

Back to the Future? The Tale of Two Trudeaus and Their Defence Policies

by Myles Erickson

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Introduction

The election of Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister of Canada in 2015 presented Canada's first case in which a father and son have both assumed the position of Prime Minister. Despite a nearly 50-year time difference between the two 'prime ministerships,' their first terms were strikingly similar in several ways. Each Prime Minister took office with a majority Liberal Party government. For Pierre Trudeau, 58.7% of the vote;¹ for Justin Trudeau, 54.4%.² As well, for each Prime Minister, their respective election victories came after two Prime Ministers – Lester B Pearson and Stephen Harper

respectively – from whom each Trudeau sought to distinguish themselves. Both Trudeaus had to manage outspoken, charismatic, and domestically- divisive Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon and Donald Trump. Additionally, both men led at a time when the geopolitical climate was evolving. For 'Trudeau Senior,' Cold War détente had ended. Canada was wedged between two superpowers that seemed determined to destroy the other. Proxy wars were the norm, political unrest was rife, and world economies were shaky. In 2015, Canada and 'Trudeau Junior' found themselves in an increasingly-multipolar world, with Russia and China growing as 'near-peer' competitors to the United States, adversary states like North Korea becoming increasingly emboldened, and with regional powers in Asia and South America playing an increased role in global politics. Both Prime Ministers released defence policies within the first two years of being in office: 1971's White Paper *Defence in the '70s, (D70s)*, and 2017's *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy (SSE)*. This article intends to compare and contrast these two defence policies.

I argue that their defence policy positions on the United States, on adversaries, and upon international organizations bear a striking resemblance, due more to geopolitical context and Canada's position within the world, rather than upon political ideology or familial connection.

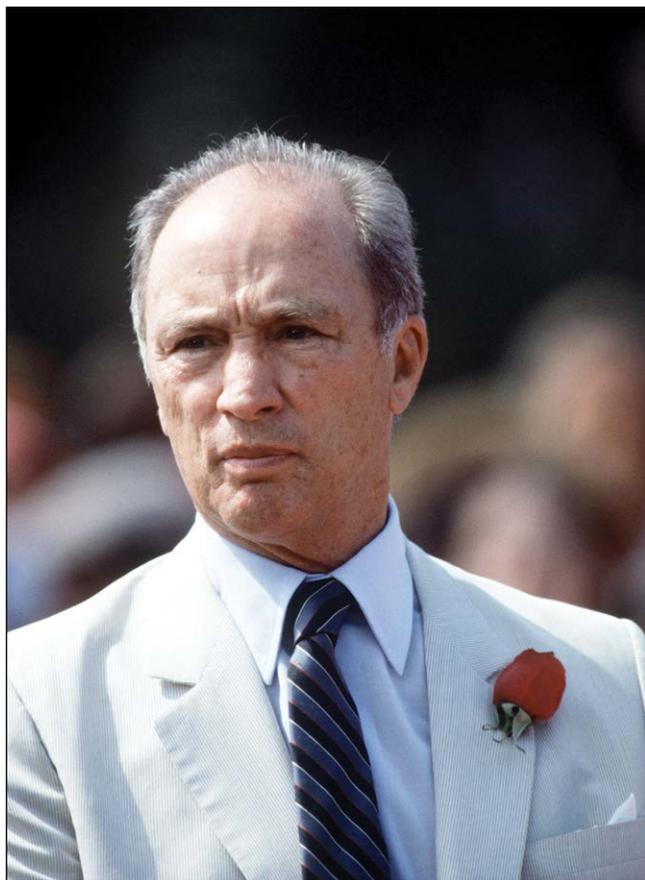
The front cover of each policy gives a hint as to priorities of the day. The *D70s* cover portrays three Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) members, seen walking in Arctic gear, away from a transport aircraft. Where *SSE* establishes a human-centered model, *D70s* instead establishes a state-centered model of defence. It begins with an overview of the geopolitical context, and orients Canada within that context. The 'Protection of Canada' is the first substantive chapter, followed by the Defence of North America, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.³ This organization is relatively traditional – orientating defence and security, centered upon the protection of the state and state interests. Focusing upon the defence of Canada, North America and beyond, *Defence in the '70s* discusses very little of how to better provide for its service members beyond better equipping them for defence and security.

By contrast, *Strong, Secure, Engaged's* cover shows service members in various settings, regions, and circumstances. Whether providing humanitarian aid, in armed conflict, or at home with friends and family, *SSE* seeks to improve conditions for Canada and its armed forces. *SSE* is a human-centered policy, one that orientates itself around the well-being of its members and of

those it intends to protect. The first chapter, "Well-Supported, Diverse, Resilient People and Families," sets guidelines on reintegrating retired service members into the work force and civilian life, promoting a culture of diversity and inclusivity (including guidelines to better investigate the issues of sexual violence within the Canadian Armed Forces), and better supporting the families of service members.⁴ This is the first published instance of service members coming first in a defence policy. Generally, as in *Defence in the 70s*, threats are first addressed in terms of adversaries, changing geopolitics, and so on. In *SSE*, the concept of potential threats has evolved to include the well-being of the Armed Forces itself. *SSE* also establishes defence and security around the defence of people. It states: "...people are at the core of Canada's new vision for defence." This is a relatively new development, as defence policy in the past, such as *Defence in the 70s*, orientated itself around the state.

Prime Ministers and Their Presidents

While the defence relationship between Canada and the United States (CANUS) has been relatively stable since the 1940 signing of the Ogdensburg Agreement, which created the Permanent Joint Board on Defense (PJBD), to guide and advise both capitals on the defence of North America, the relationship has experienced its highs and lows. Allies in the two global wars of the 20th Century, both were original parties to NATO and partners in NORAD, the CANUS defence relationship has been the envy of many states. And yet, there have been serious disagreements, especially between certain Prime Ministers and Presidents. Both Trudeaus have had to manage mercurial, Republican Presidents whose views on many topics are ideologically juxtaposed to their Liberal views.



Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Trudeau.



US President Richard Nixon.

Despite the ideological divide, Pierre Trudeau and Richard Nixon found mutual respect for one another. Despite Nixon claiming Trudeau was an “ass****,” recorded on one of the famous ‘Nixon Tapes,’⁵ Nixon viewed Trudeau with a certain sense of admiration. Distinguished Canadian historians Robert Bothwell and Jack Granatstein note that Nixon’s crude comment likely had less to do with his view of Trudeau and more with his style: “...profane when he wanted to make a point.”⁶ American appreciation of Pierre Trudeau extended beyond the President, as many American diplomats viewed Trudeau as brilliant despite being “... impatient with his advice at times, sermonizing, and his needles.”⁷ Henry Kissinger notes in his book *White House Years* that the two leaders were not “...ideally suited for each other... Trudeau was bound to evoke all of Nixon’s resentments against ‘swells,’ who in his view, had always looked down on him.”⁸ Despite this, Kissinger states, “...when they worked together, Trudeau treated Nixon without any hint of condescension and Nixon accorded Trudeau both respect and attention. They worked together without visible strain.” In his memoirs, Pierre Trudeau states: “In our dealings, I can’t say there was any warmth of feeling on either side. We did business together. I felt I could have empathy for his problems in governing one of the world’s superpowers, though I didn’t feel warmly towards him as a person.” Despite this inability to connect on a personal basis, the two were able to develop a working relationship based upon mutual respect.

“Despite the ideological divide, Pierre Trudeau and Richard Nixon found mutual respect for one another.”

Defence in the 70s needed to respond to the 1971 Nixon ‘shocks,’ which dramatically impacted the Canadian economy, Trudeau’s visit to the Soviet Union in 1971 which enraged Nixon, and Canada’s reluctance to provide direct troop support to the Vietnam War (both in terms of military and diplomatic support) placed considerable strain on the relationship. While the leaders’ relationship was cordial, the policy within *Defence in the 70s* reflects these tensions, with the document suggesting Canada’s desire to begin defending itself on its terms, without the then considerable influence of American military interests.

Nuclear war was a distinct possibility in the 1970s. *D70s* noted that Canada is “...inevitably closely associated with the United States. Even if no warheads landed on Canada in the event of general nuclear war, a strategic attack on the US... would have cataclysmic consequences for this country.” Therefore, it concluded, “...co-operation with the United States in North American defence will remain essential so long as our joint security depends on stability in the strategic military balance.”

This language of affirmation in *D70s* is far different from *SSE*, mainly because the threat of nuclear war was more muted in 2017. For instance, priorities in *D70s* emphasize “co-operation” with the United States, as opposed to the *SSE*, which highlights a “renewed defence partnership” with the United States. The relationship with the United States by 1971 is reluctant at best – one in which Canada would rather not have to deal with the US, but knows that it must do so. *D70s* states that the central national aim of the policy

was to ensure “... that Canada will continue secure as an independent political entity.” This overriding aim ensured that Canada would see itself distinct from the United States and any international defence organization. However, *Defence in the 70s* states that Canada’s involvement in nuclear war would be due to “consequence of geography.” With this, economic restraints and the “present state of weapons technology” placed Canada into a necessary partnership with the United States. 1971’s subtle reluctance in language can be due to several possible reasons. For one,



Richard Nixon and Pierre Trudeau in a 1972 meeting.

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while the policy states that deterrence is essential in the prevention of nuclear war between the global superpowers, it is always equally likely that, due to the nuclear balance of power, the likelihood of global nuclear annihilation was slim. Because of this, Canada did not need the United States as much as it may have ten years previously, when the balance of power was more precarious. Thus, because the Canadian government did not feel it needed the United States as it much as in the past, its cynicism towards the relationship was shining through clearer in a time of reduced existential threat.

Defence in the 70s envisioned Canada's relationship with the United States entirely different from the 2017 Defence policy. Today, the relationship between Justin Trudeau and Donald Trump has experienced its peaks and valleys. Conflict regarding trade (the renegotiations and resigning of the Canada-US-Mexico Trade Agreement (CUSMA)) and military spending (Donald Trump's insistence on NATO allies spending near 2% of GDP on defence) have led to a difficult relationship. It has indeed led to statements by Donald Trump calling Justin Trudeau "dishonest and weak" as well as "meek and mild."⁹ These statements perhaps reflect less a struggling relationship between the two leaders and instead reflect

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the up-to-the-minute cycle of information, as well as the brash and theatrical nature of Donald Trump's social media strategy. Despite this, Trudeau has sought to deepen ties with Trump, with the resigning of CUSMA signifying that the relationship was not 'dead in the water.' The 2017 Defence policy reflects this desire to deepen ties with the United States, evidenced by Canada's investments into the NORAD binational and other US-led collective defence organizations.

Despite a tumultuous relationship between Justin Trudeau and Trump, *SSE* unquestionably considers the United States as Canada's stalwart ally, and consistently works to reaffirm the relationship. *SSE* emphatically declares: "Canada's defence partnership with the United States remains integral to continental security and the United States continues to be Canada's most important military ally." After discussing the people-first platform in the first chapter, *SSE* follows the standard form of defence policies (as does *D70s*), starting by defence of Canadian borders. It follows by discussing the defence of North America broadly, particularly through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD); and finally the relationship of Canada and collective defence and collective security organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations. This clear order of importance, Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow Lindsay Rodman argues, signifies Canada's focus upon US-Canada relations to American readers, and any sign of Canada seeking alternative military partners from the United States is doubtful at best.¹⁰



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Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau.



White House Photo/Alamy Stock Photo HXDHDR

US President Donald Trump.

It is vital to acknowledge that the reinvigoration of Canada's partnership with the United States is also represented by Canada's investment in NORAD, and, within the 2017 Defence policy, the importance of NORAD and concomitant spending is particularly emphasized. The policy re-articulates Canadian interests, centred upon being "...active in a renewed partnership in NORAD and with the United States." In that, the Defence policy states that the defence team will "expand Canada's capacity to meet NORAD commitments by improving aerospace and maritime domain awareness," as well as ensuring NORAD is "fully prepared to confront rapidly evolving threats." However, these promises neglect to state dollar figures in the investment in NORAD, limiting their substantive weight. While these promises are relatively vague, they confirm that Canada's active investment is in its relationship with the United States.

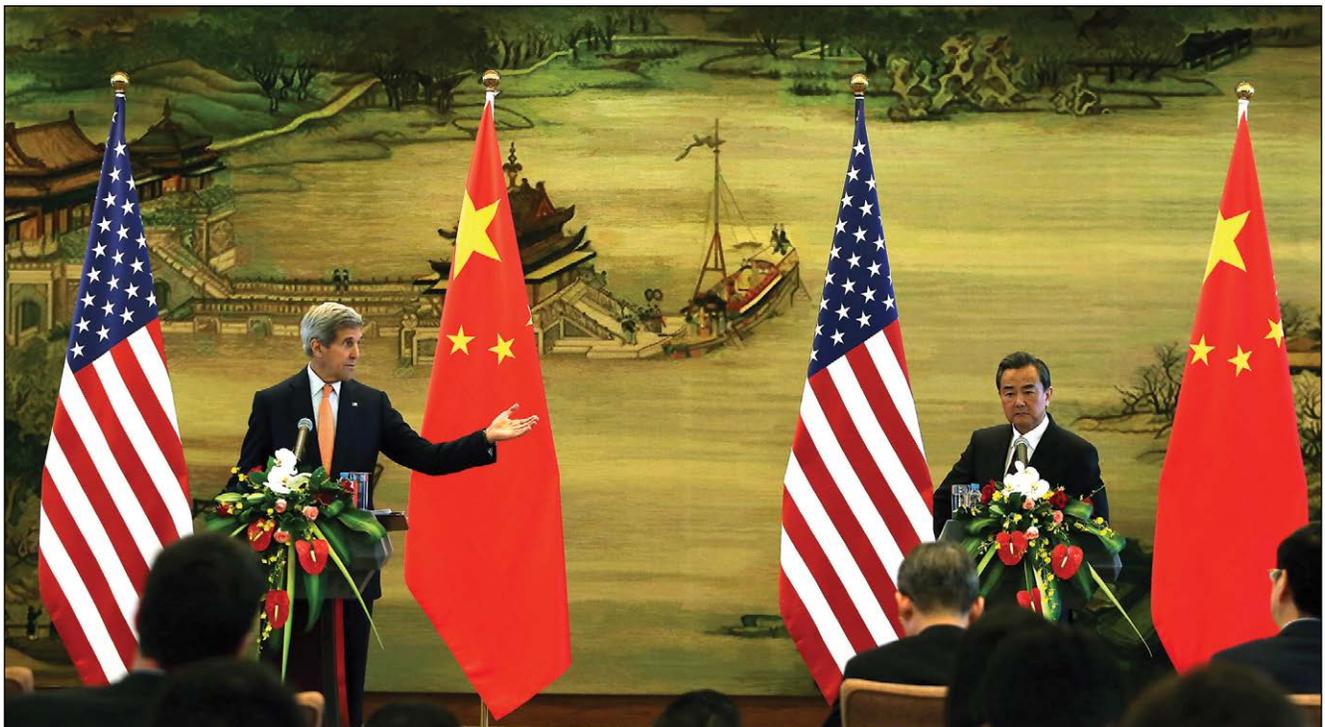
Canada in an Evolving World

SSE suggests that the global strategic environment, while increasingly multi-polar, is dominated presently by a United States hegemony. *SSE* declares: "...the United States is still unquestionably the only superpower." The nuances in U.S. definitions between 1971 and 2017 are noteworthy. 1971 appears to view the United States as a global power, but analyzes it in terms of its position as the regional power. 2017 unequivocally declares the United States the global superpower, and does little to explain it beyond such. 2017 additionally argues: "China is a rising economic power with an increasing ability to project influence globally." Chinese military advancements are considered within the paper as an example of challenges to the "rules-based international order," particularly as Chinas ramped up its military activities in the South China Sea. As well, *SSE* acknowledges that Russia is increasingly willing to test international security, listing its

illegal annexation of Crimea as a prime example. While Great Power politics loomed in the minds of policy analysts at the Department of Defence, the Defence policy also suggests that the imminent future may see regional powers constituting a new evolution in the balance of power.

Defence in the '70s suggests that nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union has diminished as an issue, as "...neither could rationally consider launching a deliberate attack." While the immediate threat was reduced, however, the importance of diplomatic ties growing between the two states remained vital to the Canadian Government. The Paper suggests the Government of Canada can work to further open negotiations on the "Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR)," which worked to reduce US and Soviet military presence in Europe. Additionally, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) – which involved formal negotiations between the two superpowers – constituted discussions of "overriding importance" to the Department of Defence. The willingness to "resolve East-West issues by negotiation" was a relatively new development, therefore the Canadian Government saw it as paramount to reducing the capacity and willingness to wage war. This development came at a time when, although nuclear war seemed less likely than previously, the number of nuclear missiles had developed a theory/condition of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), whereby nuclear war would ensure cataclysmic destruction. While a catastrophic war between the two superpowers remained an existential threat to Canada and the world, in the Canadian Governments predictions, another more significant threat to national security existed; the emergence of rising powers possibly establishing a greater multi-polar world.

Defence in the 70s viewed the international system shifting towards greater multipolarity, away from the previous bipolar



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US Secretary of State John Kerry holds a press conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 16 May 2015, after a clash between the two nations over a territorial dispute in the South China Sea.



Danila Dellimont/Alamy Stock Photo R3XEGC

Justin Trudeau and Donald Trump conversing in the rose garden of the White House, 13 February 2017.

system. Change involving “Japan’s phenomenal economic growth;” the substantially increasing Chinese military and economic growth; as well as the return to NATO member countries being able to provide their own military force and “assume a greater share of the collective Alliance defence, particularly with respect to their own continent,” displayed the increasing prospects of a multi-polar world order. It is interesting that both policies are reluctant to accept a multi-polar world, more comfortable with the current U.S. led hegemony. However, both suggest that Canada and its armed forces needs to play a more active role in an increasingly multi-polar world, and must be prepared to defend its borders and national interests/values.

Deterrence: A Matter of Technology

Defence in the 70s insists that the pre-dominant threat to Canadian security is the possibility of nuclear war between the two superpowers. Because of this, Canada’s “overriding defence objective must therefore be the prevention of nuclear war by promoting political reconciliation to ease the underlying causes of tension...” This view of security concerns differs from *SSE* in several ways. First, this perspective of Great Power defence sees its parties in a static form – neither is rising to power. However, the threat of nuclear war permeated as each state sought to manage its power. Therefore, the ability to reduce tensions and create diplomatic ties were more necessary than

stockpiling defence. Alternatively, *SSE* seems to suggest that with the rising powers of China and Russia, steps should be taken to reduce their ability to engage militarily with Canadian space stations and networks.

Non-state actors in *Defence in the 70s* were far different than in *SSE*. Where *SSE* sees non-state actors more as concepts such as climate change or refugee crises, *Defence in the 70s* envisions non-state actors in regards to nationalist extremists in Canada. It was released just two years after the FLQ crisis (which *D70s* refers to subtly as the “recent crisis”). It argues: “...the threat to society posed by violent revolutionaries... merited close consideration in projecting Canadian defence activities in the 1970’s.” The threat from violent nationalists had been realized during the October Crisis; due to this threat, deterrence considerations needed to be evaluated on a national, as well as an international level.

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Alternatively, *SSE* acknowledges the evolving and rising economies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. With that, *SSE* suggests the evolution of a greater multi-polar world requires the Canadian Government to further engage with emerging powers to foster new partnerships and promote peace. *SSE* also acknowledges emerging global threats, including North Korea’s “ongoing efforts to advance its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs,” as well as Syria’s “abhorrent use of weapons of mass destruction against

innocent civilians.” These threats to Canadian and international security, *SSE* posits, requires an increased emphasis on deterrence. Deterrence, to the Department of Defence, constitutes both “...a diplomatic tool to help prevent conflict [which] should be accompanied by dialogue,” as well as a deterrence “...focused on conventional and nuclear capabilities... [and deterrence] relevant to space and cyber domains.” This means that deterrence can constitute either diplomatic and/or economic deterrents; and, if soft power cannot prevail in properly deterring adversarial states, a wide variety of military deterrents should be available to the Department of Defence. This is rather similar to *Defence in the 70s*, which suggests that deterring nuclear war between the two superpowers can best be prevented through diplomatic methods. The two policies differ on deterrence mainly due to their distance in time, and *SSE*’s evolving view of technology and its impact upon national defence and security.

With an evolving global strategic environment, and the increased presence of violent extremism around the world, *SSE* places Canada ideally at the forefront of international security, declaring:

We have the capacity to help those who live under the threat of violence, or have been consigned to protracted refugee status. We can reach out to those who suffer from weak governance. We can be a force for stability in the world.

This statement demonstrates the shift in what can be considered international security. Whereas in the 1971 document, state actors and violent extremists can be considered a threat to national security, *SSE* expands security concerns to the people affected by war and extremism, and their livelihoods must be addressed as well. Additionally, the threats of climate change are discussed in the terms of security concerns. With the possibility of disrupting and threatening the livelihoods of millions of people and communities around the world, there is a need to “work hand-in-hand with like-minded partners around the world to meet this threat and beat it, rather than stand passively by.”

Finally, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, introduces further complications to the branch of national defence: particularly cyber and space domains. *SSE* states the increased need for the Defence Department to invest in cyber defensive infrastructure, preventing actors from being able to steal sensitive information from internal networks, and increasing prevention from terrorist organizations from being able to spread disinformation online and from being able to finance their operations. This best emphasizes how deterrence has evolved from 1971 to 2017 – deterrence is necessarily extending into domains that had not been previously imagined.



DVIDS photo 6236638 courtesy of North American Aerospace Defense

An F-22 *Raptor* assigned to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson intercepts a Russian Tu-95 *Bear*, 9 June 2020.

Canada, NATO, and the Quiet Growth of NORAD

Strong, Secure, Engaged and *the Defence in the 70s* defence policies differ in small but essential ways regarding which international organizations Canada aligns itself more predominantly. The 2017 Defence policy emphasizes NORAD as the most vital organization to Canada's defence, while also highlighting the role of NATO in broader global defence. Alternatively, *D70s* envisions NORAD as a 'given' for Canada's defence from a nuclear strike. It instead emphasizes the role of NATO in the security of the Western world in an era where the effectiveness of peacekeeping was coming into question.

D70s works to reaffirm Canada's commitment to NATO collective defence at a time when peacekeeping was growing out of favour. At the time of publication, NATO was only 22 years old, a dramatically-short period of time considering the successes and expectations that had been placed upon it. In the section, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization," NATO's successful history of rebuilding and solidifying Western Europe, and North America's connections to it are mentioned. With Europe's continued rebuilding after the war, and its ability to enjoy freedom from conflict for twenty-five years, *D70s* emphasizes Canada's aims to continue to commit forces in Europe. It states, "...it is in the interest of international peace, and ultimately of Canada's security, that measures be maintained to discourage deliberate aggression in security, and to contain quickly any hostilities which might nevertheless occur." This commitment entailed the continued stationing of forces in Europe, to prevent possible aggression, and to express Canadian support for collective security.

This continued support for NATO's collective defence was expressed at a time when, admittedly for Canada, the role and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping was diminishing. Canada's role in the creation and implementation of peacekeeping within the United Nations was pivotal. However, by 1971, the strategy was being put into question within the Department of Defence. The Defence policy acknowledges Canada's "exceptional insight" in international peacekeeping, but then states that, "...the experience has all too often been frustrating and disillusioning." Additionally, the policy states that Canada will "consider constructively" any request for Canadian participation in any peacekeeping operation. This is a far cry from the 'golden age' of UN Peacekeeping when Canada more actively played a role in keeping the peace, exemplified by the nation's involvement during the Suez Canal Crisis, and perhaps contains Canada's first motioning towards NATO as the predominant international organization for national defence and security.

Within *SSE*, there is a strong emphasis on the role of NORAD for North American defence, placing it ahead of other international organization in terms of investment and importance. Perhaps most tellingly, on Page 82 of the policy, a text box ranking Canada's defence priorities references NORAD second to the top, behind the defence of Canada. Lindsay Rodman states that Canada has remained consistently hesitant towards devoting investment to NORAD modernization; however, throughout the Defence policy

there are references to the need for Canada to "meet its NORAD obligations," and investigate security requirements. Canada's stated obligations to NORAD is uncommon in most eras, where NORAD is seen as the given – the organization which needs no further dedication or investment; the organization in which Canada does not need to continue proving itself to any other state. Furthermore, the notion of "meeting its NORAD obligations" is unusual, as there is no bar for Canada to meet as there is in NATO with the 2% spending rule.

Additionally, throughout the 2017 defence policy, Canada reaffirms its dedication to NATO and its missions. While the defence policy fails to fund the Canadian Armed Forces past the point of NATO's 2% funding threshold, it declares, "...while defence spending is an important part of ensuring appropriate defence capability, it is not the most effective measure of ensuring appropriate defence capability." Furthermore, Canada argues within the Policy that NATO does not correctly weigh defence spending from member states, as NATO does not take into consideration spending relevant to a defence that is found in other federal departments. If NATO took a more accurate analysis of spending, Canada would comfortably meet its spending requirements. While the policy fails to meet spending measures in its current form, the Defence policy does ensure that Canada will pursue a leadership role within NATO, and invests in ensuring cooperation with allies and partners. The emphasis on leadership demonstrates Canada's increased interest in playing a role in international security, and in attempting to reinforce its position on the international stage. Through NORAD and NATO, the 2017 Defence policy most emphasizes itself with respect to national and global security.

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While not as strongly emphasized as NORAD and NATO, the 2017 Policy states Canada's plan to increase support to United Nations peace operations. While *D70s* conveys some cynicism towards peacekeeping operations, it does want Canada 'out in the world,'

trying to encourage peace-building, mediation, and stability – with a particular emphasis upon security for women and youth. At the time of its publication in 2017, many were anticipating an announcement by the Canadian government regarding its planned mission in Africa, which would result in Canada committing 250 soldiers to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).¹¹ This optimism for peace suggests that while Canada is not a big player in international politics, nonetheless, it can play an essential role in ensuring security on a case-by-case basis, and the Canadian government should take measures to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces are well equipped to do so.

Conclusions

Defence in the 70s and *Strong, Secure, Engaged* are similar with respect to their perspectives on the evolving geopolitical climate (both eras shifting into a multipolar world), the relationship with partner states, and the relationships with enemies abroad. However, their differences highlight where Canada finds itself among the geopolitical climate. Specifically, *Defence in the 70s* portrays Canada as a state



A NATO flag flies at Cardiff Castle during the NATO summit, which was held in Newport, 31 August 2014.

with considerable power, one that grounds Canadian forces in Western Europe for NATO, while investments in surveillance and intelligence were being made to protect Canada's sovereignty. On the other hand, the 2017 Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, situates Canada as being in a weaker position than in 1971. Canada in 2017 feels it needs to prove its worth to its international partners; investments need to be made to meet NORAD requirements; investments need to be made to reach towards the NATO spending threshold with promises to take a leadership role in NATO, not committed by Canada before. Troops are not being stationed to prevent aggression from a global superpower in 2017, as Canada does not have that type of hard power capabilities. While troops are currently deployed to Ukraine to help prevent Russian aggression, there is no mention of their positioning therein to be found within *Strong, Secure, and Engaged*.

The similarities between the two Trudeaus are striking, in terms of both ideological positions, as well as the

organizations and peace-seeking diplomacy with Eastern powers. While Pierre Trudeau was open to international diplomacy, his defence policy reflects a "Canada-first" defence strategy, caused by rising frustration and dissent with the United States. Instead, Justin Trudeau has sought to deepen ties with the United States and invest in infrastructure to defend North America. While there is still an emphasis upon the importance of NATO and the United Nations, the defence of North America is paramount in 2017. This reflects a greater desire to place Canada aside other states to defend Canada's borders – however, the policy aims to put Canada in a stronger place as a player and potential leader within those relationships. Further investigation should be done with respect to the implementation of both defence policies, and into how each Trudeau compares in their subsequent foreign policy decisions. A leader's initial policy plays a significant role in their subsequent decision-making and provides the clearest indication of their ideologies, interests, and values.



NOTES

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- 10 Lindsay Rodman, "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Evaluating Canada as a Dependable Ally and Partner for the United States," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute* (2017), p. 3.
- 11 Government of Canada, "Canada's engagement in Mali," last modified 3 September 2019, at: <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/country-pays/mali/relations.aspx?lang=eng>.