

The State Of Strategic And Security Studies In Canada: Workshop Report

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Introduction

On January 24-26, 2019, *The Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* hosted a workshop on the state of strategic and security studies in Canada. The focus was on both the institutional environment facing the relevant community of scholars in Canada and the range of issues facing actors – especially governments at various levels – and their bearing on the community of scholars. With regard to the institutional environment, shifts and developments over time in the approaches and concerns of governmental actors, and their relationships with the scholarly community, were two stimuli for the workshop, but so, too, were relations between scholars and universities, and the situation of Canadian think-tanks in this issue area. With respect to changing issues and concerns, the great expansion in the range of strategic and security issues facing Canada, both at home and abroad, was an obvious point of interest, but also there were questions that do not necessarily fall readily or at first sight within the more traditional – or perhaps even the broader – set of matters usually thought of as in the security and strategy realm. Given the changing institutional and issue-area landscapes, the editors of *JMSS* thought it an opportune time to invite participants from the scholarly community, various levels of government, think tanks and others to share

their thinking and news on the state of strategic and security studies in Canada. The discussions were held under Chatham House rules. As the issues under discussion were often quite densely intertwined across sessions, this report has been organized by broad issues rather than being presented in terms of specific sessions.

Strategic and Security Issues and Concerns facing Governments, and Others

The range and types of security and strategic questions facing Canadian governmental actors, at all levels, with a bearing on the scholarly community were seen as quite broad, dealing not only with substantive questions but also with approaches to addressing these. Operational issues and statecraft were no longer the only sorts of concerns in focus. It was also clear that government departments and agencies had to consider as well the policy relevance of research as compared to their foci and interests, and the relationship of research to ministerial priorities. Matters of personnel, organization, infrastructure and innovation were among the concerns noted. These, and the relationship with Canadian society as a whole, could figure significantly in how government actors might identify and address security concerns. This affected as well what sorts of research and research relationships were seen as needed and desired by governments, with considerable emphasis on the need for diversity in voices and multidisciplinary in research. It also created room for scholars beyond a narrow, more traditional range of defence and security issues.

The greater complexity of security concerns required movement beyond a jurisdictional focus when dealing with multiple levels of government. Security was no longer primarily a service provided by the federal level. Thus, jurisdictional matters could be subsidiary to the substantive questions at stake. As well, security issues were not simply focused on questions of violence, which forces a more complex response. In the provincial case, more traditional security issues could include emergencies, disaster management and public safety, but now there was a longer list. Provinces have focused largely on education and health as main areas of activity, but now many ministries might now find themselves facing security-related concerns yet have no real experience, lens, funds or infrastructure to address these. Radicalization and local terrorism (both domestic and foreign) were examples offered: health, education, and social services

might all have roles to play regarding this, but these agencies have no real infrastructure to deal with this. Other examples offered were money laundering, cryptocurrency operations, and critical infrastructure. With respect to influence operations, ranging from elections to specific issues, the problem of an overlap with legitimate activism was noted. Legal and communication approaches might dominate in shaping responses in this area. Agencies – other, perhaps, than police departments – specifically identifying and addressing security matters below the federal level could be small, not well-funded, and have difficulty absorbing scholarly research which, as well, might not be well-oriented to their needs. A focus on resilience was also noted, arising as well as the municipal level, but there was a need for cooperation across agencies and levels of government to address this. In response, there was now more sharing of information across all jurisdictional levels.

It was suggested defence and security was something of a niche issue in Canada, not the first thing on the mind of the Canadian public. There was thus a need to convince the Canadian public of the broadening scope and the importance of such issues. It was suggested that such concerns formed an “arc of insecurity,” ranging from more conventional, “kinetic” (no longer the central part) and traditional matters on one end to, increasingly, cyber-related matters and others. Thus, war was no longer the whole of the “arc” – an F-35 might be on one end, but a home computer could be on the other. The public needed to be aware of this. The use of a broad array of power resources (hard, soft, diplomacy, aid and so on) to achieve policy objectives as well has implications for multidisciplinary approaches by scholars.

Relationships and Funding

Several sorts of relationships came up for discussion: between scholars and government agencies (including granting bodies) at various levels, between scholars and universities, and between scholars and Canadian think tanks, for example. Funding was a dominant question with respect to these relationships, but there was also significant discussion regarding the nature of a precise relationship, especially with respect to research networks.

Particularly with governments, relationships have taken a variety of forms, including: base program funding (such as the now-discontinued Security and Defence Forum model); grant, project and contract funding; support for research networks; quick response"-type engagements and consultative roundtables regarding specific issues; and scholarships. The availability and form of government funding was clearly a major concern. Expanded funding within the Defense Engagement Program was noted, as were efforts to increase research funding in conjunction with other federal funding bodies. The problem of adjudicating multidisciplinary research proposals was noted. Government motives for such relationships have been multiple: to develop and sustain a knowledge community within Canada; to contribute to a better-informed public; to obtain input on particular issues or topics; and so on. The tension between dependence on government funding and research independence was noted, leading to a question of research that is client- or sponsor-driven versus that which is not. Client-driven research was necessarily focused on the client's agenda. The role of policy relevance as a criterion for government interest was clear here, but the usefulness *to* government of independent research was also flagged. The desirability of funding independence from private industry groups was noted by one participant in another context.

Student support has come via a number of channels, including direct scholarship support by government agencies, broader Tri-Council research grants and student scholarships and, on a lower scale, from particular student prize competitions. Efforts to increase student support were noted, including through cooperation between funding agencies.

Grant, project and contract funding was a significant source of research funding both during and after the SDF period, but increased emphasis is now being put on the creation of research networks. The possibilities such networks posed for interdisciplinary research – also emphasized by government agencies and general funding bodies – was noted. Several questions, however, were posed regarding the network model:

1. The difficulty in creating and sustaining such relationships. Money might be available from various sources to create networks, but short funding cycles meant that too much effort would go into trying for the next supporting grant rather than into actual networking. If longer-term funding was not reliably

available, the network could not endure. (Some time after the workshop, we received information that a proposed Canadian Defence and Security Network had been awarded substantial SSHRC funding – nearly \$2.5 million — over a seven-year period.) Limits and issues in university support for home bases as an alternative or a complement to other funding sources could also be problematic.

2. National versus international networks and participants. The Canadian government draws significantly on international research networks, which can include Canadian participants. However, were some government agencies missing opportunities to work with experts in Canada as a result? One academic participant suggested that there is no specifically Canadian solution to international peace and security issues, but at question was whether this international approach worked against national networks, and against participation in such national networks by those Canadians having a broader network or platform for their work. This could also bear on issues of publication in national versus international academic journals, and the sorts of research likely to be favoured in the latter.
3. Communication among Canadian researchers and centres. One speaker suggested that too much emphasis was being put on generating research and not enough on communicating it across Canadian centres. One function of a research network could thus be to promote contacts among Canadian researchers, including through conferences and topic-oriented meetings.
4. Tension between an independent (horizontal) model and a government-responsive (vertical) model. This links to the client-based versus independent research issue as well. A contract-based model would not of itself create a true network. A strong independent research network could respond in part to government needs, but would also serve the other needs of the researchers in the broader, social science academic context. Thus, while there were tensions, the effects could also be complementary.

Another issue regarding the research relationship between academics and governments was what governments got out of the connection. Was the resulting research always seen as relevant? Were Canadian governments actually interested in the results? It was suggested that the US military seemed more interested, and that a Canadian student in the area seeking a future would thus go to the US. Another

participant suggested that academics were not as vigorous in connecting to agencies as they could be. While there could be problems in getting feedback from governments, academic reluctance could also be a problem. Informal and personal linkages could be important currently, as compared to more formal links; the importance of informal contacts was also noted more generally. One participant also suggested that universities could “overload” agencies with “situational awareness” but be less helpful in terms of understanding, foresight and estimative-type intelligence. A limited government capacity to access and process scholarly output would also be a factor.

Scholars and Universities

Funding and other also arose with respect to Canadian universities. Universities and their mission statements might not be highly engaged with defence and security issues, and there could even be some hostility, though university visions could give some scope to them as well. For example, a university could include resilience among their research foci, and could build connections with municipal and other governments in this area, as well as others.

With respect to funding, while federal agencies may have the money to support specific research projects, provinces fund the universities more generally, and set priorities to which universities respond. An emphasis on “academic stars” could reflect national and university priorities, which were not likely to be defence and security issues. A shift towards sessional lecturers and to instructors could also be problematic. Reliable program-type funding – an institutional base – was necessary on a university basis to sustain networks and multidisciplinary research units if it was not coming from elsewhere. Project, grant and contract funding could not do this. Competition among universities in seeking grants could arise in the Tri-Council funding model, in terms of allocation of credit, and in pressures for each institution (even within multi-institutional projects) to increase the involvement of its people and to get more money.

Vulnerability to departmental needs and to shifting departmental priorities was also noted. Retirements and replacements were problems, as hiring could be oriented to serve line departments as opposed to interdisciplinary programs. Despite the emphasis on interdisciplinarity in research, much research, and university departments, were

organized on a disciplinary basis. Interdisciplinary units could use more independence and self-management – which meant reliable unit funding. Departments could move away from defence and security topics, and there could also be disengagement from and hostility to defence and security issues on this level. Once expertise was lost, there were great problems in rebuilding it. University funding models might not lend themselves well to interdisciplinary studies. Lack of attention in public policy schools to defence and security issues was also noted.

Tenure and promotion considerations with respect to junior scholars in particular, and their connection to publications, were also flagged. Various kinds of scholarly products were weighted differently, with papers and reports disadvantaged relative to journal articles etc., and with publications in certain journals weighted more than in others. Journals, conferences and topics with a strongly Canadian focus might be disadvantaged relative to more prestigious international or foreign journals and meetings, and to other topics. However, it was suggested that *Canadian Military History*, at least, was well regarded in international military history circles. One participant suggested that the best way to minimize one's citation count was to study Canadian topics; another suggested, however, casting Canadian topics into a comparative mould to counter this – a blinkered focus on Canadian issues could be avoided, and this could help in placing articles in international journals. Others challenged this strategy, and suggested that tenure and promotion committees needed to be more supportive of those studying Canada. Various means were noted, in another context, of assisting the next generation of scholars, through conferences, workshops, scholarships and student support, and so on.

Although most of the attention of the workshop was on research-related issues, questions of training for non-academic employment were also raised: students were coming to graduate programs for professional training, not simply for a future as a scholar. Some university programs were more focused on degree-granting, though the faculty concerned were also researchers in security and defence issues. Here also, building and maintaining a multidisciplinary degree-granting program could be difficult given the disciplinary orientation of university departments, problems in coordinating with these (including getting information), department-centred hiring models, central funding models and bureaucratic practices, and the broader strong

research focus of universities. The needs of government actors and others for people with appropriate training were noted, as was the value of a Liberal Arts education. The Policy Officer Recruitment Program, the role of co-op education programs, and the possibilities for employment in the transportation sector and other areas were noted.

Think Tanks

The Canadian think tank environment in the security and strategy area was seen as quite different from that in the US. The latter was quite strong, with significant funding from government, industry and sources, but was also highly partisan. It could draw on a range of expertise – academics, journalists and, with the American “in-and-out” model of government service, people with government experience. By comparison, the Canadian situation was relatively weak: many Canadian think tanks were poorly funded (one speaker argued a direct correlation between non-partisanship, independence and lack of bias on the one hand and a lack of funds on the other), the issues were seen as niche rather than central, and hiring and replacement could be problems. There could be some employment opportunities for people but these were also limited: such people needed to be researchers but also cooperative, self-starting and critical thinkers. They might draw on both established and new scholars, but may not necessarily fund research; instead, they might serve as a conduit for material rather than a generator or funder of research, moving material out to get noticed by the public and by governments through opinion pieces and published research. These vehicles might get broader exposure than through academic journals. Lack of funds could also created a problem of taking cues from a funder’s agenda. A longer-term focus on changing a climate of opinion, versus simply changing immediate policy, was suggested as one role for think tanks. The role of social media was also noted, but so were the problems of poor information and polarized debate.

Intergenerational issues were also noted in this context: who was providing material for think tanks in their role as conduits? Although the production of defence and security scholars did not end with the SDF program, and the products of this program did not just “go away,” one speaker suggested that the same people kept showing up, e.g., in the media, though there were also some new people.

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