



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

Creating a Big Bang

Implementing the Procurement Ambition in Strong Secure Engaged

Conference Report
October 26, 2017

CONFERENCE REPORT

CREATING A BIG BANG: IMPLEMENTING THE PROCUREMENT AMBITION IN STRONG SECURE ENGAGED

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PANEL 1: SETTING THE STAGE

Panelists: Jody Thomas, Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence; André Fillion, Chief of Staff (Materiel), Department of National Defence; Maj.-Gen. Jean-Marc Lanthier, Chief of Program, Department of National Defence

Moderated by David Perry, Senior Analyst and Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute

The defence policy – Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE) – is in the very early days of a 20-year plan. It is a very large, ambitious, and complex policy with a lot to unpack. The defence team is working extremely hard and is focused on delivering SSE. The fall economic update, released Oct. 24, further reinforced the government’s commitment to SSE, showing the money that has been allocated for SSE implementation. However, it is important to understand that not everything will happen at once, and that there is no prioritization of initiatives within SSE. All initiatives are aligned with funding and capability, and will occur when and where the money has been allocated. While SSE is a top priority, it must be carried out in conjunction with the daily activities of the Department of National Defence (DND).

The processes and approaches of past policies cannot be relied on to successfully implement SSE. There are four key enablers to a successful SSE implementation. First, it will depend on the government’s and DND’s ability to handle the increase of procurement projects and initiatives in terms of human resources. Currently, there are approximately 500 project managers at different levels throughout DND; however, the department is expected to grow the workforce and leverage experience from previous successful procurement projects. Additionally, as DND receives increased contracting authority of up to \$5 million, the Department will undergo internal restructuring to put leadership in the right places to successfully deliver the SSE.

Second, SSE needs strong governance to guide its implementation. The deputy minister (DM) and chief of defence staff (CDS) own SSE. They are responsible for SSE, and will closely monitor its progress, ask questions and ensure that initiatives serve the goals of SSE. An executive oversight committee has been established to oversee the entire SSE implementation process.

Third, to provide greater amounts of fact-based information, data analytics will be used to monitor SSE’s daily progress. The DM and CDS will be able to use this information to identify any challenges or issues with implementation and quickly address the situation to keep implementation on track and avoid problems. Attaching data analytics to SSE implementation helps drive better informed decisions that are rooted in highly detailed fact-based information.

Fourth, communication will be a key component of SSE implementation. Throughout implementation, the defence team will openly talk about its successes and failures, allowing the



public to remain informed on the process. DND remains committed to engaging with industry and the public throughout the process.

Question & Answer

Q: Communication has been mentioned as a key to transparency with the SSE. What forms of communication will be used to connect with the public?

A: The ADM of Public Affairs has been and will continue to be closely involved in the communication of SSE, and is working on a communication strategy to report progress. In addition to releasing annual reports, information will be made public in an ongoing manner allowing people to monitor developments with SSE implementation.

There is a risk associated with being so public with information. People will be able to monitor progress, failures, poke holes in the process and ask questions. However, there is a duty to be public, and it may even assist in getting more insight on issues that may have been missed.

Q: Are there any savings initiatives planned to help implement the program?

A: There is no expectation that the department would make any cuts to other programs or areas in order to implement SSE. SSE is a fully funded policy. Nothing has changed and there are no plans to cut anything. There is an obligation to find efficiency in the processes and programs to help save some money where possible, in order to create some flexibility within the policy.

Q: Is the transparency of this program a move towards having similar transparency standards as the United States?

A: Baby steps are being taken towards transparency.

Q: What are two capacity or resource issues that impede the system? What can we do about those issues?

A: It is important to recruit the right people to help deliver the initiatives in the policy. The procurement processes must be professionalized, using the current work force and experience, and in attracting new hires.

Q: There have been conversations about the mechanisms that have to be in place to implement the policy. In two years' time, when priorities change, how will the changing environment and its impact on the mechanism delivering the policy be managed?

A: It's important to be optimistic about the policy and implementation. The policy is fully funded, operational, and the budget is aligned with the capabilities. This policy and its delivery are going to be transparent, so any change to what is being delivered will be public, and will have to be addressed. A series of processes are being developed to ensure the policy is implemented, and the



internal structure of the department is changing to provide the best chance of success. If in the next few years there are changes in the department's priorities, adjustments will be made accordingly.

Q: Will non-disclosure agreements apply?

A: Transparency will be about the way we are operating. Non-disclosure agreements that go into decisions about capabilities are a completely different issue, and in the early stages of planning this information may have to be protected. But there will not be a blanket non-disclosure.

PANEL 2: FRAMING THE CHALLENGE

Panellists: Rob Fonberg, retired deputy minister, Department of National Defence; Tom Ring, retired assistant deputy minister, Public Service Procurement Canada; John MacDonnell, former chief of staff to the Minister of National Defence

Moderated by Eugene Lang, former chief of staff to the Minister of National Defence

It is hard to find anyone outside of the government who thinks Canada's system of defence procurement isn't broken. But if you talk to people inside the government they will have a different perspective, as they have a more robust picture of what is going on. "Strong, Secure and Engaged" is a shift in what we have been doing, but there seems to be a shortage of ideas that are practical and implementable for defence procurement purposes.

Remarks from Rob Fonberg, retired deputy minister, Department of National Defence

With a focus on the procurement side, there are always ways for something to go wrong at any stage of the life cycle of a procurement project. However, there is an emphasis on the potential for problems to occur during the planning stage. Many problems are internal, and a well-functioning procurement life cycle has many attributes that contribute to a project's success. These include: cabinet approval; the necessity for transparency of requirements (which is not addressed in SSE); sound costing; approved funding; clear and respected accountabilities across departments and their employees; timely processes for timely decisions; and informed audiences. These are necessary for success but could be more or less prominent depending on the profile needs.

In addition, other government departments can affect a project's success. The first is the lack of transparency in the Prime Minister's Office, the second is cabinet committees and their lack of communication, and the third is the Parliamentary Budgetary Office which is not always informed and can undermine the confidence of a procurement project. Any one of these departments can put a project into delay mode if they do not agree with a particular aspect of the project; however, the ambition for SSE will not be in place without the support of these departments.



One recommendation is to improve the efficiency of defence spending. The goal is to be able to say that every dollar is being spent on procurement objectives that are needed and that no dollar is being wasted. The problem is this is not the case at the moment. The department must get itself into a world where the business of the business – defence spending – is airtight. Currently, strides have been taken in this direction, but the bottom line is that it is not there yet. Overall, a best practice for improvement is to constantly scan for risk management events that are outside of the purview of national defence as those will impact the success of the procurement plan.

Remarks from Tom Ring, retired assistant deputy minister, Public Service and Procurement Canada

There are three main points to be made. First, Canada has never had a 20-year defence policy. This is partially because defence problems will come up that will change the plan. The 20-year SSE plan seems like an excuse not to do concrete procurement efforts in the near future. SSE is a tall order and at some point, efforts need to be made to achieve certain goals. Therefore, it is imperative that a couple of projects are picked to complete in the near future. For example, there is an urgent requirement to replace Canada's fighter jets. Canada needs to stop stalling for political reasons and get the equipment the Canadian Armed Forces need.

Second, there is a difference between program and project management. Certain departments can be managed as programs, for example CSE. Certain departments can be improved and their projects can be managed on a program basis in order for them to achieve success in their mandate.

Third, SSE is not set up to allow people to do what they are good at. This is because over the course of 20 years, there will be 10 chiefs of program, as every couple of years the position is rotated. The change in the position means there are constant changes in perspectives regarding the project's direction, which does not bode well in the long term. However, changing this aspect of SSE will require a cultural shift in order to achieve the desired results. Otherwise, SSE will simply repeat past directives.

Remarks by John MacDonnell, former chief of staff to the Minister of National Defence

It is strongly noted that defence procurement is broken, and must be rethought and re-designed. If the government had manpower and money, then procurement efforts would improve, and the CAF could get new equipment, such as new aircraft and ships. It may be thought that the off-the-shelf design is easier to procure, but doing so only dwarfs the size of the Canadian fighter fleets. The problem with procurement is that there is no oversight or political pull. Most of the senior officials needed to manage these projects and give public servants the ability to do what they can have moved on from the Canadian government.

A secondary problem has to do with the budget allocated to defence procurement. It appears that there is less investment than in the Canada First Defence Strategy, with the budget not growing



over \$1 billion before the next election. The increase does not come until after the next two elections.

Finally, deployment will dictate completely different needs as well. There is a relative difference between procurement in peacetime and procurement in wartime. When lives are at stake, the individuals in charge can effect change much faster, compared to when there is no imminent threat.

Question & Answer

Q: It seems there are two schools of thought around defence procurement, the first being that the best thing to do is to keep politicians out of procurement so that it works better. The second school of thought is that when politicians are engaged and have political pull that is the only time procurement projects work well. These are irreconcilable. Please provide your thoughts on which is the better approach.

A:

Rob: School of thought number 2 is the better approach. Cabinet ministers and politicians are elected to make decisions. Not having them engaged is detrimental to the outcomes we in the procurement industry are after. The problem in the past was that politicians were not informed ahead of time and that was why procurement failed. However, this does not mean that politicians should be evaluating the bids when the project is being addressed.

John agrees with Rob. He explains his reasoning by outlining that the procurement of ships in the past was successful, in part because the public service ran the program entirely. He believes in parliamentary democracy and says it is sad that the non-involvement of ministers is seen as a virtue.

Tom states that Rob is right and also wrong. Of course, it is ideal to hold ministers accountable for their decisions. To illustrate his point, he draws attention to the shipbuilding project, which is often not well understood. Former prime minister Stephen Harper took personal responsibility for the difficult decision, that it was essential to remove politics from decision-making. Canada can now look back and imagine how the procurement of ships could have played out if there had been no lobbying. Politics should be kept out of what should be the public service's decision.

Q: Can you comment on your thoughts around the process of procurement of PSPC working with others to be successful as we engage in bigger files?



A:

Tom: There does not have to be a negative perception of the challenges associated with the requirements of national defence. Requirements change when there is a change in project manager, as there is then a new perspective on how the objective should be defined. An additional requirement surrounds what can actually be delivered. With this, there is a resistance to openness in the procurement process. Furthermore, the potential bidders for a project shape the requirements and determine how certain aspects should be weighted. This works well because there is transparency in how it can work and what can be delivered.

Rob: The biggest problem pertains to the definition of requirements. Civilians have no insight into any of it. Once they do have insight, the project has essentially been set in stone. The question must be asked what the department needs in order to be successful. That way, you can be confident the necessary means are being provided. Also, the space between ADM MAT and PSPC was confused. In other words, work was being transferred to the other department, and when departments start looking for cover and comfort from the other department, accountability gets lost. This is a space that we are still in and needs to be addressed.

Q: Can you speak to your views on the agreement on internal trade vs. NAFTA, which does not require defence to be in that space, and our incessant desire to compete on everything even if it will not get Canada the best value for its buck?

A:

John: In the past, governments have failed to get the public to understand what they were doing. People often want equipment made in Canada, but this is difficult to achieve. Canada may as well spend its money on maple syrup because it is made in Canada.

Tom: There needs to be a balance. Canada does not always need to buy Canadian designs. For example, the fixed-wing search-and-rescue defence team would be an interesting case study on procurement.

Q: There are many risks to the implementation of the procurement agenda, but there are reforms underway and a generation to work it out. However, as has been discussed, other powerful forces can upset the agenda. The biggest risk to the procurement agenda is the three essential agencies. There is a lack of understanding in respect to the agencies, and also constitutional hostility to national defence, but assuming this, how do you get the central agencies aligned around the procurement agenda?

Rob: First of all, there is really limited policy capacity in those central agencies. There needs to be more back-and-forth between the agencies via their personnel. For example, they should have personnel from each agency sit at the Treasury Board Secretariat. In this way, they can each inform



the others, and identify problems before they become a problem. Also, a board of directors from each department should be created, so that everyone can understand what each is doing. These types of procedures were never completely implemented. There is always someone making random decisions; the idea is that by using these types of mechanisms to inform each agency, better and more informed decisions can be made.

John: Another way to get the central agencies aligned around the procurement agenda is to keep people in their jobs longer than we currently do. This is important to keep the procurement agenda progressing on the same track. In the past four years there have been four deputy ministers who altered the direction of projects according to their own points of view.

Q: Today, there's a challenge in getting information to each department to do the costing. Do you think we should do more to address this? Is it a good thing to have this independent role to do the costing?

Rob: The F-35 procurement project was handled completely wrong. There were aspects of that project that could have played an important part and were intended to do so; however, they were not done correctly. Procurement projects have to be handled cautiously.

LUNCH KEYNOTE

Mark Thomson, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Australia and Canada are facing similar challenges, which relate to the promised delivery of capital projects to their respective armed forces. Australian procurement has been, historically, a tortured path. Throughout the 20th century, Australia made a concerted effort to procure its military equipment locally and nationally. In the 1980s, Australia reorganized its procurement system, selling off shipyards and outsourcing its procurement projects to the global market. While Australia opened up to the world, it still wished to keep industrial capacity in the defence sector afloat and used industrial offsets as a way to keep money within the local economy. Over time, local Australian arms manufacturers moved into a sub-contractor role within the procurement chains of global defence industries.

The use of contract-based projects and local offsets had mixed results for overall Australian procurement. Some projects, such as the Anzac ship program, were delivered on time, to specification and on budget, while others such as the submarine program failed to meet timeframes and budgets.

By the early 2000s, the Australians began reforming their procurement structure so that the government would become more involved in each project. The formation of a defence material agency accompanied this. These reforms improved performance in projects, and pushed the



domestic development of professional defence capacity. Despite reforms, problems still arose, surrounding the interpretation of what “off-the-shelf” meant. In the case of its naval procurement, the government chose an off-the-shelf design as opposed to a finished product. Furthermore, the creation of the quasi-independent defence material agency became bound by public sector employment rules, which hampered its recruitment of talented professionals into its organization.

Similar to Canada, Australia is currently undergoing a massive procurement program with its armed forces, with major procurement projects slated for the Air Force (72 F-35s) and Navy (12 submarines and eight or nine frigates). To deliver on these capital projects Australia is planning to increase investment into the defence sector per annum by 8.7 per cent. This is problematic, due to the reality that the defence sector is too small and the practical bound on increased investment would be around five per cent per annum. The current defence sector cannot handle an 8.7 per cent increase in defence investment so suddenly.

Furthermore, these massive procurement projects have abandoned the competition framework for procurement, and instead opted for a sole-source procurement to deliver the Australian armed forces the weaponry that meets their requirements. Australia is knowingly accepting the risk of sole-sourced production for the speed that is evident in its method, especially regarding its ship-building procurement.

Ultimately, some projects will go bad, because there are no silver bullets when it comes to defence procurement. Choices must be made, and it is those choices which determine the future of procurement.

PANEL 3: WHAT FACTORS ARE CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING SSE?

Panellists: Dr. Craig Stone, Canadian Forces College; John Ivison, National Post; Mark Thomson, Australian Strategic Policy Institute; Mike Greenley, L3 WESCAM

Moderated by David Perry, Senior Analyst and Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute

Remarks by Dr. Craig Stone, Canadian Forces College

The two key challenges facing contemporary procurement are: 1) how do we accomplish our procurement goals; and 2) how do we connect procurement to innovation? Ultimately, procurement has been a problem for Canada and its allies since the end of the Second World War. When we look at Canadian procurement, both historically and contemporarily, two features are immediately evident. Canada is really good at small-scale procurement, and terrible at big-ticket procurement – such as the F-35 or other such projects. This is due to the simple fact that small-scale procurement is apolitical, whereas big-ticket procurement is a political game of



brinksmanship between political parties. In times of immediate need, Canadian politicians can force the procurement system and drag through procurement projects with relative ease. The urgent operational needs and connection to literal live-or-die situations make this project easy. In times of peace, procurement becomes unnecessarily politicized for internal jockeying of power.

The only way to potentially fix the inherent problem within this procurement structure would be to create an all-party agreement on procurement priorities and decision-making. While this is unlikely to happen any time soon, Canada should learn from Australia and the United Kingdom and attempt to bring communities together from public and private sectors, where professionals can gather and discuss procurement within a co-operative environment.

Remarks by John Ivison, National Post

The problem with successfully implementing SSE is that the Westminster governmental structure is purposefully oppositional – it is an inherent characteristic of the system. This oppositional framework makes procurement unpredictable, because there is no consensus at the governmental level of what procurement should be. Regarding the new defence policy, it is clear that we cannot definitively claim that these procurement projects will occur as stated. These major procurement projects and the increase in defence spending are not going to take place until five, 10 or 15 years in the future. Some of this investment is not just one, but two federal elections away. The Liberal government has made promises but holding them to account on their own promises requires that they win the next several federal elections. If they do not win these elections, they cannot be held accountable to SSE.

In that sense, the key to successfully implementing SSE requires the Liberal government to maintain a majority throughout the next two elections.

Remarks by Mark Thomson, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

The key to implementing the increased investment and procurement projects within SSE is to match resources properly to the tasks SSE requires. Australia has a major gap between its means and ends with regard to its procurement system; however, it seems that the Canadian government was thinking of this scale of resource matching when it developed SSE. From Australia's experience, it is not possible to know what the defence sector will need 10 years out. Procurement must be continuous, and the Department of National Defence has to be given the flexibility to manage SSE. For SSE to work properly, politicians must be involved in the program.

Remarks by Mike Greenley, L3 WESCAM

The goals of SSE can only be met with the increased participation of industry in the Canadian defence sector. The defence industry responds quickest when it can see a clear opportunity. The problem, however, is that the Canadian procurement market is not predictable. Canada must



develop a transparent mode of creating and publishing its requirements for its procurement projects. Once the defence sector knows what Canada is looking for, it will jump into the market.

Furthermore, the doubling of defence investment requires not a simple tweak to the Canadian procurement program, but rather, structural changes. There is an absolute requirement from industrial firms that Canadian procurement become predictable. The nature of defence investment and research and development requires commitments of purchase and clear guidelines on the requirements of the armed forces for their procurements. Clarity and predictability will bring global defence firms into Canada to pursue the requirements of SSE.

Question & Answer

Q: All the panellists have spoken to the problems associated with government involvement in the procurement process. There has been no talk of intra-industrial competition, and the cutthroat attitude of global defence firms in suing each other and national governments in their pursuit of contracts. How can the Canadian government handle this, and how should the private sector deal with this?

A: The way forward is clarity. Industry can smell when governments have weak resolve and they will exploit that gap. If the government has declared its requirements and awarded contracts fairly, while acting with resolve, then they should not fear the private sector. Industry will undertake its access to the legal courts when it smells weakness in a government. If the government were transparent and resolute in its procurement process, private industry would have no recourse to these measures.

Q: Mr. Thomson, could you speak to why the quasi-independent materiel agency failed in Australia and to the successes of alliance and sole-source procurement in the Australian context?

A: The project failed because it was a government organization attempting to operate as a private sector organization. This meant it could not successfully poach top talent, as the private sector does at will. Furthermore, later, the difference became apparent among personalities, which made the project inoperable. Regarding sole-sourcing, Australia has moved to a value-for-money system, and if the sole-source project is the cheapest, then Australia has decided it will forgo competition. Sole-sourcing has worked for Australia, but that does not mean it will work for Canada. Australia needs capabilities immediately, and it needs domestic capabilities due to its own geostrategic position vis-à-vis China, and its geographical separation from Western powers.

Q: What does value mean in the Canadian context? How does SSE deliver value?

A: Politicians must make the case for value. Canadians, broadly, are unaware of the intricacies of defence procurement and requirements. Therefore, political leadership must make clear statements



regarding geopolitics and convince the public that their procurement projects are valuable. The Liberal government, so far, has been very good at explaining to the public why we need these systems.

Q: Over the past few governments, trust has eroded between Parliament and the Department of National Defence. How can the government re-establish trust in DND?

A: Frankly, the Department of National Defence is not completely trusted; however, there is more trust now than there was five years ago. Departments are working more closely with other departments and with the government as well. The increased transparency of the new government is responsible for this new environment. Trust, as we all know, is very fragile and it is easy to break, but very hard to restore. There is hope that the new government is mending the trust gap with DND, and this will aid the government in its pursuit of implementing SSE.

PANEL 4: HOW DOES CANADA ACTUALLY MOVE FORWARD TO IMPLEMENT SSE?

Panellists: Lisa Campbell, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Services Procurement Canada; Ian Brennan, vice-president, Vancouver Shipyards; Eric Dagenais, Assistant Deputy Minister, Innovation, Science and Economic Development

Moderated by L.Gen (ret.) D. Michael Day, former chief of force development, and Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute

When there is an urgent need for defence capabilities or operations, defence procurement and the political will associated with it are extremely efficient and effective. However, when the urgency subsides, government and federal departments have a tendency to revert back to previous processes and approaches that have proved less effective. SSE is a highly ambitious policy with great aspirations; however, to deliver on its goals government cannot rely on less effective methods simply because there may not be a current urgent need.

Past defence procurements have created a sense of distrust and unpredictability among both the Canadian public and the defence and security industry. To implement SSE and manage successful procurement initiatives, DND and the government need to reinstate confidence and predictability into Canadian defence procurement. Industry – both Canadian and foreign – particularly needs to have confidence in the policy and process; otherwise, they may not see the value in investing time and money into preparing bids for procurements they feel may never come to fruition. In addition to establishing trust and predictability in the Canadian defence procurement, government needs to collaborate with industry, and allow industry to innovate. Currently, there are too many identified requirements in a procurement that are highly technical, which can inhibit innovation. Identifying



between 15-20 key performance and support requirements may keep industry motivated and develop Canadian capabilities.

The SSE is an ambitious policy that is derived from the operational needs of the Canadian Armed Forces, and within the existing procurement processes government will not be able to deliver. The policy is asking for more to be done within a system that is not built to manage the increased workload. As the government's main procurement body, PSPC may receive a significant portion of the increased work. PSPC does not currently have the people or experience to manage the increased demands the policy and procurement initiatives will bring. Additionally, due to the global nature of supply chains, human resources and levels of risk, defence procurement is becoming increasingly complex. PSPC exists in a challenging procurement environment that is being driven by a desire to eliminate risk, and the department recognizes that to mitigate failures and risks it must modernize procurement methods to better respond, manage and adapt to the challenges it faces.

Question & Answer

Q: Is there enough flexibility in the policy that it allows risks and failures?

A: Guaranteed there will be failures. Implementing the policy requires the department to try and do more in a system that isn't currently built for it. All that can be done is to ask that people be patient, and to try and change the mindset around risks and how they are managed.

Q: To what extent does CETA create greater opportunities for the European Union to compete for Canadian procurements?

A: The interests between procurement and trade cannot be ignored. However, trade agreements do not offset Canada's daily procurement objectives.

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