

## Criticizing Defence Research

Defence – the very word seems to get under Canadians' skin. The Canadian Forces is expensive, its actions abroad sometimes involve casualties, and its military operations sometimes interfere with the Canadian perception that we are peacekeepers first and foremost. Defence is so, well, so American.

You could feel all these undertones in the article by University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran in the *Globe and Mail* (Feb. 21, "When think tanks produce propaganda") in which he attacked the Conference of Defence Associations and the Department of National Defence's Security and Defence Forum.

The Conference is an amalgam of defence organizations, most related to the reserve forces. The CDA has an advocacy and educational pro-defence role, and it receives \$100,000 a year from the Defence department. The Security and Defence Forum is a Department of National Defence programme that offers financial support to university centres that work on defence-related topics. Neither is secret, both operate publicly, and in Prof. Attaran's eyes, both do nothing but generate pro-defence propaganda. As every Canadian knows, everything to do with defence is bad.

If it was only Attaran complaining, no one would much care, but David Pugliese, the Ottawa Citizen's respected defence correspondent, has published similar complaints about the CDA, and so has *Maclean's* magazine. More predictably, Steven Staples of the anti-defence Rideau Institute has also complained that the SDF programme constitutes a federally-funded defence lobby in the universities. So what's going on here?

First, it needs to be said that the federal government funds many different kinds of activities. It finances scholarly research through a host of agencies (including the Social Science and Humanities Research Council that drops lavish annual funding into Prof. Attaran's pocket). It has funded a Court Challenges programme that gave funds to organizations to oppose the government in court. The Department of Foreign Affairs gives grants to Non-Governmental Organizations and a host of other departments, fund associations and groups that lobby the government and educate the public. With the exception of the now defunct Court Challenges programme, no one said or says a word about this. Nor should they: this is a proper use of public funds to create an educated, informed public on the issues that matter to Canadians.

Second, it also must be noted that the Conference of Defence Associations is not a tame mouthpiece for the government or the military. CDA publications have vigorously attacked government policy on many occasions, and in its educational efforts it has also tried to push and prod policy-makers to act in ways that serve the national interest and enhance Canadian security. This is education, and there's nothing remotely improper with this.

Finally, the Security and Defence Programme is even more bullet-proof. In the universities across the country where it operates, a host of professors and students have done research in the areas they choose. These range from climate change and conflict to international law and to world religions. No one in Ottawa twists the academics' arms and demands that they study this topic or that one. No one orders them to spout a party line (as if academics could be made to do so). An independent peer-review process run by scholars decides which centres get – or lose – funding, and the decisions are properly based on their track record in publication and research.

DND's only reward for all this has been the creation of more experts out there who can praise – or damn – the department's work. The Defence view, quite properly, has been that it is better to get informed criticism than none at all. If only that was what Professor Attaran had offered.

Why all the abuse about funding defence research or defence education then? The Canadian self-image is that we are a nation of peacekeepers, different from our more warlike American neighbours. We have no national interests, such as other nations do, only universal values that we should propagate around the globe. It is, therefore, good for government to support NGOs with public funds since they uplift the downtrodden. But it is by definition wrong to fund any organization that might believe that defence is necessary to protect and advance the nation's interests at home and abroad or even that defence ought to be studied.

This is naïve in the extreme, of course. Canada has national interests to protect and advance. It has the Canadian Forces that can and should do peacekeeping when that is possible or necessary, but also must be prepared to do vigorous peacemaking when that is required – and when it serves our national interests. Learning how to define our interests and calculating how best to serve them is a proper role for scholars. So too is reminding Canadians that their Canadian Forces are a necessary adjunct to our government and indeed to all our lives.

**Historian J.L. Granatstein writes for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute – which gets no program funding from the Department of National Defence.**