



Canada's National Interests and Land Power¹ Implications

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*"First, the land matters most. Whether or not land constitutes the principal geographical medium on which combat is waged, strategic effect ultimately must have its way in a territorial context. Most wars entail some fighting on the geography where the belligerents live, the land. Even if a war is dominated by the ebb and flow of combat at sea and in the air, still the whole object of the exercise is to influence the behavior on an enemy who needs to be controlled where he lives, the land... Human beings do not live at sea, or in cyberspace."*²

The halls of academia are the normal venue for any discussion of Canada's enduring national interests, and a recent internet search for a discussion of national interests outside of academic sources turned up only a 2007 article from Douglas Bland that contained anything more than either a reference to the term 'national interest' or a very cursory examination of the subject. This lack of discourse in the public domain leaves any given Canadian Government ill-informed of what the public sees as enduring national interests and, depending on the experience level of the cabinet in the realm of defence, security, and foreign affairs, potentially ignorant of the impacts of declaring specific policies or issues as being linked to a national interest. This paper will identify Canada's national interests and indicate their potential implications for the delivery of land power by the Canadian Army.

Definitions are important and defining 'national interests' provides the first logical step in their examination. In simple terms, and for the purpose of this paper, national interests are those that are sufficiently important for any Canadian Government to expend blood and treasure towards their attainment or protection. Embedded in this definition is the expectation that any existential threat to the nation would most certainly be against its interest. This gives the first and most basic of Canadian national interests – that of the defence of the nation.³

In this regard, Canada is most fortunate. Geography and the settling of differences with our closest neighbour in the 19th century removed from the calculus of national interest the vital issue towards which most nations must commit a significant amount of time, money and energy: the protection of the state from an invading army. The only physical military threats that Canada must protect herself against are those that involve very advanced technology and long-range weapons. Given our membership in NORAD and NATO, only the most dire of changes to the geopolitical realities would foresee any of those types of weapons being used directly against Canada. Further, while the use of such weapons may result in the death of a number of Canadians, they are unlikely to result in the fall or surrender of Canada. Therefore, the physical defence of the nation as a whole

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does not require the layered air, sea, and land defensive bands that can be found on the border between North and South Korea along our entire perimeter. However, it does indicate the need to maintain our positive relationship with the United States as embodied in NORAD and the Permanent Joint Board of Defense, as well as our continued membership in NATO. Given the lack of immediate existential threat, our actions and efforts to protect and promote our national interests can be focused more on our prosperity and the well-being of our people.

Nations around the world require a healthy economy to allow them to provide for their people. Canada is no different. While Canada does not lack for natural resources, it requires an outlet for its goods and services. Canada's economy is dependent on an open and free global trading environment, particularly with the United States.⁴ Open access to the global commons is therefore critical and represents a national interest for Canada. Without being a super-power, however, it is difficult to ensure that the global commons remain open and free. The implications of this for Canadian defence, security and foreign policy are that Canada needs to contribute to global stability in such a manner that the contribution is recognized by the world, but not so large that it bankrupts the nation. The danger is that if Canada's contributions are too minor the nation will not have any voice in the resolution of trade disputes and those disputes may then be solved to the detriment of Canadian access to the global commons. Further, the Canadian contribution must be such that the nation is not seen as free-loading on the efforts of those nations that are directly contributing funding, military assets or diplomatic efforts to keep trade as free as possible through the global commons. This is a very difficult national interest to quantify and to turn into policy. The important point is that Canada cannot afford to become

isolationist and must continue to contribute to global peace and stability.

Beyond a positive financial situation, a nation must also ensure that there is a stable domestic environment. In Canada, a stable domestic environment translates to national unity as well as good order and governance.⁵ Domestic realities can easily preoccupy a Government, be they natural disasters, internal security threats or unity issues. Any discussion of national interests must acknowledge that in times of domestic crisis the Government needs to use all of its assets to ameliorate the problem. Hence, domestic stability is a national interest, albeit one dealt with by Public Safety Canada and the police. Only *in extremis* should the Canadian Armed Forces be involved.

The logic in the preceding paragraphs appears in the 2015 Speech from the Throne as well as the mandate letters for the ministers of National Defence and Foreign Affairs.⁶ Those documents reflected, as national interests, the protection of our nation and the prosperity of our people.⁷ Specifically mentioned were growing the economy, strengthening relationships with allies, contributing to greater peace throughout the world, and expanding economic opportunities. Also indicated in those documents was the need to have a strong Canadian Armed Forces in order to pursue these goals; in other words, to pursue our national interests. The key questions are, therefore, how does, and how can, the Canadian Army in particular contribute to the protection of these national interests through the delivery of land power?

Defence of the nation, access to free and open global commons and domestic stability are therefore Canada's national interests but the first and third rarely place any significant demand on the Canadian Army. The rapid

deployment, presence, and engagement of organized personnel and equipment under an effective command and control apparatus is normally enough to mitigate and, with time, resolve domestic crises.⁸ Similarly, the defence of the nation responsibility rests, as part of our collective defence, with NORAD and, in extremis, NATO. The Canadian Army, through the presence of the Canadian Rangers and regular northern exercises and patrols, augments these operations. The Canadian Army must therefore focus its efforts on ensuring that Canada can remain, as befits a G7 nation, an active participant in the policing of the global commons. At times these missions will directly relate to the requirement to keep trade flowing but often it is one or two times removed from that direct effect. Taking part in expeditionary operations when identified by the Government of Canada is the method to achieve the objective of remaining a useful member of coalitions, a good ally and a participating global citizen. The mandate letters and Speech from the Throne reflect this focus. Further, as conflict is at its base a human endeavour, to ensure its resolution it is necessary to interact on a person-to-person basis. Only the Army can persistently operate among a population in a conflict zone after diplomacy, sanctions and other soft power methods have failed. Last, an Army deployment into a conflict zone demonstrates a real and enduring demonstration of Canada's commitment to any given international issue.

Canada's Army is a force of last resort to protect Canada's national interests. Fortunately, in the near future the deployment and employment of Canada's Army to deliver effects in the land domain remains a discretionary decision by the Government of Canada. Unfortunately, it is impossible to create a competent Army just in time to deal with evolving geopolitical realities. Our involvement in the G-7, NORAD, 5 Eyes and NATO demands that our Army is capable of

operating in some of the most difficult potential conflicts. The technological advantage that is necessary to achieve this goal must figure significantly in any plans for Canada's Army, as must interoperability with our closest ally – the United States. This paper has demonstrated that an examination of our nation's interests can logically lead to these conclusions. While this logic exercise is not normally performed outside of academic circles, it is important to walk through these connections when contemplating defence policy.

"You may fly over a land forever; you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it, and wipe it clean of life – but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground, the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young men into the mud."⁹

The views contained in this paper are the author's alone and not a reflection of any official Canadian Army policy or point of view.

Endnotes

1. Land power is defined as, "the ability in peace, crisis, and war to exert prompt and sustained influence on or from land." See William T. Johnsen, *Redefining Landpower for the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1998), 6.

2. Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 207.

3. For the relationship between national interests and security see Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' As An Ambiguous Symbol," Chapter 1 from *National and International Security*, ed. Michael Sheehan, Aldershot, (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2000), 3-24. For a hierarchy of national interests see Lt. Col. T. P. Olwell, USAF, "Foreign Policy and a State's Hierarchy of Needs," USAF Air War College Paper, March 1995, published at www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA328891, accessed 13 February 2016.

The Conference of Defence Associations Institute stated that Canada's National Interests are, "to ensure that its people are safe, that they prosper, and that the country maintains its political independence, security, and a role on the international state consonant with the pursuit of that security and that prosperity." Ferry De Kerkchove, *The Strategic Outlook for Canada 2016*. CDAI Vimy Paper, http://www.cdainstitute.ca/images/Vimy_Papers/Vimy_Paper_27_-_SO2016_English.pdf, accessed 8 March 2016.

4. Government of Canada, "Canada's State of Trade: Trade and Investment Update – 2016," [International.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/performance/state-point/state_2016_point/index.aspx?lang=eng), accessed March 23, 2017, http://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/performance/state-point/state_2016_point/index.aspx?lang=eng.

5. Laws of Canada, "Constitution Act 1867, Section 91," accessed March 8, 2016, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/CONST_E.pdf.

6. Government of Canada, Prime Minister's Office, "Mandate Letters," *PM.gc.ca*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/mandate-letters>.

7. Recent work from the Conference of Defence Associations Institute reflects the same interests but examines in more depth those interests as well as the mechanisms with which Canada can export our values in the international arena. See Ferry de Kerkchove, "The Strategic Outlook for Canada 2016".

8. Government of Canada, News Release, "Canadian Armed Forces adjusting ice-storm assistance to New Brunswick as conditions improve," Canada.ca, February 5, 2017, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2017/02/canadian-armed-forces-adjusting-storm-assistance-new-brunswick-conditions-improve.html?undefined&wbdisable=true>; MacLean's, "Canadian Forces cutting back numbers helping in Alberta floods," *MacLean's.ca*, June 24, 2013, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canadian-forces-cutting-back-numbers-helping-in-alberta-floods/>.

9. T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 408.