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**Strong, Secure, Engaged:
Evaluating Canada as a Dependable Ally
and Partner for the United States**

by Lindsay Rodman
November, 2017

POLICY PAPER

STRONG, SECURE, ENGAGED: EVALUATING CANADA AS A DEPENDABLE ALLY AND PARTNER FOR THE UNITED STATES

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► Executive Summary

This article provides an American analysis of Canada’s recently released defence policy: Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE). On the whole, the document reaffirmed Canada as a dependable “closest friend”, partner and ally. From an American perspective, SSE is well received, providing additional capacity in high-demand areas and additional capability, particularly in areas that complement U.S. capabilities. In North America and overseas, the United States looks to Canada to be a highly capable, highly interoperable, complementary and sophisticated partner. SSE invests in many aspects of Canadian defence that will bolster the country’s effectiveness as a U.S. partner and ally. Although the document does contain a force utilization construct that provides a helpful guide to American policy-makers, the organizational structure of the document, and the complete lack of a threat assessment or other prioritization, leave some unanswered questions about who Canada intends to be, and how Canada plans to engage with the world.



Over the past year, since the election of Donald Trump, Canadians have wondered what kind of a partner and ally the United States will be to Canada in the years ahead. The publication of Canada's new defence policy – *Strong, Secure, Engaged* – presents the opposite question. Now that Canada has made its statement about the next 20 years of defence policy, what kind of a partner and ally is Canada, from an American perspective?

In this article, I provide an analysis of *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) from the vantage point of a self-interested American defence policy professional,¹ in light of U.S. national and international priorities. Although the Trump administration is routinely criticized for its unfocused and unclear global policies, the relationship between the United States and Canada is robust and longstanding. Most defence policy interests related to Canada will supersede the changes currently being made in Washington. Unless and until President Donald Trump turns his focus to Canada specifically with respect to defence policy, the mandate for those who execute U.S. defence policy will remain relatively unchanged.



Figure 1: Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland delivers a speech in the House of Commons on Canada's Foreign Policy in Ottawa on Tuesday, June 6, 2017. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

On the whole, the new defence policy reaffirmed Canada as a dependable “closest friend”, partner and ally. Around Washington, a growing sense has developed that Canada is looking elsewhere for partners. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland's remarks just before the publication of

¹ Although the author is an American defence policy professional, she is currently outside government and living in Canada as the Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow (Canada). This article represents her views alone.



SSE, citing the United States' desire to "shrug off the burden of world leadership", raised some eyebrows in Washington.² The nearly simultaneous release of SSE helped resolve some potential concerns about tension between the two countries. Even the basic structure of the document – focusing first on Canadian defence, then on the partnership between Canada and the United States, and then on the rest of the world – is likely to placate any potentially concerned American policy-makers.

First and foremost, Canada's defence policy makes clear that Canada prioritizes its relationship with the United States, and its commitment to continental defence. Those reassurances are not lost on American policy-makers, and serve as useful reminders of our mutual interdependence. From an American perspective, SSE on the whole is well received, providing additional capacity in high-demand areas, and additional capability, particularly in areas that complement U.S. capabilities. For the United States, the utmost priority in its relationship with Canada lies in continental defence. Outside of North America, however, the United States often asks Canada to operate in partnership on behalf of other operations or causes. For those eventualities, this policy provides helpful guidance. However, as Americans turn to Canada, they often have the same question that Canadians ask themselves at home: who do you want to be in the world? And unfortunately, SSE does not provide an answer.

Text Box on Page 81 of SSE:

CONCURRENT OPERATIONS

At any given time, the Government of Canada can call upon the Canadian Armed Forces to undertake missions for the protection of Canada and Canadians and the maintenance of international peace and stability. It will often call upon the Canadian Armed Forces to deploy on multiple operations at the same time. This policy ensures the Canadian Armed Forces will be prepared to simultaneously:

- defend Canada, including responding concurrently to multiple domestic emergencies in support of civilian authorities;
- meet its NORAD obligations, with new capacity in some areas;
- meet commitments to NATO Allies under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty; and
- contribute to international peace and stability through:
 - two sustained deployments of ~500-1500 personnel in two different theatres of operation, including one as a lead nation;
 - one time-limited deployment of ~500-1500 personnel (6-9 months duration);
 - two sustained deployments of ~100-500 personnel;
 - two time-limited deployments (6-9 months) of ~100-500 personnel;
 - one Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) deployment, with scaleable additional support; and
 - one Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation, with scaleable additional support.

² Uri Friedman, "Canada is Now Openly Questioning the Future of U.S. Leadership," *The Atlantic*, July 7, 2017. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/canada-trump-leadership/529353/>.



Seeking Canada's Role in the World

Americans and the international community understand Canada's values. The question is often not "what does Canada think?" but rather "what is Canada willing to do?" Therefore, to American readers of SSE, the most eye-catching portion of the document from this perspective is in a text box on page 81 – the only nod to how Canada intends to engage with the world in the document, written in terms of a force utilization construct, which the Department of National Defence is calling the "concurrent mission concept".³ SSE does not justify or further explain the numbers or descriptions in this box, leaving the reader to wonder: What types of units are these? What types of missions will they perform?

To American policy-makers, that text box provides the menu of potentially deployable units that they are likely to look toward, if and when the two countries come to discuss Canadian involvement in future operations or missions. The policy is intentionally vague about these units – they could be air, land or sea units with any range of capabilities, according to DND,⁴ prompting questions about how Canada plans to train and organize around this concurrent mission construct. Units are obviously best utilized when they are deployed to perform the missions they trained for. Notably, the previous Canadian force utilization construct in the 2005 International Policy Statement was more detailed in terms of unit type and mission, but did not articulate the overarching theory about simultaneous capability.⁵

Force Construct and Procurement are not Strategy

U.S. strategy, policy and force development all derive from the National Security Strategy. The United States has a well-established rhythm of policy document production. Without the National Security Strategy, the National Military Strategy does not have its foundational underpinnings. Without those two documents, Pentagon force planners do not have the guidance they require to determine an appropriate force utilization construct of their own. Every American decision about what to buy and how many troops are required can be traced back to a requirement, established in written U.S. policy documents, that supports a strategic objective or mission of the United States. Understanding this process on the American side helps contextualize what Americans might expect from a Canadian defence policy.

Others commentators have noted the lack of a threat analysis and lack of prioritization within SSE.⁶ The lack of strategic underpinning is disorienting to an American reader. SSE is also organized backward. The document begins with people and then moves to procurement. Both topics are incredibly important, and American policy-makers will welcome efforts to expand Canada's total force numbers, as well as much-needed reforms to a hobbled procurement establishment. However, it is only in the latter chapters that the American policy-maker would

³ Remarks by Maj.-Gen. Jean-Marc Lanthier, Chief of Program, Department of National Defence, CGAI Conference on Oct. 26, 2017.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Canada's International Policy Statement. DEFENCE: *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World* (2005), 30-31.

⁶ See for example Canadian Global Affairs Institute, The Global Exchange (podcast), *Canada's Defence Policy: What Does it Mean?*, episode posted June 8, 2017.



get a sense of those people's missions, and what equipment will be needed for their execution. As mentioned above, the "concurrent mission concept" in the second-to-last chapter is the only articulation of what Canada intends to be able to do with its people and materiel, and it does not follow from any articulation of goals or priority.

Similarly, although *Strong, Secure, Engaged* is thorough, it lacks clarity below the surface. Obvious follow-up questions include: when will we see these new investments and capabilities? There are very few, if any, timed goals, except that the policy as a whole refers to a 20-year time horizon. Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan has signalled that an implementation plan is forthcoming,⁷ so any further criticism on that front should wait until the plan's release.

Canada's Recommitment to its Alliances – Welcome Reassurance for NORAD and NATO

Nevertheless, SSE does provide an emphatic and resounding restatement of the importance of the relationship between the United States and Canada. Canada's devotion to its alliances was never in question, but it is always welcome to see a close ally express its commitment explicitly. The trend between the two nations has been toward increasing interdependence and partnership. To that end, the U.S. likely appreciates Canada's interest in modernizing NORAD, as well as its commitment to NATO.

NORAD will turn 60 next year, prompting a natural opportunity to reassess the organization and its mission. SSE expresses generalized support for the organization and the mission, but is otherwise relatively unspecific. Specifics about Canada's willingness to invest more deeply in NORAD did not appear in the document. Instead, SSE speaks to meeting current commitments and maintaining interoperability.

NORAD modernization efforts have their own long history.⁸ Canada is often reticent to raise questions of modernization because the United States will rightfully then ask what Canada is prepared to offer in terms of additional resources. These questions are likely to come up next year, and it will be frustrating to American ears if Canada's response is that SSE obligates all of Canada's future capacity for investment, and therefore precludes meaningful NORAD modernization.

The only reference to ballistic missile defence (BMD), an important aspect of continental defence planning, is buried on page 90, stating: "Canada's policy with respect to participation in ballistic missile defence has not changed." Canadians debate the merits of joining BMD at length, and it is a worthwhile debate. However, Americans are far less focused on BMD as a symbol of Canadian-American partnership than Canadians might believe. Other issues, such as Canada's inability to pick and stick with a fighter replacement, are much more important to address for continental defence purposes.

⁷ Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan's remarks at Canadian Global Affairs Institute Conference, *Unpacking Canada's New Defence Policy: The Path to Strong, Secure, Engaged*, on Oct. 4, 2017.

⁸ See Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, *Beyond NORAD and Modernization to North American Defence Evolution*, at http://www.cgai.ca/beyond_norad_and_modernization_to_north_american_defence_evolution.



In contrast to NORAD, NATO has been on the minds of many Canadians and Americans since Donald Trump's election, particularly with respect to Article 5.⁹ Canada notably recommitted to meeting its Article 5 obligations, potentially a large undertaking in the prototypical scenario of a Russian invasion. However, Canada did not recommit to meeting other NATO obligations, namely the spending threshold.

The Canadian government's framing of its modest increase in defence expenditure as a percentage of GDP can be viewed in three ways: 1) it brings credibility to the document, as there are no outlandish promises, and the accounting was detailed; 2) Canada is increasing its defence funding from 1.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent, and though it is small, any increase in expenditure is welcome; 3) Canada is unwilling to meet its obligation to fund its defence at two per cent of GDP, and is therefore not meeting its NATO commitments.¹⁰ All three responses are likely to surface from various parts of the U.S. policy-making apparatus, as Canada and the United States continue to engage on NATO issues.

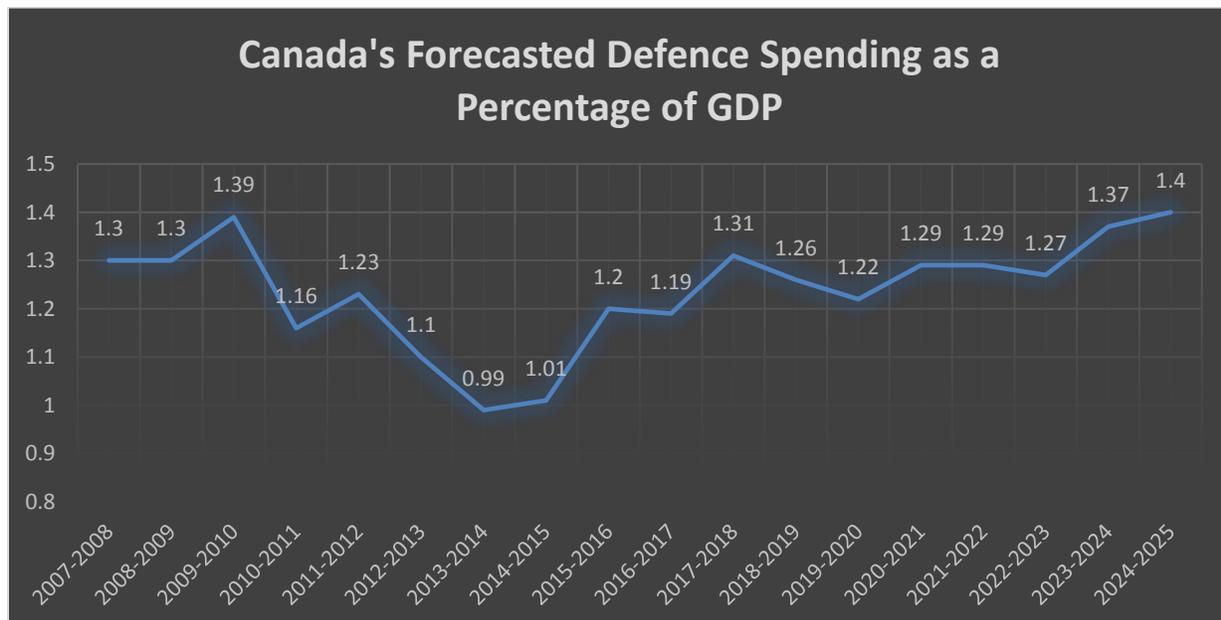


Figure 2: Forecasted defence budget as a percentage of GDP (Data: Strong, Secure, Engaged -- Canada's Defence Policy, pg. 46)

⁹ Article 5 states “an armed attack against one or more of them ... shall be considered an attack against them all.” President Donald Trump has raised some doubts about American willingness to abide by Article 5 (and to therefore rush to the defence of another nation), as he has criticized the willingness of member nations to meet their obligation to fund their own defence capabilities at two per cent of GDP. See Rosie Gray, “Trump Declines to Affirm NATO’s Article 5,” *The Atlantic*, May 25, 2017. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/trump-declines-to-affirm-natos-article-5/528129/>; Jeremy Herb, “Trump Commits to NATO Article 5,” *CNN*, June 9, 2017. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/09/politics/trump-commits-to-natos-article-5/index.html>.

¹⁰ Joel Sokolsky, “Canada’s Defence Policy Review – The Asterisk Dear Boy, The Asterisk,” *Inside Policy*, July 6, 2017. Available at: <http://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/canadas-defence-policy-review-the-asterisk-dear-boy-the-asterisk-joel-sokolsky-for-inside-policy/>. As Sokolsky notes, Canada’s candour is notable, yet the 1.4 per cent approximation does not include the cost of future operations. Canada should highlight any future expenditures for operations, as they would have the effect of increasing Canada’s expenditures. Historically, the method of accounting for the two per cent figure has not mattered – it is a symbolic matter, not a mathematical one.



While SSE makes Canada's commitment to its existing alliances clear, additional multinational efforts such as peacekeeping missions, go virtually unmentioned. Given Canada's strong history of support to peacekeeping operations, this omission seems noteworthy. On November 15, Prime Minister Trudeau provided an update on Canada's policy with respect to peacekeeping, explaining that the government is in consultation with the United Nations regarding how Canada should contribute. However, real specificity is still lacking.

What is the United States Looking For?

Canada can be a highly competent and desirable partner in international efforts, though sometimes reluctant and requiring significant cajoling. A few recent examples include: Canada's deployment to Latvia in support of NATO,¹¹ Canada's support to the Ebola effort,¹² and Canada's willingness to provide troops to support the effort in Syria.¹³ There are many important counter-examples, including Afghanistan, Canada's current special forces in Iraq, and the response to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

In addition to dependence on Canada for continental defence, and for its support to the NATO alliance, the United States needs partners like Canada for multinational responses to various security challenges around the world. Regardless of whether the United States is looking to Canada for support in North America or overseas, a few underlying principles will help clarify what the United States might be looking for.

First and foremost, willing partners and allies for multinational efforts are important to the United States for political reasons, if nothing else. Therefore, the United States has been willing to accept very little from countries just to be able to expand the list of signatories to a certain cause. However, there are additional considerations for the United States' more sophisticated and economically well-off partners. The United States looks to countries like Canada, and Canada in particular, for a few important things. Listed in order of importance, they are: (1) interoperability, (2) FVEY/intelligence support, (3) complementary capabilities, (4) capabilities that require technical expertise or specialized training, and (5) capacity. SSE helps clarify Canada's ability to meet these objectives in some areas, while it leaves some questions unanswered.

Interoperability

Interoperability refers to the ability of American and Canadian equipment and systems to talk to each other and to work together. SSE includes interoperability with allies as an important

¹¹ The Canadian Press, "NATO Head Applauds Canada's Decision to Commit Troops in Latvia," *Maclean's*, July 4, 2016. Available at: <http://www.macleans.ca/news/nato-head-applauds-canadas-decision-to-commit-troops-in-latvia/>.

¹² See <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad/op-sirona.page>. Although Canadians did provide science- and health-related support to the U.K. effort in Sierra Leone, in terms of military support they were asked to take the lead in Guinea, a francophone nation, which never materialized.

¹³ The Canadian Press, "Sajjan Rules Out Sending Canadian Troops to Syria as Part of New Mission Against Daesh," *thestar.com*, June 16, 2017. Available at: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/06/16/deploying-canadian-troops-to-syria-not-part-of-new-mission-against-daesh-sajjan-says.html>.



component to each major procurement project, for each of the three services. Buying American platforms obviously leads to greater interoperability, but that is not the priority of American defence policy-makers.¹⁴

Taken figuratively, interoperability is also the way that American and Canadian units can fight together, with the benefit of shared language, culture and training. There is no country closer to the United States than Canada in these intangible characteristics.

Support to Intelligence

The FVEY community is perhaps the most important, and least publicized, pillar in the United States' ability to depend on its friends and allies for support. SSE provides a number of welcome new investments in Canadian intelligence capability and capacity that will provide direct benefit to the United States. The close-knit relationship that developed between the United States and Canada within the FVEY community necessarily bleeds into other facets of the security relationship – it is no coincidence that the closest intelligence partners also look to one another for support to other defence missions.

SSE's commitment to investment in joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) at the tactical, operational and strategic levels is particularly noteworthy. From battlefield commanders to policy-makers in Washington, D.C., American decision-makers are hungry for information as they make life-and-death decisions. The United States struggles internally to keep up with demand for ISR. Canada's development of Arctic-capable ISR is also important, as the United States, rightly or wrongly, will depend on its partners who are also Arctic nations to have well-developed capabilities for cold weather, plugging a potential weakness in the United States' own capabilities.

The publication briefly mentions modernization of the North Warning System but does not dwell on it. As the United States and Canada refocus attention on potentially adversarial behaviour from Russia, we cannot allow any decline in our ability to detect activity along northern approaches.

Complementary Capabilities

Investment in the Arctic is particularly important because the United States looks to its allies to provide complementary capability wherever possible. Although the United States tries to cover all possible needs with its own military, there are areas in which other countries will have a natural comparative advantage. The United States would gladly depend on a country like Canada to develop a modern Arctic capability that exceeds its own. Canada's investment in search and rescue (SAR) is also much needed in North America, since the United States under-invests in its own SAR capability.

Complementary capabilities do not have to be as technologically specialized as Arctic-capable war-fighting units. They could be as simple as having francophone (or simply non-American) units in certain parts of the world or peacekeeping units who are specially trained for certain

¹⁴ It is, of course, the priority of the American defence industry, and possibly others within the U.S. government.



predictable missions. SSE does not speak to any of those scenarios, but its commitment to investment in the Arctic is welcome from an American perspective.

Specialized Capabilities

The United States considers Canada to be among its most sophisticated allies. Canada's comparative advantage, as compared with other troop-contributing nations, is not necessarily how many bodies Canada can provide to a mission, but how tactically and technically proficient and/or specialized those bodies will be. Canada is uniquely positioned to provide units for specialized missions in air, on land and at sea that other U.S. allies would not be as competent to support.



Figure 3: Polish and Canadian soldiers practice fast-roping from a Polish helicopter onto a building during Operation REASSURANCE, June 2016 (Credit: CAF Combat Camera)

SSE's emphasis on innovation and intelligence, as well as its expansion of special operations and Canada's commitment to space, indicate Canada's willingness to focus on these sorts of areas. More Canadian investment in niche capabilities, especially those that require sophistication, advanced technology or highly specialized training will provide welcome support to the United States.

Capacity

While the force utilization construct discussed above provides numbers, from an American perspective numbers are not quite as important as what those people will be doing. Given the above considerations, the United States is not likely to prioritize mere capacity – numbers,



regardless of type – over other contributions from Canada. Nevertheless, the press tends to focus on numbers as being indicative of a country’s commitment to a cause, and therefore capacity for capacity’s sake could also be important to the United States.

Conclusion

The United States has come to depend on Canada for its support, at home and abroad. Had the SSE looked different – if it had signalled lagging commitment to alliances, less investment in North American defence or a dramatic shift in Canadian priorities – Canada might have expected a strong American reaction. Instead, the relatively quiet American reaction thus far reflects the policy’s generally unobjectionable nature. On the whole, while SSE rearticulates the strong bond between the two countries, which is welcome from an American perspective, it leaves many open questions about who Canada wants to be in the world, and what Canada wants to do. The United States therefore is left with some uncertainty about how Canada plans to partner with the United States, in North America and abroad.

► About the Author

Lindsay L. Rodman is the Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow (Canada), placed at the University of Ottawa's Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS). She is a U.S. attorney and an expert in U.S. defence and foreign policy, and recently joined CFR (a U.S.-based think tank) and CIPS after leaving the Obama Administration, where she served in the Pentagon as Senior Advisor for International Humanitarian Policy. Prior to her political appointment, she was an active duty judge advocate in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving in various roles, including as Deputy Legal Counsel to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as the Operational Law Attorney for 1st Marine Division (FWD) in Afghanistan. Her last assignment as an active duty Marine was in the White House as Director for Defense Policy and Strategy at the National Security Council. She remains in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. Prior to joining the Marine Corps, Lindsay was an associate at the law firm of Arnold & Porter LLP (now Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer) in Washington, DC. She is a graduate of Harvard Law School (JD, 2007), the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (MPP, 2007), and Duke University (AB Mathematics, 2003).

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