

Policy Without Culture: *Strong, Secure, Engaged* at the centennial of independent Canadian strategic thought and policy

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Abstract

The release of *Strong, Secure, Engaged* comes at a notable point in Canada's military and diplomatic history. It has been roughly a century since the beginnings of independent foreign and defence policies emerged from Canada's inclusion as an autonomous strategic actor at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. A retrospective of this centenary leads to important questions about the evolution of Canadian defence policy: *How far has the capacity of the Canadian state come in drafting defence policy? Has a Canadian strategic culture taken root?*

This paper begins by examining strategic culture conceptually. An exploration of the conflict between differing conceptions of strategic culture, namely, whether it is an explanatory or a causal phenomenon, are reconciled with both David Haglund's use of symbolism and an emphasis on including an aspirations-ends-means relationship in any discussion of the concept. This approach allows for an understanding of strategic culture as a conditioning element in policy. When the search for casual relationships is avoided, it is possible to see that states can operate without a strategic culture at all. Under these conditions, defence and policy is governed by a domestic political culture meeting the demands of service cultures without commonly-held understandings about the nature and use of military force and security priorities to guide them. Under these circumstances, policy is likely to be uncoordinated, with national priorities undefined and policy inefficient in its allocation of resources in furthering national interests.

A brief history of Canada's first independent attempts at strategic planning, examined alongside the contemporary example of *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, provides an opportunity to examine the relative impact of state institutions and strategic culture. The inter-war period shared many strategic challenges with today: struggling multilateral security organisations; concerns about funding; increasingly powerful revisionist powers in Europe and Asia; and uncertainty about the role and intentions of the United States. Examining how a young state with fledgling diplomatic and military establishments addressed these challenges contrasted with the policy produced by a modern G7 country, allows for a comparison between the relative impacts of structural and cultural factors in the creation of policy. This study concludes that although significant structural growth has occurred since the inter-war period, Canadians still lack a widespread and durable strategic culture, limiting the effectiveness of investments made in military capabilities.

“An optimistic Borden returned to London in November 1918 to press Canada’s claim, aching to have some influence at Versailles Though the great powers of France, Italy and the United States had no desire to see any of the British dominions represented at Paris Canada’s and Australia’s wartime dead of 60, 000 for each nation eventually swayed the French, but not before Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wrote to Lloyd George, “Come – And bring your savages with you.”

- Tim Cook, *Vimy*¹

Such were the beginnings of an autonomous Canadian strategy. In the aftermath of the First World War, Canadian politicians, diplomats, and military officers began laying the groundwork for a tentatively independent defence policy. Their efforts produced discordant results, with military planning that, in the words of James Eayrs, “ran counter to the central assumption of Canadian foreign policy.”² For a nation that had recently fielded an impressive fighting force on foreign soil and leveraged its performance for diplomatic benefit, it was an unimpressive start. A hundred years later, it is worth assessing just how far Canadians have come in aligning their military forces, equipment, and mandates with larger governmental objectives, and where there is room for growth.

This paper will examine *Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE)* by assessing both the written policy itself and the culture that informs it. To do so, this study will undertake a review of strategic culture as a concept, a brief history of Canadian strategic thinking in the inter-war period, and an analysis of *SSE* using insights from both the theoretical and historical surveys. This essay has found that although Canadian defence policy has benefitted greatly from structural growth in the Canadian government, the failure to generate a strategic culture has limited the country’s ability to align aspirations with ends and build the appropriate means to fulfill them.

¹ Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (London: Allen Lane Press, 2018), 219.

² This specific quote refers to Defence Scheme No.1; however, Eayrs also details similar discord between the government and the military over the planning for an expeditionary force in Defence Scheme No.3. See: James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 75

Strategic Culture as a Concept

“The fencer who demanded a contest according to the rules of fencing was the French army; his opponent who threw away the rapier and snatched up the cudgel was the Russian people; those who try to explain the event matter according to the rules of fencing are the historians who have described the event.”³

- Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, describing Napoleon’s 1812 invasion of Russia

Strategic culture is a relatively new concept in the field of international relations, so while it is a useful tool of analysis, it still requires definitional clarity. It was originally a narrow concept coined by Jack L. Snyder in a 1977 RAND report to describe unexpected Soviet reactions to changes in American nuclear posture. Soviet planners, Snyder argued, would not act as “culture-free, perception-free game theorists” dispassionately responding to US signalling but would instead respond in a way shaped by “a set of general beliefs, attitudes and behavioural patterns [in a] state of semipermanence that places them on a level of ‘culture’ rather than mere ‘policy.’”⁴ Colin S Gray broadened and popularised the concept in a 1985 *Parameters* article, where he proposed that strategic culture was an outcome of unique national historic experience, the interpretation of which would guide different reactions to similar developments.⁵ Snyder and Gray were what David S McDonough would later classify as first-generation strategic culture theorists, who sought to provide a general framework for explaining how the socialisation of military and civilian decision makers shaped how they were likely to view threats and opportunities, guiding subsequent diplomatic and military behaviour.⁶

Later scholars took on many of the concepts outlined by the first generation of theorists while attempting to bring methodological clarity to ambiguous and unclear concepts. Although they have provided procedural rigour to their analyses, these second and third generation theorists have blurred the line between political and strategic culture. Drawing heavily on Constructivist theory, these thinkers sought to prove causality between culture and behaviour

³ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Anthony Briggs, (Amazon Digital Services), Location 21472

⁴ Snyder, Jack L. *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options*. Report no. R-2154-AF. Project AIR FORCE, RAND Corporation. 1977. 5

⁵ Colin S. Gray, "Comparative Strategic Culture," *Parameters*, XIV, no. 4 (1985): 30.

⁶ David S. McDonough, “Grand Strategy, Culture and Strategic Choice: A Review”, *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 13 no. 4 (Summer 2011) 23-24

through an examination of elite cultures (second generation) or highlighting specific cultural variables (third generation).⁷ In defining strategic culture as essentially whatever produces any combination of political and military action, there is an assumption that the underlying rationale is a strategic one, which it may well not be.

Unfortunately, the dispute over whether strategic culture exists to provide context or act as a set of predictive variables muddies the discussion more than it helps to clarify concepts. David Haglund has made the compelling argument that we should abandon much of the definitional dispute between the two camps, accepting that the concept should be used as a “conditioning element [in] explicative understanding of strategy.”⁸ Strategic culture, then, is most valuable when it is not used in a strictly predictive, but, rather an explanatory role. Further, when paired with the larger meanings of “strategy” or “grand strategy,” it is clear that a strategic culture exists where there is a cultural assimilation of aspirations, means and limits, and that this understanding is embedded within larger political and military cultures. Absent any of these key elements, the discourse becomes either a purely military-technical discussion or a dialogue about political aims, without the two cultures converging in a workable aspirations-ends-means understanding.⁹ In this light, strategic culture should be seen as a dependent variable, resulting

⁷ McDonough, 26

⁸ David G. Haglund, “A Modest Defence and an Immodest Concept”, *International Journal*, 59, No.3, (Summer 2004): 501

For a definition of strategy, see: John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 30. Here, Gaddis defines “grand strategy” as “the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities.” Haglund defines strategy as “the process by which ends and related to means, intentions to capabilities and objectives to resources.” Haglund: 483

In terms of political culture, this paper will use David Haglund’s choice of conception to prevent confusion between strategic and political cultures. Haglund uses Lowell Dittmer’s conception of symbolic analysis to see “the symbol as the central variable in the political culture system.” In this concept, symbols are used a depository of meaning, allowing for a clear distinction of the concept between political psychology and political structure. See: Haglund, 499-502 and

Lowell Dittmer. “Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis.” *World Politics* 29 No.4 (July 1977): 579-582.

⁹ For the sake of clarity, the author will be using the definition of military culture set out by Robert Cassidy, who defines military culture as “a set of beliefs, attitudes and values within the military establishment that shape collective (shared) preferences of how and when military means should be used to accomplish strategic aims”. Where the term “service culture” is used, it is this concept pared down to an individual branch of the military. See: Jeannie Johnson. *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America’s Wars*. (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2018):45

from a junction between identity-based political symbols (who we are and why we ought to behave in a certain way) interacting with military and service cultures (how institutional identities impact the organisation, doctrine, and employment of military forces) to produce a common comprehension of means (what the nature of military power is and how best to pair operational priorities to realistic aspirations). Missing the convergence of these cultures, both diplomatic initiative and military action are still possible, but these activities are likely to occur without an underlying strategic logic.

For the sake of this paper, “strategic culture” will be defined along three key facets: First, that it is an explanatory, and not predictive, concept; second, that it encompasses a simultaneous consideration of political objectives with the means of applying of state power; and, third, that it is not the only causal explanation for military, political and diplomatic activity – that it is possible for a state to act purely on the basis of political culture, that is, without a detailed consideration of means in relation to aspirations. This disconnection between aspirations and means was readily apparent in the years following the end of the First World War.

Independent Institutions, Subservient Strategy: Canada in the Inter-War Period

We live in a fireproof house, far from inflammable materials.

- Senator Raoul Dandurand, League of Nations Assembly, 1924.¹⁰

It is hoped that our Statesmen will act in such a manner to give us as many advantages in as possible in case war becomes inevitable between the British Empire and the United States of America.

- Defence Scheme No.1 (United States), 1922¹¹

A persistent Canadian strategic tradition is for Canadian diplomats and military officers to work discordantly, and this began in earnest as Canada moved towards strategic independence at the end of the First World War. Although Canada had had limited international engagement before – largely over trade and border disputes with the United States – the First World War demonstrated that Canada had both the requirement to respond to international crises and, in the

¹⁰ Quoted in: Gwynne Dyer and Tina Viljoen, *The Defence of Canada: In the arms of the Empire*, (Toronto: McClellan and Stewart, 1990), 314.

¹¹ “Defence Scheme No.1: United States” RG 24 Vol 2925, 1922

form of its impressive mobilisation potential, the means to do so. The question remained: what would the young country would do with them?

A dearth of common understanding between politicians, diplomats and military leaders about the nature of the national interest, and the utility of military power in furthering it, greatly reduced the effectiveness of Canada's newly independent foreign and defence policies.¹² Domestic pressure led Canadian leaders to limit defence expenditure, and the destruction of the Union/Conservative Party after the Great War served as a cautionary tale about costly military commitments. Yet the cultural impact of the war was such that political leaders were obliged to seek strategic autonomy, even as there was little popular support to build the tools that might secure it. The result was confusion. During the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Canadian representatives hacked through a confusing mess of legal ambiguities about Ottawa's constitutional status to gain an independent seat at the negotiations. Once there, however, Canada's representatives mainly militated against the implementation of Article X of the League of Nations Covenant, which obliged members to a mutual guarantee of territorial integrity in the face of aggression.¹³ After fighting against these key provisions on the grounds that they were undue European impositions on a North American country, Canadian diplomatic representatives spent the remainder of the early 1920s waxing poetic about being a "nation within the British Empire" – which was bizarre, given the isolationist tone of Canadian opposition to Article X and the UK's global security entanglements. In one example, Canada desired to have independent representation at the British embassy in Washington, but in a way that would not imply an "inherent division of genuine representation of the policy of the British Empire."¹⁴ This was an ungainly arrangement, leading to such arcane questions as what to call the Canadian

¹² Here, "independent defence policy" encompasses not just the organisation of, and funding for, military forces (something that had been exclusively Canadian since the British North America Act of 1867) but also the more holistic sense of why, where and how these forces would be employed. Although Canada would not gain *de jure* independence in foreign affairs until the 1931 Balfour declaration, independent signature to the Treaty of Versailles suggests a *de facto* independence from 1919.

¹³ C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies*, Vol 2, 1921-1948, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press): 71

¹⁴ See: Alfred Milner, Telegram to Victor Cavendish, 23 February 1920 in Lovell C. Clark, *Documents Relatifs aux relations extérieures du Canada / Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Vol.3 (1919-1925), (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1970) http://gac.canadiana.ca/view/oclc.b1603413E_003/130?r=0&s=1, 13 .

representative - a dispute which took nearly six months to resolve.¹⁵ This confusion was not limited to diplomatic circles – Military leaders and their staffs were equally adrift.

The Canadian military establishment, accustomed to operating in an imperial framework, proved unqualified to give independent advice on national strategy. Instead of adapting to navigate the complex and difficult waters of the post-war period, militia and navy factions spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy fighting each other over control and resources. As such, they were unable to support the establishment of effective policy-making bodies.¹⁶ Major-General James MacBrien, the first post-war Chief of the General Staff (CGS)¹⁷, had the task of reforming a system of military governance that until then had allowed for undue political interference with both appointments and planning. The existing governance body, the Militia Council, had proven to be ineffective and was dominated powerful political personalities; before the war, it was largely a vehicle by which Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence, resisted reforms that might have professionalised the deeply nepotistic Canadian militia. MacBrien's original proposals were quickly subsumed into a larger programme of reform centred on merging the militia and naval departments into the Department of National Defence (DND). Instead of taking this opportunity to shape the new department into a professional, efficient organisation that could capitalise on hard-won knowledge gained during the Great War, MacBrien instead began a long campaign of bureaucratic guerilla warfare. Convinced of the need for Militia dominance over the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the young Royal Canadian Air

¹⁵ Loring Christie had first proposed the title “His Majesty’s Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary for Canada” on 19 September 1919, with the letter from the *charge d'affaires* to the US Secretary of State outlining the rank and terms of the Canadian diplomatic representative being sent on 27 February 1927. See: Memorandum from Loring Christie to Robert Borden, “Notes on the Title and Status of Canadian Agent in Washington,” 19 September 1919 in Clark, 124
Letter from Charge d’Affaires in the United States to Acting Secretary of State of United States, 27 February 1920 in Clark, 132

¹⁶ The terms “Militia” and “Canadian Army” are used interchangeably here. The term “Canadian Army” came into use during the Second World War and was used thereafter. As the inter-war period was a time of transition in terms of terminology, both terms are used with the understanding that they both refer to the land forces of Canada.

¹⁷ The Canadian Expeditionary Force was constitutionally separate from the peacetime Militia. A bridge between the two organisations was created when sir Arthur Curries was appointed “Inspector-General” with additional powers in 1918, however, by 1920 this title was retired and MacBrien filled the normal CGS role. See: John Keess. “Defence, Diplomacy and Discord: The Impact of the Great War and Its Effect on Canadian Strategy, 1920-1928”. Master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2012.

Force (RCAF),¹⁸ he campaigned to have the CGS, with authority over land forces, double as the departmental Chief of Staff (CoS), with authority over the Militia, the RCAF and the RCN.¹⁹ Such a move brought bitter resentment from the Director of the Naval Service (DNS), Commodore (later Rear-Admiral) Sir Walter Hose.²⁰ Hose simply refused to obey MacBrien, and through political connections, essentially sabotaged the departmental chain of command and froze the activity of the new tri-service Defence Council.²¹ By the time the DND stood up on 1 January 1923, it was stillborn as a body for serious decision-making or strategic analysis. With so much time spent fighting each other, the service chiefs didn't have much time to think about understanding or supporting national aspirations

Military planners, lacking both formal links with diplomats and political leaders or a shared strategic culture, relied on known values – namely, the imperial connection, to conceive a series of plans completely at odds with national political objectives. Even where planners differed, they agreed that what was good for the Empire was good for Canada, with the main difference being whether this meant the direct defence of Canadian territory or the despatch of an expeditionary force. In the 1920s, for example, the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMO&I), Colonel James Sutherland-Brown, led a planning effort for Defence Scheme No.1: United States, which envisioned a massive spoiling attack against a hostile southern neighbour in the event of a conflict with the Americans. Though later mocked, this plan had a generally wide acceptance in the Canadian military establishment.²² Tellingly, Sutherland-

¹⁸ Until 1924 the Canadian Air Force did not have a Royal designation. The term “RCAF” here is used for simplicity.

¹⁹ At this time, air forces were not an independent service but technically subservient to the Militia. Again, it is listed as a separate service for the sake of clarity.

²⁰ In a particularly petty quarrel, head of the naval service had been resigned to the title of “director” until reforms came about in 1928, when the name of the position was changed to Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS). See Eayrs, p. 256.

²¹ Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 154-155.

²² Although Defence Scheme No.1 was ordered destroyed in 1933, surviving correspondence indicates that Sutherland-Brown had asked for commentary on the scheme and had directed local military districts to begin local planning. The GOC 10th Military District, for example, sent a detailed memorandum on specific tactical conditions relating to the conduct of the plan in Alberta. GOC 4th Military District sent a four-page summary of specific concerns local to Quebec in January 1923

Brown's rival, future CGS A.G.L. McNaughton, envisioned a plan that was equally as imperial in tone, if different in practice. McNaughton's concept revolved around a single-division expeditionary force, capable of supporting imperial operations abroad.²³ Neither plan had significant circulation or commentary in political or diplomatic circles. The dysfunction peaked in 1939, the Minister of National Defence, Ian Mackenzie, was encouraging the army to quietly develop plans for a large expeditionary force while deliberately misleading both the Prime Minister and the diplomatic establishment about planning priorities.²⁴ This, was not particularly difficult to do, as the diplomatic establishment, in any meaningful sense, was still in its infancy.

Canada's small diplomatic service, the Department of External Affairs (DEA), was in no position to coordinate the efforts of the different elements of state power through a formal strategic doctrine. Founded in 1909, the department was still very small and incapable of producing its own diplomats; in 1922, for example, the DEA had just three permanent positions, and an open competition for applicants was not held until 1927.²⁵ This institutional weakness pushed governments to acquire outside talent – namely, Loring Christie under Borden and OD Skelton under Mackenzie King. Christie was never officially made head of the department but was brought on as a legal adviser who accompanied Borden to the Imperial War Cabinet in 1917, the Paris Peace Negotiations in 1919 and the 1922 Washington Naval Conference on naval disarmament.²⁶ Under Mackenzie King, the prominent voice in external affairs became OD Skelton, an academic who was first employed as an adviser for the Imperial Conference in 1923 after the prime minister had been impressed with a lunchtime talk he gave at the Canadian Club. He later took over as Deputy Minister for External Affairs in 1925, heading a diplomatic service

visible, suspected 1922-1923.

LAC, "Letter from Major General C.J. Armstrong to LCol James Sutherland Brown," RG 24 Vol 2925, 28 December 1923

See also: Keess, John. *Defence, Diplomacy and Discord: The Impact of the Great War and Its Effect on Canadian Strategy, 1920-1928*. Master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2012, 127-129

²³ Harris, 173-175. This plan, known as Defence Scheme No.3, later expanded to seven divisions.

²⁴ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017) 171-172

²⁵ J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998):, 37, 41

²⁶ *Ibid*, 66

despite having limited diplomatic experience.²⁷ Such an arrangement, though effective at compensating for the lack of a Canadian diplomatic tradition in the short term, was anathema to building inter-departmental relationships and creating a strategic outlook which included all aspects of government. Canada would not gain a well-organised body of diplomats until the rise of the “mandarins” in the late 1930s and 1940s. In the meantime, Canadian policy would be directed not by building consensus or working through difficult practical problems, but primarily by individual ideologies.²⁸

The growth of what Norman Hillmer calls “North Americanism” in the nascent DEA demonstrates just how pigeonholed both policy and strategic thinking were. Exemplified by O.D. Skelton, this view held that Canada benefitted from its inheritance of British democratic political institutions, but Canada’s “lasting community of interest” on the North American continent – far from the militarism of Europe or “Australia or Timbuctoo, or wherever other part of the map a Jingoistic spree may chance to paint red.”²⁹ Cooperation, not competition, with the United States to resolve boundary disputes was a far better guarantor of Canadian security than close alignment with the British Empire:

“Canada lies side by side for three thousand miles with a neighbour fifteen times as powerful She knows that not a country on the Continent of Europe would lift its little finger to help if the United States were to attack her. Her security lies in her own reasonableness, the decency of her neighbour and the steady development of friendly intercourse.”³⁰

This was not an unreasonable position, yet it was deeply at odds with *both* of the military community’s rival camps. The disconnection ran deep. Although Canadian military success during the First World War had contributed greatly to the advancement of diplomatic independence in the inter-war period, the relatively undeveloped Canadian state was in no position to take advantage of these gains.

²⁷ Granatstein, *Ottawa Men*, 35-36

²⁸ The term “Mandarins” to describe the early wave of young, professional civil servants was first coined by J.L. Granatstein with the 1982 publication of *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957*. Although the DEA was generally in good order (though severely limited in size) as early as 1934, the civil service generally did not fully professionalise until after the Second World War. See p.43-44.

²⁹ Norman Hillmer, “O.D. Skelton and the North American Mind,” *International Journal*, 60, no.1 (Winter 2004) 95-96

³⁰ *Ibid*, 101-102

Identity as a Substitute for Strategy: Canadian Conceptions of Strategic Culture

Canadians, French- and English- speaking, are not a military people. Enjoying a sense of security in their geographical position, Canadians within the last century have displayed a small interest in the problems of defence, either of the past or of the present day. And yet, withal, the history of Canada is filled with military and naval exploits: the very fact that Canada exists today as a separate and distinct political entity on the North American continent is the result of military operations of some magnitude.

- George Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers*, 1960³¹

Undoubtedly, many of the problems associated with Canadian defence policy in the inter-war period were structural. However, after nine decades of growth in the Canadian state, it is clear that a strategic culture - one that unites discussions of aspirations, ends and means across organisational boundaries - has struggled to emerge. Canadian defence policy remains overwhelmingly a product of political culture, concerned with identity and financial allocations, meeting the technical demands produced by individual service cultures, without a shared medium by which they can come together. As a result, political and military imperatives often share limited unifying concepts, hampering both decision-making and prioritisation with regards to resources, commitments, organisation, doctrine, equipment and capabilities.

The lack of a mature strategic culture is evident in the Canadian literature on the subject. Although the academic discourse is of a high scholarly quality, it is invariably related to questions of political identity and resource allocation, with only a tangential discussion of means. As such, this body of work has more to do with political than strategic culture. Justin Massie, for example, has reviewed three Canadian security cultures and found that "Canada's international security policy is essentially identity-based."³² The description of the three extant security cultures - "continental soft-bandwagoning," "defensive internationalism," and "soft-balancing Atlanticism" - are all theoretically rigorous in explaining the rationale of state behaviour, but they are all ultimately concerned with short-term questions of how much money to spend and

³¹ George F.G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: the Military History of an Unmilitary People, Revised edition*. (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1960), 1.

³² Justin Massie, "Making Sense of Canada's 'irrational' security policy: A tale of three strategic cultures" *International Journal*. 64, no.3 (Summer 2009): 627

what missions to contribute to. Long-term questions such as capability development, resource prioritisation and defining core interests are left unanswered.

Kim Richard Nossal's article, "Defending the 'realm': Canadian Strategic Culture Revisited" exemplifies the view of strategic culture as an identity-based explanatory tool for military and diplomatic behaviour, even if such behaviour lacks strategic coherence.³³ Nossal's argument is that Canadians have a flexible understanding of "what - and who - is to be defended and made secure" with this "realm refer[ring] to a political space defined by Canadians and including more than 'Canada' – in other words, places and peoples that were (or are) defined as being inside rather than outside."³⁴ In this model, Canadians identify with a different kind of political community, beyond national borders or interests, which push them towards different levels of engagement with the broader world. So, while an "imperial" conception from 1867 to 1918 pushed Canadians – or at least English Canadians – towards contributing to the South African War and the First World War, a narrower view of the realm took hold in the inter-war period and pushed policy towards isolationism. Various re-conceptions of realm – from the North Atlantic community in the Cold War or a wider community of human beings generally in the 1990s – moved Canadian defence policy down different paths. Yet although Canadians self-definition is an important *political* aspect of Canadian military and diplomatic behaviour, it cannot be said to constitute a truly *strategic* culture. There is nothing in the essence of feeling like an imperial subject or member of the North Atlantic community that implies how such a "realm" is to be defended.

Although these works provide admirable explanations for diplomatic, and in some cases, military decisions made by the Canadian state, they do not indicate that any culturally-embedded, strategically minded decision making was at play. The theory that comes closest to an enduring aspirations-ends-means discussion is the "potlatch" model first put forward by James Eayrs.³⁵ This theory posits that Canadian defence policy reflects a strategy of economy, with

³³ Kim Richard Nossal, "Defending the 'Realm': Canadian Strategic Culture Revisited, 59, no.3 (Summer 2004) pp. 503-520

³⁴ *Ibid*, 504-505

³⁵ Colin S. Gray, "The Need for Independent Canadian Strategic Thought," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 1, no.1 (Summer 1971): 9

Canada contributing to international missions the minimum forces necessary to be granted representation at major diplomatic and security forums. This model, however, is a discussion of funding, not military utility. Leuprecht and Sokolsky, for example, label Canada's "not so grand strategy" in retail terms: by pursuing middle of the road, "Walmart" defence spending levels, Canadian leaders avoid the pitfalls of being both profoundly insecure (the "dollar store" approach) in addition to taking on unreasonable funding commitments (the "Saks Fifth Avenue" approach).³⁶ Though an interesting analogy for defence spending, this perspective overlooks what military expenditures *do* – provide capability. How *much* one spends might be important, but the *what* and *why* are doubly so. Military capabilities take years, if not decades, to develop and require regular inputs of limited talent, equipment, technology and training to remain relevant.

A Policy Without a Strategy: *Strong, Secure, Engaged* as a Product of Political Culture

"The women and men who wear the uniform of the Canadian Armed Forces are at the heart of this policy. It's about them."

- The Honourable Harjit Sajjan, Minister of National Defence, announcing the release of *Strong, Secure, Engaged*³⁷

SSE, though reflecting significant structural developments, reveals the absence of a deep-rooted strategic culture. Here, the organisation of the document has much to say. Admirably, it begins with twin forewords – one from the Minister of National Defence (MND), Harjit Sajjan, and the other from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chrystia Freeland. In terms of international diplomacy and the CAF's place within it, Minister Freeland indicates that NATO, NORAD and the UN are the prime areas through which the government wishes to contribute to collective security and "strengthen global norms" while "promot[ing] Canada's interests and values; serv[ing] our economic interests and contribut[ing] to a more peaceful and prosperous world."³⁸ Yet the MND's foreword makes no comment whatever on how military power will be used to

³⁶ Christian Leuprecht and Joel J. Sokolsky, "Defence Policy 'Walmart Style': Canadian Lessons in 'not-so-grand' Grand Strategy" *Armed Forces and Society*, 41, no. 3 (2015) 541-562

³⁷ "Harjit Sajjan Announces a new defence policy: Full speech" *Macleans*. Last modified: 2017-06-17 <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/harjit-sajjan-announces-a-new-defence-policy-full-speech/>

³⁸ *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* Department of National Defence, Catalog number D2-386/2017E, 2017: 7

contribute to those aims. Asserting that “*Strong, Secure, Engaged* is a long-term, fully-funded plan built around people,” this introduction sets the tone that the policy “is all about serving our women and men better than in the past . . . [T]he policies and investments set out here will deliver what they need to get the job done,” while defining what the “job” is in only the vaguest of terms.³⁹ Indeed, the first chapter is devoted to personnel policies, and outlining the “global context” does not occur until Chapter 4 – two chapters after outlining long-term investments. This intense focus on politically sensitive issues – treatment of soldiers and veterans, benefits for Canadian industry, diversity, and a “renewed commitment to United Nations peacekeeping” can be seen throughout the document. Core strategic interests are detailed on one page, and broadly, as “Canadian security and prosperity” linked to “global stability, the primacy of the rules-based international order and the principle of collective defence.”⁴⁰ These goals are laudable, but they are ultimately general political aspirations without a listing or prioritisation of supporting ends. Ultimately, *SSE* does not provide what John Lewis Gaddis defined as the essence of strategic thought: “the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities.”⁴¹ And with the limited means Canada has at her disposal, such choices are crucial.

SSE’s framing of future missions mainly in terms of size, not capability or mandate, is emblematic of a policy built on political considerations and service preferences, without a strategic understanding to align them. The CAF is mandated with maintaining two sustained missions and one short term mission of 500-1500 people, two sustained missions and two short term missions 100-500 people, a Disaster Assistance Response Team and a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation.⁴² Yet this description of missions in size, not capability, falls well short of outlining a coherent estimate of costs, diplomatic outcomes, level of political commitment or strain on the military. CAF personnel are not all interchangeable, and different kinds of missions require different combinations of potentially scarce specialists, equipment, logistical backing, political risk acceptance and capability development. The chapter on “Global Context” outlines

³⁹ *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 6

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 24, 59. “Interests” and “values” are highlighted throughout the document, however, they are usually listed simply as “Canadian interests and values” with no firm definition of what these interests *are* until p.59

⁴¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2018): 21

⁴² *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 81

the need for deterrence of “near-peer” or “major power” adversaries in conjunction with collective security organisations like NORAD and NATO.⁴³ But the need to engage in support of UN peace operations is also highlighted, if the underlying logic is made far less clear: they are necessary to pursue the vague aims “prevent[ing] conflict, stabiliz[ing] fragile situations and combat[ing] threats.”⁴⁴ Operational realities make some missions more demanding than others, with a significant impact on the ability to sustain them and hard choices may need to be made about which missions receive priority for limited assets. A common understanding of which missions are important and why will be crucial in maintaining coherence in the allocation of resources, political attention, development of capabilities and selection of tasks.

By pinning missions to size and foregoing a clear prioritisation of tasks, it is unclear whether the CAF will be able to effectively allocate its limited resources to support wider policy aspirations. On basic logistical grounds, it remains uncertain if these stated missions can be maintained. Canada’s fleet of CC-177 Globemaster strategic lift aircraft was bought to act as a lifeline for the Canadian battlegroup in Kandahar, which peaked at roughly 3000 troops, and there are no plans to expand it.⁴⁵ The RCN, for its part will be allocated two new joint support ships (JSS). These JSS will have the ability to move land forces; however, with only two JSS and the mission to deploy two naval task groups based on the new Canadian Surface Combatant at any given time, the ability to move ground forces or support them will be limited.⁴⁶ Sustaining up to seven separate commitments could be possible, but only if they were kept below the maximum size indicated in the policy, engaged in less logistically intensive operations than conventional manoeuvre or deterrence, and only if political leadership is willing to accept the risk of having virtually no flexibility in any response to a fresh crisis. It is clear that the alignment of military priorities with policy direction and institutional constraints has some way to go.

⁴³ *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 48

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 84

⁴⁵ “The Canadian Armed Forces Legacy in Afghanistan.” *National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces*. Last modified 2017-11-15. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/cafla.page>

⁴⁶ *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 34-35

The Special Operations Forces (SOF) component of the policy demonstrates that such an alignment is possible. The section on SOF pairs an operating concept, “highly-skilled, adaptable, multi-purpose forces held at very high readiness levels,” to the national interest “[SOF] are employed in situations that pose an imminent threat to national interests where the use of larger military forces is inappropriate or undesirable” while describing operational limits, “small, well-planned and precision operations . . . [require] limited numbers of highly skilled individuals [who] typically deploy for limited durations of time.”⁴⁷ This not only makes a clear basis for the investments being made in SOF, namely airborne ISR, low-profile armoured vehicles, additional personnel, and defensive cyber capabilities, it makes a clear linkage between means and ends. Although SOF, by virtue of their specialisation, may have the advantage of simplicity in this regard, this section demonstrates that strategic coherence is possible. Such a shared understanding of how political objectives and military action across the entirety of the CAF will be vital as Canada embarks on a leadership role.

Conclusion: Small Steps Forward

Geologic pressure creates both coal and diamonds; historical pressure is required to forge both effective institutions and a strategic culture that can inform them. Canada has been lucky historically: living in a “fire-proof house,” the need to think through security issues has not been particularly pressing. Yet times of international stress have resulted in periodic advancements, and such a time may be upon us again. The intensity of the First World War resulted in the emergence of the first bodies responsible for creating an independent Canadian strategy, however defective they turned out to be. Although defence policy in the inter-war era languished from both cultural and structural issues, the new conditions brought about by the end of the Second World War pushed the young Canadian state to develop its policy-making machinery. These revamped institutions made great progress. Writing in 1968, John Gellner noted that the 1964 White Paper on Defence was the a truly independent defence policy, “[s]omething we have not had before.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 40

⁴⁸ John Gellner, “Strategic Analysis in Canada” *International Journal*, 33, no.3, (September 1978) 493-494

This pressure, however, was only enough to form coal, not diamonds, and this shows in contemporary defence policy. Colin S. Gray, commenting in 1971, noted that “Canada has no strong tradition of strategic thought” which left its ostensibly independent defence policy “subservien[t] to foreign military doctrines” with individual services, who were prone to concede “strategic theoretical leadership” to larger allies.⁴⁹ As has been detailed above, the lack of a central guiding set of ideas about how military force can be applied in matching aspirations with means available has resulted in a series of incompatible commitments from the RCN, RCAF and CA. *SSE* reflects strong political and culture service cultures, but not a strategic one.

Cultural change, like geological change, takes time. There is far less pressure required to make coal than diamonds, but that pressure is building slowly. The end of a stable bipolar system and the perception that, in the words of Minister Freeland, “[t]o rely solely on the U.S. security umbrella would make us a client state [and]...such a dependence would not be in Canada’s interest.” As part of the pursuit of the national goals, it is in “Canada’s broader interest [to invest] in a capable, professional and robust military.”⁵⁰ In other words, although Canada is unlikely to stand alone, it must possess the ability to stand apart. While it is tempting to focus in on what a defence policy might outline in terms of financial resources, acquisition pledges and short-term operational commitments, the value of these things will be transitory unless there is a common understanding of *why* they are important to Canada’s security and *how* they will further it. With such aspirations in mind, *SSE* assigns both intermediate ends - building “academic and analytical communities across Canada” and assigns means - \$4.5 million – to do so.⁵¹ Perhaps, then, the pressure brought about by the changed international conditions may turn some of the strategic community’s raw materials into gems.

⁴⁹ Gray, “Canadian Strategic Thought”, 7-8

⁵⁰ “Address by Minister Freeland on Canada’s foreign policy priorities” *Global Affairs Canada*, Last modified 2017-06-12, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html

⁵¹ *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 67

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