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# Canada's New Defence Policy: A Huge Step in the Right Direction

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by  
Christopher Kilford

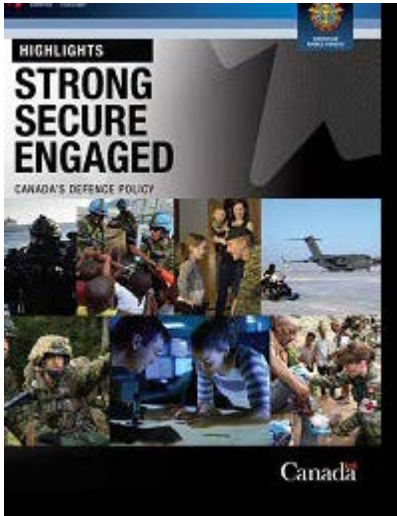
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This article is one of a series of short, focused analyses of the new Canadian Defence Policy "Strong, Secure, Engaged" which was launched in June 2017. In this article, Christopher Kilford examines the consistencies in recent Defence Policies as well as the striking foreign policy nature of the document.

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## Canada's New Defence Policy: A Huge Step in the Right Direction

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### Introduction

Canada's new defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, is undeniably a well-crafted document and comes after months of hard work by military and civilian officials in the Department of National Defence and elsewhere in government. It's also the product of a comprehensive public consultation process that brought thousands of Canadians together to discuss our place in the world and what kind of military Canada should have.

*Strong, Secure, Engaged* is also the product of a military leadership sharpened by shared experiences in Afghanistan and more recently in and around the Middle East. Importantly, it comes at a time when we continue to be faced with failed and fragile states often too complex to fix, but also far too unpredictable to be left alone.<sup>1</sup> As Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland recently said in the House of Commons, we are "connected to – and affected by – everything that happens internationally, and we want to be part of solutions to complex global challenges."<sup>2</sup> Evidently, the decision to extend Canada's mission in Iraq until March 2019 is confirmation the government is serious.

The new defence policy, at 113 pages is obviously designed to serve many purposes – part educational for the public, part recruiting tool with an important nod to diversity, women and Canada's indigenous community, part retention tool, part nod to cyber warriors and part message to the United States, NATO, the United Nations, Russia and others that we are taking our domestic, continental and international defence obligations seriously. All combined, it's very good news.

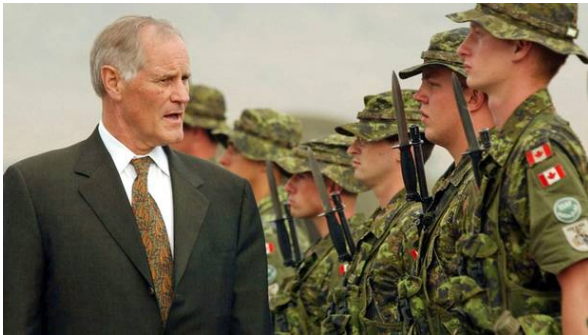
In the meantime, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* has given Canada something it will be argued here, often talked about but never realized so far: consistency when it comes to our future defence plans. Consistency because *Strong, Secure, Engaged* is very much a synthesis of Bill Graham's 2005 defence section of the short-lived, *International Policy Statement* and Peter Mackay's 2008 *Canada First Defence Strategy* (CFDS). And given the foreseeable global security situation, it is hard to imagine why any future Canadian government would seriously consider departing from it.

As will also be discussed, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* is much more than just a defence policy. It is, intentionally or not, very much a broad statement of Canada's foreign

policy. That's why the government likely determined it was important for Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs to deliver a foreign policy speech in the House of Commons on 6 June 2017, the day before the defence policy was released.<sup>3</sup>

### The Graham-MacKay-Sajjan defence policy synthesis

The idea of a Graham-MacKay-Sajjan defence policy synthesis at first glance may seem quite farfetched. But if we consider that Bill Graham was a member of Defence Minister Sajjan's advisory panel, perhaps not so farfetched after all.<sup>4</sup> However, there is much more to it than that.



In 2005, the Liberal government released their new defence policy.<sup>5</sup> There was new money for defence, a growing and important role in Afghanistan and the Navy actually owned 15 surface combatants back then. The government and military had also adopted an expeditionary mindset typified by General Rick Hillier's plan for a Standing Contingency Task Force (SCTF) that would be transported to global hotspots via a "big honking ship." This expeditionary mindset was made very clear in the hard numbers provided in the policy. For example, from a Land Force (Army) perspective, Canada would be ready to sustain overseas, for an indefinite period, two task forces of approximately 1,200 personnel potentially in different theatres of operation. A third task force of approximately 1,000 personnel would be available to deploy for a six-month period at the same time.

In comparison, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* coming 12 years after the 2005 defence policy states, for similar large scale deployments, that in future the Land Force will be able to sustain two deployments of between 500-1500 personnel in two different theatres of operation and an additional deployment of between 500-1500 personnel for 6-9 months. There is little difference really to what was stated in the 2005 defence policy.

In fact, the 2005 defence policy went considerably further when it came to specifying the military capabilities defence was required to establish, deploy and sustain. For example, the Air Force was told that they would need to provide an Air Expeditionary Unit (AEU) for up to six months comprised of up to two Aurora maritime patrol aircraft and up to six maritime helicopters for deployment with a naval task group, and up to six medium-to heavy-lift helicopters to support land operations. There was also a requirement to sustain indefinitely overseas another AEU of up to six medium-to heavy-lift helicopters while also being able to deploy for up to six months an AEU consisting of one Airbus configured for air-to-air refueling and six CF-18 aircraft for air-to-ground

missions.<sup>6</sup> All-in-all very specific outputs for the Air Force, for which there is no equivalent in *Strong, Secure, Engaged*. On the other hand, and with recent operational deployments in mind, obviously, these tasks are still very much extant.

However, Bill Graham's 2005 defence policy did not last for very long. It all came crashing down on 23 January 2006, when the Conservatives won the 39<sup>th</sup> general election and Stephen Harper entered office with his "Canada First" theme. In real terms this meant that the SCTF, the hallmark of a new expeditionary focus, died. In its place, the government defence platform called for a decidedly domestic focus with the acquisition, for example, of three armed icebreakers and the formation of rapid reaction army battalions composed of 650 Regular Force personnel that would be stationed in Comox, Trenton, Bagotville, and Goose Bay. New territorial battalions with urban emergency response capabilities were also to be created in 14 cities across Canada with 100 Regular Force and 400 Reserve personnel each.<sup>7</sup>



In due course, most of Harper's "Canada First" campaign ideas never made their way into the final version of Peter MacKay's 2008 defence policy and the military continued to be engaged in many overseas missions. And when the CFDS was finally published it was actually quite vague – gone were the hard troop-to-task figures on

offer in the 2005 policy. All the new policy would say was that Canada would be ready to "lead and/or conduct a major international operation for an extended period."<sup>8</sup> The good news was that the CFDS did commit the government to acquiring 15 new surface combatants, six to eight Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships and 65 "next-generation" aircraft.<sup>9</sup> The new policy also predicted the defence budget would reach almost \$30 billion in 2026-27. And there was a promise to invest \$490 billion in defence over 20 years, grow the Regular Force to 70,000 personnel, the Reserves to 30,000 and the civilian workforce to 25,000.<sup>10</sup>

As its conclusion made clear, the CFDS was a "20-year plan to rebuild the Forces, supported by an unprecedented long-term, predictable funding framework."<sup>11</sup> However, the 2008 defence policy was no match for a \$55.6 billion dollar federal deficit in 2009-2010 and a \$33.4 billion shortfall that came after. The result was that much in Canada's defence world, especially when it came to procurement, came to a grinding halt.

Harjit Sajjan's *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, nine years on, promises much of what was promised, but not delivered, in the CFDS. The government, similar to its predecessor, committed to acquiring 15 new surface combatants, five to six Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships but increased the number of "advanced fighter" aircraft required to 88. As for personnel numbers, the



Regular Force, it was announced, would grow to 71,500 personnel, the Reserves to 30,000 and the civilian workforce to 25,000. The defence budget, the government added, would also climb to \$32.7 billion in 2026-27 and overall defence investment would equal \$553 billion over 20 years.

In 2008, it was predicted the defence budget would reach almost \$30 billion in 2026-27. In comparison, the new defence policy predicts a budget of \$32.7 billion by then. But to be fair, the new defence policy adds in 1,500 Regular Force personnel who need to be paid and 23 additional fighter jets are a major expense. It appears, then, that those costing the defence budget back in 2008 probably didn't do a bad job after all. And this is a good sign because it demonstrates a degree of budgetary consistency at play.<sup>12</sup>

There are more, not unsurprisingly, comparisons between the 2005, 2008 and 2017 defence policies. All have very similar global and domestic security assessments, mission sets, offer stable and predictable funding, lament the size and poor condition of the military's infrastructure, speak to the importance of technology and innovation and the need to work closely with Canada's defence industry. In keeping with the 2017 defence policy, the 2005 policy also included small sections on arms control, defence diplomacy and foreign military assistance. However, in terms of overall breadth the 2005 and 2008 defence policies, at 32 and 21 pages respectively, are certainly no match for 2017's *Strong, Secure, Engaged*.<sup>13</sup> But the important point, regarding the matter of defence policy synthesis, is that the military capabilities required to meet our defence obligations, in each of the three defence policies, are indeed very similar.

### **Strong – Secure – Engaged: Defence policy, and foreign policy?**

In the months preceding the 1968 federal election, Pierre Trudeau issued "Canada and the World," his major foreign policy statement, in which he announced that his government, if elected, would immediately undertake an all-encompassing review of

Canada's foreign and defence policies. For him, defence policy had led foreign policy for far too long, and in particular, Canada's role in NATO dominated both, leaving little room for imagination and change.

With the above in mind, one might imagine that when the final draft of *Strong, Secure, Engaged* landed on the desk of the current prime minister, Pierre's ghost was hovering nearby, a look of deep disapproval etched on his face. Why, because the new defence policy contains a hefty amount of foreign policy and likely evolved this way as the draft moved across multiple departments. In fact, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* could easily pass for the title of our foreign policy. It is why the government likely determined it had to deliver a foreign policy speech in the House of Commons the day before the defence policy was released in order to ensure the correct "policy order of march" was respected. It is why *Strong, Secure, Engaged* also has a message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs inside.

In the new defence policy Canada's strategic interests and values are clearly laid out. We are told that "global stability, the primacy of the rules-based international order, and the principle of collective defence" underpin Canada's strategic interests of maintaining and improving security and prosperity.<sup>14</sup> Next come our "core" values of inclusion, compassion, accountable governance and respect for diversity and human rights.<sup>15</sup>

After noting Canada's strategic interests and values, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* sets a scene of a global economic disparity, rising instability, violent extremism and unstoppable mass migration. The United States, as the defence policy notes, is still the only superpower but increasingly challenged by China and a Russia eager "to test the international security environment," and therefore "a degree of major power competition has returned to the international system."<sup>16</sup>

As such, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* makes clear that Canada is a relative island of stability by "virtue of our geography, our history, our diversity and our natural wealth," and is therefore "called to leadership."<sup>17</sup> It is at this point many of the government's core foreign policy goals are revealed within the defence policy. Below, for ease of reference, are the key ones by theme:

### **On our traditional allies**

- Canada will continue to collaborate internationally with the United States, consistent with Canadian interests and values, engaging in complementary activities that contribute to stability abroad, which in turn helps maintain security at home.
- Canada's policy with respect to participation in ballistic missile defence has not changed.

- Canada will nurture its close relationships with the United Kingdom and France while seeking opportunities to further develop them.
- Acknowledging rising international interest in the Arctic, Canada must enhance its ability to operate in the North and work closely with allies and partners.

### **Asia-Pacific**

- Canada will seek to develop a stronger relationship with China.<sup>18</sup>
- Canada will engage with emerging powers, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Canada will establish meaningful strategic dialogues with key regional powers in the Asia-Pacific region to exchange views on regional security issues and threats to regional stability.
- Canada will increase its engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.
- Canada will work closely with long-standing partners, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States on Asia-Pacific security issues.
- North Korea poses a serious and increasing threat to both regional stability and international peace and security.

### **The Middle East**

- Canada will continue to contribute to regional peace and stability in the Middle East, along with countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and reducing the threat of terrorism.

### **Africa**

- Canada will contribute to peace and security in Africa through re-engaging in United Nations peace operations, providing training, supporting development and empowering women and girls.
- Our approach to Africa will seek to make tangible contributions to the stability necessary to advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals<sup>19</sup> and create the conditions for peace.

### **International organizations and treaties**

- Canada will reinforce its export controls and help strengthen international controls on conventional arms by joining the Arms Trade Treaty.
- Canada will promote the peaceful use of space and provide leadership in shaping international norms for responsible behaviour in space.
- As part of a feminist approach to international policy, Canada is committed to working with the United Nations to end conflict-related sexual violence and the use of child soldiers.



## Climate change

- Recognizing the devastating effects of climate change, Canada must bolster its ability to respond to severe weather events and other natural disasters, both at home and abroad.

## Terrorism

- Canada must address the threat stemming from terrorism and the actions of violent extremist organizations, including in ungoverned spaces.<sup>20 21</sup>

The above foreign policy goals may seem a tall order to fill, but Canada is not a minor international player even though modesty may often make us think so. Economically, according to the World Bank, we have the 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world based on 2015 GDP data and higher than Russia in 12<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>22</sup> As for our defence budget Canada, according to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, has the 16<sup>th</sup> highest level of expenditure in the world.<sup>23</sup> While this means 15 countries spend more on defence than we do, many have no choice given regional factors and immediate threats – this would include countries such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and South Korea. The so-called “Great Powers”<sup>24</sup> come with their own political and defence related baggage. The net result is that only a few countries are in the unique position of being able to deploy highly trained, professional, well-equipped people, defence and otherwise, where and when needed with the minimum of fuss.

## Final thoughts

Whatever one may say about the new defence policy, it took great political courage around the Cabinet table and by the Prime Minister to agree to publish *Strong, Secure, Engaged* especially given the current deficit situation.<sup>25</sup> Defence expenditures seldom translate into votes come election time as politicians and seasoned defence observers well know. Signing on to a more active international role can also be politically risky. The perils of making major defence acquisition announcements, with the accompanying fanfare and photo ops, are also well known as the previous Conservative government can attest. Few at the time foresaw the coming economic crisis and the government’s resulting *Deficit Reduction Action Plan*.

It’s also important to acknowledge that in between the launch of the defence policy public consultation process in early April 2016 and the release of *Strong, Secure, Engaged* on 7 June 2017, Donald Trump became President of the United States. Back in April 2016, well before the Republican primaries had wrapped up, few thought Trump might one day be President of the United States. Of course, no one in the Canadian government would ever publically admit that Trump’s presence in the White House had

any impact on the final version of *Strong, Secure, Engaged*. But it had to be a factor in the end.

On the day *Strong, Secure, Engaged* was released much of the good news was overtaken by the issue of where the money would come from to pay for everything? It was a question the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Transport seemed unable or unwilling to answer even though they were asked at least five times by journalists.<sup>26</sup> In the end, a frustrated Minister of Transport told them to ask the Minister of Finance. We do know that prior to the defence review the defence budget was predicted to be \$23.14 billion by 2027-28. Now the forecast is \$33.4 billion. Was the additional defence requirement for just over \$10 billion in 2027-28 captured in the government's December 2016 *Update of Long-Term Economic and Fiscal Projections*? It's not clear but the fiscal projection for 2027-28 already shows an approximate \$25 billion deficit.<sup>27</sup> Will this now be \$35 billion?

What was also striking in the new defence policy was an apparent lack of constraint. There was something for everyone, from the civilian academic community to resource intense Special Forces and the Ground Based Air Defence community whose occupation was only recently phased-out by the military with little apparent angst.<sup>28</sup>

Will Canada eventually make its way to having 15 surface combatants and 88 fighter jets and most everything else detailed in the new defence policy? Probably, because the other option is to become, as Minister Freeland noted in her speech, nothing more than a client state of the United States. But there will undoubtedly be setbacks, delays and numerous course corrections along the way. Money will always be an issue. But, at its core the 2017 defence policy successfully builds on its 2005 and 2008 predecessors and given the foreseeable global security situation it is hard to imagine why any future Canadian government would seriously consider departing from it.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew S. Thompson makes this point in: Andrew S. Thompson, “Entangled: Canadian Engagement in Haiti 1968-2010,” in *From Kinshasa to Kandahar – Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: 2017), 7.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie released Canada’s first feminist international assistance policy on 8 June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> General Ray Henault was also a member of the Minister’s Advisory Panel and a former Chief of Defence Staff whose term in office (28 June 2001 – 4 February 2005) overlapped with then Minister of National Defence, Bill Graham (20 July 2004 – 5 February 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World – Defence*, (Ottawa, 2005). From a continuity perspective, at the time the 2005 defence policy was published Canada had 15 major surface combatants. There were approximately 64,000 Regular Force and 26,000 Reserve personnel serving and the modernization of 80 CF-18’s was on-going (see the 2004 November Report of the Auditor General of Canada. Internet: [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_200411\\_03\\_e\\_14907.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200411_03_e_14907.html)).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>7</sup> This latter promise prompted the Liberal Party to respond with a pre-election and now infamous attack ad. With ominous music playing in the background Canadians were informed that Stephen Harper was about to put “soldiers, with guns, in our cities.” See: You Tube, 2006 Liberal Attack Ad. Internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMsqEph7a8I>. Accessed: 2 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*, (Ottawa: 2008), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> It is also important to note that when the CFDS was published the Canadian dollar was almost on par with the American dollar and as a result the government at that time likely had much greater purchasing power.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the 2017 defence policy dedicates an unprecedented 14 pages (plus Annex C) to people issues and just over 2 pages to the Reserve Force.

<sup>14</sup> *Strong, Secure, Engaged : Canada’s Defence Policy*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 61. In her foreign policy speech, Minister Freeland added feminism and the promotion of the rights of women and girls and noted that “our values include an unshakeable commitment to pluralism, human rights and the rule of law.” See: Canada, Global Affairs Canada, *Address by Minister Freeland on Canada’s foreign policy priorities*, 6 June 2017. Internet: [https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address\\_by\\_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html). Accessed: 20 June 2017.

<sup>16</sup> *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Minister Freeland’s speech noted that there was “a need to integrate the South and Asia, most prominently, China into the world’s economic and political system while preserving the best of the old order and addressing the existential threat of climate change.” See: *Address by Minister Freeland on Canada’s foreign policy priorities*, 6 June 2017.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 27 September 2015. Internet: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>. Accessed: 20 June 2017.

<sup>20</sup> *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*. If anyone had cause to complain about Canada’s international engagement plans it was probably Mexico. Mexico figured quite prominently in the 2016 *Defence Policy Review Public Consultation Document*, where it was noted that Canada enjoyed a close relationship with Mexico and that collaboration with the United States and Mexico was seen as “paramount in addressing regional security challenges, such as transnational criminal organizations, narco-trafficking, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities.” *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, didn’t mention Mexico at all. See: Canada, *Defence Policy Review Public Consultation Document*, (Ottawa: DGM-19216-2WJ, April 2016). Internet: <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/defence-policy-review/consultation-paper.asp>. Accessed: 9 June 2017.

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<sup>21</sup> *Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's foreign policy priorities*, 6 June 2017. In her speech, the Minister noted that Canada would “support and strengthen the rules-based international order, and all its institutions including the G7, the G20, the OAS, APEC, the WTO, the WHO, the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, the Arctic Council, NATO and the UN.” She also went on to note that Canada would “strive for leadership in all these multilateral forums.”

<sup>22</sup> The World Bank, *2015 GDP Rankings*, 17 April 2017. Internet: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/GDP-ranking-table>. Accessed: 29 June 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2017 Fact Sheet* (for 2016). Internet: <https://www.sipri.org/databases>. Accessed: 29 June 2017.

<sup>24</sup> *Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's foreign policy priorities*, 6 June 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Some have argued that this defence policy was “counter-brand” for a Liberal government but the 2005 Liberal government defence policy was just as ambitious. Instead, in the post-2001 strategic environment we could be witnessing a defence policy convergence between the two major political parties.

<sup>26</sup> Canada, CPAC, *Government Unveils Defence Policy Plan*, 7 June 2017. Internet: <http://www.cpac.ca/en/programs/headline-politics/episodes/51222499/>. Accessed: 29 June 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Canada, Department of Finance, *Update of Long-Term Economic and Fiscal Projections*, December 2017.

<sup>28</sup> While the military is full of quality people not all are Special Forces (SF) candidates. The addition of 605 SF personnel is ambitious and while the SF is a vital and very much over-taxed capability it is not clear if the main supplier of people, the Army, will be able to cope with the demand. On the issue of Air Defence it is likely the proliferation of drones, big and small, in Iraq and Syria has had something to do with this dramatic about turn.

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