



CANADIAN DEFENCE POLICY

Generally, but not always, after a new government takes office, it will conduct a review of policy and will produce what is referred to as a White Paper. This was done after the Liberals took office in 2015. The Liberals conducted policy consultations on a variety of topics but of interest here is defence policy. The Department of National Defence conducted a series of consultations including roundtables and town hall meetings and set up an online consultation portal. The discussions included Canadian and allied defence policy experts, the Canadian public, non-governmental organizations, industry representatives and Parliamentary committees. After the period of consultation was over, defence officials distilled the input into a defence policy for Canada.

After almost two years of consultations, the government released its new defence policy entitled *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE) in June 2017. The government claims that this new policy will provide direction on defence policy for the next 20 years.

Because the fundamentals of Canada's position in the world (a middle power living under the defence umbrella of the United States), and the geography of Canada (sharing North America with the United States), remain the same, the broad outlines of defence policy have continuity over time. Thus the broad strokes of Canadian defence laid out in SSE reflect what has been said in previous defence policies. According to SSE, as in earlier documents, the focus is defence of Canada, defence of North America in partnership with the United States, and working with allies to ensure global peace and stability. What is new for these broad strokes is how the policy is phrased. Thus, Canada will be *strong* at home, with the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) ensuring Canadian sovereignty is protected and providing assistance when there are disasters or search and rescue missions. Canada will be *secure* in North America, and work with the United States in partnership in NORAD, and it will be *engaged* in the world to contribute to a peaceful world through peace support and peacekeeping operations.

Despite the new phrasing, in these elements SSE is similar to previous defence policy statements. The core missions of the CAF as outlined in SSE are that the CAF will be prepared to:

- detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on Canada;
- detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on North America in partnership with the United States, including through NORAD;
- lead and/or contribute forces to NATO and coalition efforts to deter and defeat adversaries, including terrorists, to support global stability;
- lead and/or contribute to international peace operations and stabilization missions with the United Nations, NATO and other multilateral partners;
- engage in capacity building to support the security of other nations and their ability to contribute to security abroad;

- provide assistance to civil authorities and law enforcement, including counter-terrorism, in support of national security and the security of Canadians abroad;
- provide assistance to civil authorities and non-governmental partners in responding to international and domestic disasters or major emergencies; and
- conduct search and rescue operations.

In tone, however, it differs from earlier versions of defence policies, and some of Canada's allies. Its tone is positive, and it makes no mention of cuts or decreases to the CAF. Indeed, it pledges to increase both the budget of the armed forces and the size – the Regular Force is to increase by 3,500 personnel, and the Reserve Force is to increase by 1,500 members.

Another way SSE differs from earlier documents is in the other elements it stresses. It begins by discussing people, stating that the government will focus “On ensuring our people and their families are well-supported, diverse and resilient,” acknowledging the debt Canada owes to veterans, military personnel and their families. In the policy, in addition to allowances paid to deployed troops, the government has included tax relief measures for troops deployed on missions – they will be exempt from federal income tax. As well, the government pledged more support to families of military members. Perhaps most interesting is the government's pledge to increase the diversity of the CAF to reflect the diversity in Canadian society. In this, SSE plans to increase the proportion of women in the military by 1% annually to move from the current 15% to 25% by 2026.

A further element that makes SSE unique from earlier defence policy statements is the attempt to make the policies outlined in it fully costed. On the large scale, the government pledges to increase defence funding over the next 10 years. This increased budget means that the defence policy can make commitments to the CAF for future funding. SSE includes a promise to all three of the CAF services. For the Navy, SSE states that the government will build the full complement of 15 Canadian Surface Combatants. The Canadian Army will get land combat capabilities and its vehicle fleet updated, and the Canadian Air Force will acquire 88 advanced fighter aircraft to replace the CF-18s and will get replacement for the Aurora aircraft.

After discussing personnel and finances, SSE moves on to outlining what it refers to as its new approach to defence – Anticipate, Adapt, Act. To *anticipate*, the government pledges to improve its ability to create and provide timely information through “next generation surveillance aircraft, remotely piloted systems ... and space-based surveillance assets.” These systems will be integrated into networked systems that will allow information to be updated and shared among Canadian and allied personnel as needed. As well, to enhance the ability of the CAF to anticipate what action will need to be taken and where, SSE will invest in defence intelligence expertise and fund scholarship programs for students interested in security and defence.

The defence policy acknowledges the changes that are now occurring in the international arena – from terrorism, to cyber attacks to hybrid warfare, to new global powers. To *adapt* to the rapidly changing international environment, SSE states that Canada will continue to adopt new technologies, both in capabilities and in management. This includes enhanced capabilities in space, via satellites, and unmanned systems and the cyber domain. And it pledges to establish a program called Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security (IDEaS) to conduct research and development that will apply to the CAF. And the government will adapt and reform the procurement process to make it more streamlined and transparent.

In terms of *acting*, SSE states that “to ACT decisively with effective military capability is

the ultimate goal of Canada’s new approach to defence.” This means that the CAF will be active in the defence arrangements with the United States in NORAD, with allies in NATO, and internationally through the United Nations and in partnerships and capability-building with other countries.

In the almost three years since SSE was announced, what has changed? After the federal election in October 2019, the Liberal government issued mandate letters to members of Cabinet which set out what is expected of Ministers in their portfolio in the new Parliament. The mandate letter for the Minister of National Defence continues to emphasize the elements of SSE. It stresses the importance of diversity in the CAF, specifically mentioning the importance of considering gender, gender identities, Indigenous peoples, racialized people, people with disabilities and other minority populations. It re-affirms SSE’s commitment to the goal of achieving 25% women in the CAF by 2026, and calls for more attention to creating a harassment-free/discrimination-free work environment.¹ It re-affirms the importance of ensuring the CAF have the equipment they need, working with allies and international organizations, transparency in procurement, expanding Canada’s international defence cooperation and training, and developing better surveillance, response and reaction in the North. It specifically mentions the importance of working on the renewal of the Royal Canadian Navy fleet and revitalizing the Canadian shipbuilding industry. The mandate letter, thus, affirms the outlines provided in SSE.

SSE is not specific to the Navy, it applies across the Canadian Armed Forces. It does, however, include discussion of personnel, equipment, roles, budgets and capabilities that apply directly to the Navy. While the broad scope of Canadian defence remains constant, SSE provides a very positive vote of support to the CAF.

¹ For more information on this, see Catherine St-Jacques, “Women in the Canadian Navy,” Naval Association of Canada, Niobe Paper series, November 2019, available at <https://www.navalassoc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/St-Jacques-Women-in-the-RCN.pdf>