

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

**“A Conversation with the Honorable Anita Anand,
Minister of National Defence of Canada”**

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FEATURING

Anita Anand

Canadian Minister of National Defence

CSIS EXPERTS

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Transcript By

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Kathleen
McInnis: Good morning, everyone. And thank you for joining us. I'm Kathleen McInnis. I'm the director of the Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and I'm a senior fellow in the International Security Program. On behalf of CSIS, I am delighted to welcome the Honorable Anita Anand, the Canadian minister of national defence, for what I know will be a phenomenal conversation on Canada's defense priorities, and some of the critical issues with which it's grappling today.

First, though, I want to thank Citi for having the vision to partner CSIS in establishing this critically important platform to talk to incredible leaders like Minister Anand. And Minister Anand is truly incredible. Minister Anand was elected – or, has been in the role of minister of national defence since December 2021, and was elected to parliament in 2019. Prior to that, Minister Anand worked as a scholar, a lawyer, and a researcher. So she brings an enormous breadth of experience and expertise to her current position. She was also responsible for buying Canada's COVID vaccine, as minister for procurement. So she's had quite a lot on her plate for the past couple of years.

So, Minister Anand, I am so grateful that you've come to speak with us today. So let's dive in. First, I'd love to get into a little bit about your background. What inspired you to public service? Was there a specific moment that you knew that you needed to run for parliament?

Minister Anita
Anand: Well, thanks for having me, Kathleen. It's great to be here in Washington. I can't say that there was one specific moment. I, as you mentioned, had been a scholar and researcher and professor for about 25 years. I loved that job, as one does. You know, it was a very fulfilling life to write in the area of corporate and securities law and to be able to teach hundreds of students every year. I found myself, however, continually involved in policy issues. So I started writing reports for the federal and provincial government in the area of financial market regulation. I was writing op-eds on issues relating to corporate governance. And those op-eds were quite topical, given the importance of corporate governance, especially after the fall of Enron and especially during the financial market crash of 2008.

Dr. McInnis: Sure.

Min. Anand: And so I was approached to run for office and initially said no, and said no again – (laughter) – a few times, and over the course of a number of months got myself around to the idea that maybe I could make a difference –

Dr. McInnis: Sure. Sure.

Min. Anand: – if I were elected. And so I tried.

Dr. McInnis: Yeah. Fantastic.

So I imagine that being selected to be the minister of national defence is life-transforming moment. How did you find out that you were being selected or called to perform this role?

Min. Anand: Well, I was called to a meeting with the prime minister just after the election in 2021, and I didn't know what he was going to say or ask. But when he asked me, I said I would be honored to take on this role. And he continued to tell me how important a moment this is in the history and life of the Canadian Armed Forces and how he entrusted me with this role. And so, I continue to feel privileged every day to be able to lead the Canadian Armed Forces, together with the chief of defence staff, and my whole team in Ottawa.

Dr. McInnis: Amazing.

Now that you've been in the hot seat for a few months, how do you view your role? What do you – what priorities do you have now as minister of national defence?

Min. Anand: When I was meeting with the prime minister, I had in my back pocket a list of issues that I thought were important because I had heard – there were some conversation in media that I may be appointed to this role, so I had given it some thought and had a to-do list of my own. And on that to-do list, in case I was asked, was cultural change in the Canadian military – ensuring that everyone has a place where they feel respected, and protected, and dignified in a way that they would be able to serve our country.

Secondly on that list was the importance of ensuring that our military has what it needs from a resources perspective, from a support perspective, from an equipment perspective. And then, thirdly, ensuring that our multilateral relationships like NORAD, like NATO are very well fulfilled from a Canadian perspective. And those continue to be the three main priorities.

Of course, February 24th is etched in our minds collectively as allies, and the war in Ukraine – Russia's illegal invasion and occupation of that country creates another layer of concern, and really determined action by the Canadian government in the area of defense and the provision of lethal aid and military aid writ large to that country.

Dr. McInnis: Right. Right.

So, switching gears a little bit, the Canadian Armed Forces appear to be undergoing a pretty profound moment of introspection and reform, as is

reflected by the recently released advisory panel on systemic racism and discrimination report.

I want to quote from the report here – apologies it's a bit lengthy – but I wanted to quote the report here because it really gets to the heart of issue in my view. And the quote is: "There is a common thread to many of the heart-wrenching stories the Advisory Panel heard. At their core are the lost – but potentially powerful – contributions of the defense team who leave the organization because the price they would have to pay to persevere in the organization would be unbearable."

In other words, if we don't get things squared away on the personnel front, we are going to keep losing talent and have a hard time recruiting it. These are issues that I think a variety of national security establishments are grappling with right now in different ways. So, I wanted to ask you about your strategic approach to dealing with this organizational cultural challenge.

So, I guess my first question is, what organizational cultural characteristics do you want to see in the Canadian Armed Forces and Ministry of National Defence? And how do you plan on getting there if you're not already there?

Min. Anand:

It's such an important question, and really, as I said in my last response, at the top of my list as minister of national defence.

And what we need to continue to build is an institution where every single person regardless of background, regardless of race, regardless of religion, regardless of any other personal characteristic, can come to work, can put on a uniform, and can serve the country that they signed up to serve free of discrimination, free of harassment, free of sexual misconduct. And that is the type of institution we need to continue to build.

And the report that you mentioned is very, very important, because it underlines the importance of us continuing with the effort that our – that is already underway. In budget 2021, we committed \$236 million towards cultural change in the military; budget 2022, \$100 million to ensure that we are continuing to address the issues that you raised in your question.

And as a racialized woman myself, with a professional background and experience in another large institution, in private practice before that, I am fully aware of the importance of attacking this issue, and continuing to eradicate, root out discrimination in all its form in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Dr. McInnis:

When it comes to building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce, obviously, representation is critical. Yet, there's some who would argue that

we as a community spend a little bit too much time focusing on the inputs, and – to the workforce, and instead, ought to focus on outcomes, like military effectiveness and diversity of thought. How do you think about that balance? Or is there even a tension?

Min. Anand: Well, I think we have to go back to what morally is right. What morally is right is that we have an institution where equity and diversity and inclusiveness are fundamental principles that are universally held. And at the current time, I would say, from my conversations with the Canadian Armed Forces, from my conversations with the chief of defence staff, we are pushing on open doors, and in fact, that is what one of the panel members said verbatim on Monday, after we released that report. And I would underscore that point, given my conversations across the country, at military bases, people agree that there is this moment –

Dr. McInnis: Yeah. Yeah.

Min. Anand: – before us, to effect change. And so I believe we have momentum, and we are going to continue to see this moral underpinning of the Canadian Armed Forces continuing to take shape.

At the same time, there's also the question of longevity of the forces. We need to attract talent. We need to retain talent. And how do you do that? You ensure that your institution is built on principles that are durable, and that will endure for the long term. And certainly, non-discrimination is one such principle.

And then I would say the third point is that this principle is important for the defense of our country, for the security of our country. If we can't have an institution where everybody feels safe, and protected, and respected, our ability to defend our country and to engage in operations, domestically and internationally, is undermined. And that can't happen.

Dr. McInnis: Absolutely.

Min. Anand: So there's a holistic approach here. And I just laid it out for you –

Dr. McInnis: (Laughs.)

Min. Anand: – in terms of what I'm thinking about every day.

Dr. McInnis: Yeah, thank you. I happen to agree with you. I think that the national security workforce and ensuring that our people are sufficiently empowered to bring their best selves to the decision-making table is, hands down, the most important mission that we face as a community.

Min. Anand: One of the AP panel members was Sandra Perron. I'm not sure if you've read her book, "Outstanding in the Field." She was a trailblazer in the Canadian Armed Forces, and a chief milestone after milestone, in terms of women holding significant positions in the forces. And her story is very much a story of having to push against closed doors. And my hope is that those doors, as I said, will continue to open, and we will see greater equity and equality and diversity in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Dr. McInnis: Fantastic.

Changing gears a little bit to the Canadian defense strategy, it was recently announced that there's going to be another strategic review. Given that the lines between domestic and international issues gets blurrier by the day, how do you see the roles and missions of the Canadian armed forces evolving?

Min. Anand: So the defense review that you just mentioned was set forth in budget 2022 announced at the beginning of April –

Dr. McInnis: Right. Right.

Min. Anand: – and at the same time our government committed an additional \$8 billion in defense spending on top of the 70 percent increase in defense spending, which began in 2017 over a nine-year period. The defense policy currently in place is called Strong, Secure, Engaged, and that defense policy still remains in place and is the underpinning of many of the things we are doing right now in defense.

Our procurements, for example, we have six offshore – Arctic offshore patrol ships, three of which have been delivered to – three have – are in the water. Two have been delivered. All that to say that we have a defense policy – Strong, Secure, Engaged.

On top of that, we will do an update to that policy so that we can take into account new and emerging threats such as the increasing importance of cybersecurity and surveillance, which we are currently very much engaged with Ukraine on, offering them support in that area under Operation Unifier.

Those are the types of things we need to build into our defense policy and our update will reflect that.

Dr. McInnis: OK. So it's an update to the current policy foundation that –

Min. Anand: The current policy will remain in place and we will continue to look at this emerging threat environment – what do we need to continue to do from a defense perspective in light of changing global circumstances.

Dr. McInnis: So we read recently Hugh Segal, who's a former Canadian chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, made the argument that the end strength – how many troops/sailors that are in the Canadian armed forces is not sufficient to meet Canada's strategic level of ambition, especially given the blurring of the lines between domestic and international security issues.

How do you think about these questions of end strength and resources? Militaries always want more. (Laughs.)

Min. Anand: So I know Hugh well. I don't agree with him on this issue.

Dr. McInnis: OK.

Min. Anand: Let me tell you what I hear when I am visiting countries and speaking with our Canadian armed forces and other stakeholders. Other countries are continually asking for more Canada. The Canadian armed forces bring something to the table that is not represented across the board in other armed forces.

For example, we have been in Ukraine since 2015 training the Ukrainian armed forces. We've trained 33,000 members of the Ukrainian armed forces, 2,000 members of the Ukrainian national guard. That was a decision strategically that we made after Russia's invasion of Crimea to say what contribution can we bring as the Canadian armed forces. We are leading an enhanced forward presence battle group in Latvia. We are one of four countries to do that.

We recently doubled our commitment in the air, on land, and at sea. We have the Halifax frigate that has just arrived there. In other words, again, people say more, more Canada – what else can you do. We have outstanding requests, actually, for more Canada on NATO's eastern seaboard.

So I will say that we have to look at the tangible footprint that Canada puts on the ground, and from this vantage point at the ministerial level I see that every day. We also have 3,400 members of the Canadian armed forces on standby ready to be called up if NATO chooses to do so. That's the type of contribution Canada will continue to make. We are there for our allies.

Dr. McInnis: Mmm hmm. Burden sharing is a perennial issue here in Washington – (laughs) – and burden sharing as measured by a percentage of GDP, and you just mentioned that Canada has decided to increase its defense budget by \$8 billion over the coming years.

Can you envision any scenarios whereby Canadian defense expenditure might further increase?

Min. Anand: Well, what I will say is that with our \$8 billion commitment we are just under 1.5 percent, and so the trajectory is upward for Canada at the current time. And we are committing this \$8 billion on top of the 70 percent increase in defense spending over a seven-year period which began in 2017. And we are seeing tangible results from those increases. For example, I recently announced the procurement – being in the final phases of the procurement for 88 new future fighter jets, the F-35s. That is such an important procurement for our continental relationship, for our relationship in NORAD, for our potential NATO contributions as well, and that is a \$19 billion commitment in Strong, Secure, Engaged, our defense policy. All that to say that the focus on 2 percent excludes some of the tangible contributions that Canada is making and, in any case, our trajectory in defense spending is on an incline. I will be coming forward with a robust package to modernize NORAD and continental defense, for example, and this afternoon I'm meeting with the secretary of defense, Lloyd Austin, to discuss this and other issues, including Arctic security as well as the war in Ukraine.

Dr. McInnis: That's actually – you're sort of preempting my next question –

Min. Anand: (Laughs.)

Dr. McInnis: – which was on NORAD and how you see that command – so last year the U.S. and Canada had an agreement on NORAD modernization. How do you see that agreement being implemented? And again, how do you see the role of NORAD evolving as the security environment becomes –

Min. Anand: So last year – it wasn't so much an agreement, it was a statement of principles that both Canada and the United States agree to be important in the modernization of NORAD, so research in technology, working on surveillance systems such as over-the-horizon radar systems. It was more a statement of intent and we committed millions of dollars in our last year's budget to carry forward that thinking into the modernization of NORAD and continental defense more generally, which is ever so important in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in the face of climate change issues, in the face of the need for greater interoperability between our technological systems in the two countries. So we believe this to be extremely important, but we are not sitting by the sidelines and doing nothing on this at the same time as modernizing NORAD and our continental defense systems. We are also maintaining the current surveillance system. So recently our government put forward a \$600 million contract with a corporation that is Inuit-run, Nasittuq Corporation, and that \$600 million contract is an archetype, in fact, of the type of contract we will continue to look to as a way of engaging indigenous communities in the modernization of continental defense and NORAD.

Dr. McInnis: Oh, that's fascinating. How interesting.

Min. Anand: It's so important, right? Like, the economic benefits of NORAD modernization must be shared, and the indigenous population in our north is extremely important to our country and to our government. And as the premier of the Northwest Territory has recently said, nothing about us without us, and that is a principle that I take to heart and our government feels is very important.

Dr. McInnis: Fascinating. Now we're sort of in the High North Arctic. How is climate change opening of northern sea routes or sea lanes impacting your thinking on Canadian naval presence and capabilities and capacities, especially as the Arctic becomes more passable and approachable by adversaries?

Min. Anand: It's a great question. So obviously, across ministerial portfolios, we must think about how we address the climate crisis, from a climate emissions standpoint, from a melting polar ice cap standpoint, from a migration of fish standpoint, and all of that comes together in terms of what is happening in the northern climes, in the Arctic region, when, as you say, we are seeing ice flows change rapidly. And the need for our defense policy to be responsive to climate change and to see climate change as an actual security threat is extremely important and at the top of my agenda.

One of the ways we need to address this is to understand that Arctic sovereignty, writ large, becomes more important because with melting ice and greater ability to traverse the northwest passage, we are going to have other countries – Russia, China – undertake so-called research efforts in those waters. And we need to be able to respond to that. In addition, we need to understand how the seabed is mapped. We need to understand the migration of fish; how melting ice and polar ice caps is going to really affect fish migration, fish proteins, which are so important economically to the Canadian economy.

So these are the types of issues that climate change raises. And as I said, across the board – from the Canadian armed forces perspective – we need to be thinking about that, not just in terms of the Arctic. Our troops have been on the ground in forest fires, in floods. And climate change is exacting a toll on our country. And we need to address it head-on, not just from an ex-ante, proactive standpoint in terms of reducing carbon emissions by 2030, by 2050, in terms of our targets, but also in terms of addressing the here and now. What can our forces do? How are they going to respond?

Dr. McInnis: Right. Shifting gears to one of the biggest – well, the crisis that we're facing now – Ukraine. Canada, as you've mentioned, has committed considerable resources to help Ukraine fight against Russia's invasion, and has been doing so since 2015, with the training mission. Is it your sense that Canada will do even more? Is the trajectory upwards in terms of –

Min. Anand: Yes.

Dr. McInnis: OK.

Min. Anand: Hard yes.

Dr. McInnis: OK. (Laughs.)

Min. Anand: We prior to the budget had committed \$117 million in military aid to Ukraine. Carl Gustaf anti-tank weapons system, fragmentation vests, rocket launchers, hand grenades, and the list goes on. And in fact, we had shipments of military aid on the ground before February 24th. We were very well prepared for the potential for the invasion by Russia. Then in budget 2022, we committed \$500 million to further military aid for Ukraine. And in that regard, we have procured armored vehicles that we are sending to Ukraine. I announced that this week. And we will continue to support Ukraine. For example, with our allies, sending heavy weaponry and 777 howitzers to Ukraine for the purposes of supporting this important effort.

It's not just Ukraine's sovereignty and security that is at stake. It is the fundamental integrity of the rules-based international order. And my counterpart, Lloyd Austin, and I are very much aligned in terms of the urgency and importance of this situation. And we'll discuss that this afternoon.

Dr. McInnis: Great to hear that. Finally, to bring this fascinating conversation to a close, this is Smart Women, Smart Power. So I wanted to ask you what aspects of your job do you think are more influenced by your experience as a woman? Or do you think that being a woman in this role is influencing the way you approach the job? And if so, why? If not, why?

Min. Anand: I would say that I believe fundamentally in the importance of having women at the decision-making table in many capacities, in every institution. And one the reasons I ran for office was because I believe that the demographic composition of our population should be reflected in our institutions – whether it's government, whether it's hospitals, whether it's universities – and the list goes on. And so that's the general frame that I carry with me all day every day.

But in terms of actual decisions per se, I'm bringing a skillset to the table that is reflective of my background and experience and professional education and experience. And that showed itself to be the case in procurement of vaccines, in terms of having expertise in contract analysis and negotiation, and now in terms of being the minister of national defence especially in terms of governance of large institutions. And indeed, that was an area that I

specialized in before becoming the minister. So it is really bringing your experiences and your knowledge to the table all the time regardless of who you are that I think is important.

Dr. McInnis: Fantastic.

Well, the moment is extraordinary and you – and you're an extraordinary woman to be leading the Canadian Ministry of National Defence. And so thank you so much for your time today. This has been an absolutely extraordinary interview, and thank you so much for being here.

Min. Anand: Oh, Kathleen, the pleasure and honor is mine. So thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate the invitation and I'll look forward to another chat sometime soon.

Dr. McInnis: Absolutely. (Laughter.)

Min. Anand: Thanks again.