



CANADIAN DEFENCE POLICY

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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 Ottawa in 2015. The Liberals conducted policy consultations on a variety of topics but of interest here is defence policy. The Department of National Defence (DND) conducted a series of consultations involving defence policy experts, the Canadian public, non-governmental organizations, industry representatives and Parliamentary committees. After the consultations, DND officials distilled the input into a defence policy for Canada. After almost two years of consultations, the government released its defence policy entitled *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE) in June 2017. This new policy was designed to 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 the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) command, and it will be *engaged* in the world to contribute to a peaceful world through peace-support and peacekeeping operations.

Despite the new phrasing, SSE is similar to previous defence policy statements. The core missions 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, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other multilateral partners;
- engage in capacity building to support the security of other states 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, SSE 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 CAF and the size – the Regular Force by 3,500 personnel and the Reserve Force 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 “[o]n 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 addition to allowances paid to deployed troops, the government includes tax relief measures for troops deployed on missions. As well, the government pledges 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 calls for an increase in the proportion of women in the military of 1% annually to move from the current 15% to 25% by 2026.

A further element that makes SSE different from earlier defence policy statements is the attempt to make the policies outlined in it fully costed. 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 promises to all three of the CAF services. For the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), 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.

SSE acknowledges changes 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 unmanned systems, the cyber domain and in space, via satellites. 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 SSE says the government will adapt and reform the procurement process.

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 defence arrangements with the United States in NORAD, with allies in NATO and through the United Nations and in partnerships and capability building with other countries.

In the five years since SSE was announced, what has changed? The answer is a lot. After the federal election in 2021, 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 elements of SSE, but adds new elements as well. Thus, it stresses the importance of diversity in the CAF, but also mentions

issues related to the covid pandemic, climate change and relations with Indigenous peoples. Reflecting several years of high-profile sexual harassment cases in the CAF, the letter calls for more attention to creating a harassment-free/discrimination-free work environment. The mandate letter re-affirms the importance of ensuring the military has the equipment it needs, 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 to renew the RCN fleet and revitalizing the Canadian shipbuilding industry. The mandate letter, thus in most elements, affirms the outlines provided in SSE.

However, even a mandate letter from 2021 no longer suffices, because of the rapid changes to the global geopolitical situation that have occurred in the past year. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 violated longstanding international norms about sovereignty and territorial integrity. This plus increasingly assertive (even aggressive) Chinese actions in the South and East China Seas and with regard to Taiwan mean a new defence policy is necessary. In March 2022 the government announced that it would conduct a 'swift' review of defence policy to reflect the changing circumstances in the world. The review will be internal, unlike the broad consultations that were undertaken before SSE was written. We await the new defence policy.