



REFLECTIONS ON CANADA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

Date: November 19, 2024

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 19, 2024, Dr. Brian Crowley presented his reflections on Canada's national security environment for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the nature of national security threats, both internal and external, and the role of institutions in communicating Canada's national security values.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

The presentation discussed the importance of reflecting on the values, institutions, and cultural aspects that are deemed worthy of defense in the practice of Canadian national security, suggesting that this begins as a personal reflection and varies from individual to individual. It was argued that there is a domestic tension in Canada between traditional and progressive views toward national security and this presents the most significant challenge to Canada at present. The presentation concluded with the presenter's personal views on Canadian security priorities.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Dr. Crowley stated that national security can be considered as measures to protect the shared values of a state from those that wish to do it harm, suggesting that a coherent policy stems from first asking what these values are and which are worth

defending. He argued that this begins with each individual reflecting on what makes their respective states worthy of defense and that this reflection should begin from the point of view that poverty, disease, ignorance, and intolerance are humanity's default operation. Dr. Crowley argued that Canada has developed to escape these ills through the state's institutions, behaviours, and beliefs and that this is Canada's greatest endowment as a nation.

Following his reflection, Dr. Crowley suggested that there are two challenges facing Canada's national security at present: first, that the administration underestimates the threat presented to Canada by entities that seek to degrade its historically upheld institutions and second, that there has been a recent divergence between traditional and progressive interpretations of Canada's history that has impacted social cohesion and institutional integrity. Dr. Crowley suggested that an overemphasis on cultural diversity misconstrues the common values of Canada, arguing that diversity is the effect of Canadian institutions not the cause, and that a focus on past errors negatively impacts the functioning of Canadian institutions in the present.

Dr. Crowley highlighted recent geopolitical events that have created divisive discourse in Canada, pointing to the impact of the October 7th attacks on Israel as an example. He argued that progressive values are overemphasized in Canadian institutions, such as universities and media, and have caused a departure from more traditional conceptions of Canada's statehood and values. Dr. Crowley suggested that leaders should address this shift in culture in order to better communicate national security priorities to Canadians. He closed by offering his views regarding Canada's weak security culture, advocating for a return to robust traditional values and interpretations of geopolitical events.

Question and Answer

The overarching theme of your presentation seemed to be why Canadians should care about national security. Do you believe the average Canadian having more of an interest in national security will enhance the effectiveness of the security apparatus in Canada?

Dr. Crowley stated that he did feel an increased popular interest in national security would enhance the effectiveness of the security apparatus in Canada as it challenges the misconception of political leaders that the Canadian people are not concerned with national security. He argued that a result of this belief has been a degradation of national security culture that has only begun to recover due

to a growth of interest in foreign interference. Dr. Crowley stated that without this awareness and demand on the part of the public, political leadership may not act.

Given the current threats to Canadian security, is the creation of a foreign intelligence collection service warranted?

Dr. Crowley suggested that this would not be warranted given that Canada, as a member of the Five Eyes, is already privy to extensive intelligence sharing and the creation of our own service would be costly and redundant with our current relationships. He stated that the problem is not a lack of information, but rather a lack of action and political commitment on the part of national leadership.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- National security can be considered as measures to protect the shared values of a state from those that wish to do it harm and policy originates by asking what these values are and which are worth defending.
- There are two challenges facing Canada's national security at present: 1) the current administration underestimates the threat presented to Canada by entities that seek to degrade institutions and 2) a recent divergence between traditional and progressive interpretations of Canada's history that has impacted social cohesion and institutional integrity
- Recent geopolitical events that have created divisive discourse in Canada, such as the October 7th attacks on Israel.

FURTHER READING

Crowley, B. L., Clemens, J., & Veldhuis, N. (2010). *The Canadian Century: Moving Out of America's Shadow*. Key Porter Books.

Lefebvre, S. (2024). CANADA AND ECONOMIC SECURITY: THE WAY AHEAD. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 7(2).
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