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RCAF COMMITMENTS UNDER SSE: AN AIRBRIDGE TOO FAR

Major Alexandre Gignac

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By Major Alexandre Gignac

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AIM

1. This paper aims to provide the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) with recommendations regarding *Strong Secure Engaged's* (SSE) statements on concurrent operations. It will be focused primarily on personnel issues, airlift capability, and the RCAF's ability to force generate as they relate to SSE.

INTRODUCTION

2. As Canada enters a new decade, the defence white paper, *Strong Secure Engaged*, remains the guiding policy which will shape and guide the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and RCAF. SSE is an ambitious plan that seeks to increase the defence budget from \$17.1 billion to \$32.7 billion by 2026-27.¹ As SSE provides a twenty-year horizon, it should provide some stability in strategic capability planning.²

3. Implied demands on the RCAF within SSE must be examined and understood to be compliant with the policy. Specifically, SSE makes an ambitious statement on the CAF's requirement to conduct a specific scope of concurrent operations. SSE simultaneously commits Canada to defend our country, continent, upholding commitments to NORAD and NATO, and contributing up to 6500 CAF members globally over seven distinct operations, not counting potential deployments of DART and NEO.³

4. This paper will conduct an overview of SSE's concurrent operations statement as it pertains to the RCAF. First, the article will outline exactly SSE demands are for concurrent operations. Next, the report will examine the implications SSE concurrent operations have on the RCAF's people, its airlift capability, and finally an overview of possible FG shortcomings.

5. This paper will recommend the RCAF:

- a. Work to accelerate intake and recruitment towards specific airlift related fields while remaining within the mandated size of the air mobility forces.
- b. Streamline aircrew training towards airlift fleets to alleviate the problems caused by attrition.
- c. Establish standing civilian and military agreements to assist with strategic airlift.

¹ National, Defence. 2017a. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy." Government of Canada. <https://search.informit.org/documentSummary;res=APO;dn=238091>., p.13

² "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.", p. 11

³ Ibid., p.17

- d. Increase the readiness posture and scope of Operational Support Hubs globally.

DISCUSSION

Concurrent Operations

6. SSE states that “The Canadian Armed Forces will be prepared to renew Canada’s strong commitment to NORAD and NATO acting in multiple theatres simultaneously, while also bolstering disaster relief, search and rescue, contributing to peace operations and capacity building.”⁴

7. On concurrent operations, SSE states explicitly that the CAF will be prepared to simultaneously:

- a. Defend Canada, including responding concurrently to multiple domestic emergencies in support of civilian authorities;
- b. Meet its NORAD obligations, with new capacity in some areas;
- c. Meet commitments to NATO Allies under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty;
- d. Contribute to international peace and stability through:
 - (1) Two sustained deployments of ~500-1500 personnel, including one as a lead nation;
 - (2) One time-limited deployment of ~500-1500 personnel (6-9 months duration);
 - (3) Two sustained deployments of ~100-500 personnel;
 - (4) Two time-limited deployments (6-9 months) of ~100-500 personnel;
 - (5) One Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) deployment, with scalable additional support; and
 - (6) One Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), with scalable additional support.⁵

8. Knowing now what the policy states for concurrent operations, we must deduce the RCAF implications. For the RCAF, SSE implies that Canada will sustain domestic

⁴ Ibid., p.16

⁵ “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy.”, p. 17

and expeditionary operations, move CAF members and equipment around the globe through airlift, re-deploy them to Canada, and be prepared to support DART and NEO operations without needing to scale back other deployments. The CAF could deploy 6500 members on seven distinct operations, on top of domestic and expeditionary commitments. Where these troops end up is also unpredictable. Within the realm of *contribution warfare*, the CAF will likely find itself in coalitions, most notably with the Americans, since “[...] Canada is essentially trapped within the world of US threat perceptions which drive the North American security agenda.”⁶ Therefore, SSE implies large troop and supply movements globally, requiring the RCAF to support multiple operations without degrading its commitments to partners and allies.

9. Regarding the RCAF continued contribution to NORAD, the essence for Canada’s defence posture in North America is to provide credible support. But the standard for credibility is set by the United States. SSE also states that engaging threats abroad is essential to ensuring Canada’s defence.⁷ Therefore, it is safe to assume that the scale of effort required to remain a “value-added” partner in NORAD is a moving target. SSE’s need to simultaneously support expeditionary operations and NORAD may become problematic and cause policy-makers to choose between engaging with the world and remaining secure within the continent. For this paper, though, the assumption will be that RCAF support to NORAD will remain what it is now.

10. The support to requests made through Article 5 of NATO is an imperative of the alliance and is not predictive. Therefore, for this paper, we will assume a peacetime posture that requires no forces apportioned to a distinct operation to protect an alliance member.

11. The question remains for the CAF whether or not it has the forces available to conduct these operations, as well as those required to sustain them. From an RCAF perspective, operational sustainment requires a very complex and interwoven supply chain that services the needs of all deployed operations. Therefore we cannot merely approach this problem set by examining any individual operation in isolation. It is a system of systems where airlift missions are planned and adjusted while “on the fly” to provide support globally. To achieve this requires the crews flying the planes and expert “air movements” logisticians and the associated command and control (C2) and physical structures.

People Implications

12. Regarding SSE’s implications for the RCAF’s people, the essence of the problem lies in whether the organization will see growth or reduction. The growth or attrition of the RCAF must then be weighed against the operational demands of SSE to extract future implications.

⁶ Leuprecht, Christian, Joel J. Sokolsky, and Hughes 1963 Thomas,. 2018. North American Strategic Defense in the 21st Century: Security and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. P.115

⁷ “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy.”, p. 14

13. Within SSE, there is a plan to increase the total size of the CAF by 0.05%. The policy states that these new people will grow the intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), space and cyber domains of the CAF⁸. Since SSE intends to place these new people into these specific domains, it is safe to assume that the airlift and air movements' capability will remain at its present strength or shrink with attrition. Currently, the trained effective strength (TES) of the pilot trade at all ranks is 90%. Though this is a high percentage, the data acquired for this paper did not reflect the breakdown of TES per air force fleet. Anecdotally, the air mobility fleet's overall health is not strong since many pilots, before COVID-19, left the RCAF to work for the airlines. The high attrition rate at the time prompted the RCAF to stand up OP EXPERIENCE and OP TALENT. These two operations "seek to ameliorate the experiential gaps through targeted growth and retention initiatives that enrich quality of service and improve quality of life for RCAF personnel and their families."⁹

14. SSE recognizes that the current recruitment and intake system is too slow and uncompetitive against the private labour force.¹⁰ A lack of growth could represent a severe risk to the RCAF as this would impede its ability to provide airlift to simultaneous operations as per SSE. A targeted approach to recruitment, aimed at aircrew experts in logistics, would be aligned with SSE's targeted recruiting goals seeking specific talents and skillsets and with the RCAF's OP EXPERIENCE and OP TALENT initiatives.¹¹

Airlift Implications

15. In the SSE capability initiatives, there is no plan to augment or replace any airlift fleets since the CC117 and CC130J relatively new RCAF assets. The CC177s were obtained between 2007 and 2015, and the CC130J entered service in 2010. The only fleets being upgraded are the advanced fighter aircraft CF118 replacement and the Canadian Multi-Mission Aircraft (CMMA) destined to replace the ageing CP-140 Aurora.¹² Without new airlift capable airframes, the organic airlift capacity is expected to remain unchanged. The RCAF inventory currently has five CC117, five CC150 and seventeen CC130J.

16. According to the B-GA-404, RCAF Move Doctrine manual, airlift capability is limited by cost and availability.¹³ Without growth in the fleet, it is doubtful that the RCAF will support any more lines of operations than it already does. Despite the high cost, airlift will inevitably remain the movement option of choice for CAF assets globally

⁸ "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.", p. 13

⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/transition-materials/defence-101/2020/03/defence-101/rcaf.html>

¹⁰ Ibid., p.20

¹¹ Ibid., p.12

¹² Ibid., p.13

¹³ National, Defence. 2002. *Canadian Forces Aerospace Move Doctrine, B-GA-404-000/FP-001*. <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.695067/publication.html>. p. 10.

because of its speed and reach. Therefore the RCAF will need to fill in the gaps creatively.

17. Regarding the effective and efficient use of airlift resources, the RCAF utilizes a hub-and-spoke system to move people and materials worldwide.¹⁴ Having established Operational Support Hubs (OSH) with varying degrees of functionality and readiness, the CAF, through the RCAF, can centralize much of the sustainment related movements. A notable example of this hub type is OSH Kuwait, situated in Ali Al Saleem Air Base. From this fully developed OSH, the CAF can receive supplies that can then move through intra-theatre, or tactical airlift within Iraq or the Middle East, or even out to Afghanistan.

18. Therefore, in support of concurrent operations, the OSH system will be paramount in RCAF success. But the persistent problem remains the availability of airlift assets to provide sustainment to the simultaneous operations. This problem space is where contracted airlift or agreements such as the *Air Transport and Air to Air Refueling and Other Exchange Services* (ATARES) become valuable enablers to the CAF.¹⁵ With such contracts and agreements in place, the RCAF could contract out much of the strategic airlift destined to land at OSHs. Under ATARES, allied and partner airlift resources could be requested to provide sustainment flights supporting CAF efforts in exchange for RCAF services at a later time in a credit system. These options would offer timely movements to the CAF, and flexibility to the RCAF to employ its few airlift resources.

19. A solution to filling future airlift gaps could be to have standing agreements with contracted airlift suppliers, as was done during the early days of the Canadian engagement in Afghanistan, and leverage allied strategic airlift to supplement CAF resources. Such a set of arrangements would free up RCAF airlift lines of task that can then be used to support intra-theatre airlift into higher-risk operating areas which may be beyond the risk tolerance of civilian contractors or partner nations. More broadly, worrying about the *spoke* rather than the *hub*.

20. In essence, partner nation and civilian standing agreements would aid the RCAF in effectively prioritizing its assets to operations which are either more urgent or require a higher degree of risk acceptance.

Force Generation Implications

21. As stated in the B-GA-400, RCAF Doctrine, “The RCAF needs an expeditionary structure and proper enabling processes that will facilitate the rapid deployment of air power in support of CAF operations.”¹⁶ Air doctrine recognizes that airlift is more than

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28

¹⁵ Arcouette, Daniel, and Canadian Forces College. 2019. *CAF Sustainment to Overseas Operations*. Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College. P.16

¹⁶ National, Defence. 2015. “Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine, B-GA-400-000/FP-001.” Canadian Armed Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre. p. 5-9

just planes. It is a system that demands highly trained people, C2 structures and physical infrastructures at home and abroad to support all phases of the MOVE function. Generating the force required to achieve these capabilities and systems has always been a challenge for the RCAF.

22. Within the scope of force-generating its people, the RCAF needs to generate aircrew, ground crew for maintenance and loading, and expert logisticians in the field of air movements. Together, these are the people who make up the airlift capability. Based on previous research, airlift lines of task have historically been limited due to the RCAF's attrition rate.¹⁷ FG of airlift experts is, therefore, a weak link within the total capability.

23. As stated in the B-GA-402, RCAF Sustainment doctrine, "The availability of trained and dedicated personnel, in the right numbers and at all locations is critical to achieving operational success."¹⁸ In other words, people have always been the key to success in airlift and sustainment. With this in mind, there is no workaround to producing new and highly trained people to fly, maintain and plan these operations without sacrificing the quality of training. Therefore the RCAF's current efforts to retain its human resources (OP EXPERIENCE and OP TALENT) are the key to airlift success.

CONCLUSION

24. In conclusion, SSE formalized the government's expectations towards the CAF's ability to project power globally. Specifically, it deploys up to 6500 CAF members over seven distinct long and short term operations while still retaining the ability to support DART and NEO missions. The principle implications for the RCAF regarding these concurrent operations are that it will stretch its airlift capability to its limit. The RCAF will feel this pressure through airlift assets and people's availability and finally, through the FG structures' limitations.

RECOMMENDATION

25. This paper recommends the RCAF consider the following to better support SSE's concurrent operations:

- a. Regarding implications for people and FG, RCAF should continue with OP EXPERIENCE and OP TALENT and work with CMP to accelerate intake and recruitment towards specific airlift related fields while remaining within the air mobility forces' mandated size.
- b. Regarding FG, without sacrificing on the quality of training, the RCAF should streamline aircrew training towards airlift fleets to alleviate the

¹⁷ Arcouette. *CAF Sustainment to Overseas Operations*. P.15

¹⁸ National, Defence. 2017b. "Canadian Forces Aerospace Sustain Doctrine, B-GA-402-003/FP-001." Canadian Armed Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre. p. 2-4

problems caused by attrition. This streamlining should be fleet specific rather than pan-RCAF.

- c. Regarding airlift asset availability, the RCAF should look to establish standing civilian and military agreements to assist with strategic airlift. These agreements would help the RCAF prioritize its resources towards higher risk operations or more urgent matters such as NEO and DART.
- d. Regarding Operational Support Hubs, the CAF should look to increase the readiness posture and scope of OSHs globally. This increased posture will allow greater freedom of movement to the CAF globally without needing to surge an OSH when dealing with contingency and concurrent operations.

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