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CHARTING THE COURSE TOWARDS A NEW CANADIAN DEFENCE POLICY: INSIGHTS FROM OTHER NATIONS

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Introduction

A government's defence policy is not about what it does with its military forces during its tenure; that is a matter of foreign policy or national security policy. Rather, defence policy defines the military capabilities the nation intends to acquire, maintain, or divest and aligns those ends with the necessary ways and means, principally money, over a long time horizon. Consequently, defence policy – unlike many others – has by definition a very long-term focus. Acquiring new capabilities or undertaking major upgrades to existing ones typically takes years,¹ meaning that the defence policy decisions of previous governments will largely define the military options the new Liberal government has at its disposal. Similarly, this government's decisions will define the options available to future governments.

For this reason, it is of critical importance that defence policy development be done well. With the new government embarking upon a comprehensive defence review, a high-level scan of recent comparable exercises in other nations is a worthwhile contribution. While the experiences of others may not translate perfectly into the current Canadian context, they provide insights that are important to consider.

The most recent defence policy updates published by France (2013),² the United Kingdom (2015),³ and Australia (2016)⁴ are all well done and offer useful comparisons. Perhaps less relevant to the Canadian context, but still instructive in a number of ways, is the American Quadrennial Defense Review process, the most recent iteration of which was completed in 2014.⁵ A comprehensive analysis of these documents is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief summary of each will be useful. Anyone intending to make a serious contribution to the current Canadian defence policy review should carefully examine all four.

France

The 2013 French *White Paper on Defence and National Security* represents an interesting case as its publication pre-dated very significant events affecting national and wider European security, including Russian actions against Ukraine, externally-instigated domestic terrorist attacks, and the current European refugee crisis. It illustrates the importance of ensuring that defence policies, which necessarily have long time horizons, have reasonable resilience to what are sometimes called “future shock” events.

The French review process achieves this reasonably well, although the current government has been forced to reverse planned defence spending reductions in response to the changing security environment. Nevertheless, the broad thrust of the policy remains generally valid as it is founded upon a very

thorough analysis of the (then) global and regional security environment, and the threats and risks the nation needs to be capable of responding to. The policy comprehensively presents a logical strategic narrative that: defines France's place and role in global affairs; defines the key objectives of the policy; analyzes the global context within which those objectives must be achieved; defines priorities; sets out how the objectives will be achieved in terms of the defence capabilities to be acquired, maintained, or divested; and aligns budget commitments to these capability plans. So far, at least, only these last two elements of the policy have needed to be revised in response to "future shock" events.

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This underlines the importance of getting the foundational analysis right. It enables a government to respond reasonably promptly to most significant events with a policy course correction rather than a complete re-think. Of course, truly cataclysmic occurrences – such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example – may force a complete policy reset,⁶ but the objective should be to define a policy direction that can withstand all but the greatest unforeseen events.

United Kingdom

The 2015 UK review is similarly well founded upon a comprehensive analysis of global and regional security conditions, trends, and risks, in this case published separately in a government-level *National Security Risk Assessment*. Defence policy is articulated within a single *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review* document⁷ published every five years. Unlike the last cycle in 2010, when the *National Security Strategy* was published separately, the 2015 review produced an integrated document that comprehensively discusses both the UK's place on the world stage and the role of the military in that wider national strategy.

More specifically, the document describes the UK's place and role within the international order, and discusses the national strategies that should shape its actions over the next five years. The defence policy discussion then defines how defence will contribute to fulfilling the national strategy, setting out a clear narrative defining: the nation's vision, values, and approach to defence; the country's role in global affairs; the global context; defence capabilities to be acquired, maintained, or divested and in what priority; and the resources to be allocated to achieving this. There is a specific commitment to maintaining current levels of defence spending at the NATO target of 2 percent of GDP.

Australia

The 2016 Australian defence white paper nests within a set of related documents: the white paper itself; a *Defence Integrated Investment Program* document; a *Defence Industry Policy Statement*,⁸ as well

as a 2015 study *First Principles Review – Creating One Defence*.⁹ The last document provides important context to those parts of the white paper dealing with reform of the defence institution, but it should be kept in mind that a number of the structural issues Australia is moving to correct are not relevant to the Canadian context; for example, the need to clarify and codify the authority of the Chief of the Defence Force over the Service Chiefs.

The Australian white paper is a comprehensive document that sets out a coherent narrative articulating: the government's overall approach to defence, including the concept of risk-based responses to the strategic environment it faces; the regional and global strategic outlook; Australia's defence strategy in response to that outlook; the defence force structure to be built and military capabilities to be acquired, maintained, or divested, including the international relationships to be leveraged; the path to institutional reform; and alignment of resources to the capabilities to be acquired and maintained. The Australian policy includes a commitment to increase defence spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2021.

United States

The 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* covers largely the same ground as the other policies, but with a somewhat different content and format due to the nature of the legally mandated process and the constitutional division of authority between Congress and the Executive Branch. There is the same clear connection between a comprehensively analyzed future security environment, a clearly articulated defence strategy to respond to that environment, and the defence capabilities the nation plans to acquire, maintain, or divest to execute that strategy. There is less explicit discussion about the role of the United States in global affairs, perhaps understandable given the country's undisputed leadership role over many decades. Also, as only Congress can decide the financial means to be allocated to the Department of Defense and the Services, the Review confines itself to an analysis of the risks associated with current funding levels.

Lessons for Canada

The French, UK, Australian and US approaches to reviewing defence have a number of differences between them but are remarkably similar in how they progressively build the policy rationale and narrative in five sequential steps:

1. Defining a view of the nation's place in the world and, in broad terms, how the instruments of state power, in particular their defence capabilities, will be used to support a national strategy;
2. Analysis of the global and regional strategic outlook, including "future shock" risks, and the

military options current and future governments will need to have in order to face them;

3. Defining the defence strategy each nation intends to follow;
4. Defining the defence capabilities each nation will acquire, maintain or divest and the force structures to be adopted to implement the strategy; and
5. Defining the financial means by which the required capabilities will be acquired and sustained.

The following discussion suggests how these five stages should be applied in Canada's defence policy review.

1. Defining Canada's Place in the World and the Government's Overall Approach to Defence

As a point of departure, the government needs to set out the broad foreign and security policy context within which it plans to evolve Canada's defence policy. Will the country become more inward-looking, focused on domestic security and continental defence, or continue to be more outward-looking, as an internationally engaged G7 nation? If the former, then the Canadian Armed Forces will need to be reoriented from their current general-purpose capabilities towards a home defence and internal security role. If the latter, then a wider range of general-purpose expeditionary capabilities will need to be maintained.

Modern defence capabilities can't be built or rebuilt quickly; it takes years or decades and is very expensive. Consequently, decisions made by the current Liberal government will have a much greater impact on the military options future governments have for responding to domestic or international events than on its own. This makes it especially important that, in defining the nation's approach to defence, the present government defines one that will be durable over the long-term through at least one or two successors. This requires engaging Parliament, and indeed Canadians, in a dispassionate and reflective discussion about the future direction of Canadian defence policy. This would be especially critical if a significant reorientation were to be contemplated.

2. Analysis of the Global and Regional Strategic Outlook

Predicting the future is at best an inexact mixture of art and science. However, it is possible to rationally look at past and current trends, events and conditions and draw general conclusions about the probable and possible future. National Defence periodically publishes an excellent analysis called the *Future Security Environment*¹⁰ and the CDA Institute publishes its own annual *Strategic Outlook for Canada*.¹¹ Different analyses will offer different perspectives based on different levels of research and thought, and it will be important for the government to look critically at as many as possible in considering the defence needs of Canada over the next couple of decades.

In addition to these explorations of the future, the government should not forget George Santayana's caution: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Historians tell us, for example, that the years leading up to the Second World War were characterized by, among other things, a clear trend on the part of Germany, Italy, and Japan to increasingly disregard international conventions and the treaties they had signed as they sought to expand their territorial, economic and political reach.¹² We see comparable trends today and, while current circumstances are clearly not identical, it is useful to understand what worked and what didn't in the international community's responses to those earlier events. Past cases of mass human migrations caused by war, famine, or other wide-scale disasters can similarly offer useful insights into some of the challenges of today and tomorrow.

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For Canada, this analysis of the global and regional future outlook will inevitably be a complex exercise. Our geostrategic position is quite unique in the world, given our close proximity to the US, our geographical insulation from many types of direct threats (though not all), and the size of our economy compared to our land and maritime areas. However difficult, it is critical that this important foundational underpinning to the nation's defence policy be very well thought through and clearly articulated. It is especially important that the process include careful consideration of widely diverse perspectives and views. Without such a broad scope of analysis and depth of effort, the policy will rest on weak footings and provide a poor basis for properly guiding decisions on long-term military capability investments and divestments.

3. Defining the Defence Strategy

Building on the foundations of the first two steps, the government then needs to frame the nation's defence strategy for the future. This includes defining the "no-fail" military responses the nation must be capable of providing as an overriding priority. Things like providing security at home and defending our air and maritime approaches should fall into this category, including ensuring an adequate level of confidence on the part of both ourselves and our US neighbours in our ability to do so.

The strategy can then deal with areas where there may be more options. Will Canada seek, where it can, to play a strong international leadership role, as it did when it assumed lead nation responsibility in Kandahar Province, or will it instead focus on selectively contributing niche capabilities to larger NATO, US, or coalition forces? Does the country need balanced capabilities across the maritime, air-land, cyber, and space domains or should it adopt an asymmetric force structure? Focusing on niche areas or underweighting certain domains can certainly reduce defence capability costs, but it also adds risk by creating potentially high dependency on allied or partner nations – who will inevitably

have their own national priorities and viewpoints – in meeting Canada’s future defence and security challenges. This risk needs to be carefully weighed.

The strategy then needs to define the levels of capability, flexibility, agility, and responsiveness required of the Canadian Armed Forces; i.e., how far, how fast, and with what intended capacities? This question has to be looked at not only in terms of the personnel and hardware required, but also the level of training needed to ensure each force element can deliver the outcomes required, the level of readiness expected (high readiness can be expensive), and the extent and nature of support each requires. Perhaps more importantly, the strategy needs to place the military capabilities of the nation into a broader context of how the government envisages using all instruments of state power (including diplomacy, development assistance, economic levers, etc.) in concert with military forces to achieve the expected defence and security outcomes. Throughout, appropriate resilience to “future shock” events needs to be built in to the strategy and the assessment of the military capabilities required.

Clearly, Canada cannot afford (any more than any other nation) to maintain military forces capable of responding to every conceivable eventuality. Therefore, a prudent and rational assessment of the risks is a necessary part of the process. Risk is generally defined in terms of both probability and likely impact of an event, and those that rate highest on both counts require the greatest focus in terms of ensuring that current and future governments will be capable of providing effective military responses to them should they occur. Lesser risks may be possible to manage or mitigate (or even just accept) with fewer resources.

All of these factors and more need to be considered in crafting a sound defence strategy, and the process will be much stronger and the resulting product superior if it includes consideration of many perspectives, including contrary views. This does not mean that the government needs to have unanimous endorsement for its strategy, just that it needs to have looked at all the perspectives and identified all the major risks.

4. Defining the Defence Capabilities to be Acquired, Maintained or Divested

Only after completing the first three foundational steps is it possible to rationally and objectively determine what military capabilities the nation should acquire or maintain. The process is of course somewhat iterative, with risk assessments done earlier likely needing to be revisited as the hard military and financial implications (the latter to be discussed in step 5 below) are identified and considered. However, it would be a serious mistake to allow affordability issues to distort the strategic foundations laid in the first three steps. If financial (or other) considerations cause gaps between what is determined to be needed and what is politically or fiscally possible, then the solution is not papering over the gaps. It is developing plans for how to deal with them, which could include finding alterna-

tive responses and risk management strategies such as closer collaboration with our US neighbours or others in certain areas.

It is important to remember that defence capabilities are complex and comprise multiple elements (personnel; equipment, supplies and services; infrastructure; and military doctrine and professional military knowledge). These elements all have to be present in an appropriate balance, and the force well trained, integrated and readied, before a defence capability can be considered operationally effective. This means that it is critical for the government to ensure a sustainable balance of resources

“A particular concern is the fact that too much of the defence budget is going towards personnel costs and not enough into the other key elements of capability, especially equipment modernization, training and readiness.”

across the many related elements and activities. A good example of this can be found in Australia’s defence white paper, which includes a “fully-costed and independently-verified investment plan” that ensures alignment between the resources allocated and the intended military force structure.¹³

Canada, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer¹⁴ and others have noted, has created a significant imbalance between the size and scope of its military force structure and the defence budget in recent years. If not addressed in the current defence policy review, this imbalance represents a major risk to the long-term viability of Canada’s defence capabilities. A particular concern is the fact that too much of the defence budget is going towards personnel costs and not enough into the other key elements of capability, especially equipment modernization, training and readiness.

A full discussion of this problem is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, to put some context around it, Figure 1 provides a rough comparison of current defence force size versus defence spending among France, the UK, Australia, the US, and Canada.¹⁵ The spending per Regular Force member in Canada illustrates just how seriously essential equipment modernization, force readiness, and support are being disadvantaged in favour of meeting ongoing personnel costs. This seriously risks the long-term viability of the Canadian Armed Forces as a modern, effective military.

5. Aligning the Policy Ends with the Required Ways and Means

Defence planners across the Western world would love to see this last step as a straightforward financial calculation of the cost of implementing their government’s defence policy. The reality of course is quite different. As in the fourth step, there will inevitably be several revisits of the risk assessments underpinning the defence strategy as well as some re-examination of the capability requirements. Cost and political considerations are always major drivers of defence capability investments.

The most basic question for governments is what proportion of their nation’s treasure should be allo-

FIGURE 1: Defence Resources Comparison of Selected Countries (2015 Budgets)

Country	Regular Force	Defence Budget	Percentage of GDP	Spending per Capita in \$CA	Spending per Regular Force Member in \$CA
France*	215,000	€46.9B	1.9	\$927.69	\$322,200
United Kingdom	149,000	£45.1B	2.0	\$1,160.30	\$576,380
Australia	58,000	\$AS 32.0B	1.8	\$1,321.50	\$522,000
United States	1,430,000	\$US 597.5B	3.3	\$2,456.70	\$552,100
Canada	68,000	\$CA 20.0B	0.9	\$527.28	\$294,120

(Source: author)

***Notes:**

- The French data does not reflect the fact that the country is now going through a significant transition from a reducing to an expanding trend in its defence spending and force structure.
- France has proportionally smaller naval and air forces (which are capital and maintenance intensive) than land and support forces (which are more personnel intensive) than either the UK, Australia, or the US (38 percent of total versus 45 percent or more).
- French force strength and budget data excludes the paramilitary Gendarmerie.

cated to acquiring and maintaining defence capabilities? The most widely used measure is percentage of GDP, and all NATO countries have agreed to a non-binding target for member states of 2 percent of GDP. The 2015 Secretary General's annual report, however, shows that only five of the 28 countries are meeting that target (US, Greece, Poland, UK, France)¹⁶ and, as indicated in the table above, Canada is spending only half this amount.

It does not necessarily follow that Canada should double its defence spending to align with the NATO goal. The country will make its own assessment of its needs. However, that assessment needs to consider not only short-term political considerations around government spending, but also a realistic appraisal of the future implications for the nation of either having or not having adequate military responses to the evolving global security environment. This is why maintaining objective rigour in the first three steps discussed above is so important.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, the tasks military forces are assigned by governments at a given point in time are matters of foreign or national security policy, not defence policy. Defence policy is about the military capabilities the nation intends to acquire, maintain, or divest over time periods extending out a decade or more, and about the resources to be allocated to these purposes. Development of defence policy therefore requires taking an objective, long-term view of the country's enduring international and domestic security interests, and the global and regional risks future governments will need to be capable of responding to.

Canada has at best a chequered history when it comes to developing and implementing defence policies, a chronic problem being a mismatch between governments' stated desire to have viable military capabilities and their willingness to adequately fund them. All Western democracies try to stretch

their defence dollars as far as possible, but in recent years especially Canada has created an unusually large imbalance that, if not addressed, will materially erode the ability of the Canadian Armed Forces to meet the future defence needs of the country.

The current government, to its credit, has acknowledged the need for a comprehensive defence policy review and has begun the process. This paper is aimed at contributing to the review by taking a high-level look at recent similar exercises in four countries – France, the UK, Australia and the US – to see how they were done and assess the outcomes. All four followed relatively similar paths with good (if sometimes imperfect) results, suggesting that Canada can benefit from applying comparable discipline and method to its process for developing a well-founded, rational and durable policy. At the very least, those undertaking the current review, and those seeking to influence it by contributing their own analyses, need to carefully look at these four examples of quite well-developed defence policies.

Whether the current Canadian review follows a similar or different process, the result must be a defence policy that rests upon sound foundational analysis of the current and likely future global security environment, and the military options Canadian governments can reasonably be expected to need over the next ten years or more. It must also define a clear and coherent national strategy for using military forces within an effective whole-of-government and international collaborative framework. Finally, it must clearly define what defence capabilities are required to execute the strategy and how they will be aligned with resources needed to establish and sustain them over the long term. Canada needs, and Canadians deserve, nothing less.

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Notes

1. The previous Conservative government's acquisition of the C-17 strategic airlift fleet in less than two years is an anomaly occasioned by unique circumstances.
2. France, *White Paper on Defence and National Security* (2013), <http://www.rpfrance-otan.org/White-Paper-on-defence-and>. The French version is available at <http://www.rpfrance-otan.org/Le-Livre-blanc-sur-la-defense-et,1209>.
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4. Australia, Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>.
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7. *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*.
8. All three documents can be found at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/>
9. Australia, *First Principles Review – Creating One Defence* (2015), <http://www.defence.gov.au/Publications/Reviews/Firstprinciples/>
10. The most recent version is Canada, Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040* (Ottawa: 2014), http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/mdn-dnd/D4-8-2-2014-eng.pdf.
11. For the latest version, see Ferry de Kerckhove, *The Strategic Outlook for Canada: In search of a new compass* (Ottawa: Conference of Defence Associations Institute, 2016), http://www.cdainstitute.ca/images/Vimy_Papers/Vimy_Paper_27_-_SO2016_English.pdf.
12. A good, concise overview is provided by Professor Patricia Clavin at Oxford University in a chapter she contributed to *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II*, edited by Professor Richard Overy of the University of Exeter (2015, Oxford University Press). Despite its title, the book is a serious historical work and not a 'coffee table decoration.'
13. Tom Ring and David Perry, "Lessons from Australia's defence review," *The Embassy*, 18 March 2016, <http://www.embassynews.ca/opinion/2016/03/18/lessons-from-australias-defence-review/48388>.
14. See the Parliamentary Budget Officer Report: *Fiscal Sustainability of Canada's National Defence Program* (26 March 2015), http://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/files/files/Defence_Analysis_EN.pdf.
15. Data for the table was obtained from Wikipedia and the defence policy documents referenced earlier.
16. *The Secretary-General's Annual Report 2015* (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2015), http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_01/20160128_SG_AnnualReport_2015_en.pdf.

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