



Northern Lights, also known as *Aurora Borealis*, at moonset.

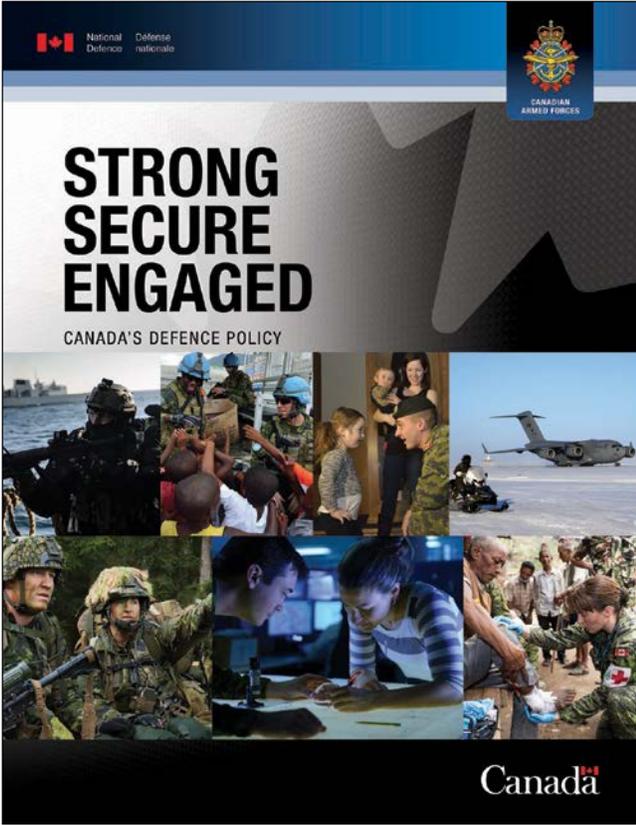
Strong, Secure, Engaged: The Liberal Defence Policy Statement of 2017

by Martin Shadwick

Although scarcely two years old, the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has published, or encouraged the publishing, of an impressive array of defence-themed studies, reports, speeches, and policy statements. To the defence plank in the Liberal campaign platform of 2015, one can add the governmental and non-governmental literature associated with the defence policy consultation process of 2016 (i.e., a 27-page Public Consultation Document, six multiple-topic and three specialized roundtables, “consultation events” hosted by Members of Parliament and assorted non-governmental organizations, numerous formal submissions and 20,000 entries online), the deliberations of a high-level Ministerial Advisory Group, insightful reports by Parliamentary committees, some candid speeches by Minister of National Defence Harjit Sajjan and a particularly oft-cited speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland on 6 June 2017 (given events on an earlier sixth of June, arguably a most appropriate date on which to offer reflections on Canada’s foreign policy priorities). The end product of Ottawa’s defence policy review, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, was, not coincidentally, rolled out

one day later. Noticeably more detailed than its white paper and *de facto* white paper predecessors of recent decades, the copiously illustrated (and alliteration-heavy) policy document promised a “new vision”—and extensive capital investments—for Canada’s armed forces while devoting unprecedented attention to personnel issues and the “health and wellness” needs of serving and retired military personnel. These will be the subject of a follow-on column.

Unconventionally but thoughtfully setting the stage for *Strong, Secure, Engaged* was Chrystia Freeland’s speech—delivered, most appropriately, in the House of Commons—on Canada’s foreign policy priorities in the contemporary world. “Two global conflicts and the Great Depression, all in the span of less than half a century,” noted the minister, “taught our parents and grandparents that national borders must be inviolate; that international trading relationships not only created prosperity but also peace; and that a true world community, one based on shared aspirations and standards, was not only desirable but essential to our very survival. That deep yearning toward lasting peace led to the creation of international institutions that endure to this day—with the nations of Western



Government of Canada

Europe, together with their transatlantic allies, the United States and Canada, at their foundation. In each of these evolutions in how we humans recognize ourselves, Canadians played pivotal roles. [...] It is important to note,” continued the minister, “that when sacrifice was required to support and strengthen the global order—military power, in defence of our principles and our alliances—Canada was there. In the Suez, in Korea, in the Congo, in Cyprus, in the First Gulf War, in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, up to and including today in Iraq, among many other places, Canada has been there. [...] Today, it is worth reminding ourselves why we step up—why we devote time and resources to foreign policy, defence and development, why we have sent Canadian soldiers, sailors, aviators, diplomats, aid workers, intelligence officers, doctors, nurses, medics and engineers into situations of danger, disaster and chaos overseas, even at times when Canadian territory was not directly at risk. Why do we spend billions on defence, if we are not immediately threatened?”

Although one “could easily imagine a Canadian view that says [...] let’s turn inward. Let’s say Canada first. Here’s why that would be wrong. First, though no foreign adversary is poised to invade us, we do face clear challenges. Climate change [...], [c]ivil war, poverty, drought and natural disasters anywhere in the world threaten us as well—not least because [they] spawn globally destabilizing mass migrations. The dictatorship in North Korea, crimes against humanity in Syria, the monstrous extremists of Daesh, and Russian military adventurism and expansionism also all pose clear strategic threats to the liberal democratic world,



KCNA KCNA/Reuters RTSLOPZ

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang, released by Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) 4 August 2016.

including Canada. Our ability to act against such threats is limited. It requires cooperation with like-minded countries. [...] Some think, some even say, we should [take a] free ride on U.S. military power. Why invest billions to maintain a capable, professional, well-funded and well-equipped Canadian military? The answer is obvious: To rely solely on the U.S. national security umbrella would make us a client state. And although we have an incredibly good relationship with our American friends and neighbours, such a dependence would not be in Canada's interest. That is why doing our fair share is clearly necessary. It is why our commitment to NORAD, and our strategic relationship with the United States, is so critical. It is by pulling our weight in this partnership, and in all our international partnerships, that we, in fact, have weight. To put it plainly: Canadian diplomacy and development sometimes requires the backing of hard power. Force is of course always a last resort. But the principled use of force, together with our allies and governed by international law, is part of our history and must be part of our future."

In its assessment of today's "complex, unpredictable security environment," the 2017 defence policy statement, in turn, stressed that "three key security trends will continue to shape events." These trends included: (a) the evolving balance of power (i.e., the "return of major power rivalry, new threats from non-state actors, and challenges in the space and cyber domains [that] have returned deterrence to the centre of defence thinking", a changing Arctic, and numerous challenges to global governance);

(b) the changing nature of conflict (i.e., its growing complexity, the "grey zone" and hybrid warfare, the linkages between inter- and intra-state conflict, global terrorism, the security challenges imposed by climate change, increased weapons proliferation, and the changing nature of peace operations); and (c) the rapid evolution of technology (i.e., the *rise of*, and *challenges to*, the cyber and space domains).

Given the uncertainty and complexity of the global security environment—and its multi-faceted implications for Canada—the country would "continue to invest in a multi-purpose, combat-ready force that is able to act decisively and deliver results across the full spectrum of operations. The roles and missions of the Canadian Armed Forces have traditionally been characterized in geographic terms, with distinct lines drawn between domestic, continental and international responsibilities. The Canadian Armed Forces' commitment to defending Canada and the broader North American continent and contributing to international peace and security will be stronger than ever. However, making sharp distinctions among the missions that fulfill these roles is becoming less and less relevant in the new security environment. The rise of borderless challenges such as terrorism and cyber attacks, the increasingly strong connection between global stability and domestic security and prosperity, and the fact the Canadian Armed Forces is as likely to support broader whole-of-government efforts abroad as it is at home, mean that its three traditional roles are becoming more and more intertwined."



DND photo ET2015-5118-005 by Leading Seaman Ogle Henry

HMCS *Winnipeg* sails the Eastern Atlantic Ocean on ship's transit to Exercise *Trident Juncture* during Operation *Reassurance*, 21 October 2015.



DND photo ET2016-0468-03 by Corporal Carbe Orellana

HMCS *Chicoutimi* escorts People's Liberation Army (Navy) ships visiting Victoria on behalf of the Chinese military, 13 December 2016.

Consequently, the “eight new core missions” of the Canadian Armed Forces identified in the 2017 policy document “must reflect this reality. Instead of being simply divided geographically, they are now also plotted against the spectrum of military options. These missions are all critical to delivering on Canada’s defence objectives, and are not listed in order of priority”: (a) detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on Canada; (b) detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on North America in partnership with the United States, including through NORAD; (c) lead and/or contribute forces to NATO and coalition efforts to deter and defeat adversaries, including terrorists, to support global stability; (d) lead and/or contribute to international peace operations and stabilization missions with the United Nations, NATO and other multilateral partners; (e) engage in capacity building to support the security of other nations and their ability to contribute to security abroad; (f) provide assistance to civil authorities and law enforcement, including counter-terrorism, in support of national security and the security of Canadians abroad; (g) provide assistance to civil authorities and non-governmental partners in responding to international and domestic disasters or major emergencies; and (h) conduct search and rescue operations.

To the relief of Canada’s maritime forces, the 2017 defence plan “fully funds, for the first time, the [...] full complement of 15 Canadian Surface Combatants [CSC] necessary to replace the existing [*Halifax*-class] frigates and retired [*Iroquois*-class] destroyers. Fifteen. Not “up to” 15 and not 12. And definitely not six,” stressed defence minister Sajjan, “which is the number the previous government’s plan would have paid for, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer [has] reported....” The single class of 15 Canadian Surface Combatants, noted a Backgrounder, would be “capable of

meeting multiple threats on both the open ocean and the highly complex [littoral] environment.” The policy statement also pledged to move forward with the inherited plans for two joint support ships and five-to-six Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships. The Trudeau government’s pledge of full funding for the Canadian Surface Combatant—clearly the future backbone of the RCN—represents no small undertaking but, that said, the CSC will require substantial and sustained funding over multiple decades and multiple governments. Whether that will ultimately generate a fleet of 15 comparatively high-end frigates, or something rather less,

remains to be seen—particularly when even major navies have been directed, for financial, political and other reasons, to plan for high/low or high/intermediate mixes of frigates (i.e., the Royal Navy’s Type 26 and projected intermediate Type 31). The commitment to the joint support ships is welcome, but a case can continue to be made for the acquisition of an additional support ship possessing greater multi-role flexibility (i.e., replenishment, sealift, support to forces ashore and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) than either the JSS or the interim ‘*Resolve*-class’ conversion. Such a ship, either a conversion or new-build, would appear to be a logical match for the defence priorities set down by the Trudeau government.

The policy statement also pledged to “modernize the four *Victoria*-class submarines”, acquire “new or enhanced naval intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems, upgraded armament, and additional systems for current and future platforms allowing for more effective offensive and defensive naval capacities” and “upgrade the lightweight torpedoes carried by surface ships, maritime helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft.” The pledge to modernize the four *Victoria*-class submarines has been well-received in some quarters, but some observers have bemoaned the absence of a submarine replacement plan, and, concomitantly, the absence of a rebalancing of the ratio of submarines to major surface combatants in the Canadian fleet.

For the RCAF, the cornerstone of the 2017 defence policy statement was the pledge to replace the aging CF-18 fleet with 88 “advanced fighter aircraft” following an “open and transparent competition.” The new fleet, substantially larger than the 65-strong fighter force envisaged by the Harper government’s



A Canadian Ranger receives an orientation ride on a LAV 6.0 armoured vehicle by members of Land Task Force Pacific in Williams Lake, BC, during Operation *Lentus 17-04*, 25 July 2017.

Canada First Defence Strategy, would help to “counter today’s evolving threat environment,” “improve [Canada’s] air control and attack capability,” and “allow us to fully meet both our NORAD and NATO commitments simultaneously.” In a cryptic passage, the policy statement also reported that the Government of Canada was “continuing to explore the potential acquisition of an interim aircraft to supplement the [legacy] CF-18 fighter aircraft fleet until the completion of the transition to the permanent replacement aircraft...” Dating back, at least in formal terms, to the Trudeau government’s November 2016 announcement that it planned to acquire 18 Boeing F/A-18E/F *Super Hornets*, the interim fighter concept has drawn fire from various quarters, including a plethora of retired air force commanders, for being overtly political, expensive, “strategically unwise” and a wasteful diversion of scarce aircrew and groundcrew (see, for example, John Ivison, “Fighter Jet Deal ‘Makes no Sense,’ Liberals Told,” *National Post*, 23 February 2017). In a 2017 survey conducted by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, fully 88 percent of the defence specialist respondents rejected the interim *Super Hornet* proposal. Should, however, the Trudeau government wish to reconsider the interim fighter option, it may have been provided with a most convenient out by Boeing’s decision to ask the United States Department of Commerce and International Trade Commission to investigate subsidies for Bombardier’s C-Series airliner.

In addition to the 88 advanced fighter aircraft, the 2017 defence policy statement pledged to: (a) replace the CC-150 *Polaris* with a next generation strategic air-to-air tanker-transport; (b) replace the CP-140 *Aurora* with a next generation multi-mission ISR aircraft (one trusts that Ottawa will resist, as the first Trudeau government did in the mid- 1970s, political and industrial lobbying for a superficially attractive but operationally and financially suspect made-in-Canada solution to maritime patrol/ISR requirements); (c) replace the CC-138 *Twin Otter* utility transport aircraft; (d) acquire new short-range and medium-range air-to-air missiles; (e) invest in medium-altitude remotely piloted systems; (f) “sustain domestic search and rescue capability, to include life extension of existing systems, acquisition of new platforms, and greater integration with internal and external partners”; and (g) “operationalize the newly-acquired Fixed-Wing Search and Rescue [i.e., C295W] fleet”. The defence policy statement also pledged to: (h) upgrade/life-extend, to varying degrees, the CH-149 *Cormorant* SAR helicopter, the CC-130J *Hercules* airlifter, and the CH-146 *Griffon* utility tactical transport helicopter; (i) “acquire space capabilities meant to improve situational awareness and targeting, including replacement of the current RADARSAT system[...]; sensors capable of identifying and tracking debris in space that threatens Canadian and allied space-based systems[...]; and space-based systems that will enhance and improve tactical narrow- and wide-band communications, including throughout

Canada’s Arctic region;” (j) upgrade air navigation, management and control systems; (k) acquire new aircrew training systems; and (l) “acquire new Tactical Integrated Command, Control, and Communications, radio cryptography, and other necessary communications systems.”

Although devoid of a CSC or fighter-like megaproject, the capital investments projected for the Canadian Army—which “will recapitalize *many* [emphasis added] core capabilities”—are deemed by the 2017 policy statement as “fundamental to [the army’s] future effectiveness as a combat-ready force.” *Strong, Secure, Engaged* seeks to: (a) acquire “ground-based air defence systems and associated munitions capable of protecting all land-based force elements from enemy airborne weapons;” (b) acquire a new multi-purpose anti-armour, anti-structure weapon system; (c) procure 20,000 new assault rifles; (d) upgrade the light armoured vehicle fleet “to improve mobility and survivability;” (e) replace the family of armoured combat support vehicles, including command vehicles, ambulances and mobile repair teams vehicles; (f) modernize logistics vehicles, heavy engineer equipment and light utility vehicles; (g) acquire “all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and larger tracked semi-amphibious utility vehicles optimized for use in the Arctic environment;” (h) acquire “communications, sustainment, and survivability equipment” for the Army light forces, including improved lightweight radios and soldier equipment; (i) modernize land-based command and control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; (j) improve “the Army’s ability to operate in remote regions by investing in

modernized communications, shelters, power generation, advanced water purification systems, and equipment for austere environments;” (k) acquire new night vision and related systems; and (l) modernize “the fleet of Improvised Explosive Device Detection and Defeat capabilities.”

Lengthy and eclectic, the capital investment list identified by the 2017 defence policy statement provides a useful—if sobering—insight into the capability gaps and deficiencies that have developed over recent years and decades in the Canadian Army. That said, the number of references to “light forces,” expanded “light forces capability” and “light” vehicles will raise concerns in some quarters over the future of heavy armour (i.e., the *Leopard C2* main battle tank).

In addition to adding 605 personnel to Canada’s Special Operations Forces—an eminently sensible enhancement, given the high operational tempo of SOF formations—the 2017 defence policy statement pledged to: (a) “acquire airborne ISR platforms” (long-mooted and potentially quite useful, but with a number of potentially awkward intelligence-gathering and domestic privacy implications); (b) “recapitalize existing commercial pattern, SUV-type armoured vehicles”; (c) “modernize and enhance [SOF] Command, Control and Communications information systems, and computer defence networks”; and (d) “enhance next generation [SOF] integrated soldier system equipment, land mobility, and maritime mobility and fighting vehicle platforms.”



DND photo YK-2016-036-004 by Petty Officer 2nd Class Belinda Groves

Aerial photograph of Nunavut, taken from a CC-177 *Globemaster III* aircraft during Operation *Nevus*, 10 June 2016.

Other initiatives outlined in the 2017 policy document focused upon the future of the reserves, the bolstering of academic outreach (i.e., \$4.5 million per year for a “revamped and expanded defence engagement program, including collaborative networks of experts, a new scholarship program, and an “expansion of the existing expert briefing series and engagement grant program”), an enhanced presence in the Arctic and improvements in the defence procurement system. While noting that “the Reserve Force has a long history of making important contributions to the Canadian Armed Forces across the spectrum of operations, most recently during the Afghan conflict,” the policy statement posited that “fundamental changes are necessary for the Reserve Force to meet its full operational potential.” Reserve Force units and formations would consequently be assigned “new roles that provide full-time capability to the Canadian Armed Forces through part-time service,” including light urban search and rescue, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defence, combat capabilities such as direct fire, mortar and pioneer platoons, cyber operators, intelligence operators, naval security teams, and linguists. Existing roles assigned to the reserves, including information operations, combat support and combat service support, and air operations support technicians, would be enhanced. There is much of merit in this list, although there could be nervousness in some reserve quarters over an apparent shift to niche specialization.

In the Arctic, new initiatives included “enhancing the mobility, reach and footprint of the Canadian Armed Forces...to support operations, exercises, and the Canadian Armed Forces’ ability to project force into the region,” aligning the Canadian Air Defence Identification Zone (CADIZ) with our sovereign airspace, enhancing and expanding “the training and effectiveness of the Canadian Rangers to improve their functional capabilities within the Canadian Armed Forces,” collaborating “with the United States on the development of new technologies to improve surveillance and control, including the renewal of the North Warning System,” and conducting “joint exercises with Arctic allies and partners and support the strengthening of situational awareness and information sharing in the Arctic, including with NATO.” Those and related declarations, suggested Arctic authority Rob Huebert, underscored a shift from a sovereignty-focused approach to the Arctic to a security-focused approach. In a quest for “effective” defence procurement—which, the 2017 defence policy statement correctly observed, was “essential for ensuring public trust”—new initiatives included reducing “project

development and approval time in the Department of National Defence by at least 50 percent for low-risk and low-complexity projects through improved internal coordination, increased delegation and strengthened approval processes” and growing and professionalizing “the defence procurement workforce in order to strengthen the capacity to manage the acquisition and support of today’s complex military capabilities.” Increased transparency and timeliness of communication with both the defence industry and the public would also be pursued.

Initial reaction to the 2017 policy statement from defence analysts and other stakeholders was predictably mixed, ranging from near-universal endorsements for its attention to “health and wellness,” to assorted complaints over a perceived lack of detail at some junctures, a perceived lack of specificity regarding defence policy priorities, and the somewhat unorthodox sequencing of the ‘chapters’ in the defence policy statement. The overwhelming focus of attention, however, was the adequacy (or otherwise) of the additional funding promised by the Trudeau government. A *Globe and Mail* editorial of 7 June 2017 adopted a middle path, lamenting that the aim of the new defence plan “is to allow the Canadian [Armed] Forces, a decade from now, to be able to do roughly what the Canadian [Armed] Forces were doing, a decade ago” while acknowledging that the Trudeau government “nevertheless is promising to spend more on defence—not less. It is promising to reverse the decline in the Canadian [Armed] Forces, not accelerate it. And it’s promising to greenlight the two biggest ticket items, fighter jets and [combatant] ships, despite huge price tags and massive cost escalation. This is not nothing.” Indeed, as the defence minister noted, the defence budget would grow, on a cash basis, from \$18.9 billion in 2016-17 to \$32.7 billion in 2026-27. These figures, he added, did not include the costs of future major operations or NORAD modernization. Further substantial injections of new money would appear post-2026-27. In many respects, though, the real question may not be the total amount of new funding—important as that is—but the *speed* with which the new monies actually arrive.

Martin Shadwick *has taught Canadian Defence Policy at York University in Toronto for many years. He is a former editor of Canadian Defence Quarterly, and he is the resident Defence Commentator for the Canadian Military Journal.*

