



## Why Canada Needs an Updated National Security Strategy

Major Nigel Allan

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#### Exercise Solo Flight

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## **Why Canada Needs an Updated National Security Strategy**

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## **TRUE NORTH STRONG AND FREE: WHY CANADA NEEDS AN UPDATED NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Canada's lack of a current National Security Strategy (NSS) is troubling for a variety of reasons. While the Government of Canada (GoC) under PM Paul Martin's leadership published "Canada's first-ever comprehensive statement of our National Security Policy"<sup>1</sup> in 2004, it is sorely dated and requires updating to address the evolution of contemporary threats. Credibility on the world's stage is underpinned by conforming to expected norms, of a sovereign state conducting itself as expected by its counterparts. Crucial to the concept of a state's sovereignty is its ability to provide security, in various forms, to protect its citizens<sup>2</sup>. This requirement is self-evident; regardless of the style of government (ranging from democratically-elected to autocratically-imposed governance), the legitimacy of the state cannot persist without provision of security to the populace. A vital requirement for protecting and projecting this security sustainably is the ability to plan around, and execute, a coherent strategy. A formally-published strategy sends a signal of commitment to various stakeholders: the population being governed, multilateral institutions (UN, NATO, etc.), various partners and allies as well as neutral and adversarial states globally.

A mandatory precursor to any state publishing its NSS is defining an accepted framework of what exactly their national security consists of. The precision of language itself is important domestically, to ensure that Canadian citizens, elected leaders and members of the national security apparatus understand specifically what is being safeguarded. Similarly, for interactions at the state-to-state level as well as economic interests abroad, it is important to ensure Canada's values and ideals are well communicated to those who share our vested security interests. A recent example which exemplifies such deliberate language is Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS). "Canada will, at all times, unapologetically defend our national interest, be it with regard to the global rules that govern global trade, international human rights or navigation and overflight rights"<sup>3</sup>. While this document itself would ideally be subordinate to a more holistic NSS, it implies existence of Canada's "national interest"; the missing piece is a capstone strategy laying out what these interests are and how Canada will go about securing them.

### **NATIONAL SECURITY IN A CANADIAN CONTEXT**

Some of the unique aspects of the Canadian national security environment can be summarized in one word: geography. "Canada's strategic geography has very much shaped how Canadians have chosen to respond to global politics"<sup>4</sup>. Due to Canada's

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<sup>1</sup> *Securing an Open Society*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Krasner, "The Persistence of State Sovereignty," 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*. p.10

<sup>4</sup> CDA Institute, "Kim Nossal: Canada Needs to Change Its Attitude Towards Defence in the 21st Century."

landmass being bordered by oceans on three coasts (Pacific, Arctic, Atlantic) its security is inherently reliant upon its maritime approaches. This represents a possible threat vector (from a defence perspective) as well as a trade opportunity, relying upon global shipping networks for both importing and exporting various goods and commodities<sup>5</sup>. The physical distance separating Canada from overseas continents is significant: while transport costs increase to traverse the vast oceanic distances, there is an inherent obstacle for adversaries to overcome to physically threaten Canadian citizens on Canadian soil. While climate change is drawing the arctic into increasing relevance, it currently remains a military threat from an aerial approach perspective (demonstrated by routine Russian penetration of Canada's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)<sup>6</sup>). The sheer size of Canada's landmass is challenging to physically defend, however it is equally difficult to physically reach, except from its south.

The most significant factor dominating any Canadian national security conversation is undoubtedly Canada's proximity to the United States. Sharing the largest international land border<sup>7</sup> physically draws Canada towards the world's superpower (who has been the dominant player in global politics for the last seven decades), which inevitably results in Canada living beneath an American shadow. (Anecdotally summarized as 'when the US sneezes, Canada catches a cold'). While both nations' histories differ appreciably, there is a shared cultural root emanating from previous British colonial rule which inextricably binds them together. This has been ever-present from a security perspective, most recently re-asserted by US President Joe Biden during his inaugural trip to the Canadian Parliament: "Canada and the United States always will have each other's backs"<sup>8</sup> referring to NORAD as "the only binational military command. There's none other in the world"<sup>9</sup>. Having a shared interest in continental security was instrumental in naming Canada's extant defence policy *Strong, Secure Engaged* (SSE): "It is about our contribution to a Canada that is strong at home, *secure in North America* [emphasis added], and engaged in the world"<sup>10</sup>.

Combined security of North America will not only influence Canadian defence policy but permeate into considerations of national security. While the US administration publishes its annual NSS<sup>11</sup>, outlining "America's vital interests"<sup>12</sup> and setting priorities for Government to address them, Canada's equivalent formal documentation is notably absent. Understanding no singular, universal definition of national security exists, the formal publication of one's contemporary definition is a mandatory pre-requisite to adequately addressing the threats posed to the state's security. Lacking a defining

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<sup>5</sup> *The Value of Commercial Marine Shipping to Canada*. xii

<sup>6</sup> Greg Hadley, "NORAD Intercepts Russian Warplanes for Second Time in Two Days."

<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada, "Canada Year Book."

<sup>8</sup> White House Briefing Room, "Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada in Joint Press Conference."

<sup>9</sup> White House Briefing Room.

<sup>10</sup> Canada. Dept. of National Defence and Canada. Ministère de la défense nationale, "Strong, secure, engaged: Canada's defence policy." p.6

<sup>11</sup> House of Representatives, "GOLDWATER-NICHOLS DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1986," 88.

<sup>12</sup> The White House, "National Security Strategy."

framework document, the GoC and by extension Canadian citizens are either unable, or unwilling, to answer the question of what is worth safeguarding. While certain burdens such as NORAD or NATO are firmly entrenched in both GoC and citizens' psyche, the fundamental threats which they mitigate are not fulsomely defined for public consumption and debate<sup>13</sup>.

While the military and defence naturally come to mind when discussing national security, these are merely components of a larger mosaic of security elements affecting a sovereign state (such as economic security, food security, cyber security, among others.) *Security* is not synonymous with *defence*; security must be considered as the over-arching, broadly-encompassing term, beneath which defence is but one component. Physically protecting state citizens from violence is integral to ensuring 'protection from fear' however there are countless additional threats which require mitigation to holistically ensure citizens' security. These examples could include, but are not limited to the eight UN's Millennium Development Goals: poverty and hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, environment, development<sup>14</sup>.

While many of these are less prevalent sources of insecurity to Canadians specifically, the UN initially set these goals (in 2000), and followed up with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (in 2015) to promote and achieve human security worldwide. While this concept is not synonymous with, or appropriate to overlay upon, a state-centric security framework, it is noteworthy that their approach began with defining the terms before committing resources to address the underlying root causes. As time passed, the goals were expanded, reflecting a pragmatic approach to security in an ever-changing world. Attempting to answer the impossible question 'what is security?' sends a signal to the international community that the UN is aware of, and taking seriously, threats which cause insecurity to disadvantaged people worldwide. Canada has yet to do likewise by defining what its national security includes and how the GoC will commit to upholding it.

Publishing an NSS allows the GoC to define national security as it sees fit, which is an important opening step to furthering any serious discussion addressing security threats or mitigations thereof at the state-level. A few possible reasons why this has yet to occur have been aforementioned: Canada's geography and relationship with the US have largely mitigated traditional security threats. Coupled with a society which remains generally unaware or disinterested in national security<sup>15</sup>, sufficient political motivation has been absent in recent decades. Kim Nossal summarized this perfectly in a 2021 podcast, stating:

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<sup>13</sup> Public Safety Canada, "National Security Public Opinion Research Snapshot."

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015."

<sup>15</sup> West, Leah (@leahwest\_nsl). "...if Cdns routinely took nat sec matters seriously and not only when it's politically expedient or when there is a juicy headline we could perhaps be grown ups & have real conversations about the threats to our nation & what to do about them." Twitter, Mar 22, 2023. [https://twitter.com/leahwest\\_nsl/status/1638702342735380481?s=46&t=9YDuH0yT\\_IMyALtCtgvTbQ](https://twitter.com/leahwest_nsl/status/1638702342735380481?s=46&t=9YDuH0yT_IMyALtCtgvTbQ)

So many other countries in the world have to take their physical security far more seriously than Canadians. Canadians do not have to take defence seriously, and unsurprisingly, we do not take defense seriously. We spend as little as we can get away with. We do not have serious conversations with ourselves about what we need to purchase to defend ourselves. We do not have serious conversations about what the threats to Canadian existence might be. Therefore, we get the kind of white paper that every government since Pierre Trudeau's government has put out, which is to get around the problem of our essential safety in international affairs.<sup>16</sup>

## CANADA'S STATUS QUO: NATIONAL SECURITY APPARATUS

"The first priority of the Government of Canada is to protect Canada and the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad."<sup>17</sup> Within the GoC, Public Safety Canada (PSC) is the central organization responsible to "protect the safety and security of Canadians both at home and abroad. PSC spearheads this effort by coordinating the activities of federal departments and agencies tasked with protecting Canadians and their communities, businesses and interests"<sup>18</sup>. National Security is one of the initiatives managed within its overall portfolio, (along with border strategies, countering crime and emergency management<sup>19</sup>), however it lacks an overall capstone strategy. A comparable policy to an NSS is the 2004 *Securing an open Society* which "articulates core national security interests and proposes a framework for addressing threats to Canadians"<sup>20</sup>. Produced following 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the policy was tailored for a contemporary geopolitical climate, which has appreciably changed in the nearly two decades that followed. While threats such as terrorism have drawn sufficient securitization, nascent threats emerge, requiring contemporary reproduction of an NSS.

Cyber security, for example, is subordinate to PSC within the national security framework yet interestingly, it has a published strategy. "This document outlines the key elements of the global cyber security environment and articulates some of the ways that the Government of Canada will respond to an array of new challenges and opportunities in cyberspace"<sup>21</sup>. Beautifully written, the National Cyber Security Strategy clearly communicates the threats to Canadians through easily relatable vignettes and sets a definite foundation for how the GoC will maintain cyber security and demonstrate leadership as technology evolves. While this initiative is commendable, and a similar approach should be used to draft an NSS, it remains somewhat stand-alone in that there are insufficient peer or similar documents from which an overall NSS can be created by composite. Comparable examples such as the 2013 Counter-terrorism strategy or 2017's

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<sup>16</sup> CDA Institute, "Kim Nossal: Canada Needs to Change Its Attitude Towards Defence in the 21st Century."

<sup>17</sup> Government of Canada, "Building Resilience Against Terrorism CANADA'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY," 2.

<sup>18</sup> Government of Canada, "Public Safety Canada."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Securing an Open Society*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Goodale, *National Cyber Security Strategy*. p.4

Defence Policy (SSE) exist within silos; while there is undoubtedly overlap between these initiatives, they are far from all-encompassing from an overall national security perspective.

An extant piece of legislation which broadly defines national security, through the lens of *threats* to Canada is the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Act (Bill C-23). Written in 1984, the act “provides the legislative foundation for the CSIS mandate, outlines CSIS roles and responsibilities, confers specific powers and imposes constraints, and sets the framework for democratic control and accountability for CSIS”<sup>22</sup>. Its origins stem from the McDonald commission, whereby security intelligence services were separated from the RCMP’s federal policing mandate, resulting in the creation of a civilian intelligence agency (CSIS). The history itself is relevant as it signals a discrete separation between national policing services and national security intelligence. The act itself is deliberately open-ended in defining security threats:

threats to the security of Canada means

- espionage or sabotage that is against Canada or is detrimental to the interests of Canada or activities directed toward or in support of such espionage or sabotage,
- foreign influenced activities within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada and are clandestine or deceptive or involve a threat to any person,
- activities within or relating to Canada directed toward or in support of the threat or use of acts of serious violence against persons or property for the purpose of achieving a political, religious or ideological objective within Canada or a foreign state, and
- activities directed toward undermining by covert unlawful acts, or directed toward or intended ultimately to lead to the destruction or overthrow by violence of, the constitutionally established system of government in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

Defining threats to national security in such generic, all-encompassing terms enables legal interpretation, which ultimately provides flexibility for Parliament to act upon said threats with a variety of measures. This has resulted in the formation of The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) and National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA), as formal bodies to assist in public transparency and government accountability<sup>24</sup>. The lack of a descriptive ‘checklist’ of national security threats frees elected officials to exercise judgement and incorporate subjectivity into governance. The example serves to illustrate a critical point: national security *threats* are loosely defined, precisely *because* there is no over-arching

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<sup>22</sup> Government of Canada, “CSIS Legislation.”

<sup>23</sup> Minister of Justice, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act. p.3

<sup>24</sup> NSICOP, “The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians”; “National Security and Intelligence Review Agency.”

NSS from which to deduce threats towards Canada. The CSIS act has not been thoroughly reviewed since 1984<sup>25</sup>, pre-dating the digital revolution; countless threats towards Canada have substantially evolved since its passing. Without a capstone document defining the terms, how does one define “the interests of Canada”<sup>26</sup> to a common understanding?

Viewing national defence as a subset of national security, Canada as an independent state has not faced an existential crisis in the form of a credible foreign invasion upon its sovereign territory (post-Confederation). By consequence, the defence of Canada is somewhat unique in that it does not focus upon traditional territorial military concepts such as large troop concentrations in tactically relevant locations, fortifications near international borders, or air defence networks surrounding key infrastructure. When discussing the useful function of main battle tanks for Canadian defence, Clinical Professor Christopher Ankersen (NYU) submits that “the CAF is largely an instrument of foreign policy, not territorial defence”<sup>27</sup>. Seeing as the dominant global superpower is Canada’s closest neighbour and military ally, Canada’s overall security landscape will justifiably have, but a minority’s share of defence-focus. While this has been witnessed throughout history, it fails to be captured in formal writing in the medium of an NSS or similar document which would establish the individual components which aggregate to an overall national security apparatus.

While the lack of written identification does not preclude the GoC from executing an ad hoc NSS, it is problematic when viewed on the world’s stage through the lens of credibility. Recently, the perennially-recurring observation that Canada fails to meet the proposed NATO defence spending allocation of 2% GDP, has resurfaced in the mainstream media. Prompted by the CDA Institute’s Call for Action, a series of prominent former Members of Parliament (MPs) and retired senior CAF Officers have stated that they: “strongly encourage Prime Minister Trudeau, his Cabinet and the Government to lead and act with a sense of urgency and heed the recent call of the NATO Secretary General to treat 2% of GDP as a floor rather than a ceiling for defence spending”<sup>28</sup>. Prof Adam Chapnick retorted that “the *lack of clear policy direction* [emphasis added] does, however, enable a diverse list of current and retired senior officials with otherwise divergent views on public policy to line up alongside one another.”<sup>29</sup> While debate surrounding the metric of NATO members’ defence spending will undoubtedly continue in perpetuity, Chapnick’s point is relevant precisely because there is no overarching NSS which provides clear policy direction.

A main reason the GoC continues to spend below 2% GDP towards defence is because the metric is externally established, without internal justification. While an open letter may garnish media coverage during an otherwise slow news cycle, there is little

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<sup>25</sup> Vincent Rigby and Thomas Juneau, “A National Security Strategy for the 2020s,” 15.

<sup>26</sup> Minister of Justice, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act. p.3

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Ankersen, Twitter post, March 2023, 10:45 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ProfAnkersen>

<sup>28</sup> CDA Institute, “Former Ministers, Generals and Senior Public Servant’s Call for Action: CANADA’S NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN PERIL,” April 16, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Chapnick, “On the CDA Institute’s Open Letter...”



hope for substantive change without a higher-level policy or direction beneath which 2% GDP expenditure can be acceptable. This reality was unceremoniously revealed (via the ‘Discord Leak’) to have been discussed privately between PM Trudeau and NATO officials “and that the situation was not “likely” to change without a shift in public opinion”<sup>30</sup>. Without a means to communicate the value proposition to Canadian taxpayers as to what 2% GDP spent on defence actually buys them, shifting public opinion is unlikely. While 2% GDP is explicitly a “defence” budget target, this should be merely a component of an overall security budget which would exist to protect Canada’s vital interests (whatever those may be defined as).

Ignoring the objective number (as a percentage of GDP) and instead focusing on the subjective messaging surrounded by failure to live up to alliance demands is more relevant from a national security perspective. While the shortcoming is easily measured in dollars spent in a given fiscal year, the true impact can be felt in a loss of credibility amongst allies and adversaries alike. The revelation of the Discord Leak was not newsworthy because it revealed Canada consistently failed to meet NATO defence-spending targets (as this has always been public knowledge<sup>31</sup>), it was shocking because it highlighted Canadian allies’ concerns about the overall state of Canadian commitment to the alliance, as well as military capacity and readiness. “Canada’s “widespread” military deficiencies are harming ties with security partners and allies”<sup>32</sup>. Publishing an NSS would improve the GoC’s international standing and mend ties with its closest partners and allies, by signalling a credible commitment to upholding and defending shared values.

International law conceptually provides a common language for states to peacefully settle disputes. Although its enforceability and overall effectiveness remain up for debate, undoubtedly the use of commonly understood language enables states to establish international behavioural norms<sup>33</sup>. Similarly, a defined NSS offers a venue to communicate Canada’s values internationally using terminology consistent with its counterparts. A significant advantage of having these values defined in writing, communicated broadly amongst the international community, is that it offers *predictability* for emergency planning purposes *vice reactionary* formation of ad hoc solutions (such as convening an Incident Response Group, or appointing an Independent Special Rapporteur). Canada stands to gain credibility overall on the world’s stage, concurrently offering a medium by which to exert national sovereignty. Inversely, lacking an NSS, and clearly defined priorities, lends itself to competing interests during times of crisis, without clear direction as to departmental responsibilities.

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<sup>30</sup> Amanda Coletta, “Trudeau Told NATO That Canada Will Never Meet Spending Goal, Discord Leak Shows.”

<sup>31</sup> Parliamentary Budget Officer, “CANADA’S MILITARY EXPENDITURE AND THE NATO 2% SPENDING TARGET,” 10.

<sup>32</sup> Amanda Coletta, “Trudeau Told NATO That Canada Will Never Meet Spending Goal, Discord Leak Shows.”

<sup>33</sup> James Larry Taulbee and Gerhard von Glahn, *Law Among Nations : An Introduction to Public International Law*, 16, 23.

Canada's lack of an NSS creates a vacuum for various governmental departments to fill. The most obvious example is the Department of National Defence (DND) which bears a significant share of responsibility for national security (both militarily, physically defending sovereign Canadian territory and via the Communications Security Establishment). The lack of a coherent and periodically reviewed NSS has resulted in various defence policies being created in isolation. These policies have ultimately been ineffective and incomplete, since they have previously been driven from the 'bottom up' (by DND, CDS) vice 'top down' (by PM direction)<sup>34</sup>. The most recent example can be found in the ongoing Defence Policy Update (DPU) announced in the 2022 budget as an update to SSE (2017). "Over the past number of months, DND officials, members of the CAF and the Minister of National Defence have been working with partners to identify the challenges that the DPU must address, and the means to get us there"<sup>35</sup>. The department is looking internally for inspiration to update its guiding policy; it is not being steered by higher direction. The DPU was prompted by fiscal concerns (hence its origin in the budget) *not* being driven by a holistic strategy of overall purpose of defence working within an overarching security framework. Conceptually, defence is but one part of a state's security and therefore any such policy should be subordinate and follow from an NSS. Lacking a 'north star' providing superior direction and intent, any defence policy is, at worst, doomed to fail, or at best, be inefficient in partially achieving its overall stated aims.

## PRECEDENT-SETTING ALTERNATIVES

Looking south of the border offers a possible model of how to derive an NSS. The US government administration publishes its NSS every year. This is derived from the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols act which states "the President shall transmit to Congress each year a comprehensive report on the national security strategy of the United States"<sup>36</sup>. This serves to update both the executive and legislative branches of government ahead of the budget proposal. The NSS rationalizes the requested fund expenditure which is annually sought<sup>37</sup>. The links between national security, military defence spending and overall government budgets highlights the criticality of security as a state's primary responsibility to its citizens. This sends a message internally and externally as to how much value the US federal government places upon its national security.

The Goldwater-Nichols act further stipulates which elements must be included within the NSS:

- The worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are vital to the national security of the United States.

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<sup>34</sup> CGAI, "Making Defence Policy."

<sup>35</sup> Government of Canada, "Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Open Public Consultations on Update to Canada's Defence Policy to All Canadians."

<sup>36</sup> House of Representatives, "Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986." p.88

<sup>37</sup> OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE And (COMPTROLLER)/CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, "Defense Budget Overview," 3.

- The foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities of the United States necessary to deter aggression and to implement the national security strategy of the United States.
- The proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of the national power of the United States to protect or promote the interests and achieve the goals and objectives referred to in paragraph (1).
- The adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy of the United States, including an evaluation of the balance among the capabilities of all elements of the national power of the United States to support the implementation of the national security strategy.
- Such other information as may be necessary to help inform Congress on matters relating to the national security strategy of the United States<sup>38</sup>.

Furthermore, “each national security strategy report shall be transmitted in both a classified and an unclassified form”<sup>39</sup>. Underpinning these documents are the National Defense Strategy, the Nuclear Posture Review and the Missile Defense Review<sup>40</sup>. While the contents themselves are unique to the US, the framework is worthy of emulation – an overall NSS drives various subordinate strategies, for both public and private consumption. In the American context these are integrated towards defense, however could equally include non-militaristic components of national security such as economic prosperity, combating climate change, or cyber security. The list is non-exhaustive, but serves to show that security is not a uniquely military component underpinning a state’s sovereignty.

Examining another Five Eyes ally, the UK produces a similar, yet distinctly different, strategic guidance. *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* contains additional headers beyond defence and security such as climate action, soft power, science and technology, among others. “At the heart of the Integrated Review is an increased commitment to security and resilience, so that the British people are protected against threats”<sup>41</sup>. This document, similar to the US NSS, begins with the Head of State’s vision, and derives a subordinate Government strategic framework with policy objectives and priorities.

These are but two of many examples of foreign states formally publishing an NSS. Leveraging both these documents as examples, it is understandable that *precedent has been set* amongst world leaders in clearly articulating their vital national interests,

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<sup>38</sup> House of Representatives, “GOLDWATER-NICHOLS DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1986,” 88–89.

<sup>39</sup> House of Representatives, 89.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department Of Defense, “DOD Releases National Defense Strategy, Missile Defense, Nuclear Posture Reviews.”

<sup>41</sup> *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, 11.

and communicating a strategy openly as to how they will be defended. This begins by orienting their governments towards achieving or maintaining national security via a coherent direction which enables subordinate plans to be formulated. Implicitly derived is the assumption that subordinate initiatives will be both supported and funded, if appropriately in line with the NSS. The subsequent extension of this effect is that private industry and civilian populations can react accordingly in support of state security<sup>42</sup>. In regards to the Israeli NSS, it has been acknowledged that “this effort is also important for building up the internal legitimacy of all other national security efforts”<sup>43</sup>. While defence is an obvious portfolio which has representation within an NSS, there are additional facets of security (previously mentioned) which are equally crucial. This begs the question as to which elements would be beneficially addressed via a Canadian NSS?

### WHAT PROBLEM DOES AN NSS SOLVE?

Canada’s overall awareness of security threats has been described as “worryingly low”<sup>44</sup>. This is a ‘first world problem’, where Canadians are spoiled with riches, due to geography more than anything else. The homeland Canadians are fortunate to occupy happens to possess abundant land, with sufficient sustenance and energy to support a growing population. Natural resources are plentiful and accessible from an economic perspective to sustain a high GDP and generous standard of living. As previously described, from a military or physical security perspective, Canada neighbours the current and most lasting global superpower, who is not only its number one trade partner, but also aligned culturally with many shared values. This deduction is consequential because the witnessed outcome has been that Canadians’ economic and physical security have not been traditionally threatened during most of its citizens’ lifetimes. Since Canadians do not generally feel threatened, political pressure to create an NSS is absent.

Because Canadians generally do not have reason to fear traditional external threats to the nation or its democratic institutions, there has not been a compelling ‘watershed moment’ birthing an NSS. Building off this relative security and low general awareness of threats towards the everyday citizen, Canada’s adversaries have seized the opportunity to conduct hybrid (or grey zone), offensive operations below the threshold of war<sup>45</sup>. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has recently been accused of federal election interference, threatening a sitting MP’s family, operating covert police stations on Canadian soil and an array of espionage-related activities<sup>46</sup>. While flagrant in nature and shocking to most Canadian citizens when uncovered in open source media publications, these acts are nefarious by design *because* they threaten a soft underbelly of

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<sup>42</sup> GADI EISENKOT, and GABI SIBONI, “Guidelines for ISRAEL’S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY,” 42.

<sup>43</sup> GADI EISENKOT, and GABI SIBONI, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Vincent Rigby and Thomas Juneau, “A National Security Strategy for the 2020s,” 21.

<sup>45</sup> Guermantes Lailari, “Chinese Communist Way of War: Different than the West”; Krishnan, “Fifth Generation Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, and Gray Zone Conflict: A Comparison,” 21.

<sup>46</sup> Steven Chase, “A Timeline of China’s Alleged Interference in Recent Canadian Elections”; Catherine Lévesque, “Privy Council Office Was Aware of Threats to MP and Family, Chong Says, despite Trudeau’s Claim”; Ismail Shakil, “Canada Probes Reports of Chinese ‘police Service Stations’ in Toronto”; “Hydro-Québec Employee Accused of Spying for China Is a Flight Risk, Crown Says.”

Canada – a lack of security awareness. Since there are no firm definitions of vital national interests laid out in an NSS, such as election integrity or industrial intellectual property, disruption towards these subjects forces the GoC to react vice having a proactive defence. Lacking a focal point derived from an NSS, various government departments are left to assume or self-determine the direction they should be moving.

An NSS would greatly assist the GoC in responding to, or better yet, preventing these crises entirely. By spelling out the elements of Canadian security and assigning areas of responsibility to various agencies within the national security apparatus, the GoC would seize the initiative and enable subordinate departments to plan efficiently and avoid information silos<sup>47</sup>. Internally this would enhance GoC focus towards security threats; externally it would build credibility for Canada amongst partners and allies who correctly perceive Canada's lackadaisical attitude towards security. By signalling its priorities, the GoC can work internationally to determine where collaboration is possible, to mutually compliment security efforts.

The US NSS boldly identifies the “PRC as its pacing challenge”<sup>48</sup> and states that “Russia poses an immediate threat to the free and open international system”<sup>49</sup>. Just as this allows military commanders to pivot their focus from the Global War on Terror (GWOT) towards contemporary operating environments, it equally compels industry to do likewise. A consequential example can be found in the US *CHIPS and Science Act*<sup>50</sup>, where convergence between military strategic objectives and economic interests are forged. By alignment of the military and economic elements towards a common threat, the administration sends a clear message of resolve to friends and foes alike. Canada's IPS names China as “disruptive”; it offers similar thematic benefits to protect national interests such as critical mineral supply chains and intellectual property<sup>51</sup>. The missing link, however, is a connection towards an over-arching strategy, which can be leveraged to stimulate investment in the Canadian private sector (as *CHIPS* lays out stateside).

Viewing security through a variety of perspectives helps to illuminate the range of components of national security, which stand to benefit from adoption of an NSS. A thriving economy, to ensure prosperity for a state's citizens, is idealized by many nations, irrespective of their governance methodology. “Poverty alleviation, in fact, has been central to the broad view of Human Security”<sup>52</sup>; the concept of economic security has been embraced by the UN as paramount to human development. While Canada continues to enjoy membership in the G7, as one of the world's largest economies<sup>53</sup>, it currently lags behind the OECD average in terms of research & development (R&D) expenditure,

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<sup>47</sup> Vincent Rigby and Thomas Juneau, “A National Security Strategy for the 2020s,” 23.

<sup>48</sup> The White House, “National Security Strategy,” 22.

<sup>49</sup> The White House, 8.

<sup>50</sup> The White House, “FACT SHEET: CHIPS and Science Act Will Lower Costs, Create Jobs, Strengthen Supply Chains, and Counter China.”

<sup>51</sup> Government of Canada, “Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 8.

<sup>52</sup> Hough, Peter, Moran, Andrew, Pilbeam, Bruce, and Stokes, Wendy., “International Security Studies : Theory and Practice. Milton: , 2020. Accessed May 3, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.,” 64.

<sup>53</sup> OECD Data, “Gross Domestic Product (GDP).”

as measured by a percentage GDP<sup>54</sup>. Investment in R&D is recognized as vital for economic growth, job creation, innovation and competitiveness<sup>55</sup>. Understanding that R&D is but one component sustaining a world-leading economy, it serves as an example of how a non-military aspect of national security can be enhanced by publishing an NSS.

Publication of an NSS would offer impetus for increased investment domestically into particular economic sectors which are relevant to national security. An example from a highly securitized nation state is Israel's NSS which explicitly states that: "Israel must adapt the development of economic infrastructures so that they can be harnessed for national security needs and to support the war effort"<sup>56</sup>. With many defense-related industries being domesticated by necessity, "the multiplier effects on R&D, as well as on the high-tech end of manufacturing industries, were enormous"<sup>57</sup>. Although this is a non-exhaustive summary of immediate benefits to publishing an NSS, there are equally risks which must be considered.

### **RISKS ACCOMPANYING AN NSS**

An obvious drawback to publishing an NSS is that it clearly illuminates to Canada's adversaries exactly which interests are vital and where the GoC is potentially willing to commit resources to protect. Canada draws tremendous strength and credibility internationally from abiding by the rules based international order<sup>58</sup>. This is predicated upon clearly communicating what Canadian values are, and most importantly what Canada is willing to do to uphold them. As a liberal, democratic society, accountability and transparency are paramount to governance; these tenants are upheld and strengthened by openly declaring what it is the GoC determines are elements of national security. A risk in doing so is that the GoC may be highlighting to its adversaries what it values most in terms of protecting its sovereignty and interests. Consequentially, the inverse (what is *not* mentioned) may be revealed as a weakness to be targeted. Using the Cyber Security strategy as an example, this sends a clear message that Canada values its cyber security and lays out the steps it is willing to take to ensure it is protected<sup>59</sup>. When no such peer document exists for economic interests, or vital energy infrastructure this could present a vulnerability to be exploited. Without defining these interests clearly, the risk of securitization presents itself.

According to Ole Wæver's securitization theory, the concept of introducing a threat towards a referent object (in this case, the Canadian state) runs the risk of reducing

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<sup>54</sup> Statistics Canada, "Gross Domestic Expenditures on Research and Development (R&D) Intensity in the G7 Countries, 2018 to 2020."

<sup>55</sup> DIRECTORATE FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION and COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL POLICY, "The Impact of R&D Investment on Economic Performance: A Review of the Econometric Evidence," 4.

<sup>56</sup> GADI EISENKOT, and GABI SIBONI, "Guidelines for ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY," 42.

<sup>57</sup> Broude, Deger, and Sen, "Defence, Innovation and Development," 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Securing an Open Society*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Goodale, *National Cyber Security Strategy*, 27.

civil liberties and citizen freedoms<sup>60</sup>. Without an NSS this risk is somewhat non-existent; Canadian citizens are generally either disconcerted or indifferent regarding national security<sup>61</sup>. The status quo allows for the perception of personal freedoms to be paramount within Canadian society. Introducing an NSS creates the opportunity to formally identify certain threats, thereby enabling them to become securitized and consequently impacting civil liberties. “Not every problem is a matter of national security”<sup>62</sup>. The publishing of an NSS merely *illuminates* the threat; the threat will exist regardless of whether or not it is introduced in official written policy. However, the attention garnered by an NSS will potentially have an unintended consequence of leading to policy, legislation and actions which could restrict personal freedoms for the ‘greater good’.

This risk can equally be viewed as an opportunity for the GoC. By deliberately selecting threats or thematic groupings thereof to formally identify, the GoC can draw attention to concerns which otherwise go unnoticed. The balance must be carefully sought, however, sacrificing personal liberties for benefit of the state may be required when confronting emerging ‘problems without passports’ such as climate change. Certain threats will be impossible to address without intervention at the state level, such as cyber security of critical infrastructure<sup>63</sup>. While there exists a risk of the state over-riding personal freedoms, this can be mitigated by transparent governance and accountability in the form of governments beholden to routinely refresh and publish updated versions of the NSS, and continued use of NSIRA.

If publishing an NSS can direct economic efforts and benefit certain sectors, this can equally disadvantage opposing industries. A relevant Canadian example may be of prioritizing climate change as a vital area of national security, and vilifying the energy sector (oil and gas producers who emit significant pollutants<sup>64</sup>). By selecting a component to address in the NSS, the GoC will prioritize its efforts, and subsequently its budget, accordingly. In a world where financial resources are limited, this inevitably will result in divergent outcomes, whereby certain segments of the population will receive preferential treatment over others, which could lead to politicization of the security issue itself. The broader risk is that an issue which threatens the state in its entirety may get bogged down in politics, instead of serving as a rallying call to action for all Canadians. One proven mitigation for such risk includes private-public partnerships (routinely used by NASA<sup>65</sup>) to providing government direction and equal opportunity for funding towards private innovation and research. By leveraging an NSS to transparently establish

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<sup>60</sup> *Securitisation Theory - International Relations (3/7)*.

<sup>61</sup> jack MAGEAU, “PREPARING CANADA FOR A NEW GENERATION OF SECURITY CHALLENGES.”

<sup>62</sup> Vincent Rigby and Thomas Juneau, “A National Security Strategy for the 2020s,” 3.

<sup>63</sup> Vincent Rigby and Thomas Juneau, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Statistics Canada, “Canadian System of Environmental–Economic Accounts: Energy Use and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 2020.”

<sup>65</sup> KAREN L. JONES, “PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS: STIMULATING INNOVATION IN THE SPACE SECTOR,” 4.

a phased approach for spending government dollars, the GoC can incentivize commercial innovation towards achieving its objectives.

There are certainly additional risks presented by implementation of an NSS. Further study is required to understand the potential trade-offs by implementing a robust NSS similar to those which Canada's closest allies have published. While Canada's adversaries may find vulnerabilities to target, the heightened societal awareness surrounding national security amongst Canadian citizens is invaluable. As various world leaders have demonstrated, these risks can be mitigated to ensure the benefits externally of enhanced reputation and credibility outweigh the potential drawbacks of its publication.

## **CONCLUSION**

Among the most important responsibilities of the federal government is the need to protect the safety and security of its citizens, defend Canadian sovereignty and maintain our territorial integrity. However, in recent decades, issues of national security and defence are rarely treated as a priority other than in times of great peril<sup>66</sup>.

Canada's lack of a current NSS is understandable, yet simultaneously unforgivable. What has worked in years past may very well continue to satisfy Canada's security needs in the future, however, there are tangible benefits to formal publication of an NSS. Both the GoC and its internal security apparatus as well as foreign states and private industry would benefit from the signal of intent communicated by a GoC which prioritizes national security and commits sufficient resources to take it seriously. Precedent has been set internationally by Five Eyes partners publishing equivalent documents, upon which Canada can predictably engage multilaterally.

While the defence community would undoubtedly benefit from such a cornerstone document of government policy, the broadest opportunity exists for the Canadian private sector. By openly declaring where the GoC intends to focus its security efforts, and therefore capital expenditure, industry can pivot to ensure sufficient response to secure government contracts. While publishing an NSS does come with its own risks, the benefits are asymmetrically greater, as Canada's reputation and credibility internationally stand to improve. By demonstrating renewed leadership, the GoC should communicate to its citizens that it takes their security seriously, redefining how Canada will remain 'true north strong and free'.

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<sup>66</sup> CDA Institute, "Former Ministers, Generals and Senior Public Servant's Call for Action: CANADA'S NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN PERIL," April 16, 2023.



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