



Introduction: Procurement and Politics— The Defence Policy Consensus or Aligning Strategy and Policy Is Necessary But Not Automatic

Abstract Large-scale military platform procurement is an essential but understudied component in policy and administrative studies. Procurement decisions in this area, which include major platforms and systems such as ships and aircraft, are very expensive and feature complex multi-actor and multi-year processes which can be highly conflictual. The extant administrative literature on the subject is of limited help: on the one hand, most procurement studies in public administration and public management focus on smaller, short-term, more routinized and less conflictual purchases. On the other hand, studies centred on military acquisitions tend to treat each major purchase as idiosyncratic. Hence, military procurement provides an excellent source of case studies to expand our knowledge and understanding of larger and more complex types of procurement processes. It allows us to draw lessons about successes and failures that will be relevant to similar expensive and large-scale purchases, such as railways, hydroelectric dams, highways and port development, while also drawing out the similarities and lessons for future defence purchases.

Keywords Policy procurement • Military procurement • Doctrinal alignment • Service doctrine • Joint forces • Armed forces • Canada • Australia • *Type 26* frigate • F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters • Defence procurement • Public administration

Large-scale military platform procurement is an essential but understudied component in policy and administrative studies. Procurement decisions in this area, which include major platforms and systems such as ships and aircraft, are very expensive and feature complex multi-actor and multi-year processes which can be highly conflictual. The extant administrative literature on the subject is of limited help: on the one hand, most procurement studies in public administration and public management focus on smaller, short-term, more routinized and less conflictual purchases. On the other hand, studies centred on military acquisitions tend to treat each major purchase as idiosyncratic. Hence, military procurement provides an excellent source of case studies to expand our knowledge and understanding of larger and more complex types of procurement process. Studying such cases allows us to draw lessons about successes and failures that are relevant to similar expensive and large-scale purchases, such as railways, hydro-electric dams, highways and port development, while also drawing out the similarities and lessons for future defence purchases.

Procurement in itself is a policy tool involving the use of government resources to achieve its aims (Hood, 1986). It is through procurement that many governmental aims and ambitions are physically implemented, from purchases of school supplies to hospital equipment and many other items and systems (Greve, 2007; Harland et al., 2007; Lember et al., 2014). We can therefore think of procurement as a policy instrument requiring detailed specifications and consistency of action to ensure that specific government goals are achieved (Hood, 1983; van den Berg et al., 2019).

Governments can use procurement for different reasons and in different ways. In addition to acquiring specific kinds of goods and services, procurement can also be used for ‘procedural’ purposes in a process sometimes referred to as ‘strategic procurement’ (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017) in order to promote other, broader, government goals, such as facilitating climate change adaptation through purchases of innovative technologies, to promoting gender-corrective businesses. Procurement officials thus often are not simply tasked with securing a steady and effective supply of goods and services at the lowest cost possible that will ensure the routine activity of public institutions (Rogerson, 2004), but are also engaged in areas such as supporting strategic industries (Dewes et al., 2015), enabling economic development (Rogerson, 2004) and innovation (Edquist & Hommen, 2000; Edquist & Zabala-Iturriagoitia, 2012), and may be responsible for tasks such as promoting the formation of specific kinds of industrial clusters and research and development (R&D) activities (Demircioglu & Vivona, 2021).

They can also, of course, deploy procurement in a direct, substantive fashion, targeting a specific government goal through the purchase of, for example, cost-saving buses or transportation equipment, or a more general goal such as improving government efficiency through the purchase of information technology (IT) software and hardware. While the latter uses have formed the bulk of studies into the subject, in recent years there has been heightened interest in the former, with new studies of strategic procurement processes emerging. These include, for example, the promotion of environmentally sustainable practices and products (Aragão & Jabbour, 2017; Jothi Basu et al., 2015), the use of commissioning to procure social services from the non-governmental sector (Sturgess, 2018) and examinations of how Corporate Social Responsibility, and other socially relevant principles, have made their way into public procurement contracting (Pauly & Swanson, 2017; Snider et al., 2013). Researchers have also explored how certain discriminatory practices within procurement can be changed, especially to ensure that goals, like sustainability or gender, equity or regional parity, are an integral part of these purchasing processes and outcomes (Keulemans & Van de Walle, 2017; Kono & Rickard, 2014). They have also examined related phenomena such as the ‘escalation of commitment’ when decision-makers cling to, and continue to invest in, failed projects (Berente et al., 2022).

Simply put, procurement is more than a purely formal or technical intra-agency bureaucratic purchasing process; it requires that the public administrations engage in complex and often overlapping policy, political and administrative activities which may involve trade-offs, for example, between lowest price bids and higher priced ones which meet strategic goals (World Bank Group, 2016; Krause & Zarit, 2022). And, of course, procurement efforts also may fail. This happens when desired goods and services fail to be successfully procured, do so with enormous cost overruns, or are marked by processes featuring small- or large-scale corrupt practices (Flyvbjerg et al., 2022).

In this broad field, the procurement of major weapon systems, such as warships and aircraft, occupies a very specific niche. Military purchases are often a high-stakes game characterized by very high expenses and risks, relying on very large, multi-year contracts which must account for a complex life cycle extending from design to decommissioning, all amid uncertainties about the exact nature of future defence needs and technological horizons.

All types of procurement have a political component and large purchases, especially, can easily become caught up in larger political struggles (Keeble, 1997). Unfortunately, this political dimension is often

down-played or ignored altogether, both in studies that focus on small-scale, routine purchasing contracts (de Araújo et al., 2017; Harland et al., 2019), and in studies examining the procurement of more complex platforms and systems. These latter studies tend to focus on key technological shifts, analysing related policy and administrative decisions within a technological or ‘evidence-based’ framework and in the military case treat military platform decisions as largely *sui generis* with a corresponding focus on the micro-details of the procurement processes that should support this model—frequently disregarding the politics of procurement which are a major feature of such cases (Collins, 2021a).

More often than not, however, funding and political support for major defence platforms is in relatively limited supply as these expenses often clash with more pressing and day-to-day social needs and concerns of governments and their electors. That is, not only must strategic and operational military considerations synchronize in agreement on the benefits of the acquisition of a specific platform, but these military considerations need to be aligned with budget constraints as well as complex performance and accountability requirements (Caldwell & Howard, 2014; Krause & Zarit, 2021). In the former case these considerations often include ‘inter-operability’—the requirement to operate alongside members of an alliance across vast geographical spaces and potential war zones—as well as concerns around ‘proto-typing’ or the advantages and disadvantages of being among the first to use unproven, if potentially advantageous, weaponry.

Furthermore, unlike the situation with many less expensive or lower-profile purchases, all of the multiple actors engaged in large-scale military purchasing processes, ranging from public servants working in defence ministries to regional suppliers, are self-interested—as are politicians, who must consider the electoral cycle, issues of national sovereignty and calculations regarding industrial or regional ‘offsets’ when and if large contracts are assigned (King & Sekerka, 2017).

This situation is further complicated in the military case since defence markets, because of the complexity of weapons systems and because military procurement is generally excluded from free trade agreements, are typically characterized by oligopolistic or even monopolistic structures in which only a single or very few potential suppliers exist. This puts purchasers at a disadvantage and makes truly open and competitive bidding processes—the holy grail of smaller scale procurement—problematic if not impossible to achieve (Rickard & Kono, 2014; Williams, 2006).

This latter problem is magnified when suppliers are foreign and continued service and delivery cannot be guaranteed, potentially threatening future national defence and jeopardizing strategic interests. The result in the military case is often a preference for domestically designed and built products or, at least, for the domestic production of products that are designed often in collaboration with foreign companies (so-called modified off-the-shelf procurement, or MOTS).

All of these concerns and calculations often result in highly politicized defence purchasing processes that involve both cooperation and conflict among governments and administrative actors and suppliers regarding how costs, benefits, blame and success are to be apportioned across multiple dimensions and interests (Calcara, 2018, 2020). Because of these complex political-economic dynamics, states seeking to replace ageing or obsolete systems often face serious procurement challenges (Louth & Boden, 2014; L. Page, 2007) whose nature and characteristics deserve closer study and examination.

This book examines two empirical military procurement process cases in Canada and Australia—the American F-35 aircraft purchase and plans to purchase British *Type 26* frigates—through a comparative lens. Both the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) are planning to procure derivations of the same Royal Navy *Type 26* frigate, and the book seeks to explain why to date Australia has largely succeeded in its effort to build new vessels (especially for its surface fleet), while Canada’s effort to purchase 15 similar new frigates—the largest procurement effort in Canadian history—has failed to produce a single ship after almost 30 years of planning and negotiation. The situation is very similar for the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF): whereas the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) will be one of the first countries to have a full complement of F-35 fighters, Canada’s delays and back-and-forth over its procurement approach have delayed the purchase of the F-35 by more than a decade and left most stakeholders (not least of all the RCAF) disappointed with delays and contract cancellations (Collins, 2021a; Vucetic, 2022).

The analysis is centred on these two countries because, notwithstanding some institutional, historical, and geographical differences, in general they are well suited for comparison as ‘most similar’ cases: not only did they start, more or less at the same time, needing to replace the same earlier aircraft, but both are members of the British Commonwealth, have historically been staunch supporters of western alliances centred on the United States, and share Westminster-style political regimes and administrative systems. Canada is one of the original members of the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a core member of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), while Australia signed the Australia-United States (ANZUS) agreement in 1951 and is a contact nation of NATO in which it is highly integrated (Karnozov, 2020). Finally, both belong to the AUSCANNZUKUS (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States) group of English-speaking democracies.

Even if Australia and Canada have generally comparable levels of military expenditure, some differences are relatively conspicuous. Australia, while demographically smaller than Canada, in 2020 had a larger defence budget of US\$27.6B, whereas Canada's was only US\$22.8B. Although for both countries we can see a trend towards higher military expenditures in the late Post-Cold War 1990s, but, when measured in terms of percentage of GDP, this has yet to result in a return to their levels of spending from the 1980s.

In 2020, 2.1% of the Australian GDP went to the Australian Defence Force (ADF), while Canada committed only 1.4% of its budget to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The extra financial commitment of the Australian government represents 21% of the entire Canadian figure, or 46% more in terms of GDP percentage (see Fig. 1.1).

Despite these differences, recent successful and unsuccessful Canadian and Australian efforts to acquire a large number of similar warships to replace their equally ageing fleets, and their simultaneous procurement of the same Fifth-Generation fighter jets, the F-35, nevertheless represent a unique opportunity to study significant military procurement in two comparable countries. The fact that—despite procuring the same platforms—Canada and Australia's procurement efforts resulted in divergent outcomes is instructive to scholars studying military purchasing and to those studying large-scale procurement more generally, with respect to how differing strategic and political visions and factors influence procurement processes and outcomes.

Canadian military procurement, in particular, has often been described in the literature as fraught with partisan politics, typically suffering from serious underfunding and constantly shifting political and economic interests (Nossal, 2016; Plamondon, 2010), which have resulted in many delayed and cancelled programmes and projects, with very few purchases having met initial expectations and announcements. These processes have often lacked agreement between key users and purchasers in terms of both strategic and operational procurement considerations, and have commonly yielded long, drawn-out processes that have resulted in at times confused and piecemeal outcomes, more often than not satisfying no one (Fleurant & Quéau, 2016; Williams, 2006).

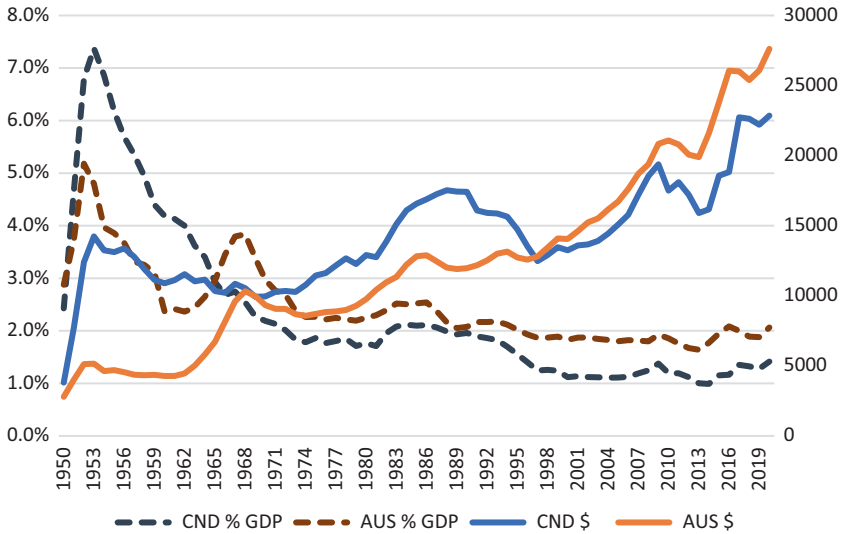


Fig. 1.1 Military spending (constant 2019 US\$ and % of GDP). (Source: SIPRI (2021))

Over the past 25 years, Canada’s plans to purchase new fighter jets for the RCAF, and submarines, helicopters and vessels for the RCN, have all been hobbled by these kinds of political concerns and budget constraints (Plamondon, 2010; Hickey, 2008). Furthermore, leadership in both the military and federal government often emerge from even multi-billion dollar purchasing processes feeling shortchanged (Richter, 2013), especially when the federal government has promised (and this has transpired often and very publicly) to provide major investments—but where results are lacking. These failures have prompted strong reactions in the media, condemning existing procurement approaches and demanding that they become more transparent, efficient and effective (Gilmore, 2021). But little has been achieved, despite decades of criticism (Williams, 2006).

Canadian military procurement experts have produced a wealth of research aimed at explaining these shortcomings. Davies (2016), for example, identified a general lack of accountability for the implementation of long-term approved spending plans regarding Canadian defence contracts, further compounded by weak performance measures, as the major impediment to successful defence procurement. Collins (2018) found that how the Canadian political executive positioned itself *vis-à-vis* the procurement

process only partially explained delays, and that a fuller explanation required inclusion of more variables: notably, strategic and political concerns such as the nature of the country's military alliances, the structure of its defence procurement bureaucracy, and the relationship between politicians and the defence industry itself. Other scholars have called for a more agile model of procurement to overcome these limits, but it is unclear exactly what this would entail (Richardson et al., 2020; Williams, 2006).

In Australia, on the other hand, some critical strategic keystones laid the foundations for government administrations of different partisan persuasions actually meeting their long-standing commitments, including in terms of procurement, to the ADF.

In the Australian case, procurement, while at times facing heated discussions and costly changes in direction—notably reflected in the recent cancellation of what would have been the French-built *Attack*-class submarines (Doran, 2022)—has been able to deliver substantial modernization and capacity to the ADF both in terms of the RAN and the RAAF.

This is possible because of a strategic focus and agreement between different governments and the defence sector in Australia on the concept of 'defence in depth'—the assumption, broadly shared between the political and administrative leadership, that the country will need to be self-reliant in at least some of the defence solutions it selects due to Australia's isolated and difficult to defend geostrategic position—and on the idea that the United States represent a key long-term ally.

Underpinned by an early assessment that the end of the bipolar world order and the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) would make the 21st century more unstable rather than create a 'peace dividend,' the Australian approach not only unlocked more procurement successes but also led to qualitatively different results than those witnessed in Canada. These include the recent selection of nuclear submarines (SSNs) and the agreement—sought by Australia—to position US B-52 strategic bombers in the north of the country (Booth, 2022), in addition to a significant expansion of joint US-Australia intelligence-gathering efforts (Bisht, 2022).

As the detailed case studies contained herein argue, while the Australian clarity upon and bipartisan agreement on strategic defence imperatives and government-ADF alignment has resulted in a fairly coherent approach to Australian military procurement, including important investments to implement a well-defined and coherent long-term strategic and political posture, the Canadian case demonstrates the opposite: misalignment between government objectives, partisan administrations and the CAF's own doctrine which have led to a disjointed and muddled history of both delays and swings in both large and small platform procurement.

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