

Defense Policy “Walmart Style”: Canadian Lessons in “not-so-grand” Grand Strategy

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Abstract

As the government of Canada cuts back on defense spending after years of significant increases, critics lament the supposed lack of a “grand strategy” when it comes to military expenditures. But the current reductions are actually a return to traditional Canadian grand strategy, albeit one that is not that “grand.” Put in retail shopping terms, Canada has tended to follow an economizing *Walmart* approach to defense spending as opposed to a more upscale *Saks Fifth Avenue* style. Though often criticized as nothing more than “free riding,” this approach may be more accurately described as “easy riding.” It is one that was deliberately and carefully chosen by successive Canadian policy makers, acting in accordance with “realism Canadian style.” It allowed the country to achieve security at home and to use the justifiably highly regarded Canadian Armed Forces to participate in a limited, yet effective and internationally appreciated manner in overseas military engagements as a stalwart Western ally without endangering the economy and social programs by spending more on defense than was absolutely necessary. While the Walmart approach can be taken too far, in these times of fiscal austerity when national budgets are difficult to balance without cutting defense spending and when interventionist exhaustion is afflicting many Western governments, including the United States, the lessons from the Canadian experience should resonate with policy makers and analysts well beyond Canada.

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Introduction

After years of historically relatively large increases, Canada, alongside America and her allies, is tightening the defense purse. Since 2010 alone, reductions have been in the order of 10 percent with force reallocations amounting to another 3 percent.¹ In its 2014 budget, the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced a three-year deferment of over three billion dollars in major equipment purchases.² As rising costs and long delays in military procurements became a looming political liability, the government also moved to reduce the military's role in defense acquisitions in favor of greater civilian bureaucratic oversight of major defense projects.³ Although, as argued subsequently, these cutbacks are returning Canada to an historic norm when it comes to defense spending, they have touched off a lively discussion in the Canadian foreign and defense policy literature on the subject of whether Canada does and/or should have a "grand strategy."⁴ For some critics, Ottawa has consistently underinvested in its military to the detriment of the country's vital national interests and its standing in the world.⁵ In its 2014 *Strategic Outlook for Canada*, the Canadian Defense Associations Institute (CDAI) criticized the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper for not having "articulated a broad vision for Canada on the international stage and, as a consequence, Canada's credibility in the world has suffered." Although calling for "more teeth and less tail in Canada's national defence, the lack of a clear definition of what the Government wants from its armed forces makes it difficult to define a strategy and underpin it with the right equipment, resources, and training and to plan joint services operations." In this "post-Afghanistan amnesia" Canada, the CDAI claims, is often "a nonplayer in times of crisis."⁶

The Harper government is the not the first to be charged with failing to articulate a clear strategy backed up by commensurate defense expenditures. Indeed, such allegations have been the staple of discussions about Canadian defense policy for decades. In this sense, the current government is not suffering from "amnesia" but, as argued subsequently, is actually recovering its memory of defense policies past.

Those charged with formulating Canada's defense policy have consistently, except in times of war and pressing international crisis, concluded that the country's vital national interests and a modicum of global influence do not correlate with profligate spending on the armed forces. Advocates for a better made-in-Canada grand strategy contend that this happy situation may be the result of simple geography. Structurally (as neoclassical realists might say), Canada does not face existential threats (other than dissolution or absorption, neither of which can be addressed

through militarization) and, therefore, has little incentive to spend on defense in peacetime. And more spendthrift countries' (principally the United States) investment in their own armed forces to advance their own national interests generates security externalities of which Canada takes advantage, making Canada a "free rider," shamelessly benefiting from the wiser—if more costly—grand strategy of its bigger peer/peers.⁷

The article takes issue with the claim that Canada has suffered because of a failure to think in grand strategic terms. For Paul Kennedy, grand strategy transcends military capacity and must instead be understood as state capacity more broadly conceived:

The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long term (that is in wartime and peacetime) best interests . . . it operates at various levels, political, strategic, operational, tactical, all interacting with each other to advance (or retard) the primary aim.⁸

Judged by international standards, even restricting the scope conditions to major western liberal free-market democracies, Canada is secure from armed attack, has an economy and a citizenry that continue to enjoy prosperity even amid worldwide economic upheavals, and is so stable internally as to be out-and-out boring to residents and (infrequent) observers alike. Either Canadian society is already (and has long been) the beneficiary of an effective grand strategy or it is an example of the great things that can be achieved without one; especially one that does not pledge copious amounts of national treasure to military power.

Canada does actually have a grand strategy; it is just not all that "grand." Yet, it is firmly entrenched in "realism" with regard to both exogenous (international) and endogenous (domestic) constraints. Concerning the military elements of grand strategy and the benefits that may flow from it, Canada—like so many in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies—is actually more of an "easy rider" than a "free rider"—understood as bandwagoning as a function of (opportunistic) followership as opposed to acquiescence⁹—yet is so not by default, but by deliberate, adroit, and largely successful choices. In retail-shopping terms, Canada has no need for an upscale Saks Fifth Avenue level of grand strategy when it has fared well with Walmart. Dollar stores peddle cheap off-label knockoffs, Costco has people buying in bulk, but Walmart shoppers are looking for deals on name brands. Specifically, the department store analogy is meant to capture Canadian politicians' (albeit not the generals') overall approach to defense expenditures: a predilection for window shopping, deferred procurements, shopping for defense goods without breaking the bank, yet enough practical utility and superficial style to keep the country secure, prosperous, and stable.

Over the years, Canada has struggled to calibrate its "easy riding," Walmart-shopping, yet wholly realistic grand strategy. Unlike most allies, however, Canada

is a critical case study because of greater variation over a longer period of time. Variation makes it possible to gauge the implications of deviating from “just enough” and struggling for equilibrium, and thus scrutinize the hypothesis. To this end, the article examines variation in Canadian defense policy across four phases. *Rationalizing* to the point of spending “just enough” to play in the international clubs (1960–1994) was marked by minimal commitments in the form of peacekeeping, inexpensive, off-the-shelf purchases, armed forces unification, divestment, and nationalist retrenchment. *Reinventing* (1994–2005) involved overcoming the limits of “just enough,” in an era of budgetary constraints, the post–Cold War period of high tempo overseas operations and the Axworthy human security doctrine. *Jettisoning* “just enough” (2005–2007) in the years after 9/11 had a newly elected government differentiating its agenda by selling a Conservative political brand with a tilt toward the military side of civil–military relations during the Afghan campaign and friction over defense spending giving rise to aberrant increases. Once electoral payoff had been reaped, however, the government promptly *scaled back* (2008 onward) operations, death, dismemberment, and expectations: it reasserted civilian leadership, curbed the military’s influence over policy and spending, and protracted procurements. There were few concrete results to show for as much of the infusion of cash had gone into personnel, operations, and maintenance, there was little actual newkit—apart from the acquisition of new strategic lift aircraft—and the overall level of engagement approximated what Canada had previously contributed to UN and NATO Peacekeeping and peace restoration missions in the late 1990s.

Within the NATO Alliance, governments are undertaking the “most significant [. . .] retrenchment” in defense expenditures “since the end of the Cold War.”¹⁰ But this is about more than lack of funds. It reflects rising doubts about the efficacy, relevance to the national interest and domestic support for military spending, especially on expeditionary operations. “There is,” as NATO’s Secretary-General Fogh Rasmussen observed, “an unmistakable sense among Western decision-makers of power slipping away.” This is not solely a matter of possible American global disengagement, but a situation of “exhaustion-moral, political and economic-of nations that have been in the forefront of the international security business and the vibrant ascendancy of some other players.”¹¹

In this light, the article surmizes that due to proliferating budgetary pressures, interventionist malaise, and nationalist retrenchment, lessons from Canada’s “not-so-grand” strategy resonate beyond Canada. This is not because of its admittedly unique geostrategic situation, but because throughout the West politicians and bureaucrats charged with formulating and implementing so-called grand strategy may well be, implicitly, gravitating toward the approach long honed by Canada: easy-riding—not free riding—on the coattails US military power while seeking to reduce the fiscal burden to maintain military establishments. However, the article concludes with a word of caution: Canadian lessons notwithstanding, in the present international geostrategic environment, defaulting to Walmart may not be the most realistic way to get the best bargain for dwindling defense dollars.

Canadian Strategic Culture: Expeditionary Expediency

In contradistinction to the aforementioned understanding of strategy as policy culture, the concept of strategic culture denotes dominant strategic preferences among states, rooted in their formative experiences and influenced to some extent by the philosophical, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites.¹² Canada's grand strategy has rested on two seemingly contradictory dimensions of its strategic culture. The first is that Canada has historically embraced an expeditionary approach when it comes to defense policy and the posture and deployment of Canadian military power. "From Paardeberg to Panjwai," as eminent historians David Bercuson and J. L. Granatstein have written, "Canadian governments [. . .] have believed that one of the key missions of the Canadian military is to deploy abroad. . . ."¹³ These deployments have served the national interest because, in imperial wars, world wars, the Cold War and myriad limited conflicts that have characterized the post-Cold War and post-9/11 period, Canada has contributed extremely useful and highly regarded forces to the efforts of allies to contain global threats and lesser challenges posed by regional instability to the security and stability of the West and, therefore, to Canada. As such, Canada's national interest was served.

But in addition to meeting a common threat, forces have been dispatched overseas to send a message and, by so doing, to guarantee Ottawa "a seat at the table"¹⁴ along with a sense of prestige¹⁵ and status.¹⁶ This expeditionary strategic culture allowed Canada—which was never regarded, nor saw itself, as a great power—to nonetheless,

. . . show larger nations (e.g. Britain and the United States), international organizations, such as the United Nations, or allied nations such as the members of NATO that Canada is ready and able to put a shoulder to the wheel when military forces are needed to defend allies, deter aggression, or keep or enforce the peace. In other words, Canada has been willing to do its share of the hard, dirty work. Doing so wins Canada diplomatic recognition, political acceptance, entrée into arrangements, treaties, and alliances that are important to Canada and Canadians, and a voice on how future international policies will be pursued. Were Canada not to take part in such missions abroad, friends and enemies alike would have concluded long ago that Canada is of no consequence, does not deserve to be heard and ought not to be accorded any favours in bilateral or multilateral negotiations over matters of consequence.¹⁷

Put somewhat more sardonically by James Eayrs: "the main and overriding motive for the maintenance of Canadian military establishment since the Second World War has had little to do with our national security as such [. . .] it has had everything to do with underpinning our diplomatic and negotiating position vis-à-vis various international organizations and other countries."¹⁸ These operations assured Canada an international profile which, safely situated between two oceans and adjoining a decidedly benign and friendly hegemon, it would otherwise not have had. In this sense, Canada has been no different than other countries which, to greater and less

degrees, employ their armed forces as an instrument to do their military, diplomatic, and policing bidding.¹⁹

Yet, recognition, influence, and acceptance are means to assuring security and prosperity, not ends in and of themselves. They are inherently chimerical, transitory, difficult to pin down, and turn into real assets.²⁰ In a world dominated by super and great powers, where small powers can stir up trouble regardless of whether Canada is at the table or not, how does Ottawa know when its expeditionary expenditures of treasure—and sometimes blood—are worth the price?

Moreover, it is virtually impossible to establish an actual causal link between any metrics of meaningful global influence and Canadian military contributions to operations overseas. The best that can be said is that Canadian expeditionary deployments have contributed to the peace and security of that of the West, and, therefore, have benefited Canadians. Although Canada might have been conspicuous by its absence, it has not always been conspicuous by its presence, especially in the higher geostrategic stratospheres where the great powers deliberate on the fate of the world and try (with mixed success) to manage regional conflicts and restore a degree of stability and civility.

Canadian leaders, skillful and worldly practitioners of the ancient political art of the possible, rarely speak the language of *realpolitik*. Wont to explain Canada's foreign and defense policies by utilizing the seemingly selfless (and domestically appealing) rhetoric of liberal internationalism, they labor under few illusions about how much concrete influence could be bought by the dispatch of forces overseas in peace and in war. Thus, along with an expeditionary orientation, Canadian strategic culture has always included a second important characteristic, a tendency toward expediency. A careful trade-off between costs and benefits had to accompany individual deployments and defense policy in general. In answering Robert S. McNamara's famous question "How much is enough?" Ottawa would, for the most part, retort: "How much is just enough?" The answer, bearing in mind the entirely reasonable yet unavoidably imprecise objective of securing a seat at the diplomatic table or multilateral military headquarters, was expediency, an essential part of Canadian strategic culture. Insofar as Canada strives for a seat at the table (in Iraq, for instance, it did not), this approach to allied commitments, as David Haglund and Stéphane Roussel have observed, "guarantees that Canada will almost always prefer to undertake less of an effort than its great-power partners want it to, but not so little as to be eliminated altogether from their strategic decision-making."²¹

Canada's Walmart Approach: Just Enough

To a significant degree, the nature of the post-World War II "threats" that Canada faced and character of the country's external defense commitments afforded Canada's leaders the luxury of spending less on defense in the pursuit of recognition than allies—and pecuniary prodefense interests in Canada (e.g., CDAI)—would have preferred. The overwhelming threat was a Soviet strategic nuclear attack. While

Table 1. Canadian Defense Expenditures as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Year	1960	1966	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2013
Statistics Canada ^a	4.2	2.6	2.1	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.2	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.3
Stockholm Institute for Peace Research ^b							2.0	1.6	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.0

^aFor the full time series, see Statistics Canada, Fiscal Reference Tables, table 8. <https://www.fin.gc.ca/frt-trf/2013/frt-trf-1302-eng.asp#tbl7>. Due to a break in the series following the introduction of full accrual accounting, data from 1983 to 1984 onward are not directly comparable with earlier years. ^bStockholm International Peace Research Institute's military expenditure database, 1988–2013. Available at http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database. Discrepancy between StatCan and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and greater variation within the SIPRI data is a function of different methods of accounting for military expenditures.

Canada could and did contribute to warning of an air and missile strike through the binational North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) command, there was little either Washington or Ottawa could do in the way of active defense. All bets were on the American offensive strategic nuclear arsenal.

NATO provided a mechanism to extend the US nuclear deterrent to Western Europe. The Alliance did seek to maintain a conventional capability, to which Canada contributed, but the politics of NATO meant that no contribution, however trivial, would be turned away. Thus, over the course of the Cold War, Canada was able to draw down its physical presence in Europe and still remain a member in good standing. When it came to the Atlantic Alliance, Ottawa's goals were to keep Canada in allied councils, keep defense spending down, and keep criticism from the right and left out of the public discourse on defense policy.²² Beyond the Atlantic triangle, apart from the Korean War, Canada did not dispatch or maintain forces. Ottawa did become active in UN peacekeeping operations, but these were sporadic and did not represent a major portion of the defense burden. Indeed, except for the very early years of the Cold War—and even then to a certain extent—Ottawa had a great deal of discretion when it came to size, posture, and especially foreign deployment of Canadian Armed Forces. As summed up by Eayrs at the time: “We would be as safe from attack by any conceivable aggressor with no armed forces at all, as with the armed forces we now have, or any combination of armed forces we may care to have.”²³ Or, as the Minister of Defense put it in 1971: “There is no obvious level for defence expenditures in Canada”²⁴—precisely because grand strategy transcends military capacity. Table 1 proves the point, irrespective of the data used.

Peacekeeping operations undertaken by Canada during the Cold War were widely mythologized as Canada's altruistic commitment to the global community and international peace. In fact, as Sean Maloney has argued, it was Cold War by other means.²⁵ It was not in Canada's interest for the superpowers to go to war, both, a

nuclear war that posed a genuine existential threat, or a war that might antagonize Anglo-Franco relations and thus jeopardize national unity.²⁶ Canada also had another reason to instrumentalize peacekeeping for strategic purposes: although supportive of an American-led collective Western defense effort, Canada lacked the financial means and inclination to keep up with the defense spending of its larger allies in the effort to maintain the nuclear peace. As defense budgets atrophied from their early Cold War heights, peacekeeping was but a manifestation of support for national interest that proved to be a cheap supplement to Canada's allied obligations and a manifestation of Canada's overall commitment to Western collective defense while also showing support for broader collective security through the United Nations.²⁷

The discretion around classic peacekeeping of the Cold War period was a domestically popular activity for Canada's Walmart grand strategy. It contributed to the search for a distinctively Canadian identity and, by providing an (allegedly) "non-American" alternative contributions to collective defense, reinforcing the axiom (or myth) that Canada was an honest broker in the world: "Americans make war, Canadians make peace."²⁸

Canada's "romance" with peacekeeping coincided with the push for unification. After an initial surge in defense spending early on in the Cold War, by the early 1960s, the government was looking for savings in how Canada conducted its military policies. While remaining committed to collective defense as a NATO ally, the "big war" aspirations—especially the Army's—were increasingly drawing the attention of defense spendthrift Canadian politicians.²⁹ Accordingly, Ministers and their civilian bureaucrats sought to save money and assert civilian control by unifying the three services—the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the Army—into a single entity. Although the idea had been around since World War I, it had been floated in earnest in the 1950s, endorsed by a major government commission, and championed by Minister of National Defence Paul Hellyer.³⁰ In his view, the three services had an unwieldy structure and no war plans in common.³¹ He referred to recent trends in US military thinking about "flexible response," the need to fight "brushfire" limited wars, and the requirement for the three Canadian services to engage in joint operations. Yet—ostensibly for reasons of national unity—Canada had steered clear of limited or "brushfire wars" since Korea (and would not do so again until the Gulf War in 1990). Peacekeeping did not involve the deployment of Canadian troops in the face of hostile fire. As David Burke observed, "Canada's world-wide intervention force was literally all dressed up with nowhere to go [. . .] Canada had a structurally unified defense force without a mission to match. Moreover [. . .] Canada continued to supply discrete air, sea and land units to NATO and NORAD."³²

The spurious rationale for unification only highlighted its main purpose, the need to reduce defense expenditures, an objective with which Mr. Hellyer was seized. Defense spending had increased by 21 percent between 1961 and 1963. Yet, the government of the day was facing a fiscal crisis and preferred to rein in military expenditures over social spending. Unification was designed to break entrenched service cultures and interests, keep Canada in the game, and at the table, but without having to ante up any

more than necessary in the hopes of creating a US-style expeditionary Marine Corps—of sorts. As grand strategy this worked splendidly. Washington's and Brussels' reservations notwithstanding, Ottawa remained an active participant in NATO military commands and political councils and the NORAD agreement continued to be renewed.

Reassured that strategic payoff was not directly related to the size and structure of its military, Ottawa could count on being welcomed in allied strategic organizations, and with the advent of Soviet–American détente in the late 1960s, it was perhaps unsurprising that unification, with its rationalization, did not end the Canadian search for a less expensive defense establishment. In 1971, the government of Pierre Trudeau laid out a new approach to the armed forces in its White Paper: *Defence in the 70s*.³³ The underlying premise was a nationalist retrenchment that jettisoned Pearsonian middle-power liberal internationalist enthusiasm, foreshadowed by a policy more closely linked to domestic priorities, with greater emphasis on projecting “Canadian” national interests abroad: “Canada, like other states, must act according to how it perceives its aims and interests. External activities should be directly related to national policies pursued within Canada, and serve the same objectives,” read Trudeau's *Foreign Policy for Canadians*. In 1969, the defense budget was frozen and troop strength reduced from 98,000 to 82,000. Between 1968 and 1971, real defense expenditures declined by 7 percent and the capital portion of the budget declined to a mere 8 percent.³⁴ Although the freeze was lifted in 1973/1974, inflation ate up increases in the defense budget that averaged 3 percent per annum. Moreover, these increases were driven more by military expenditures as an attractive instrument of electoral economic policy—“Industrial Regional Benefits” that appeal to politicians of all stripes provided their ridings benefit—than by security considerations.³⁵ Defense spending did increase in absolute terms, but as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) it declined, while, in accordance with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development data that suggest that declining defense expenditure is one of the correlates of growth in GDP, Canadian GDP increased overall.³⁶

When the Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney replaced the Trudeau Liberals in 1984, supporters of greater defense spending looked forward to a major restoration of Canada's military capabilities. It was not to be. Beset with slow economic growth and deficits from entitlement spending, the government maintained Canada's active involvement in western collective defense, replacing equipment as necessary while restraining defense expenditures. As a result, Canada, in what appeared to be a validation of its grand strategy, was said to have already cashed in its “peace dividend” when the Cold War ended.

Reinventing Walmart: Overcoming the Limits of Spending “Just Enough”

Unforeseen by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and its political masters (as well as most “expert” analysts in Canada and elsewhere), the end of the Cold War ushered in

a period that would animate the expeditionary dimension of Canadian strategic culture. In the early 1990s, the CAF deployed forces to almost every UN and non-UN operation to foster stability in the new international disorder. Canada's military was especially involved in the former Yugoslavia, both wearing UN blue and later, NATO green helmets, but in missions (United Nations Peace Forces [UNPF], Implementation Force [IFOR], and Stabilization Force [SFOR]) legitimized by strategic consent. Overall the CAF, along with key NATO allies, including the United States, delivered outstanding service although the military's reputation was tarnished by an incident involving the killing of a civilian teenager by the Airborne Regiment in Somalia.

Yet, the high tempo of expeditionary operations came at a time when budgets were again under pressure. In keeping with defense expenditure trends among its allies, Canada sought to leverage the post-Cold War peace dividend by making major cuts to defense.³⁷ Saddled with a US\$40 billion deficit, in the *1994 White Paper on Defence*, the recently elected government of Prime Minister Chrétien sought to reduce the number of civilian employees in the Department of National Defense by 25 percent and headquarters by 50 percent. In 1995, the government introduced an austerity budget to bring the nation's books in order. In the aftermath of the Somalia inquiry, the government had little difficulty rallying popular support for sharp cuts to military spending. By 1997/1998, defense had been cut by 28 percent; by 2001/2002, it was still 13 percent lower than in 1993–1994. Between 1993/1994 and 1998/1999, defense funding had been reduced by 30 percent in real terms, falling from US\$12 billion to US\$9.38 billion. However, defense got away fairly unscathed compared to just about every other federal direct spending program; but other federal spending also recovered quicker and steeper than defense.³⁸

To retaining a global capability in the face of declining budgets, Canada's grand strategy banked on interoperability. In the wake of the first Gulf War (to which Canada was ill prepared to contribute), the CAF began to turn its attention to how it could improve its ability to operate with the United States in the disorderly regions of the New World Order. According to the 1994 Liberal White Paper, Canada was to be prepared to fight with the best against the best. The generals posited interoperability as the answer.³⁹ To their chagrin, interoperability was folded into Canada's Walmart grand strategy in Somalia (United Nations Operation in Somalia [UNOSOM], United Nations Task Force [UNITAF], and United Nations Operation in Somalia [UNOSOM II]), the Balkans (United Nations Protection Force [UNPROFOR], United Nations Protection Force [UNPF], and International Security Assistance Force [ISAF-SFOR]), Kosovo, and the "bungle in the jungle" after Rwanda (which was aborted because the Walmart force lacked intelligence): a useful, inexpensive, certainly stylish approach with "the best"—at a reasonable price.

Jettisoning Walmart for Saks

By the mid-1990s, the CAF was facing an existential crisis. During the Cold War, the armed forces had served at least two functions: deterrence and peacekeeping

(as a preventative measure to avoid the superpowers from going to war). In the post-Cold War era, by contrast, the CAF's purpose was no longer obvious. That changed with the Dayton Accords in 1995 and the subsequent appointment, in 1996, of Lloyd Axworthy as Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs. The articulation of Canadian foreign policy principles into a reasonably cogent human security "doctrine"—women, children, landmines, and democracy—reinvigorated Canada's energetic commitment to human rights.⁴⁰ It resonated with Canadians: staunchly internationalist in orientation, feeling more confident than ever about Canada's standing in the world—despite decades of government divestment from its armed forces. While the moral and humanitarian objectives of the doctrine were admirable, hard vital national interests related to the security, prosperity, and stability of the country were not at stake. Ergo, the underlying logic of the doctrine could be divorced from military power. In keeping with Canadian defense policy, Ottawa could continue to benefit from discretion as to when, where, and how it would apply the doctrine. In this sense, the Axworthy Doctrine was wise and consistent with the Walmart approach to grand strategy: it afforded Ottawa participation in domestically popular undertakings that looked good but which could be had at low cost.⁴¹

Toward the end of the 1990s, with an improved fiscal outlook and the near-death experience of the 1995 Quebec referendum on sovereignty behind it, and just ahead of the shock of 9/11, the international engagement preserved by the Axworthy doctrine prodded the Canadian government to reinvesting in its armed forces. Premonitions that the cuts of the 1990s would leave the country "without armed forces"⁴² proved premature: the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a marked renaissance in Canada's military posture. Eying the political benefits of foreign deployments, Canada's civilian authorities were less concerned about winning on the battlefield than about being seen on the battlefield.⁴³ The high tempo of operations in the 1990s and commitment to a war in Afghanistan made Ottawa realize that just showing up would no longer suffice and doing so was proving increasingly dangerous absent sufficient quality and quantity. Having shifted from peacekeeper to putative stabilizer, "just enough" would no longer do.

In 2005, the *Defence Policy Statement* committed the government to expand the Canadian Armed Forces, transform its capabilities, and increase the defense budget. That same year, the federal budget entitled "Delivering on Commitments" reinvested in means by increasing defense spending by US\$13 billion over five years.⁴⁴ A subsequent commitment by the Conservative Harper government went US\$5.3 billion further. As a result, defense spending grew from about 1.1–1.2 percent of GDP to 1.5 percent of GDP by 2011, the highest level it had attained since the mid-1990s. Those figures do not account for the supplementary appropriations for the Afghanistan mission that, by 2011, reached US\$11.3 billion, US\$9 billion of which accrued directly to National Defense. Aggregate defense spending was up by 51.8 percent between 2001 and 2010, and grew from US\$13 billion annually in 2000 to more than US\$19 billion by 2012. By 2011, Canada was the thirteenth top spender on defense globally and the sixth biggest contributor to Afghanistan

among the twenty-eight NATO countries (albeit at a mere 4 percent of manpower, and not much more in total expenditure).⁴⁵

Increased defense spending was not just making up for previous reductions; they also reflected Canada's continued overseas military engagements. These operations also had an impact on civil–military relations. They served to equalize what Eliot Cohen has called the “unequal dialogue” between civilian leaders, who hold the final decision-making power, and their senior military advisors⁴⁶—a dialogue which in Canada tilted heavily in favor of civilians. Successive Canadian governments have had an image of the military as an instrument of alliance politics rather than national security; consequently, civilians assigned military leadership a marginal role in the formulation of defense policy.⁴⁷ This sharply circumscribed the military's influence over civil–military relations.

Rick Hillier's 2005 appointment as Chief of the Defense Staff signaled a greater willingness to heed professional military advice. To distinguish himself from his predecessor, newly minted Prime Minister Paul Martin was intent on tuning up the image of the Canadian Armed Forces, not for the sake of the CAF per se, but hypothesizing that a robust defense portfolio now stood to reap political payoff at home and abroad.⁴⁸ But the Prime Minister may have gotten more than he bargained for in Hillier who broke with the convention of the “silent soldier” as he set out to loosen the strictures of control by politicians and senior civilian defense bureaucrats who had reigned over CAF policy and finances since 1973.⁴⁹ He very publicly signaled his intent to be a strong, outspoken advocate for those under his command at his change-of-command ceremony: “In this country, we could probably not give enough resources to the men and women to do all the things that we ask them to do” (Hillier, *A Soldier First*, 324-325), he said in front of the Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense. “We can give them too little, and this is what we are now doing. Remember them in your budgets.”⁵⁰

The Canadian Armed Forces had hitherto lacked the expertise and leadership to challenge defense spending. By the late 1990s, the combination of previous budget cuts and the high tempo of overseas operations persuaded the senior military leadership that it had to be more proactive. Aided by retired officers, academics, and public intellectuals, promilitary interests mounted a sustained campaign to build public support for the CAF, convince Canadians that their military was in disarray because the advice of senior officers was ignored, and persuade politicians that a large-scale increase in defense spending was needed to save Canada's supposedly free-falling international stature.⁵¹ In other words, the military deliberately played to the very image Canadian politicians were now willing to embrace: an institution that had been so depleted that its ability to deliver the expected political payoffs was now in jeopardy. In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the defense community capitalized on Canadians' sympathy for the United States feeling vulnerable and under assault by advocating a large-scale reinvestment in the CAF to demonstrate Canada's value as an ally.⁵²

In the course of this campaign, Hillier popularized a now-infamous expression first coined by LGen Al DeQuetteville: “Those actions, dollar deprived, have now

led to some deep wounds in [. . .] the Canadian Armed Forces over this past, what I would call, a decade of darkness.”⁵³ He strove to change Canadians’ image of their armed forces from mere peacekeepers, a constabulary force of uniformed bureaucrats, or subservient political instrument and instead have the CAF acknowledged as professionals with an expertise in the use of force for the protection of Canada’s way of life: “We’re not the public service of Canada. We’re not just another department. We are the Canadian Armed Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people.”⁵⁴

In his attempt to reshape public perception of the military, Hillier not only cast himself as the public defender of the CAF’s interests but also as the country’s top defense expert, an image he cultivated through media interviews. He offered unsolicited policy suggestions, advocating for more robust funding. He took the even more unprecedented step of explicitly criticizing government policy and had a public spat with the Minister that culminated in the Minister resigning. This image was unfamiliar to Canadians: “Previously, it was held that a CDS who failed to abide by the defence minister’s decisions and dictates was unqualified to head the Canadian military. Now the mood was that a defence minister who failed to heed the advice of the CDS was unworthy of the office.”⁵⁵ The change in civil–military relations was palpable. The image was one of a military no longer pandering to the Minister’s every wish. His US experience led Hillier to share the Government’s concern about Canada’s easy-riding Walmart strategy wearing on Canadian–American relations, especially after the very demonstrable decision not to participate in the Iraq war. As the remedy, he convinced the Prime Minister to commit to a kinetic combat mission in Afghanistan’s southern Kandahar province, in stark contrast to the more conventional role of the Canadian Armed Forces during their initial deployment to Kabul.⁵⁶ Straddling a Liberal and a Conservative government, Hillier’s image of “his” Canadian Armed Forces was one of kinetic expeditionary force projection, an image that would count where it mattered most: in Washington.⁵⁷

Hillier posited reinvestment as an indispensable complement to Canadian grand strategy with its expeditionary strategic culture that would also provide the government with wider choices for discretionary deployments.⁵⁸ The US\$1.8 billion procurement of the CC-117 Globemasters, for example, was a strategic decision to expand the array of options at the government’s disposal to bring a substantial contribution to bear: strategic lift is always in short supply, especially during international crises. Yet, Hillier—and the approach he embodied—was a flash in the pan. Canada’s utility-maximizing approach that seeks to maximize the foreign policy political payoff of expeditionary operations while minimizing investment in defense is back in equilibrium.

Although Hillier’s efforts, combined with the world-class performance of the men and women of the CAF in Afghanistan (and in Libya in 2011), dramatically enhanced the image and support for the CAF among Canadians as a national institution of which to be proud, this did not translate into widespread and robust public support for continued and costly expeditionary operations and the increases in

defense spending required to sustain such undertakings. Lukewarm to Canada's deployment to Afghanistan from the start, before long Canadians grew weary of the fruitless and expensive violence.⁵⁹ Once the bills started coming in, Canadians found the cost of such a force and such missions even more disquieting, especially during an economic downturn when Canadians were pleading for fiscal stimulus at home. The more the endgame of Hillier's vision of a kinetic expeditionary force crystallized, the more it became clear that this vision did not resonate with the Canadian public.⁶⁰

Scaling Back

Hillier wanted to move "upscale" in shopping terms. It worked, as long as the government and the public were prepared to bear the cost. Once it became evident that this was outside Canada's budgetary means and its utility in terms of security, influence, and electoral payoff was ambiguous, Ottawa reverted to the Walmart approach to grand strategy. Between 2010 and 2015, Canada's defense budget will have shrunk from 1.4 percent of GDP to 1.08 percent—a far cry from the goal of 2 percent envisioned as recently as the 2008 update to the *Canada First Defence Strategy*. A revisionist "Canada First" defense policy would henceforth reprise a more traditional meaning: maintain an expeditionary strategic culture tempered by fiscal expediency.

This return to a "not-so-grand" Canadian grand strategy is driven by politicians and bureaucrats who are reasserting the traditional inequality in the civil-military dialogue in Canada when it comes to defense decision making. The CAF's Global Engagement Strategy is the case in point: where the government goes, the CAF will follow. The Harper government has already moved to curb the military's role in the acquisition of weapons systems and, reminiscent of previous governments, draw out the time line for others. As one analyst observed, if the military is asking for a "Cadillac and you actually need a Corolla," then the system needs someone who "has the authority to ask why do you need this Cadillac?"⁶¹ Even if one acknowledges that the premium Saks version of the CAF's shopping list had only recently been encouraged by the government and that few "Cadillacs" were actually purchased, evidently the political and civilian leadership no longer deferring to the military's professional expertise, are instead exercising their prerogative to ask the hard questions that come with ultimate authority and responsibility for the public purse.

Between Easy and Free Riding: The Lessons of the Canadian Experience

Though never known as a source of grand strategic thinking, the lessons of the Canadian experience when it comes to defense policy resonate in the contemporary comparative context. Throughout the West, the protracted, costly, and ambiguous

Afghanistan mission and economic downturn have prompted a reassessment of defense expenditures demanded by overseas interventionism as an element of so-called grand strategy. Even in the world's greatest military power, the United States, budgetary pressures, and war-weariness have already reduced defense spending, especially on the Army, with more yet to come.

Indeed, the mood in the United States today is decidedly anti-interventionist. Andrew Bacevich has long raised questions about the militarization of US foreign policy and the utility of force, especially in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods: "Nearly 20 years ago, a querulous Madeleine Albright demanded to know: 'What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?' Today, an altogether different question deserves our attention: What's the point of constantly using our superb military if doing so doesn't actually work?"⁶² Skepticism about the ability of (US) military prowess to address human, national, international and emerging security concerns feeds a logic of military divestment. Canada's Walmart approach, which never received due recognition for prowess in strategic thinking, may not play too badly in today's Washington. In *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Barry Posen recently derided America's post-Cold War grand strategy of "liberal hegemony" as "unnecessary, counterproductive, costly, and wasteful" and suggests a more restrained approach to US military strategy.⁶³ Similarly, President Obama told the 2014 West Point graduating class:

Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences . . . Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail. And because the costs associated with military action are so high, you should expect every civilian leader—and especially your Commander-in-Chief—to be clear about how that awesome power should be used. The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it—when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger. . . . On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake—when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us—then the threshold for military action must be higher.⁶⁴

The Harper government has been pummeled from all sides for errors and omissions (China, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC], and United Nations Security Council [UNSC]) stemming from its alleged abandonment of an activist foreign policy. Roland Paris has characterized Canadian foreign policy under the Prime Minister as "missing in action": "Apart from its ambitious trade agenda, which is finally beginning to pay dividends with the CETA (Canada-Europe Free Trade Agreement), Canada's foreign policy has been reduced to an idiosyncratic handful of narrow issues." Mr. Harper's early declaration that foreign affairs were important has proven to be "more of a passing thought than a transformative

insight.”⁶⁵ Others, as noted earlier, have taken the government to task for wont of a grand strategy and returning to the stingy traditions of the past.

But Mr. Harper, in addition to reprising conventions in Canadian defense spending and “not-so-grand” but realistic grand strategy, may in fact be a harbinger of a catchy new vision. As Thomas Friedman, drawing upon the views of Michael Mandelbaum, argues: “the biggest geopolitical divide in the world today ‘is between those countries who want their states to be powerful and those countries who want their people to be prosperous.’ The great game of power politics still matters to countries, such as Russia, Iran and North Korea; they are focused on building their authority, dignity and influence through powerful states.” Other governments, however, are “focused on building their dignity and influence” by making their people more prosperous:

These countries understand that the biggest trend in the world today is not a new Cold War but the merger of globalization and the information technology revolution. On putting in place the right schools, infrastructure, bandwidth, trade regimes, investment openings and economic management so more of their people can thrive in a world in which every middle-class job will require more skill and the ability to constantly innovate will determine their standard of living (The true source of sustainable power).⁶⁶

Ottawa’s return to a policy of modesty in defense spending may be seen as increasing national power by other means, consistent with international trends. Ironically though, making disciples is problematic for Canada’s bargain grand strategy: the red line between “easy riding” and “free riding” can be a thin one. It is in Canada’s interest both to avoid excessive US entrenchment and a race to the bottom among allied defense capabilities and expenditures. NATO, conceived of not as a military alliance but as a forum to overcome precisely these types of collective action problems, is Canada’s means to that end. Though weary and mindful of some of its power slipping away, the West will nonetheless face new challenges from nontraditional sources and countries who will stir up disorder in certain regions that may threaten the interests of countries focused on prosperity. As such, Canada still has national interests to assert, and its prevailing calculus on defense spending would have to shift beyond thrift, possibly quite significantly, if the synergies and economies of scale that NATO provides no longer worked to Canada’s advantage.

Which raises an interesting question about path dependency (that is beyond the scope of this article): to what extent are states locked into their shopping patterns? That is, what endogenous and exogenous variables determine a state’s behavior in this regard? This is an important question. Walmart may offer utility and discount prices, but there is something to be said for the quality and style that buttresses internationalism and collaborative solution seeking, especially when, notwithstanding the current widespread reassessment of military expenditures, there is no reason

to believe that the utility of armed force per se is on the wane. Under President Obama, the United States has been moving from an emphasis on the ability to fight big wars, which led to the quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, to more precise, limited, targeted operations using drones and special operations, including targeted strikes against known terrorist leaders.⁶⁷ The challenge for Canada is to draw upon the realism of its traditional low-budget approach to defense expenditures as well as the lessons of the post-Cold War and post-9/11 Afghanistan experience: regardless of how little you spend on defense or limited your contributions, armed forces need the right equipment to succeed at what is asked of them. Just showing up is not enough if you do not have the proper kit to get the job done. As in motorcycling so, too, in realist international security relations: easy riding is not joy riding. NATO members would, therefore, be well advised to steer clear of both, Saks and Walmart, when it comes to defense spending. So as not to succumb to the fallacy of composition, collectively, they will want to shift their business to Target: a downscale retailer that affords the ability to achieve utility and savings in defense policy, just not at rock-bottom prices and with more style and flair.

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