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CANADIAN AND AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE POLICIES: STRATEGIC COUSINS OR DISTANT RELATIVES?

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Exercise Solo Flight

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

- Senator Raoul Dandurand, Canada's delegate to the League of Nations, 1924

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not bring enduring peace and stability as some have hoped. Instead, the post-Cold War geostrategic evolution brought on ethnic conflicts that can be traced back a millennium ago; for instance, the Kosovo conflict (1998-1999); as well as new wars, for example, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 followed by the War on Terrorism. Most recently, Russia showed renewed aggression through incursion to Ukraine and seizure of the Crimean peninsula. There is no doubt that these significant events shaped the defence strategies of the Western world.

From a geographical point of view, Canada is the second largest country in the world after Russia and has the largest body of water. Australia does not have a land border and is the sixth largest country by area and the largest country in the Southern Hemisphere. The Australian population concentrates in the temperate, southeast coastline of the island whereas the majority of the Canadians live in narrow tracts of urban settlements in the southern part of the country, in close proximity to the Canada/ United States (US) border.

Notwithstanding the fact that Canada and Australia are located on the opposite sides on the globe, these two nations share many similarities in terms of political disposition. Both

Canada and Australia are members of the United Kingdom – United States of America Agreement, a multilateral alliance of signals intelligence also known as Five Eyes. Furthermore, despite the differences in geographical location, both Canada and Australia have US as the common thread in their national defence strategies, in that, Canada is the partner to the US in the bilateral North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). In fact, the Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS) issued by the Harper government in 2008 depicts that the second role of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is “defending North America – delivering excellence at homecontribute to the defence of North America in cooperation with the United States, Canada’s closest ally.”¹ Similarly, in the most recent Australian Defence White Paper published in 2013, the Australian government specifically identified US as its partner in their “bilateral relationship that will support increased regional security cooperation.”² Indeed, US as an alliance was a prominent theme that permeated the 2013 Australian Defence White Paper.

This paper asserts that Canada and Australia are indeed strategic cousins and the Canadian government must benchmark the Australian defence strategy in order to meet Canada’s defence needs and to remain a relevant middle-power in today’s world and perhaps more importantly, as the US’ closest ally. This objective will be achieved by studying the key factors that influence the formulation of national defence strategies. Specifically, it will examine the similarities and differences between Australia and Canada in security priorities, political concurrence, regional threats, and partnership in security. Following the comparison, this paper

¹ National Defence, "Canada First Defence Strategy," Department of National Defence, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/canada-first-defence-strategy-summary.page> (accessed 04/08, 2015).

² Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013* Australian Government, (2013), 10.

will provide recommendations on what Canada should adopt from the Australia model to best suit our security needs.

SECURITY AS A PRIORITY?

In 2008, the Canadian government published the CFDS and described the roles of the Canadian Forces as the following:³

1. Defending Canada
2. Defending North America
3. Contributing to international peace and security

Specifically, the CAF has the principal responsibilities to ensure the security of our citizens and sovereignty. The second role, which is quite complementary to the first, is the defence of North America “with the United States, Canada’s closest ally.”⁴ The CFDS reiterated that Canada needs to be “a strong, reliable defence partner” to the US by being the reliable partner in the binational North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), responding to crises, and being interoperable with the US military through “effective collaboration”.⁵

Although the CFDS committed the government to a long-term plan of budgetary increase and capability enhancement, the priorities-of-the-day of the current government focused heavily on the continuous recovery from the global economic crisis and achieving a balanced budget.

³ National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

While it is indeed the current government's intent to "stay the course on long-term priorities... rebuilding the Canadian Forces"⁶, there is much indication that the government is unable to maintain its long-term goal to rebuild the CAF due to lagging economic recovery from the 2008 financial crisis. Statistics Canada has reported that the Canada GDP shrank in November 2014, while Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz projects the oil market crash will further negatively impact on Canada's GDP growth for this year.⁷

The CFDS had a long-term funding framework that would have increased the defence budget by 2.7% nominal growth per year from 2008 to 2027, with a goal to expand the defence budget from approximately \$18 billion in 2008 to over \$30 billion by 2027.⁸ However, with the austerity measures put in place by the Harper government, the defence budget not only did not receive any increase but was reduced by \$2.1 billion from 2012 to 2014. The fallout of this budget cut was a reduction of up to 61% in Army operation and maintenance budget; thereby reducing funding for troops training and equipment maintenance.⁹ The government that published the CFDS has deviated from its own plan.

The 2013 Australia Defence White Paper clearly indicated that "there is no higher priority for a government than the protection of Australia's sovereignty, people and national security interests."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Australia has – as its primary strategic interest - the

⁶ Office of the Prime Minister, "Priorities," <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/priorities> (accessed 04/12, 2015).

⁷ Colin Kenny, "Harper Changes the Channel," *National Post* 14 Feb, 2015.

⁸ National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*

⁹ Kenny, *Harper Changes the Channel*

¹⁰ Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 1.

defence of its homeland against direct attack, economy, and resources. However, Australia has a much wider strategic policy approach that is further than its immediate environs; it has enduring strategic interests in a secure South Pacific and Southeast Asia.¹¹ After all, Australia was attacked repeatedly by the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Force and Army Air Force during the Second World War. The relatively complex politics in Southeast Asia compared to that of North America means Australia must plan their defence far beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Further to Indo-Pacific, the Australia government has a strategic interest in international order which is similar to the third CAF role as depicted in the CFDS.

Despite the 2008 global economic downturn which greatly impacted the Australian economy¹², the Australian government still managed to advance its Australia Defence Force (ADF) procurement. This was evident with the continuous progress in projects like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter which will reach its Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in November 2020, the Air-to-Air Refueling (AAR) Capability project which attained IOC in February 2013, and the Next Generation Satellite Communication (Satcom) Capability project which declared IOC in December 2014.¹³ It must also be emphasized that both the AAR and the Satcom projects achieved IOC either in advance of or on schedule, despite Australia was also suffering from the same global financial crisis as Canada.

¹¹ Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 1.

¹² Michael Janda, "Making Sense of the Global Downturn," <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-05-07/making-sense-of-the-global-downturn/1675556> (accessed 04/13, 2015).

¹³ Department of Defence, "Equipping Defence," Australian Government, <http://www.defence.gov.au/dmo/EquippingDefence/default.aspx?c=7> (accessed 04/13, 2015).

POLITICS BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES

Australia has made the strategic decision to play a leading role in the maintenance of security in Australia's immediate neighbourhood and beyond, thereby becoming US' closest ally in Southeast Asia security.¹⁴ Both the ruling and opposition parties recognize and endorse political bipartisan concurrence, ensuring defence objectives are met in spite of change of governments. Indeed, the ADF enjoys a much more privileged place in the realm of Australian politics and culture than its Canadian counterpart.¹⁵ This is in part due to the role of the armed forces in the development of Australia as a nation. The annual Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) day commemorates Australians who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations. As depicted in the Australian War Memorial website, "The spirit of ANZAC, with its human qualities of courage, mateship, and sacrifice, continues to have meaning and relevance for our sense of national identity."¹⁶ Furthermore, ADF personnel are stationed in major cities, hence increasing its visibility to the general public. It is under these conditions that the Liberal / National Coalition could make strategic choices and decisions to devote significant resources to national defence. The politicians know that such decisions are popular amongst the general public.¹⁷

Not the same can be said about the Canadian government and the CAF. There is no nation-wide CAF commemorative day that celebrates war-fighting as part of the formation of

¹⁴ Kim Richard Nossal, "Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Canada among Nations 2005*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands (Montreal - Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 88-89.

¹⁶ Australian War Memorial, "Anzac Day," Australian Government, <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac-day/> (accessed 04/14, 2015).

¹⁷ Nossal, *Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 89.

Canada as a nation. It could be argued that Vimy Ridge Day on 9 April may serve as the equivalent to ANZAC day for Canadians as it is generally considered in Canadian history that the Vimy Ridge battle in 1917 saw Canada mature into nationhood. However, Vimy Ridge Day only commemorates the actual Vimy Ridge battle; it is not a recognized holiday and there are no public ceremonies. Furthermore, most CAF operational bases and wings are located away from major cities with the exception of Victoria, Edmonton, and Halifax. Being out of sight also means out of mind of the public. The 13-year Afghan War and 158 casualties have definitely raised the CAF profile amongst the public; however, the surge of support is bound to decline as the troops return to their homes, located far away from urban centres.

Canadian politicians seldom practice bipartisan concurrence. Jean Chrétien, then leader of the Liberal Party, won the election and became the Prime Minister in 1993 with a campaign platform that included the cancellation of the procurement of the EH101 helicopters, a contract that was signed during Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government to replace the CH124 Sea King ship-borne helicopters. In fact, it was one of Prime Minister Chrétien first orders of business to carry out the contract cancellation, albeit its action cost the Canadian government \$200 million.¹⁸

It could be argued that Canadian politicians can practice bipartisan concurrence if one considers Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. The Chrétien government announced within a month after the 9/11 attack that Canada would participate in an international anti-terrorism

¹⁸ Martin Shadwick, "The Chrétien Legacy," *Canadian Military Journal*, Winter (2004), 68.

mission in Afghanistan. The Afghan mission eventually lasted for 13 years and three different governments: Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, both Liberals, and finally, Stephen Harper's Conservative Party.¹⁹ It must be understood; however, that the mission in Afghanistan had much more international significance and Canada, which strives to be the closest ally to the US, was committed to the mission and wanted to be seen as an ally that contributes to the war. Moreover, the public support for the troops at the height of the war would have made withdrawal a very unpopular political decision.

Canadian politicians might seem to have some degree of bipartisan concurrence on defence; for instance, as seen with the 13-year mission in Afghanistan, or fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the Republic of Iraq and in Syria as part of Operation IMPACT, or conducting training missions in Central and Eastern Europe as part of NATO assurance measures. However, it must be made clear that, unlike in Australian politics, there is rarely any political bipartisan concurrence for defence budget or capability procurement and enhancement.

REGIONAL FRIENDS AND FOES

Australia is situated in a precarious geostrategic location. It is closely situated with numerous significant regional powers; namely, China, Indonesia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. Both China and the US seek stability rather than conflict in Asia, making China a partner

¹⁹ The Canadian Press, "Timeline: Canada's Involvement in Afghanistan," <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/timeline-canada-s-involvement-in-afghanistan-1.1814698> (accessed 04/14, 2015).

of security to Australia. Indonesia is growing in capability and influence, as seen in its leadership in multiple regional meetings; for instance, the East Asia Summit, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and the G20.²⁰ Its regional power and emerging international influence will continue to grow in the future. Japan, a US ally, remains a major power in the Indo-Pacific. Last but not least, the Republic of Korea, a significant regional middle power, is also a US ally.²¹

Australia is located proximally to some of the significant regional flashpoints – the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea and South China Sea. A small miscalculation or misinterpretation of incidents can quickly escalate into international conflict. Most notably, tensions on the Korean Peninsula have heightened since 2009. Continuous provocations by the DPRK leader Kim Jong-Un included nuclear testing in February 2013 and threat of strikes against the Republic of Korea and continental US.²² While the majority of Islamist terrorist attacks are still in the Middle East, Australia was the target of numerous Islamist extremist attacks; particularly, the Holsworthy Barracks terror plot and the Sydney Five. It is therefore quite understandable that the Australians have a sense of insecurity.

By contrast, the geostrategic location of Canada is far less complex. Canada is geographically located immediately north of the US, the world's only superpower. The US provides Canada with a high level of security by way of NORAD, thereby inadvertently

²⁰ Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 12.

²¹ *Ibid*, 11-12.

²² *Ibid*, 12.

encouraging the Canadian government to spend as little on national defence as possible. Unlike Australia, Canada does not have a sense of insecurity. In fact, one can argue that Canada still carries the sense of “fireproof house, far from the sources of conflagration” mentality as described by Canada’s delegate Raoul Dandurand, at the fifth assembly of the League of Nations assembly in 1924.²³

Moreover, the Canadian government knows that regardless of the relation between its Prime Minister and the US President, the US will come to Canada’s aid and defend it from external threats. This arrogant yet careless attitude was most overt with Prime Ministers Chrétien and Martin.²⁴ Chrétien led the Americans to think that Canada was going to join the invasion of Iraq, only to rise in the House of Common and announce Canada would not, much to the complete surprise and dismay of Washington. Similarly, Martin announced that Canada would not participate in the US Ballistic Missile Defence program without offering any prior, private indication to President Bush.²⁵ No other nation could have had such latitude with the world’s superpower without suffering from substantive security and economic backlashes.

STRATEGIC COUSINS OR DISTANT RELATIVES?

The Australian government has made the decision to align itself with the US. Under Howard’s government, it has repositioned itself to become the “deputy” of the US for Southeast Asia security. It is also a supporter of the Ballistic Missile Defence program. Australia’s

²³ Adam Chapnick, "On Protocols and Fireproof Houses: The Re-Emergence of Canadian Exceptionalism," *International Journal* 61, no. 3 (2006), 713.

²⁴ Nossal, *Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 88.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 88.

defence strategy and “heavy lifting” did not go unnoticed. By embracing a robust regional role, the Australian government made itself useful to the US, increasing its visibility in Washington.²⁶ President Obama, in his speech to the Parliament House during his visit to Canberra in November 2011, specifically emphasized “the bonds between us run deep. In each other’s story we see so much of ourselves.”²⁷ He continued in his speech to praise both the Australian Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader for their country’s support to the Afghan War that, “it is why I salute Australia – outside of NATO, the largest contributor of troops to this vital mission.”²⁸ Throughout his speech, he reiterated numerous times the alliance between the US and Australia. This security partnership has also benefited the economy of both two countries – the alliance saw an increase in the volume of trade between the US and Australia and establishment of free trade agreements.²⁹

The differences between Australia and Canada in terms of their defence strategies can be attributed to one key factor – a sense of insecurity for the Australians and a sense of invulnerability for the Canadians. As depicted in its 2013 Defence White Paper, Australia is located in a volatile area with multiple geopolitical flashpoints. It needs to be able to defend against external threats and cannot rely on any neighbour for aid. On the contrary, Canada is a middle power and will never have, or can afford, armed forces as powerful as those of the US. However, it enjoys the same security by merely staying in the shadow of its superpower neighbour. This bred arrogant and insouciance as demonstrated by Prime Ministers Chrétien and

²⁶ Nossal, *Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 90.

²⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament* (Washington, DC: The White House, November 17, 2011).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Nossal, *Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 79-92.

Martin.³⁰ Nonetheless, spending anything more than the minimum on national defence, other than to meet the defence imperative as stated in CFDS, serves no apparent and immediate added value to the general public. In the face of global austerity, it may in fact be considered sensible for the Canadian government to limit defence spending in order to preserve other public services.

Despite the fact that Canada's geographical location coincidentally allows it to spend as little as possible on defence with little or no adverse short-term security consequences, the Canadian government should look to its Australian counterpart and adopt the practice of political bipartisan concurrence. This will ensure defence strategy as well as capability development and procurement avoid becoming political pawns and be delayed due to elections and change of governments. For example, had the Progressive Conservative and Liberal Parties had political bipartisan concurrence, the EH101 contract cancellation would have been averted, saving heavy monetary penalties, and avoided the CH124 Sea King replacement debacle that Defence Minister Peter MacKay has called "the worst procurement in the history of Canada."³¹

It is true that we cannot blindly adopt the Australian defence model and make it the Canadian defence strategy. This is because there is precisely very little geostrategic commonality between the two countries. Undoubtedly, Canada needs to remain a relevant, "strong, reliable defence partner"³² to the US, NATO, and other allies, but this can only be

³⁰ Nossal, *Looking Enviously Down Under? the Australian Experience and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 90.

³¹ CBC News, "MacKay Says Chopper Deal 'Worst' in Canada's History," CBC, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/mackay-says-chopper-deal-worst-in-canada-s-history-1.1132899> (accessed 04/15, 2015).

³² National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*

achieved if the Canadian government is willing to initiate and follow-through with long-term, significant decisions with the concurrence of both ruling and opposition parties. The practice of Parliament holding non-binding votes prior to military deployments implemented by the Harper government could be the first step leading towards the exercise of political bipartisan concurrence, thereby gaining consensus on defence decisions from both ruling and opposing parties. However, real bipartisan concurrence will only be achieved when both side of the House of Commons have concurrence on defence budget, capability procurement and enhancement.

CONCLUSION

This paper argued that Canada and Australia are indeed strategic cousins and that the Canadian government must use the Australia defence strategy as a benchmark to enhance its defence strategy; thereby remaining as a relevant global middle-power in today's world and more importantly, as the US' closest ally. It achieved the objective by studying the similarities and differences of key factors that influence the formulation of defence strategies; namely, security priorities, political concurrence, regional threats and security partnership.

Australia has defence strategic interests that are far-reaching and beyond its immediate neighbourhood. Australia is located in a region of political flashpoints and it is highly unlikely that it could ask a neighbour for military help in case of attacks. It has also taken on the role as the security heavy-lifter in Southeast Asia. Canada; however, is situated in the shadow of the US and is protected by the world's superpower. With its complex regional friends and foe relations,

the Australians constantly live with a sense of insecurity while the Canadians believe they are living in a “fireproof house”.

Due to the public’s sense of insecurity and the prestigious status the ADF enjoy in both Australian political and cultural realms, Australian political parties have adopted bipartisan concurrence and are able to make strategic defence decisions. This practice enables the ADF to plan and procure defence capabilities regardless of changes of government. In fact, bipartisan concurrence has led to some very successful procurement stories despite Australia, like Canada, is still recovering from the 2008 financial crisis. Canada, conversely, has struggled immensely with defence budget and capability procurement, partly due to a cumbersome defence procurement process but also because these projects are often treated as political pawns.

It is a fact that there is little geostrategic commonality between Canada and Australia. Canada’s geographical location allows it to become complacent with defence spending and not be immediately confronted by such decisions’ consequences. There is no incentive for the Canadian government to spend more than the minimum in defence other than to meet the CFDS defence imperative, as there is neither apparent security threat nor immediate benefit to the public. Nonetheless, this paper advocated that Canada must adopt political bipartisan concurrence whereby its government is willing to initiate and follow-through with long-term, significant decisions with the concurrence of both ruling and opposition parties. This is the only way Canada can remain a relevant, “strong, reliable defence partner” to the US, NATO, and

other allies.

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