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POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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Canada's international security partners release national security policies annually, bi-annually, quadrennially, etc. However, Canada's one and only policy, entitled *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy,* was released in April 2004 under the Liberal government of Paul Martin. The policy was considered innovative for its time. In the interest of establishing a framework to enable a response to "events and circumstances that generally require a national response as they are beyond the capacity of individuals, communities or provinces to address alone,"[1] the policy securitized a number of program mandates that typically fell outside traditional national security remits – health, transportation, natural disasters and protection of critical infrastructure. As one pundit observed, "It sits in contrast to the traditional association of security with the state, involving little tangible reference to the security of its inhabitants. Today, these inhabitants have become the central focus on Canada's domestic security agenda … including reliance on discourses of public health and critical infrastructure designed to protect human life."[2]

There are four possible reasons why the policy has not been updated. First, the *Open Society* document has provided sufficient policy coverage and flexibility to address the prevailing traditional threats since its inception, at least until the last few years. Second, although the policy states "there can be no greater role, no more important obligation for a government, than the protection and safety of its citizens,"[3] issues related to national security are typically not first and foremost in the minds of Canada's elected leaders or the public on a daily basis. This suggests the public and Canada's leaders take comfort in knowing that national security and law enforcement agencies, in collaboration with international partners, are on top of mitigating and responding to long-standing national security threats such as espionage, influence and terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This – and a lack of sustained, successful terrorist attacks in the country – is perhaps why Canadians don't make national security much of an issue, either in public discourse, during elections or in the media, except perhaps fleetingly if there is an identified intelligence failure or scandal.

In a post-COVID-19 environment, and barring any serious incident, security is most likely to be further demoted down the policy batting order. Third, other than when national governments are expected to do something in the aftermath of a specific security event, and in the absence of any public interest in updating the current policy, there is little political incentive to open up a strategic security policy discourse. As Fitz-Gerald and Segal note, discussions of this nature are typically bilateral among those who feel security measures are a threat to individual freedoms, and those who feel governments in Canada are too passive.[4] The political minefield is clearly evident. Finally, since 2004, many efforts related to updating Canada's national security framework have been undertaken, either in response to judicial decisions or through ad hoc

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[1] Government of Canada, Privy Council Office of Canada, *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy,* (Ottawa, Government of Canada, April 2004), 3.

[2] C. Bell, *The Freedom of Security: Governing Canada in an Age of Counter-Terrorism,* (Vancouver/ Toronto: UBC Press, 2011), 29

[3] *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy,* vii, 1.

[4] A. Fitz-Gerald and H. Segal, "Reimagining National Security in Canada: The Challenge of Dynamic Change," Center for International Governance Innovation, April 13, 2021, https://www.cigionline.org/articles/reimagining-national-security-canada-challenge-dynamic-change/.

changes to the mandates of national security or law enforcement agencies. A case can therefore be made, whether operationally or politically, that the *Open Society* policy still provides a sufficient framework to underpin these same agencies' strategies and programs in their daily conduct.

There are, however, faint signals in the national security and academic communities that it is perhaps time to dust off the *Open Society* policy in order to do a "fact-based reality check on national security and Canada's future."[5] Furthermore, national security is no longer strictly about "counter-espionage or anti-terrorism or criminal intelligence that prevents bad things from happening."[6] Instead, a new national security policy needs to adopt a more inclusive view of what constitutes the threats Western liberal governments face, threats that in some instances attack the economic prosperity and sovereignty that are considered essential to their political fabric. And to counter these threats, an innovative whole-of-government, indeed a broad sectoral response, is urgently required before Canada is forced to respond in less than favourable conditions.

To Update or Not? That is the Question

The existence of unfamiliar or non-traditional threats has been clearly proven over the past few years, and some see it as demonstrating the need to revisit the national security policy. From an academic perspective, discussion has centred on whether it is better to have a national security policy or strategy that is somewhat ambiguous in its narrative so as to provide greater flexibility in its coverage of an ever-changing threat spectrum. Indeed, the *Open Society* policy itself states it "employs a model that can adapt to changing circumstances over time."[7] Alternatively, a more prescriptive narrative can provide better clarity as to what the policy/threat priorities are, and how resources should be applied in kind, given the wide range of potential threats faced.

Public Health/Pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised concerns about the need for a greater capacity for health-related intelligence and, from an economic security perspective, the need to better securitize the sourcing of strategic supply chains, however they may be defined.

Largely forgotten in the current discourse (and at times political finger-pointing) about governmental ability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic is that *Open Society* provided considerable policy coverage to enable the necessary organizational and program means to mitigate pandemic-like threats to public health. In fact, public health and the possibility of another SARS-type outbreak received as much attention in the policy as did the threat posed by terrorism. While no one could have reasonably predicted the nature of the COVID-19 virus and its variants, and its subsequent spread across the globe, it would be difficult to suggest where the current policy would need to be augmented to provide the direction necessary to establish a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] *Open Society* policy, vii.

management framework to respond to future pandemics. This includes consultations with other levels of government and presumably health-related intelligence which has been cited as lacking leading up to the outbreak of the virus. The sort of data required to feed health intelligence programs in order to provide value-added assessments probably needs to be more fully examined, along with what entity is best suited to undertake the necessary information collection and analysis to inform decision-making.

Sufficient, or at least adequate, policy coverage to manage pandemic outbreaks was in place as far back as 2004. This appears to be a case where respective governments failed to fully implement and resource policy direction for whatever reason.

Economic Security

Besides the need to examine the security of key strategic supply chains, greater attention, oversight and consistency must be accorded the purchase, control of or investment in, mineral, petroleum, technological or other industries by state-owned enterprises (or private companies with an established link to state-owned enterprises) of governments that do not adhere to Canadian values and norms. These governments can employ such industries to support anti-Western agendas and strategies. While national security concerns linked to foreign investments are currently addressed from a regulatory perspective under the *Investments Canada Act,* it may be time to give the responsible entity in Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada enhanced coverage for a more comprehensive mandate through an updated national security policy. This would involve updating thresholds and criteria prompting a review of investments by foreign entities, possibly even from certain listed countries, and the need to establish programs to inform the commercial and legal sectors and communities of the security challenges and risks associated with granting certain states access to key industries.

State-Directed Exploitation of Social Media and Deep-Web Networks

The use of social media to influence national political agendas, promote discord, undermine social cohesion in domestic societies and discourage co-operation in international partnerships and established international institutions has been well documented. The pervasiveness of this threat was clearly not contemplated when the 2004 policy was being drafted. While individual national security and law enforcement agencies have touched on it in their strategies or annual reports, this threat – and its potential to impact the country's political fabric – demands it be addressed from a broader, strategic-level policy perspective that reflects a whole-of-government and multi-sectoral response.

Environmental or Climate Security

In various reports, the impacts of climate change or environmental events or trends are regarded as threat multipliers, in that they have the potential to exacerbate other socioeconomic and political challenges that a particular country or region faces. National power, whether measured in economic opportunity, human capital or military strength, has long been shaped by geography and climate. Today, we're seeing climate change alter fundamental geopolitical structures, with

the Arctic being the best example. Furthermore, natural resources are not distributed equitably across the globe, nor are arable land or natural transportation routes. [8]

Given the high priority the Canadian government has assigned to the environment and climate change, it is surprising more attention has not been given to the issue of climate security, despite calls by the United Nations to do so.[9] While the government's climate plan, *A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy*, identifies 64 measures to reduce greenhouse gases, it does not touch on climate security nor explain how Canada will adapt to climate impacts.

Concerns have been raised in a variety of venues and forums. Environmental disasters or degradation abroad could impact the Canadian economy or Canadians' access to certain goods, and generate flows of environmental refugees. Climate change in the Arctic is already altering its geopolitical significance, raising questions as to whether Canada is adequately positioned to defend its interests and sovereignty in that region.

The science behind the environment and climate change is best left to the scientists. But who is best positioned, both organizationally and cognitively in the federal government, to assess how the trends science has identified impact a variety of other policy centres and geostrategic issues – energy policy/security, economic policy/security, national defence and international relations, to name a few? It is suggested that piling this mandate onto traditional national security agencies would not be the most prudent move as their workloads and capacities are already taxed, nor do they have the necessary expertise to translate science to intelligence. Where, then? These are the sorts of issues a new national security policy would need to focus on and provide some necessary direction.

Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism

National security agencies in Canada have identified "ideologically motivated violent extremism" (IMVE), within the definition of terrorism. This includes a number of non-traditional threat ideologies (misogynistic, incels, anti-LGBTQ) together with more traditional threat entities (xenophobic, anti-government, anarchist-driven groups). This has only served to add to the decades-old definitional complexity as to what constitutes terrorism. From a threat reduction or de-radicalization perspective, what is the significance if some of these entities see themselves as amorphous movements as opposed to organized groups, and how do you identify at-risk individuals? To what degree are individuals in these movements to be tolerated from a societal and security perspective as extremists, if they do not engage in violence to support their ideologies? How is the broad span of traditional and non-traditional IMVE threats to be prioritized in a Canadian context to articulate the actual risk associated with these ideologies so that resources can be allocated to mitigate the threats they pose?

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[8] Roger Baker, "The Geopolitics of Climate Change: Russia's Paradigm Shift," Stratfor, June 30, 2021, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geopolitics-climate-change-russia-s-paradigm-shift.
[9] L. Dhofier, "Canada is Long Overdue for a National Climate Security Strategy," *National Observer*, March 11, 2021, https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/03/11/opinion/canada-long-overdue-national-climate-security-strategy#:~:text=The%20impacts%20of%20climate%20change,mass%20migrations%20are%20well%2Ddocumented.&text=Security%20experts%20have%20warned%20about,as%20political%20instability%20and%20conflicts.

There are ongoing discussions between terrorism traditionalists and terrorism revisionists. Traditionalists take the view that, even if couched in religious narratives, terrorism ultimately is about changing the political status quo. Revisionists are prepared to consider that grievances derive more from individual prejudices, psychologies and experiences than other more traditional drivers of terrorism. It is suggested individuals who engage in this sort of violence are instead socially disenfranchised, unwilling to accept or tolerate progressive changes to the fabric of society, and see themselves as being marginalized or disadvantaged, or their moral compasses compromised, as a result. Somewhere along the line, an internal switch is flipped and an individual chooses violence against a certain group – women, gays, a certain ethnic or religious community, or a "Stacey" or "Chad" in the case of incels, as the only available recourse or outlet for their internal demons.

Consistency with International Partners

The Canadian government will be obliged to see how the current threat spectrum is being reflected and prioritized in other countries' national security policy updates. In order to be seen as a relevant and contributing partner at the international level, Canada's national security policy will have to be largely interoperable with the policies of other Western democracies.

How much does Canadian national security policy need to be amended to be consistent with the national security policies of international partners that are undergoing similar reviews to address the changing threat environment? For example, the Biden administration has recently separated through policy domestic terrorism from foreign-based terrorism. Does Canada need to follow suit?[10] How is national security to be considered once again in the context of broader state-on-state conflicts where notions of hybrid, non-linear or grey warfare bring together both conventional and non-conventional types of attacks, requiring whole-of-government policies and strategies and partnership with other levels of government and the private sector in order to defend Canadian values and freedoms?

The Role of the Commercial and Private Sectors

There is a need to provide more policy substance that recognizes the role the commercial and private sectors will play as key partners in national security policy and strategies, both as contributors (security-based technology and research, information sharing) but also as targets of attacks (cyber, single-issue extremists).

Since 2004, the role of the private/commercial sectors in national security has, through evolution and osmosis, become much more integrated in the strategies and mandates of national security

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[10] This is interesting, as national security policy documents in Canada and the United States in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 attempted to address the decades-old notion that foreign-based terrorism and domestic terrorism were different beasts, and instead suggested the global networks employed by terrorist groups broke down that particular Chinese wall.

agencies. Much of this has centred on the commercial sector assuming the lead in technological research and development in areas that were once uniquely the domain of governments (communications, space technology, energy, information technology and networks and artificial intelligence, to name a few). This sector is also the source of much of the open-source intelligence that regularly finds its way into the assessments of national security agencies. While the issue of national agency access to social media platforms run by the private sector has been contentious at times, by and large the relationship between the two sectors remains open and positive. An updated policy should touch on how technological advancements, predominantly led by the private sector, could significantly impact the national security agenda, AI and its application to intelligence collection; for example, to provide the necessary policy coverage and resources to fully integrate these developments in national security organizations on a timely basis. Indeed, the private sector could be formally tasked with taking the program lead in certain areas that have traditionally been the federal government's purview.

However, recent events have also demonstrated that various nefarious entities are increasingly targeting the private sector. This includes cyber-attacks (whether state-sponsored or non-state) that are hard to detect until either the damage is done or firms are held to ransom or, for example, brick-and-mortar assets and infrastructure that are specifically targeted, damaged or destroyed by single-issue extremists. The soft elements of hybrid warfare most often target domains in the private sector – conventional and social media, financial institutions, energy and providers of key infrastructure.

Would a new policy better articulate how the partnership between public and private sectors be defined or clarified, as the latter's centres of expertise and impacts on national security will most likely continue to outpace the ability to characterize the relationship on paper? Intuitively, yes; innovative work and opportunities are to be found here.

Finally, there is a strong nexus between economic security and the need for private-sector entities to remain diligent when dealing with parties, tied by whatever fashion, to states that have clearly established anti-Western agendas. The financial incentives offered by foreign-based entities of this nature wishing to get a stake in domestic industries are often hard to refuse, and the need for due diligence on the part of the firm being purchased or otherwise engaged likely serves as a disincentive to complete the deal. To use an expression popular in the private sector, "What's in it for me?" Nothing short of a comprehensive education program for the business, legal and local government communities is required as part of a broader strategy to counter this particular threat.

In a Perfect World

National security policies typically provide a shopping list of prevailing threats and how the government is prepared to deal with them. However, the level of risk associated with each threat is rarely mentioned. In matching risks to threats, the latter can be better prioritized within the larger national security framework, with finite resources allocated accordingly. This would result in a policy that is more prescriptive as opposed to one that is more ambiguous and flexible, but

would provide for more solid policy ground on where priorities lie. This would likely be appreciated by those agencies engaged in national security that are continually stretched in terms of resources versus mandates. It would also serve to mitigate against the promotion of certain threats that are viewed as being, from a practical operational perspective in a Canadian context, either largely symbolic or outdated. While policy documentation would not lend itself to the incorporation of analysis behind how risks associated with specific threats were assessed and determined (and not limited to government expertise only), having this sort of information on the shelf would demonstrate a huge step forward in terms of due diligence and thoroughness in national security policy development.

On a somewhat related topic, national security policies tend to address known threats, with little attention given to threats that may be emerging on the horizon. This particular discipline has a number of handles – strategic intelligence warning, horizon scanning, crystal balling, blue-skying, etc. Although the ideal is to enable decision-makers to pre-position governments to mitigate threats before they are forced to do so under less than ideal circumstances, there are probably a couple of good reasons why national security policies in Canada don't touch on emerging threats based on faint signals. First, elected decision-makers are prone and more comfortable to deal with the here and now, as opposed to something that could be an issue five years hence. Second, an issue that is emitting only faint signals results, from an assessment perspective, in the need to consider a range of possible variables that may point to a number of possible outcomes. That makes it hard for policy-makers to construct anything in the way of a solid, tangible policy response worthy of inclusion in a policy document. Some hint as to the sorts of threats that are percolating would nevertheless be interesting from a readership perspective, without tying a government to any sort of mitigation obligation. This assumes, of course, that there is an institutional capacity to undertake this kind of analysis.

The crafting of a national security policy should ideally be done in concert with similar policy initiatives in national defence and international relations. The current *Open Society* document captures this thought when it states:

> Canadian security will be increasingly dependent on our ability to contribute to international security. This may require the deployment of military assets to protect against direct threats to international peace and security or the provision of development assistance to strengthen public institutions in weak or failing states. It will certainly require Canada to continue to play a leading role in strengthening and modernizing international institutions so that they can contribute to international security.[11]

This would require a significant amount of inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination in terms of timing at the highest policy levels. While happy to be corrected on this fact, I don't believe there is any sort of historical precedent where this has actually taken place.

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[11] *Open Society* policy, 6.

Finally, policy can only be implemented to its fullest possible extent when sufficient resources are provided to implement the strategies and programs that serve to action the policy. This narrative has suggested that traditional national security and law enforcement agencies may not be best suited to assume the tasks of mitigating the types of non-traditional threats identified herein. That means there will be a need for more resources for information collection, analysis, enforcement, communications and co-ordination in federal agencies and departments where none presently exists. By way of example, the recent U.S. budget for 2022 allocates $100 million to hire more prosecutors, investigators and analysts in support of mitigating domestic violent extremism.[12] Not surprisingly, and not for the first time, Canadian national security agencies are being asked to respond to an expanded threat spectrum within current funding levels.

Conclusion

Although some 17 years old at the time of writing, Canada's sole national security policy has provided a sufficient policy framework to address prevailing threats to the security of Canadians and their interests. Crafted in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 and an environment that focused largely on threats posed by transnational jihadist terrorism, it was progressive enough to consider other non-traditional issues such as public health and pandemics, organized crime and cyber-security, among others. It recognized the need for an integrated, whole-of-government approach to identified threats, the need for adequate evaluation and oversight, and of course the need to balance threat mitigation strategies and programs with the rule of law that is essential to Western democracies. In certain cases, the document's verbiage provided the necessary policy flexibility to provide coverage for threats that were not prevalent at the time but have since been the focus of greater attention, with right-wing extremism being a good example.

A number of different threats have emerged in parallel that the policy does not cover, but which have the potential to seriously impact this country's economic and political sovereignty. It is probably time to revisit and update the *Open Society* document in order to provide some policy guidance and direction on how governments are prepared to address these threats. The scope of recalibrating the policy will be comprehensive. Considerable discussion will be required as to which federal agencies are to assume the mandates necessary to implement the programs and strategies associated with an updated security policy, as traditional national security and law enforcement agencies may not always be the best suited to do so. At the same time, and in recognition of the work undertaken by these same agencies, any new policy will have to reflect that the threats identified in the *Open Society* document have in no way abated and must continue to be acknowledged and addressed in a revised document. Furthermore, the nature of the threats we face cannot be fully mitigated by federal security or law enforcement agencies on their own.

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[12] C. Clarke and M. Saltskog, "Assessing the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism," War on the Rocks, June 22, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/assessing-the-national-strategy-for-countering-domestic-terrorism/.

That was something of a luxury we had before. Given the nature of the threats, there must be an expanded role for all levels of government in concert with the commercial and private sectors.

The alternative is that individual agencies will do what they can in response to demands by political leadership to do something. The risk, of course, is that absent some sort of over-arching direction and co-ordination, existing mandates will be expanded or amended in an ad hoc fashion in response to new threats, which will be grudgingly undertaken by already overtaxed and under-resourced agencies. The opportunity to craft an innovative, whole-of-government response to new threats will be lost. Furthermore, such a piecemeal approach will likely not generate the political and bureaucratic momentum or critical mass necessary to develop and implement requisite legislation or regulatory frameworks, undertake organizational changes or allocate sufficient resources to address the new threat spectrum.

National security is not foremost in the public's mind, nor is there likely to be much political capital earned by undertaking an update to the *Open Society* policy. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government will no doubt have other policy priorities of a more socioeconomic nature. Nevertheless, nefarious actors, both state and non-state, have demonstrated repeatedly that they are prepared to engage in the sorts of threats described herein, so this is not a hypothetical exercise. If there is a kernel of recognition by Canada's elected officials that "there can be no greater role, no more important obligation for a government, than the protection and safety of its citizens," hopefully there will soon be an interest in providing the necessary policy framework to do just that.

▶ About the Author

John Gilmour joins CGAI after a thirty-seven year career in the federal government in positions of growing responsibility. His initial professional experience was with Transport Canada and the management of Canada's major international airports. This included serving as project manager and analyst for airport security programs. This led to a two-year assignment with the Security and Intelligence (Operations) section of the Privy Council Office as a senior policy analyst, in support of the office of the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister (NSA).

From there John joined the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), where he served in a variety of branches, most recently as the Head-Strategic Planning and Operational Analysis with the Service's Counter-Terrorism Division. Although retiring from the Service in 2018, he continues to be periodically retained as a senior advisor.

John has a BA from Carleton University (Ottawa), and a Masters and Ph.D from the War Studies Program of the Royal Military College of Canada (Kingston). He serves on the Advisory Board of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) – Vancouver, and is an instructor with Ottawa University's Professional Development Institute on terrorism and intelligence/national security issues.

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