



A Canadian soldier stands in front of a maple leaf symbol. source: bumbledee / Shutterstock.com

Canada's Defense Posture in a Dangerous World

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Introduction

June of 2022 will mark five years since the Trudeau government released “Strong, Secure, Engaged,”¹ the document which outlines its long-term defense strategy. In the intervening period the international security environment and Canada's role within it has, if anything, only grown more complex. Canada, once described as a “fireproof house, far from inflammable materials,”² now feels more like the global equivalent of a town in British Columbia nervously listening to news reports of floods or forest fires in its vicinity.

The consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will need to be assimilated by NATO and the world at large, as Europe sees its largest military conflict since 1945. China, once viewed largely as a customer for Canada's agricultural and mineral production, is now a major international actor unafraid to act toughly to promote its interests, even to the point of taking Canadian citizens hostage. The Arctic, where Canada has vast territories, threatens to become a theater of great power competition. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) faces new technological challenges such as high speed “hypersonic glide missiles.” And in a world of climate change and the coronavirus pandemic, recourse to the domestic deployment of Canada's armed forces has become more common.

Canada's defense posture is of interest not only to its own citizens but to its partners in the international network of alliances and partnerships which emerged during the Cold War and which remains a principal vehicle for addressing security issues. Through NORAD it is linked to the United States and through NATO it is linked to Europe, and here too, the United States. Thus, the degree to which Canada is prepared to fund its defense establishment and deploy it internationally impacts American and European interests.

Procurement: The Eternal Struggle

“Strong, Secure, Engaged” marked a commitment to rebuild Canada's defense forces after a long period of neglect. Prime Ministers from Pierre Trudeau onward were unenthusiastic about defense spending. Most notably, Jacques Chretien, Prime Minister from 1993 to 2003, was a committed deficit cutter and his government was viewed by the military and its supporters as a “decade of darkness.”

Stephen Harper committed Canada to fight in Afghanistan, and found the money necessary to support the armed forces' efforts there. He also made symbolic gestures of support, returning the armed forces to their original names (Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force and Canadian Army) after they had earlier been amalgamated into a generic “Canadian Forces.” He also returned them to slightly modified World War II era badges of rank. His defense strategy paper, the “Canada First Defence Strategy”³ looked to rebuilding, including a stymied effort to choose a new fighter aircraft to replace Canada's aging

1 “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.” Government of Canada. 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/canada-defence-policy.html>

2 Holloway, Steven Kendall. “Canadian Foreign Policy: Defining the National Interest.” University of Toronto Press. 2006.

3 “Canada First Defence Strategy.” Government of Canada. 2015. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canada-first-defence-strategy-complete-document.html>

F-18 Hornets and a National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy, but his own deficit fighting proclivities, together with the cost of Canada's participation in the Afghanistan operation and sluggishness in procurement left Canada's armed forces only a little ahead of where his predecessors had left them.

"Strong, Secure, Engaged" in many ways resembled its Harper-era predecessor. It pointed towards a systematic rebuilding of Canada's defense capabilities—most notably a near complete replacement of the Navy where many ships had exceeded their lifespan, even with refits, and a whole class of vessels (Iroquois class destroyers⁴) had been withdrawn from service. It also recommitted Canada to a new fighter aircraft purchase and a modest re-equipping and expansion of ground forces.

Building a New Navy

The most complex and expensive of these commitments has been the rebuilding of the Navy. The dollar amounts are huge by Canadian standards, and could be up to 77 billion dollars (Canadian) for new frigates alone, though spread out over two decades. The ships have been or are to be built in Canadian shipyards—a political necessity with which many countries are faced—despite the added expense and managerial challenges, given that Canada's shipbuilding industry had greatly atrophied in recent years as had the oversight capabilities within the Department of National Defence.

There have been some genuine achievements. The most visible has been the production of the Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessel. These are relatively small ships, lightly armed, but robust enough to be able to sail through the Arctic for part of the year. They can be used to underscore Canadian sovereignty in that region, and elsewhere can be used for fisheries, environmental, and counternarcotics enforcement. The first of these, HMCS Harry deWolf, sailed through the Northwest Passage this summer, then went south, transiting the Panama Canal to participate in counternarcotics operations in the Caribbean with the U.S. Coast Guard before returning to Canada.⁵ A second vessel has recently entered service and a third should do so shortly. A total of six of these ships are to be built.⁶

More controversial has been the Canadian Surface Combatant, a program aimed at building fifteen ships to replace both the now defunct Iroquois class destroyers and the aging Halifax class frigates. Canada, as did Australia, chose to base this ship on Britain's "Type 26" frigate, a new design, which had not yet entered into service. Construction has just begun on Canada's first Type 26 ship, but there are already concerns about mounting costs, to some degree the result of new capabilities which are now being contemplated. A critical report by the Parliamentary Budget Office has led to a flurry of commentary by defense experts urging Canada to switch to a different design, such as Britain's smaller, cheaper Type 31 or Italy's FREMM which the U.S. is adopting as the basis for a new class of ships.⁷ The Government, however, remains

4 "Canada's last Tribal class destroyer taking final tour around Halifax harbour." CTV News. March 8, 2017. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/canada-s-last-tribal-class-destroyer-taking-final-tour-around-halifax-harbour-1.3315556>

5 "HMCS Harry de Wolf crew returns home after first deployment." Navy News. Government of Canada. December 23, 2021. <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/news-operations/news-view.page?doc=hmcs-harry-dewolf-crew-returns-home-after-first-deployment/kxdy3bex>

6 "Production of Canada's Fifth Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ship Underway with Cutting of First Steel for the Future HMCS Frédéric Rolette." Irving Shipbuilding Inc. May 20, 2021. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2021/05/20/2233650/0/en/Production-of-Canada-s-Fifth-Arctic-and-Offshore-Patrol-Ship-Underway-With-Cutting-of-First-Steel-for-the-Future-HMCS-Frédéric-Rolette.html>

7 Williams, Alan. "Canada has no option but pivot away from current Surface Combatants path." The Hill Times. January 6, 2022. <https://www.hilltimes.com/2022/01/06/canada-has-no-option-but-pivot-away-from-current-surface-combatants-path/336415>

committed to building the Type 26, and has announced a decision to spend 2.2 billion dollars (Canadian) on radar systems for the first three ships.⁸

While the Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessel and the Canadian Surface Combatant have been the most visible elements of the recapitalization of the Royal Canadian Navy, other work has gone forward. New radars have been ordered for the existing Halifax class ships, which remain the backbone of the Navy.⁹ Construction has begun on the first of two new supply ships.¹⁰ But a real weak spot has been the delay until at least 2030 in obtaining year-round icebreakers for Canada's Coast Guard (a civilian service separate from the Navy) at a time when Russia's icebreaking capabilities have greatly increased and the U.S. is going forward with two new heavy icebreaking ships.¹¹ And waiting in the distance is the question of a replacement for Canada's diesel submarines, which were purchased used from the British and have had more than their share of problems.¹²

Parenthetically, the Canadian willingness to purchase used military hardware such as the British submarines is unusual compared with other countries of comparable wealth, being something usually undertaken by advanced developing countries such as Brazil, which purchased a former British helicopter carrier and India, which purchased a former Russian aircraft carrier.

Which Plane?

The headline-making defense procurement issue remains as always that of a replacement for the Royal Canadian Air Force's aged F-18 fighters. The decades-long saga of the effort to choose a replacement may have finally come to an end with the announcement that Canada intends to enter into negotiations with Lockheed Martin to purchase 88 F-35 Lightning II aircraft.¹³ The lengthy delays in decision-making have forced Canada to spend money to keep its existing fleet operational by buying used F-18s from Australia which is phasing them out in favor of the F-35. Some will fly, some will be cannibalized for parts, but in any event it can only have been painful for Canada's defense establishment to spend money which would have been unnecessary had it and its political masters been able procure a new fighter earlier.¹⁴

Previously three alternatives had survived in a competition managed by the Department of National De-

8 Pugliese, David. "Government to commit to building first three warships despite budget concerns." Ottawa Citizen. June 8, 2021. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/government-to-commit-to-building-first-three-warships-despite-budget-concerns>

9 Bahtić, Fatima. "Canadian Navy to upgrade Halifax-class frigates with Saab's Sea Giraffe radar." Navaltoday.com. December 20, 2021. <https://www.navaltoday.com/2021/12/20/canadian-navy-to-upgrade-halifax-class-frigates-with-saabs-sea-giraffe-radar/>

10 "Seaspan hosts keel laying for Canadian navy's future joint support ship." Workboat. January 17, 2020. <https://www.workboat.com/government/seaspan-hosts-keel-laying-for-canadian-navys-future-joint-support-ship>

11 "Government of Canada announces Polar Icebreakers to enhance Canada's Arctic presence and provide critical services to Canadians." Canadian Coast Guard. Government of Canada. May 6, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-coast-guard/news/2021/05/government-of-canada-announces-polar-icebreakers-to-enhance-canadas-arctic-presence-and-provide-critical-services-to-canadians.html>

12 Berthiaume, Lee. "Navy kicks off long-anticipated push to replace Canada's beleaguered submarine fleet." Canadian Press. July 14, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/navy-submarine-new-fleet-1.6102598>

13 Ljunggren, David. "Lockheed Martin takes big step towards winning Canada jet race." Reuters. March 28, 2022. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/canada-fighterjets-idCAKCN2LP1JU>

14 Sanders, Richard. "Canada's Jet Fighter Purchase Decision: Planes, Prices, Politics." Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. June 24, 2021. <https://5g.wilsoncenter.org/article/canadas-jet-fighter-purchase-deci>

fence, the U.S.-manufactured F-35, the Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet, also manufactured in the U.S., and the Swedish-built JAS-39 Gripen-E. In what came as a surprise to observers, it was announced in December 2021 that the F/A-18 had been eliminated for failure to comply with the scope of bidding requirements, leaving the other two aircraft in the running for the final decision.¹⁵

The terse announcement gave no indication of the Department of National Defence's reasoning. The F/A-18 had its virtues—twin engines, giving additional assurance in the event of engine trouble during patrols in Canada's remote north and some overlap with Canada's existing F-18's, making for an easier transition for pilots and maintenance personnel. However, its principal buyer, the U.S. Navy, has announced that its next purchase of the aircraft will be its last, as it looks to develop its next generation of fighters. It has also been suggested that some bad blood remained between Boeing and the Trudeau government over a now resolved trade complaint which it had filed regarding civil aircraft manufactured by Bombardier. In any event, Canada's defense bureaucracy deserves some credit for keeping mum on its reasoning in often leak-prone Ottawa.

When the choice then narrowed to Lockheed Martin and Saab, many gave the edge to the American firm. The F-35 Lightning II has been purchased by increasing numbers of countries, both in Europe (most recently Finland with Germany also now expressing interest) and Asia (including Japan and South Korea). It is a true fifth generation fighter with stealth capability but it is undoubtedly the higher cost option (though estimating long-term costs of high end defense systems seems more art than science), raising the question of whether Canada can afford to buy its planned 88 aircraft in the uncertain, post-COVID budget environment. There is some speculation that Britain may reduce its planned purchase of 138 F-35s. (It has already received 21 and made commitments to Lockheed-Martin that would bring the numbers up to 48.)¹⁶

The Gripen has had far fewer purchasers, although some relatively big ones such as Brazil and Thailand. It is less expensive than the Lightning II (with appropriate caveats in estimating costs). Saab has asserted that its sophisticated electronics will make up for its lack of stealth capability, and has made big promises about incorporating local manufacturing. (Lockheed Martin makes no domestic content promises, but already produces some elements locally under a cooperative arrangement Canada and other potential purchasers entered into in 1997.)

But ultimately, the decision may well have depended on the Trudeau government's geopolitical vision. Canada is continuing its history of deep integration with the United States, as reflected in its common air defense system. This relationship apparently has not been shaken by events such as the Trump administration's aggressively unilateral approach to foreign policy, the sad ending in Afghanistan where Canada had followed the American lead and committed lives and treasure, and the endless, if inevitable economic frictions which arise between the two nations. The Biden administration's robust role in galvanizing NATO in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine may also have affected the decision or at least the timing of the announcement. Still a tough negotiation over price and delivery lies ahead. And with the money to pay for the planes to come out of future budgets, we will see how firm is the figure of 88 aircraft.

Not all has gone wrong in Canada's aircraft procurement. Its fleet of five large C-17 cargo planes purchased from 2007 to 2015 have been vital to efforts ranging from firefighting in British Columbia to evacuating refugees from Afghanistan and delivering aid to Ukraine. After lengthy delays a new fleet of Sikorsky Cy-

15 Host, Pat. "Canada strikes Super Hornet from fighter competition." *Janes*. December 3, 2021. <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/canada-strikes-super-hornet-from-fighter-competition>

16 Chuter, Andrew. "Two reasons Britain could slow its purchase of the F-35." *Defense News*. June 23, 2021. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/06/23/two-reasons-britain-could-slow-its-purchase-of-the-f-35/>

clone helicopters has come into service, although issues involving cracking on their tails from the weight of antennas and electronic equipment have to be resolved.¹⁷ It is evaluating different options for drones, and is looking at prospects for the Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft, a replacement for its fifteen P-3 Orion patrol aircraft, which are vital for anti-submarine operations.¹⁸ Hopefully they will have a smoother procurement path than previous defense systems.

We Need More People...

It is an adage that while navies and air forces man equipment, armies equip men. Hence the Canadian Army has not faced the mega-level procurement decisions of its sister services. It has some large and complex systems at hand, such as the Leopard II tank, and is in the process of purchasing trucks and armored personnel carriers. Like other NATO countries it is rolling out an integrated suite of communications equipment, weapons, and clothing for dismounted soldiers—the Integrated Soldier System Project.¹⁹ But it is not immune to procurement problems, albeit on a smaller scale than the Navy or Air Force. It is in need of a replacement for its aged Browning Hi-Power pistol. While choosing a replacement would seem to be relatively easy, here too the process has been delayed over years, and decisions have led to international trade challenges from firms which have lost out in competition.²⁰

Rather, the Army's real weakness is in its chronic undermanning. While it is generally viewed as having high quality personnel, and some elements are truly elite—notably Joint Task Force Two, its special operations component which performed effectively in Afghanistan, Canada's Army is considerably smaller than those of other NATO countries of comparable size and wealth. The same is true of the other services, of course, though as the largest of them and most dependent on manpower to fulfill its missions, the Army suffers the most. According to the Department of National Defence, Canada's armed forces are 12,000 positions short of their authorized strength (both regular and reserve) of 100,000 positions.²¹

...and Less Sexual Misconduct

But the real crisis for Canada's armed forces has been at the highest levels, where some of its most senior officers have been caught up in headline-grabbing sexual misconduct scandals. The most notable case was that of Lieutenant General Jonathan Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, who allegedly fathered a child out of wedlock with a subordinate and threatened her into silence. Now retired, he is currently awaiting trial on charges of obstruction of justice. Vice Chief of the Defence Staff Lieutenant General Mike Rouleau had to retire after he was seen playing golf with Vance in an apparent gesture of support.

But the list of senior officers either charged or being investigated in regard to sexual misconduct goes on. It

17 Seguin, Nicole. "Design flaw blamed for cracks in tails of military's Cyclone helicopters." CBC News. February 1, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/national-defence-determines-cause-cracks-cyclone-helicopters-1.6335495>

18 "Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft: Defence Capabilities Blueprint." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. 2018. <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/defence-capabilities-blueprint/project-details.asp?id=975>

19 "Integrated Soldier System Project." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/procurement/integrated-soldier-system-project.html>

20 Pugliese, David. "DND replacement program for Second World War-era pistols delayed once again." Ottawa Citizen. January 3, 2022. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/dnd-replacement-program-for-second-world-war-era-pistols-delayed-once-again>

21 "Canadian military dealing with more than 10,000 unfilled positions amid growing pressure." Canadian Press. <https://torontosun.com/news/national/canadian-military-dealing-with-more-than-10000-unfilled-positions-amid-growing-pressures>

includes Vance's successor as Chief of the Defence Staff, the Deputy Commander of NORAD, the former head of military human resources, the Commander-designate of the Canadian Army and the general who had been seconded to the Public Health Agency to manage logistics for vaccine roll-out. And to cap the list, general who been named to manage the military's response to sexual issues was removed from that position after it was found that he had written a letter of support for an officer who had been convicted of sexual assault.²²

This remarkable series of investigations and charges of senior officers inevitably meant that following Canada's last election, Prime Minister Trudeau's cabinet reshuffle included the replacement of Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, once considered a star within the government, who was seen as unable to get on top of the issue. (He remains in the cabinet in the lower profile post of Minister of International Development.) His replacement, Anita Anand, has stressed the importance of eliminating sexual harassment.²³ Also, her previous position as Minister of Public Services and Procurement had given her prominence in Canada's COVID vaccination effort. It is hoped that her experience will also aid in the military's management of its big procurement decisions, as mentioned above.

Peacekeeping: No Thanks

As it struggles to implement its procurement goals and to address its personnel issues, what are Canada's armed forces actually doing to contribute to their country's security? It should be noted that since its withdrawal from Afghanistan Canadian troops have not seen combat and indeed have generally not been in harm's way. (They did, however return to Afghanistan for a brief but certainly hazardous mission, participating in the evacuation of both Canadians and Afghans following the Taliban takeover in 2021.)

Peacekeeping, once seen as a major Canadian specialty, had been largely abandoned in recent decades. When Justin Trudeau came to office, it was expected that this tradition would be revitalized. Canada engaged in one significant peacekeeping activity, taking over the provision of air support (helicopters) for the United Nations' peacekeeping mission in Mali in 2018-19.²⁴ Canada performed its mission credibly although with some delays in arriving. But it did not extend it beyond its initial length, despite requests that it do so, and has not undertaken other peacekeeping missions of scale since then, although 59 Canadians participate in six other United Nations operations.²⁵ Mali itself remains deeply troubled, and France, the major international player there, has ended its separate counterterrorism mission in frustration with the lack of local support.

In what is a minor embarrassment, Canada has been reminded of a commitment which it made to provide 200 soldiers for a rapid reaction force to support United Nations peacekeeping operations. This had been made early in 2017 when interest in the United Nations was higher and Canada was lobbying hard (though

22 Burke, Ashley and Brewster, Murray. "A military in crisis: Here are the leaders embroiled in sexual misconduct cases." CBC News. December 21, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sexual-misconduct-military-senior-leaders-dnd-caf-1.6218683>

23 Turnbull, Sarah. "Anand says she is 'determined' to resolve military misconduct crisis as defence minister." CTV News. October 26, 2021. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/anand-says-she-is-determined-to-resolve-military-misconduct-crisis-as-defence-minister-1.5639050>

24 "Canadian Armed Forces conclude peacekeeping mission in Mali." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. August 31, 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2019/08/canadian-armed-forces-conclude-peacekeeping-mission-in-mali.html>

25 Dorn, Walter. "Tracking the Promises: Canada's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping." January 28, 2022. <https://www.walterdorn.net/256>

ultimately unsuccessfully) for a rotating seat on the Security Council. When reminded of this promise, Canada's defense minister did not formally disavow it, saying it is still "under discussion," while making no commitment to actually provide forces. Instead, she has pointed to Canada's significant financial contributions to UN peacekeeping.²⁶

Operating at Home

Where Canada's armed forces have had important, relatively high profile roles has been in domestic operations. This has included providing airlift capacity and road clearing following extensive floods in British Columbia in 2021. The Royal Canadian Air Force's large C-17 cargo airplanes were used to transport its helicopters which provided food to isolated First Nations communities which had been cut off by the flooding.²⁷ Canada's armed forces also played an important role in the nationwide distribution of vaccines during the COVID pandemic.²⁸ These operations underline that in a country with so large a territory and so scattered a population, there is simply no other entity, either governmental or commercial, with the same capacity as the military.

Canada's armed forces doubtless felt relieved that they were not called upon to intervene in the early 2022 protests which occupied downtown Ottawa and blocked key border crossings with the United States, as they could have been under the Emergencies Act which had been invoked by the government. (Ultimately the occupations were addressed by a combination of municipal and provincial police forces together with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.) But while the crisis unfolded many had speculated that there would be a repeat of the 1970 October crisis in Quebec where Army troops patrolled the streets under authorities from the Emergencies Act's draconian predecessor, the War Measures Act. Many also recalled the Army's deployment in 1990 when Quebec authorities struggled to address violence in a land dispute between First Nations members and the municipality of Oka, near Montreal.

The Arctic Demands Attention

But despite its limitations in size and equipment, the Canadian armed forces have been active in undertaking actions to support Canada's international interests. As the Arctic has become more geopolitically sensitive, Canada's security interest in this vast area have become ever more relevant, although resources are limited. From 2007 onward it has mounted its major annual Arctic exercise, Operation Nanook.²⁹ And certainly, HCMS Harry deWolf's transit of the Northwest Passage sent a signal of interest, and as more ships of its class come into service we can expect a more sustained Canadian naval presence. But in the absence of year-round icebreaking capability Canada's ability to patrol this region remains impaired.

One example of the contradictions in Canada's view of the Arctic was its apparent reluctance to accept a British offer to undertake naval activity in the Arctic in conjunction with Canada. It seems that despite its

²⁶ Berthiaume, Lee. "Canada's 200-soldier promise to UN peacekeeping 'under discussion:' Minister." Canadian Press. December 16, 2021. <https://vancouver.citynews.ca/2021/12/16/canada-200-soldier-un-peacekeeping/>

²⁷ Lee-Young, Joanne. "More than 500 Canadian armed forces troops land in Abbotsford to back relief efforts." Vancouver Sun. November 21, 2021. <https://vancouversun.com/news/more-than-500-canadian-armed-forces-troops-land-in-abbotsford-to-back-relief-efforts>

²⁸ "Operation Vector." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. January 31, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-vector.html>

²⁹ "Operation Nanook." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. February 14, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-nanook.html>

own limitations, Canada was unwilling to in effect subcontract some of its Arctic defense responsibilities, even to one of its closest allies.³⁰ Canada, of course, has vast northern territories, including to not only its huge archipelago of islands north of the North American mainland but an exclusive economic zone beyond them, and potentially continental shelf claims further north.³¹ But Russia claims that its coastal shelf extends all the way across the Arctic Ocean.³² The United States, in addition, claims that the Northwest Passage is an international waterway, as much as the Panama Canal or the Dardanelles.³³ These claims are all largely theoretical for now, but obviously, should these questions ever become pressed for real, the stronger its Arctic presence, the better would be Canada's position.

NORAD Faces New Threats

Canada does engage in regular patrolling of Arctic airspace, which it has been able to maintain despite the increasing age of its fighters. It works jointly with the United States under NORAD, and its aircraft have on occasion seen off Russian aircraft approaching Canadian or American airspace.³⁴ Of course, there is also the strategic threat of Russian nuclear missiles coming over the Arctic, which Canada and the U.S. have confronted since the Cold War. In addition to its air patrols, Canada contributes to NORAD through the installation of radars across its northern reaches—the North Warning System, which also includes radars on U.S. territory in Alaska.

This line of radars, which dates from the 1980s and 1990s, and was the successor to the 1950s vintage Distant Early Warning (DEW) line, however, is increasingly obsolete, especially as Russia, as well as China have made progress on hypersonic glide weapons, which greatly reduce the amount of time which radars have to detect an incoming attack. This has led to consideration of what NORAD's future would look like. Senior Canadian and American defense officials have met and issued statements indicating that they are grappling with the problem but it is unclear what the solutions would be—and how much they would cost.³⁵

The Pacific Challenge

Beyond defense of its sovereignty and of North America, Canada's other operations have been undertaken in conjunction with its traditional allies—indeed it is difficult to imagine any sustained unilateral Canadian military operation outside of its borders. These activities, both in the Pacific and in Europe, should not be dismissed as solely gestures. From Canada's perspective, they are a real effort, given the small size and budget of its military establishment. And they also make real, if modest contributions to the U.S. and other allies, as they deal with newly assertive Russia and China. And the political dimension, as testimony to alliance solidarity, is not without importance.

30 Brewster, Murray. "Britain offers Canadian military help to defend the Arctic." CBC News. September 24, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/britain-uk-canada-arctic-defence-submarines-russia-china-1.6187347>

31 "Overview of the territorial claims of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean." European Environmental Agency. June 14, 2017. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/arctic-continental-shelf-claims>

32 Tranter, Emma. "'You cannot claim any more.' Russia seeks bigger piece of Arctic." CBC News. April 12, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/russia-arctic-ocean-canada-united-nations-continental-shelf-1.5983289>

33 Ferreras, Jesse. "Canada's Northwest Passage claim isn't settled—but it's not 'illegitimate' like the U.S. says it is." Global News. May 31, 2019. <https://globalnews.ca/news/5256532/northwest-passage-canada-us-claim-challenge/>

34 Everstine, Brian W. "F-22s, Canadian F-18s intercept Russian bombers near Alaska." Air Force Magazine. August 8, 2019. <https://www.airforcemag.com/f-22s-canadian-f-18s-intercept-russian-bombers-near-alaska/>

35 Berthiaume, Lee. "Politicians delay on NORAD as new threats leave North America 'vulnerable': commander." Canadian Press. November 30, 2021. <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/norad-modernization-awaiting-political-direction-as-china-russia-develop-new-threats>

Canada, like the rest of the world has had to deal with the new reality of China's conduct. In the past Canada's relationship with China had been generally positive; Canada had recognized the People's Republic eight years before the United States did. China is Canada's second largest trading partner after the United States and a major recipient of Canadian natural resource products such as minerals and wood pulp.³⁶ But of late relations have become rougher, with a low point coming when, following the Canadian arrest of a senior executive of tech giant Huawei in response to a U.S. request for her extradition, China arrested two Canadians, in effect holding them hostage.

Although that crisis was ultimately resolved, The Canadian government has evidently felt the need to make clear that it would not allow China to intimidate it. In this context the Canadian frigate HCMS Winnipeg transited the Taiwan Strait, together with the U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer USS Dewey in October, 2021. This action provoked a sharply critical Chinese response, though no further action.³⁷ But it did allow Canada to make its point. And it is a reminder that a navy can be a useful tool to have in one's diplomatic arsenal.

The evolution of events in the Pacific gave Canada something of a shock when the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) agreement was announced. Under it Australia would purchase nuclear powered submarine technology from the United States and Britain and together with them would work in other defense areas such as cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea technologies.³⁸ There was a fair bit of handwringing in Canada on its not being included and concern as to whether this would lessen then value of its participation in the long standing "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing arrangement it has with the United States, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

However, as Prime Minister Trudeau was quick to point out, developing nuclear submarines is not on Canada's agenda.³⁹ As for the joint development of advanced defense technologies, there seems to be no overwhelming reason why Canada, which is not without its own defense and high tech sector, could not ultimately find a way to participate if it were interested.⁴⁰

NATO Returns to the Forefront as Ukraine Burns

The recent events in Ukraine have brought to the fore the importance of Canada's other principal overseas defense commitment—Europe, where it has supported the capabilities of new Eastern European NATO members. Under the "Enhanced Forward Presence" program, Canada maintains the permanent headquar-

36 Scarffe, Colin. "The Canada-China Global Commerce Picture and Supply Chain Links." Global Affairs Canada. Government of Canada. September, 2020. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/economist-economiste/analysis-analyse/china-canada-2020-commerce-chine.aspx?lang=eng>

37 "China condemns U.S., Canada for sending warships through Taiwan Strait." Reuters. October 17, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-canadian-warships-sailed-through-taiwan-strait-last-week-2021-10-17/>

38 "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS." The White House. September 15, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aucus/>

39 McCarten, James. "Nothing to see here, Canada says of Five Eyes alliance despite absence from sub deal." Canadian Press. September 16, 2021. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/nothing-to-see-here-canada-says-of-five-eyes-alliance-despite-absence-from-sub-deal-1.5588072>

40 Bondy, Matthew. "Excluded from AUKUS? Canada Should Seek to Invite Itself Aboard." Centre for International Governance Innovation. September 30, 2021. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/excluded-from-aucus-canada-should-invite-itself-aboard/>

ters element for the battalion-sized battle group from several member countries which exercises in Latvia on a rotating basis; it also sends ships and aircraft into the area. (Britain maintains a comparable presence in Estonia, Germany in Lithuania, and the U.S. in Poland.) Under NATO's "Tailored Forward Presence" program for southeastern Europe Canada has also rotated fighter aircraft to Romania and sent warships into the Black Sea for exercises.⁴¹

As events in the Ukraine have evolved Canada has increased its activities in support of NATO, including sending an artillery battery and electronic warfare troop to Latvia, deploying a frigate to join NATO's Standing Naval Forces, and retasking a long range patrol aircraft already in the area to operate under NATO command and control.

Prior to the Russian invasion Canada was already provided trainers (typically 200 persons) and non-lethal equipment to the Ukrainian armed forces. As the likelihood of a Russian invasion increased, it withdrew its trainers first to western Ukraine and then to Poland.⁴² It did, however, change its aid policy and send two plane loads of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine in a display of solidarity.⁴³ It has made further deliveries, including the Carl Gustaf anti-tank weapon, an older system but doubtless still welcome. But as Defence Minister Anand has said,⁴⁴ there are limits to how far Canada can draw down its own stocks, and future assistance may have to come in the form of purchasing weapons rather than directly supplying its own ones. (It is with noting that Canada's support for Ukraine has a domestic political element as it has the second largest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine in the world after Russia.) How Canada will further participate the response by NATO to the new security dynamic in Europe following the invasion will have to be determined over the coming weeks and months.

Limited Resources, but Still Standing on Guard

Defence Minister Anand has indicated that she will lay out "aggressive options" for increasing defense spending in light of the Ukraine crisis.⁴⁵ And Prime Minister has said that "our investments in our Canadian Armed Forces will continue to increase."⁴⁶ What these statements mean will become clearer as the next budget is announced. But even as the military may receive some more funding in the near future, the question is how long it will be sustained. There may be pressure to rein in deficits which had risen as a result of COVID-related spending. At the same time Trudeau has made a deal with the left-leaning New Democratic Party which will provide long-term support in Parliament in exchange for increases in social spending. So whether there really is a sea change in Canadian attitudes towards defense remains to be seen.

41 "Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast." North Atlantic Treaty Organization. January 7, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

42 "Operation Unifier." Department of National Defence. Government of Canada. February 25, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-unifier.html>

43 Somos, Christy. "Second shipment of Canadian lethal aid arrives in Ukraine." CTV News. February 23, 2022. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/second-shipment-of-canadian-lethal-aid-arrives-in-ukraine-1.5792657>

44 "Trudeau: Canada to continue to provide military assistance to Ukraine." Ukrinform. March 25, 2022. <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-defense/3439214-trudeau-canada-to-continue-provide-military-assistance-to-ukraine.html>

45 "Canada's defense minister to set 'aggressive' defense spending options." Reuters. March 16, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadas-defense-minister-set-aggressive-defense-spending-options-2022-03-16/>

46 "Canada to increase defense spending, impose new sanctions on Russia." Reuters. March 24, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-canada-idCAKCN2LL25M>

Still, it must be admitted that Canada has maintained its modest but real commitment to international security. Its procurement process has been painfully slow but is moving forward and, if maintained, will eventually lead to a Navy and Air Force with comparable equipment to its partners in the West. Addressing the sexual misconduct allegations which have devastated its most senior ranks remains a “must do” challenge as is increasing personnel levels. Canada will continue to deploy its armed forces domestically as needed, of course. And within the limits of its capabilities, it is prepared to look north to the Arctic, east to Europe and west to Asia, as it works with its enormous partner to the south and other allies in an ever more uncertain world.







About the Author

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