

The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

## Defence and the 2015 Election

by Martin Shadwick

**T**he federal election campaign of 2015—truly one of the most entertaining and stimulating in Canadian political history—secured a solid majority government for Justin Trudeau’s resurgent Liberals, reduced the now ‘Stephen Harper-less’ Conservatives to Official Opposition status (albeit with a not-unimpressive complement of 99 Members of Parliament) and returned the New Democratic Party of Thomas Mulcair (which had, to its own astonishment, vaulted to Official Opposition status during the tenure of Jack Layton in the 2011 election) to third party status. If the campaign witnessed an unusually eclectic range of issues—from leadership styles and Senate scandals, to Bill C-51, the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, and the debate over the niqab—it also marked a campaign shaped, as Michael Coates of Hill & Knowlton Strategies noted in the *Globe and Mail*, by an equally eclectic range of campaign “... mistakes by the Conservatives: ads that lowered expectations about Justin Trudeau’s readiness to govern; a historically long campaign, part of which was conducted during the [Senator] Duffy trial; a debate strategy designed to show Mr. Trudeau as weak and ineffectual; and using the niqab as a wedge issue. They all appear to have failed.”

Although by no means a determining factor in the decision-making of Canadian voters, it was heartening to note the enhanced visibility of foreign policy—over trade issues, over Canadian participation in the anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and Syria, over refugee admissions from the Middle East, and over Liberal and NDP criticism that the Conservatives had strayed mightily (and most imprudently) from the post-Second World War foundations of Canadian foreign policy—in the 2015 campaign. An excellent Munk Debate on foreign affairs made an important contribution in this regard. Defence policy *per se* did not fair quite so well in terms of overall visibility—hardly surprising, given the plethora of domestic and other issues—but did manage to rise somewhat above the cameo appearance level of recent federal election campaigns.

In the 2015 campaign, the projected Liberal defence policy flowed from a broader conviction that Canada’s “influence and presence on the world stage” had “steadily diminished” during the Harper era: “Instead of working with other countries constructively at the United Nations, the Harper Conservatives have turned their backs on the UN and other multilateral institutions, while also weakening Canada’s military, our diplomatic service, and our development programs.” Whether “confronting climate change, terrorism and radicalization, or international conflicts,

the need for effective Canadian diplomacy has never been greater than it is today. Our plan will restore Canada as a leader in the world. Not only to provide greater security and economic growth for Canadians, but because Canada can make a real and valuable contribution to a more peaceful and prosperous world.”

“As the world grows more complex and interconnected, what happens outside our borders has become increasingly important in the lives of Canadians,” posited the Liberal campaign platform. “Our security, prosperity, and well-being will depend on how we navigate this period of global change. An important element of Canada’s history—and our continued engagement with the world—is our military capabilities and contributions: to the defence of Canada, to the defence of North America, to United Nations peace operations, to disaster relief, and when necessary, to combat missions.” “Years of neglect by Stephen Harper,” however, have left “the Forces...in a state of stagnation. After a heroic, ten-year engagement in Afghanistan, very little has been done to prepare the Forces for its post-Afghanistan future. The...Conservatives have provided little vision, plan, or needed cultural changes. Funding has been erratic, promised increases to the military have been scaled back, and over \$10 billion of funding—allocated by Parliament—has been left unspent.” Defence procurement has become “paralyzed”, leading to repeated delays, equipment breakdowns, greater risks to military personnel, and “a failure to create jobs and economic growth” in Canadian industry. In addition, “training and readiness have been dramatically reduced across all lines of service, spare parts are lacking, and little has happened on transformation initiatives to reduce overhead so that new investments can be made in readiness.” A Liberal government would “immediately begin an open and transparent review process” to create a new white paper on defence

and “maintain current National Defence spending levels, including current planned increases.”

Key priorities of a Liberal government would include: (a) “developing the Canadian Armed Forces into an effective, agile, responsive, and well-equipped military force that can appropriately respond to a spectrum of operations within a whole of government context,” including defence of Canada, defence of North America, support during natural disasters, international deterrence, humanitarian support missions, peace operations, and combat capability;” (b) “collaborating with the United States in the defence of North America under NORAD and contributing to regional defence within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;” (c) “ensuring that all equipment acquisitions operate with vastly improved timelines and vigorous Parliamentary oversight while providing “decisive” and “accountable” Cabinet “leadership to drive major programs to a timely and successful conclusion;” (d) “renewing” the “focus on surveillance and control of Canadian territory and approaches, particularly our Arctic regions, including an increase in the size of the Canadian Rangers; and (e) “supporting international peace and security operations, as well as humanitarian support missions with the United Nations or regional partners...” The *Promoting International Peace and Security* component of the Liberal platform added that “we will recommit to supporting international peace operations with the United Nations, and will make our *specialized* [emphasis added] capabilities—from mobile medical teams to engineering support to aircraft that can carry supplies and personnel—available on a case-by-case basis,” “provide well-trained personnel that can be quickly deployed, including mission commanders, staff officers, and headquarters units,” and “lead an international effort to improve and expand the training of military and civilian personnel deployed on peace operations.”



DND photo GD2015-0100-04

RCAF members of air Task Force-Iraq and several members of the coalition participate in the *Shamal Serials*, a combat search-and-rescue exercise held for personnel of the Middle East Stabilization Force, then-conducting operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in a training area in Kuwait, 16 March 2015.

Other priorities including “assisting in domestic security and natural disaster responses, both national and international,” “increasing the capacities of regional and local partners to prevent the spread of terrorism and radicalization by vastly increased training assistance missions,” and conducting a “thorough review” of existing measures to protect Canadians and critical infrastructure elements from cyber-threats.” To address the need for “more teeth and less tail,” the Liberals also pledged to implement the recommendations made in the Canadian Forces’ report on transformation.

As a “key procurement priority” the Liberals would “fast track and expand the capital renewal of the Royal Canadian Navy.” “Additional ship requirements identified through our review will be funded by choosing to replace the existing CF-18 [fighter aircraft] with a more affordable aircraft than the [F-35].” This commitment to naval revitalization—which included surface combatants, supply ships and Arctic and offshore patrol ships (construction of a sixth AOPS was also pledged during the campaign)—would “ensure that the [RCN] is able to operate as a blue water fleet well into the future.” Other procurement priorities included new search and rescue aircraft, long-range surveillance UAVs, and a “variety” of Army projects. A Liberal government would “not purchase the F-35 stealth fighter-bomber. The primary mission of our fighter aircraft will remain the defence of North America. We will immediately launch an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18 that will exclude requirements that do not reflect Canada’s interests, such as first-strike stealth capabilities. We will reduce the financial procurement envelope for replacing the CF-18s. Instead of budgeting for the acquisition of 65 F-35s, we will plan to purchase an equal or greater number of lower priced, but equally effective, replacement aircraft.” In a move that placed the Liberals firmly in the middle of the Conservative and New Democratic Party positions on the issue, the campaign document reaffirmed an earlier decision to end Canada’s “combat mission in Iraq” and refocus “Canada’s military contribution in the region on the training of local forces.”

Like the Liberals, the New Democrats lamented the direction of Canadian foreign policy during the Harper era. “The country that the Conservatives are projecting onto the world stage is no

longer recognizable to many of the countries we have worked with closely over the decades, and it’s no longer recognizable to us as Canadians.” Canada’s role in the world in the past [ten] years, suggested the NDP, “has become one where we lecture foreign governments at the United Nations and stymie progress to tackle climate change.” An “NDP government would work as an even-handed, fair arbiter abroad with a renewed focus on the UN and other international institutions.” Consistent with that observation was a pledge to “get us back to being [number one] in peacekeeping again. The NDP will work to increase our contribution to UN peacekeeping missions every year so Canada can become the top western contributor to peacekeeping. The NDP will also seek to contribute personnel who can play a leadership role and prioritize the contribution of personnel to situations requiring advanced linguistic, logistical and intercultural expertise.”

“After almost a decade in government,” suggested the NDP, “the Conservatives have failed to effectively manage the Department of National Defence, and have left the Canadian Armed Forces with a legacy of outdated equipment, bungled procurements, and a shameful disregard for CAF members when they need help.” A “new vision” was consequently required “to ensure that our military can defend Canada, protect Canadians, and contribute to international peace and security with an agile, well-equipped first-class force.” As a result of Conservative cuts, “already long overdue new equipment purchases are being delayed for years. The attempt to sole-source the F-35... while hiding the full costs was just one of several major procurement failures on the Conservatives’ watch.” To redress these and other deficiencies, the New Democrats pledged to: (a) draft a new “Defence White Paper by 2016 to articulate a clear strategic vision for the Canadian Armed Forces and Canada’s defence policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”; (b) provide Canada’s armed forces with “the personnel, equipment and training they need to defend Canada and protect Canadians”; and (c) “meet our military commitments by maintaining Department of National Defence budget allocations.”

The NDP also pledged to “launch a comprehensive review”, as part of the projected white paper, “to determine how best to meet Canada’s needs in the replacement of our aging fleet of [CF-18s], and ensure that any new program is subject to a competitive process,” implement a “fair and open process for military purchasing, ensuring that Canadians get the most competitive price and that military personnel get what they need,” improve our search and rescue systems “to meet international standards with respect to response times, and ensure our capabilities are sufficient to meet the needs of the North,” and “increase transparency within the Department of National Defence through the creation of the Office of the Inspector General.” The New Democrats also reaffirmed their intention to “end the ineffective combat mission in Iraq and Syria and redirect Canada’s resources to saving the lives of civilians displaced by the conflict.”



Royal Canadian Navy Public Affairs

The most up-to-date rendering of the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ship (AOPS).

The Conservatives—as is usually the case with incumbents—fashioned much of their foreign and defence policy campaign planks around staunch reaffirmations of existing policy, including the retention of the combat and training missions in Iraq and the rebuilding of the “core combat capabilities” of the Canadian Armed Forces following “a decade of darkness under the Liberals.” Canada’s military air transport, sovereignty surveillance and army combat capacities, states the Conservative platform, “have all been strengthened.” The document also notes that the Harper government has “taken the steps needed to rebuild the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard through the comprehensive National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy worth some \$35 billion.” It adds that the Harper government’s support for defence also includes an “\$11.8 billion, ten-year increase to the Department of National Defence’s budget to ensure that Canada can continue to field a combat-ready military to serve at home and abroad.”

The defence plank contained pledges to increase the size of Canada’s Special Operations Forces by almost 35 percent by 2022, to increase the number of reservists by 15 percent—thereby “bringing the Reserves’ total strength to 30,000 in the next four years”—and to re-establish the *Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean* as “a full, degree-granting post-secondary institution similar to RMC in Kingston.” It also pledged to build on recent decisions to expand “the Navy and the Coast Guard’s capacity to conduct [search and rescue] operations as well as oversee response to marine pollution incidents in the Vancouver Harbour area” by “rebuilding and expanding Royal Canadian Navy reserve division base HMCS *Discovery* in Vancouver, positioning it to become a major [maritime] joint operations centre for the Royal Canadian

Navy and the Canadian Coast Guard.” In an unorthodox move, the Conservative defence plank devoted attention to the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway System, arguing that it was “imperative” that the RCN “have a presence on these waters” given “the vital importance of this system to our national economy, and the access that it provides to our most populated areas as well as Canada’s industrial heartland...” A re-elected Conservative government would consequently “build on our commitment to national security by commissioning four [RCN] patrol vessels to be dedicated to the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway.” The vessels would also be available for Naval Reserve training.

The defence component of the Liberal platform offered some most intriguing initiatives, not least the pledge to redirect some monies from fighter aircraft procurement to naval rejuvenation, but overall spending on national defence will continue to face tough (and understandable) competition with other Liberal pledges and priorities at a time when the Canadian economy is less than healthy. The decision to eschew the F-35 in favour of a lower-cost alternative will generate no little controversy for the Trudeau government, in part because informed people of goodwill differ over questions of cost (both acquisition and operating), the utility, viability and cost-effectiveness of stealth technologies (there is a view in some RCAF and DND quarters that stealth will in due course be required for domestic air defence and air sovereignty applications, let alone for expeditionary operations), the overall performance of the F-35, the lack of a second engine in the Arctic and maritime operating environments faced by Canadian fighter pilots, the degree of required interoperability with allies, and over short, medium, and long-term industrial and regional benefits



DND photo CPA02-2015-0213-069

Canadian Army reservists from 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division medical units unload a simulated casualty from a CH-146 *Griffon* helicopter during Exercise *Stalwart Guardian*, 21 August 2015.



© Boeing/B142162

An artist's depiction of the Boeing *Advanced Super Hornet*, the *F/A-18F Super Hornet*, and the *EA-18G Growler* in formation flight.

(i.e., those that could be lost in the absence of a Canadian F-35 order and those that could be gained through the acquisition of another fighter aircraft). It is also relevant to note that the F-35 will be in production well into the future, thereby spreading deliveries and procurement costs over an extended period of time. Putative contenders, such as the *Super Hornet*, *Typhoon* and *Rafale* will leave production much sooner, thereby necessitating a comparatively prompt decision by Canada and an early injection of substantial funding. The degree to which upgraded versions of the less expensive—but still far from inexpensive—competitors should figure in Canadian calculations could also prove vexing. Should Canada, for example, opt for an essentially stock *F/A-18E/F Super Hornet* or pursue the upgraded, but somewhat more expensive, *Advanced Super Hornet*? Similarly, would a parallel purchase of a modest number of *EA-18G Growlers* be prudent?

The broader defence policy implications of foregoing the F-35 are no less intriguing. Some analysts, such as James Drew of Flightglobal, have interpreted the Liberal plans to jettison the F-35, withdraw the CF-18 from combat operations in Iraq and Syria, stress the defence of North America as the “primary mission” of Canadian fighter aircraft, and in general renew the focus on surveillance and control of Canadian territory and approaches, particularly in the Arctic, as part of a deliberate “de-emphasizing” of the RCAF’s “expeditionary combat role” in favour of homeland defence. This, he suggests, could generate

concomitant requirements for an AWACS-type capability (i.e., the Boeing E-7), long-range UAVs, new tankers, and a replacement for the CP-140 *Aurora*.

Also awaited with particular interest will be the forthcoming white paper’s analysis of “international peace and security operations,” “international peace operations,” “humanitarian support missions,” and disaster relief, as well as the place of “specialization” in these fields of endeavour. The white paper’s analyses and definitions will have obvious and potentially far-reaching implications for Canadian defence policy as a whole, but they will also have ramifications for defence procurement. The new government might, for example, find it prudent to examine the utility—and potential enhancements to improve the utility—of the projected *Queenston*-class joint support ships in these areas. Also worthy of exploration in this regard would be the long-term retention of the ex-*Asterix* or the acquisition for the RCN of a true joint support ship.

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.*



Project Resolve Inc. © Chantier Davie Canada Inc

Artist rendering of *Resolve*-Class AOR.



© ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems GmbH

Wasserbild Canada JSS submission by Thyssen Canada.