canadian picture of the world of the future is one of an efficient, equitable, inclusive and universal security institution – a strong United Nations. This is a noble vision and one which neither the expedients of the day, nor the tragic events of September 11, must persuade us to abandon.

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[1] Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century, *To Secure a Nation: The Case for a New Defence White Paper* [online]: University of Calgary, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2001, Available from World Wide Web: (http://www.stratnet.ucalgary.ca/ccs/default.htm).
[2] *Ibid*., 10 - 11.
[3] *Ibid*., 7.
[4] *Ibid*., 4-7.
[5] *Ibid.,* 31.
[6] *Ibid*., 11.
[7] *Ibid*., 9.
[8] *Ibid..* 10.
[9] *Ibid*., 9.
[10] *Ibid*., 9.
[11] *Ibid.,* 10.
[12] *Ibid*., 6.
[13] *Ibid.,* 6 – 7.
[14] *Ibid*., 9.
[15] *Ibid*., v.