



**Kim Richard Nossal, *Charlie Foxtrot: Fixing Defence Procurement in Canada*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2016.**

**Nick Pavelich, Ryerson University/University of Calgary**

I've spoken to many who have the perception that the Canadian Armed Forces are some of the best-trained and best-equipped soldiers in the world. Even with this high regard for the military, however, it should come as no surprise to anyone that Canadian defence procurement is broken. There's a rich history of failed procurement projects, with recent noteworthy examples including the CF-18 fighter replacement

program and the Canadian Surface Combatant project. It's understandable that defence procurement isn't much talked about as it's a niche subject that the average Canadian would have trouble finding readable material on.

Fortunately for them, there's now *Charlie Foxtrot: Fixing Defence Procurement in Canada* by Kim Richard Nossal, a political science professor and the director of the Centre for International and Defence Policy at Queen's University. *Charlie Foxtrot* was published by Dundurn for their Point of View series which invites a knowledgeable expert to address a vital topic in an accessible format. This book is both easy-to-read and short, coming in at under 200 pages. It not only provides readers with a wonderfully summarized history of several Canadian defence procurement projects as well as the procurement process, it also offers detailed suggestions for reforming and fixing the system.

Nossal lays out three objectives for the book. The first is to survey the defence procurement landscape and show how former Canadian governments have mismanaged the process, resulting in the waste of hundreds of millions of dollars while also depriving the Canadian Armed Forces of military capacity (25). An excellent use of historical examples in the first chapter illustrates defence procurement complexities and failures. The first example used is the Ross rifle, which was introduced at the outbreak of the Great War as Canada wanted to domestically produce its own rifle after dissatisfaction with the British Lee-Enfield rifles. Next and much later, the CF-105 Arrow was to be a world-class supersonic fighter-interceptor aircraft built in Canada with the hopes of making Canada a leader in high-end aircraft manufacturing. The lack of international interest and huge overall costs led in part to the Arrow's demise. Then there's the Iltis jeep, a light reconnaissance vehicle built by Volkswagen AG but produced in Canada under licence by Bombardier Inc. Higher costs associated with manufacturing the German jeep in Canada, as well as the lack of protection for combat roles, made the Iltis a contentious piece of hardware. Lastly, there are the four *Victoria*-class submarines that were originally designed and built in the United Kingdom for the Royal Navy as the *Upholder*-class. Mothballed when the Royal Navy decided to pursue an all nuclear-powered submarine fleet, these boats were eventually sold to Canada.

Two more recent examples are covered in the second chapter: the Sikorsky CH-124 Sea King helicopter replacement and the CF-18 fighter replacement programs. The

Sea King replacement is one of the longest running projects in Canadian procurement history with the search beginning in 1986. Only in the last several years has the new Sikorsky CF-128 Cyclone begun phasing out the Sea King. The CF-18 Hornet was to be replaced by the Lockheed Martin F-35 but since the writing of this book, the Trudeau government has pivoted from that project. Had the book been written a few years later the Canadian Surface Combatant, the replacement project for the *Halifax*-class frigate, would surely have been included.

Nossal provides a terrific and brief historical summary of each project before analyzing what exactly went wrong. Although procurement can naturally be a complicated process, these cases certainly demonstrate that Canadian governments, both Liberal and Conservative, typically implemented their own criteria and requirements which contributed further complexity. An efficient process of properly equipping the Canadian Armed Forces is often sacrificed at the democratic altar of gaining voter approval. The nationalistic penchant for giving procurement contracts preferentially to Canadian firms further drives up the costs, which generally delays the process.

The second objective is to explain why the system is so dysfunctional. Nossal outlines three explanations for Canada's defence procurement mess:

1. Canadians have always sought to spend as little as they can to get away with on defence, an aversion in peacetime that they come by honestly, given Canada's enviable strategic location.
2. Politicians in Canada enjoy a permissive environment for getting defence procurement wrong, and they face very few incentives to get procurement right.
3. Governments in Canada have a normative model of the ideal military, fed by the defence establishment, that isn't sustainable given how little Canada spends on it. They want a modest, multi-role military but do not have the budget or political will to sustain it (137).

His explanations, although brief, provide reasoning as to why Canada isn't very successful at military procurement. As a North American country that is protected by three oceans and an allied neighbour that possesses the world's strongest military, Canadians are distanced from the reality of a real security threat, something the author

called the “security imaginary.” What this means is that many Canadians have the luxury, due to their geostrategic location, to be able to devote their excess wealth to things other than defence. What projects do get approved for defence spending are done on the cheap. There is also the general unwillingness of Canadians to spend on defence as well as unwillingness from politicians to craft a defence policy reflecting that (108).

And the third objective, “offers a set of suggestions for ‘fixing’ how Canada acquires equipment for the armed forces, so that this dysfunctional and wasteful system can be improved in the years ahead.” (25) His suggestions are, in brief:

1. If Canada continues to view defence procurement with “big eyes” (being a well-equipped multi-role military) but refuses to spend the capital to make it happen, then they should instead craft a defence policy that reflects this unwillingness to spend.
2. Think strategically and procure strategically. Defence procurement should flow from a clear defence policy. Without a clear policy, the government spends billions of dollars on military expenditures without ever clarifying to both Canadians and others in the international system why and how it’s being spent.
3. Don’t play politics with procurement. As the two dominant Canadian federal parties, the Liberals and Conservatives should try to establish bipartisanship in defence procurement in order to help the military long-term instead of reaping the short-term political gains of partisanship.

Defence procurement, specifically defence procurement in Canada, is a very unique area of study. There is not a lot of easily accessible literature on the topic and this book does a fantastic job of summarizing the history and process in Canada. It is a very readable piece on the shortcomings of Canadian procurement that is refreshed by the author giving his own suggestions on how to fix these shortcomings. Although the suggestions seem sound, they don’t appear practical. The third, in particular, is borderline naïve. Politics is becoming increasingly divisive and having political parties working together on almost anything is a long shot. Nossal does admit that these are mere suggestions of how to fix it in an ideal world but is aware of how little chance there is of any of them happening.

Some of the history of failed procurements in this book were so frustrating that I had to put the book down and clear my head. I believe more Canadians should read this book, as it highlights why they should be incensed with how defence procurement is handled in their country. This book led to me to having discussions and debates with others interested in this topic, which I think is Nossal's intended purpose. I believe if more voters read it they would come away more informed to ask questions about future Canadian defence procurement. *Charlie Foxtrot* was short enough and summarized in a way to make it appealing to the leisure reader but also contained enough analysis to please academics and students in defence studies.

*Charlie Foxtrot* was written in 2016 and we are still seeing the same problems with procurement. The F-35 "fiasco," as the author phrases it, continues with the Trudeau government's plan to pivot from the project, despite remaining involved as an active participant, and re-open the bidding process for a new combat aircraft. This is very similar to what was seen when the Sea King helicopter project got tangled in politics in the early 1990s. Canada has also recently committed to the Type 26 frigate to replace its aging fleet of *Halifax*-class frigates as well as building the new *Harry DeWolf*-class ice-capable offshore patrol vessels. With these procurement projects beginning since 2016, I will no doubt keep an eye on Nossal and the potential for more of his insight into this contentious subject.

*Nick Pavelich graduated from Ryerson University in 2018 with a BA in Sport Media and a minor in History. He plans on continuing his education in 2020 by applying for a Master's degree in Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary's Centre for Military, Security, and Strategic Studies. His areas of interest include naval history, seapower, maritime security, geopolitics, and international relations.*