



## Canada Must Have the Ability to Effectively Defend Itself

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The Ukrainian War has awakened Parliament Hill and Canadians in general to the fact that we live next door to the Russian Bear! The poor state of Canada's military – laid bare due to funding cuts and a lack of proper, modern equipment – has come back to haunt the Liberal government after Russia invaded Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> This important issue has not been a priority item for governments for decades.

As noted recently in a briefing session before the Senate, Canada's top military officer remarked "that the conflict in Ukraine is the beginning of a much more dangerous world for Western nations; one in which Canada will have to adapt to. This event has caused us to face the most dangerous time in the world in what I would argue in generations, and so we have to continue to be prepared for what may come."<sup>2</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, like most others in the western world, Canada has been lulled into complacency. War no longer happened in the West. Our geographic position and harmonious approach to foreign policy with the United States has also insulated Canada from the threat of invasion. We have lived under the American defence umbrella for so long, we can no longer picture the open sky. But the cold light of day is piercing through, and it begets some hard questions.<sup>3</sup> Russia's invasion of Ukraine has spurred our government to overhaul its defence spending faster than initially anticipated.

Canada's 2017 defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged"; committed to a 20 year funding program that allowed the CAF "to grow it's force size and enhance the capabilities required to meet Canada's defence needs".

While in Europe in one of the Prime Ministers recent tours, he stated:

"... that his government recognizes that the context is changing rapidly around the world, and we need to make sure that the women and men who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces have all the equipment necessary to be able to stand strongly, as we always have as members of NATO."<sup>4</sup>

Many critics would argue however, that the Ukraine conflict has been the primary driving force for the Liberal government to address defence spending at all. Defence matters have always been a low priority by our federal governments with very little military experience sitting around the Cabinet table to offer advice on such matters.

As a result of the Liberal governments recent budget, DND gets a budget increase, but at a relatively modest level. The budget promises \$6.1 billion over a five year period, with an additional \$1.4 billion in annual spending after that. Even with this increase in annual defence spending, which is projected to use about \$41 billion in year 2026/2027, Canada will still fall short of the NATO target of 2 percent of GDP.<sup>5</sup> These new budget increases will raise our level of support from 1.36 percent of GDP to 1.5 percent.<sup>6</sup> Details on where and how this new money for DND is somewhat hazy. A senior government official told reporters that the funding commitments to strategic partnerships such as NATO and NORAD – will be determined following a comprehensive review of Canada’s defence policy.<sup>7</sup> It was also noted that there were too many variables at play, including increased tensions after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The timing to review our 2017 defence policy is probably appropriate, based on the current global threats and risks from five years ago, to include both Russia and China.<sup>8</sup> In spite of these budget increases and recent political statements concerning DND, many critics argue that Canada in the past has had a difficult problem converting such statements into real action. Certainly time will tell in the remaining mandate of the Liberal government. “You can promise the moon and the stars. If you can’t get the money out the door then it’s of no value, as stated by Andrew Leslie, a Liberal MP and retired general.”<sup>9</sup>

The April federal budget offered the Ukraine up to \$1 billion in loans and \$500 million in additional military aid in 2022/23. It is not clear if the military aid included “lethal or non-lethal” equipment. However, at the same time the government announced they are out of military stock, including anti-tank missiles, ammunition and small arms.<sup>10</sup>

Critics argue that Canada’s response in providing defensive weapons to Ukraine has been half-hearted, going back to the Crimea in 2014. In pronouncements by Cabinet ministers in Europe, you would think we were a major provider of new weapons systems from our inventory. Instead, the lethal aid we send so far consists of aging Carl Gustav anti-tank weapons and L3 Harris Westcom surveillance cameras.<sup>11</sup> The government still has not made a decision in this country to replace WWII Browning sidearms for our Army.

On March 22, the Defence Minister received a proposal from a group of Canadian industry executives to ship to the Ukraine a number of Block 11 Harpoon anti-ship missiles from the Royal Canadian Navy’s inventory for coastal defence. They submit around 120 of such missiles are in storage in Canada. To date, there has been no response to this proposal. In the alternative, the Ukrainian Army has relied heavily on anti-tank weapons such as American “Javelins” and German made Panzerfaust-35 and switchback-armed drones.<sup>12</sup> To counter low-flying aircraft and helicopters, their Army relies on US FIM-92 Stinger missiles that operate as an infrared homing surface-to-air missile (SAM).

The Ukrainian conflict has revealed a serious deficiency of new equipment for our CAF. Our Army has no dedicated air defence system such as the “Stinger” to keep our soldiers on the ground safe from attack helicopters or fighter bombers. In other words, our troops stationed in Latvia would have to rely on other NATO forces for protection from an enemy air threat.

Finally with the decision to replace our forty year-old CF 18 fighter jets with 88 F-35’s by the end of 2022, this event took over a decade before this announcement could be finally made. Canada’s current CF-18 fleet of 76 now includes 18 from Australia, which were purchased secondhand as that country was transitioning in acquiring their new F-35’s.

For decades Canadian governments have struggled to deal with an archaic military procurement system causing delays in acquiring capital equipment for the CAF; resulting in further costs down the road. According to Kim Richard Nassal, a procurement expert with Queen’s University, the military suffers from difficulties with developing and maintaining expertise in procurement negotiations.<sup>13</sup> One of the difficulties he states was “that Canada has tended to purchase military equipment in a kind of boom and bust cycle”.

Another critic of the system noted:

“The procurement process in this country is such an omnishambles that we wouldn’t spend most of the allotted money because we simply can’t procure stuff.<sup>14</sup> An alarming high percentage of the time, the Canadian military procurement process collapses under its own manifest silliness before we get to the cheque-writing stage”.

Unlike the decisions reached by most of our NATO partners, Canada has not by a long shot reached the 2 percent of GDP which the Harper government promised back in 2014. The recent increase in the April budget for DND of \$8 billion is really a drop in the bucket in Canada’s attempt to deal with major military procurement projects for all three services, as proposed in the 2010 NSS and the 2017 defence policy. One recent pundit noted that this increase in budget dollars won’t make much difference “because the systems that sustain the military are dysfunctional, if not outright broken ... A lavishly funded broken, ineffectively system is still a broken, ineffective system”.<sup>15</sup>

There is no question that the war in Ukraine has put the question of defense spending clearly before the Trudeau government, since this issue has never been a high priority for years in either budgets or strategic documents. Canadians are asking their politicians how prepared is our CAF to deal with possible military threats from Russia and China. At this stage of the game, there response would have to be subdued at best.

Here are some of the important issues that the Liberal government should be addressing, in our current defence and foreign policy matters:

1. Developing a new defence policy outlining what are the roles and mandates for each of the three services recognizing the current global threats and risks facing the nation. Emphasis should be on the recognition of the military build-up in the Arctic of Russian forces in the area and our response to this significant development.

2. Must find ways and means to increase the number of personnel in the CAF; in both the regular and reserve elements. We are currently short sailors and pilots which must be affecting our operational capabilities domestically and internationally. DND must fix the systemic failures in how to recruit and retain personnel.
3. Last year Canada made a five-year, \$252.2 million commitment toward a planned modernization of the North Warning System.

Based on the new weapons systems being developed, such as the hypersonic missile systems, a new system has to be put in place which will cost billions of dollars for both Canada and the US.

Andrea Charron, the director of the University of Manitoba's Centre for Defence and Security Studies noted:

"Continental defence should be a main concern for the government.<sup>16</sup> Russia is a persistent proximate threat to North America, and we know that China has growing capabilities and ambitions. Modernizing the NORAD air-defense partnership is key in that approach".

It is time that the Trudeau government entered into an agreement with the US to begin work on this new defence system in the Arctic.

The Ukraine conflict has demonstrated the Liberal governments' failing to adequately equip our forces in time of war, while attempting to also send inadequate and outdated military equipment to the Ukraine Army. In addition to the grand pronouncements by our politicians while touring Europe indicating we were a major defence player, the eventual results of the April budget did not match our perceived outcomes in a substantial increase in defence spending. Unlike our NATO partner, Germany increased their defence spending to 2 percent while Canada struggled to meet the 1.5 percent level. This figure further illustrates that the Liberal government does not consider that we live now in a very uncertain world and that one of their primary goals should be defending our sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia and China both challenge Canada in the Arctic.

From a financial standpoint, it is hard to see how this government can fulfill its' future contracts for projects described under the NSS and the 2017 defence policy. It will cost billions to upgrade the North Warning System. Recently the government declared there are "significant challenges" and "uncertainty" to complete over 60 shipbuilding projects for both the RCN and the Canadian Coast Guard, based on "Covid-19, supply chain problems, labour shortages and rising costs for steel".<sup>17</sup> It will be interesting to see how willing the Liberal government will be to enter into these number of substantial contracts with the three Canadian ship-building companies and the United States in the construction of the new replacement of the NWS. Interesting times ahead!

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> National Post, B. Passifiume, "Liberal budget is vague on greater defence spending amid Ukraine war pending 'review'", April 7, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> National Post, R. Tumilty, "Canada's top general says world is becoming must more dangerous", April 4, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> National Post, T. Kheisiddin, "Canada needs the ability to defend itself in an increasingly uncertain world", March 2, 2022.

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- <sup>4</sup> CBC, M. Brewster, “Canada’s increasingly isolated as allies pledge more military funding in response to Ukraine invasion”, March 7, 2022.
- <sup>5</sup> Globe and Mail, M. Lundy and J. Kirby, “What you need to know about housing, defence and climate spending”, April 8, 2022.
- <sup>6</sup> See footnote 1.
- <sup>7</sup> See footnote 1.
- <sup>8</sup> See Canadian Naval Review, J. G. Gilmour, “Now is the time for a New Canadian Defence Policy”, Vol. 17, Number 3, (2022).
- <sup>9</sup> CBC, C. Pass-Lang, “Canadian Forces in desperate need of new spending, procurement follow-through, experts say”, April 2, 2022.
- <sup>10</sup> Reuters, “Federal budget offers Ukraine up to one billion in loans, 500 million in military aid”, April 7, 2022.
- <sup>11</sup> National Post, J. Ivison, “Ukraine asked for missiles, we sent words”, April 5, 2022.
- <sup>12</sup> The Economist, “The best defence is a good offense”, April 2, 2022.
- <sup>13</sup> CBC, C. Pass-Lang, “Canadian Forces in desperate need of new spending, procurement follow through, experts say”, April 2, 2022.
- <sup>14</sup> National Post, M. Burney, “Liberals spending \$8 billion for defence won’t fix dysfunctional military systems”, April 8, 2022.
- <sup>15</sup> See footnote 13.
- <sup>16</sup> See footnote 13.
- <sup>17</sup> National Post, L. Berthiaume, “More cost overruns, delays coming for new navy and coast guard fleets”, April 7, 2022.