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Threat-based defence planning:
implications for Canada

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The Network for Strategic Analysis (NSA) has been tasked by the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) to conduct a comparative study on defence planning. Three sets of questions guide this report: 1) What is the regional, global and threat-based approach to operational and strategic planning? What are the pros and cons of each of them in the 21st century? 2) Who is using each of them now and why did they adopt them? How do the users of the global and threat-based approach feel about alternative frameworks? 3) What lessons can be learned for Canada? The report is divided in three parts. The first section presents the main approaches to force planning, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and illustrates them with the evolution of U.S. force planning. The second section reviews the current defence planning of seven allies and partners: Australia, France, Israel, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The last section presents some policy considerations for Canada.

The Evolution of U.S. Force Planning

Defence planning is the deliberate planning process of a state's necessary forces, force postures and force capabilities. It encompasses strategic planning – the development of national strategies and policies – and programmatic planning – the allocation of resources to achieve the desired goals.[1] There are two main approaches to defence planning: threat-based planning (TBP) and capability-based planning (CBP).

Threat-based planning involves identifying potential adversaries and assessing their current and future capabilities.[2] Force planning under TBP aims to develop specific capabilities to defeat those of the identified enemies and exploit their vulnerabilities. TBP focuses on a single or a small set of specific and identifiable threats, either regional or global. This approach requires clearly recognized threats. Threat-based planning is concerned with developing appropriate capabilities to match the contingencies associated with these threats, based on the identification of very specific force-planning scenarios.[3] TBP was the dominant approach to defence planning amongst Western allies during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union represented a clearly identifiable threat.

A major advantage of TBP is the ability to connect strategy, acquisitions and operating concepts to exploit enemies' specific weaknesses. However, the main critique of this approach is that "because it focuses on a specific adversary, there is a danger of developing specific types of niche capabilities that would be ill suited against other potential adversaries or operational environments."[4] Threat-based planning is thus considered inflexible and risky by focusing on precise scenarios while suppressing important uncertainties.[5] Indeed, TBP is dependent on a clear threat, represented by very few point scenarios, characterized by a fixation on particular enemies and assumptions about future wars.[6]

The end of the Cold War led Western countries to move away from TBP. Capabilities-based planning was introduced as an alternative to help identify the defence capabilities needed to achieve governments' strategic objectives in a volatile threat environment. Force planning under CBP aims to develop generic capabilities to accomplish expected future operations rather than to defeat concrete adversaries.[7] In contrast to TBP, CBP focuses on policy objectives rather than point scenarios. It is a "systematic approach to force development that aims to advise on the most appropriate force options to meet government priorities. The force options developed should meet strategic objectives, minimize cost and risk and comply with other constraints."[8] It is a risk management framework that provides a rational basis for force development in a context of uncertainty and budgetary constraints.

CBP is particularly suited when threats are uncertain and multifaceted, and defence budgets are tight. The outcome of CBP "is not concrete weapons systems and manning levels, but a description of the tasks force structure units should be able to perform expressed in capability terms. Once the capability inventory is defined, the most cost-effective and efficient physical force unit options to implement these capabilities are derived."[9] Furthermore, CBP helps overcome the traditional single-service stovepipes by requiring the identification of broad defence goals, joint concepts and cost-effective and efficient capabilities. One inconvenience of this approach is the difficulty to sell the public on defence expenditures due to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the geostrategic environment.[10] CBP can also become costly when planning for multi-purpose forces capable of operating across the full spectrum of conflict vis-à-vis a multitude of dynamic threats.

At the beginning of the Cold War, U.S. defence planning identified the Soviet Union as the principal threat and used well-specified scenarios to assess force requirements.[11] For example, the Kennedy administration adopted a "two and a half war" force planning construct. It required the U.S. military to be able to conduct two simultaneous major regional wars (in Europe and Asia) and a "½ war" in the Western Hemisphere.[12] Following the end of the Cold War, the George H. W. Bush administration shifted force planning from TBP to CBP. It established a capability target based on the ability to succeed in multiple combinations of simultaneous contingencies, such as an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, a North Korean invasion of South Korea, a Russian-Belarus attack on the Baltics and Poland, a coup in the Philippines, etc. During the Clinton administration, the shift from TBP to CBP continued, but faced resistance, notably from Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. He opposed CBP on the grounds that TBP was necessary to convince Congress and the American public of the required defence expenditures.[13] Nevertheless, the 1997 Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) considered a total of 45 scenarios, including an analysis of force requirements for two nearly simultaneous major theater wars, a wild-card scenario involving aggression by an unidentified regional great power, as well as small-scale military engagements in peace operations, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations.[14]

The George W. Bush administration officially adopted a CBP in the 2001 QDR, which led NATO and the Five Eyes to adopt the same approach to defence planning.[15] With this QDR, the U.S. adopted an ambitious "two-plus war" standard, with the military sized to simultaneously defend the United States, deter aggression in four critical regions, defeat aggression in overlapping major conflicts, and conduct a limited number of smaller-scale contingency operations elsewhere.[16] Under the Obama Administration, the 2010 QDR maintained the emphasis on a broad range of threats, but reduced the U.S. level of ambition to a one-war force planning construct. Some 11 scenarios were considered, "including stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, regime collapse in North Korea, a major conflict with China over Taiwan, Russian coercion of the Baltic states, a nuclear-armed Iran, loss of control of nuclear weapons in Pakistan, and homeland defense and cyberattacks on the United States."[17]

The Trump Administration's 2017 National Security Strategy remains committed to the U.S. long-standing three-theater grand strategy aimed at preserving stability in Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. But it puts greater emphasis on two "revisionist" great powers, China and Russia, while recognizing the threat posed by two regional powers, Iran and North Korea, as well as the asymmetric threat of jihadist terrorist groups.[18] Most importantly, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) abandoned the force planning construct of winning two regional wars simultaneously, focusing instead on defeating a single near-peer adversary in a global war.[19] This means that the U.S. military is gearing towards defeating China or Russia (not both) in a high-intensity war rather than defeating a combination of regional powers such as Iran and North Korea. This may require fundamental "rethinking [about] how U.S. forces will project power into contested environments, operate without secure rear areas, cope with attacks on their supply lines and communications infrastructure, and prevent a numerically superior adversary from overrunning exposed allies and partners before America can mount an

effective response."[20]

While maintaining a CBP, the 2018 NDS demonstrates an increasing preoccupation with specific threats, namely a global war against China or Russia. Such prioritization of threats may lead U.S. allies and partners to revert back to a TBP. So far, however, NATO continues to rely on a capabilities-based approach, but recent thinking has been increasingly threat-based.[21] Some argue that a shift in approach is to be anticipated in order to face the current security environment, encouraging NATO to rediscover the principle that allies should concentrate on the tasks for which they are the most geographically suited.[22]

In sum, the shift towards a great-power centric force planning construct has considerable implications for U.S. allies and partners. They could face pressure from Washington to adapt their force concepts, augment and modernize their defence capabilities, including with anti-access and area denial capacity, critical enablers such as airlift and sealift, and disrupting and degrading weapons systems. The pressure for increased defence spending and greater burden-sharing may also face domestic resistance given differential threat assessments between allies and partners. The following sections examine the current state of defence planning in selected allies and partners.

Australia

Australia is undertaking a major overhaul of its defence policy. This process has been conducted through the joint publication of the 2020 Defence Strategic Update and 2020 Force Structure Plan, which built on the 2016 White Paper.[23] Reviewing these documents shows that Australia remains committed to capabilities-based planning, but has given priority to Australia's periphery due to mounting concerns about China, although that country is never referred to as a threat.

The 2020 Update observes an overall deterioration of Australia's strategic environment. This includes the U.S.-China strategic competition playing out in the Indo-Pacific, as well as "China's active pursuit of greater influence" through coercive and grey-zone activities, fueled by expanding cyber capabilities, disruptive technologies and accelerating military modernisation.[24] Accordingly, the Australian Armed Forces (ADF) anticipate an increased prospect of high-intensity war in its region, which it could be drawn into. This is a drastic change from the 2016 White Paper, which states that "there is no more than a remote chance of a military attack on Australian territory by another country."[25]

The 2020 Update narrows Australia's main strategic interests to "focus on Australia's immediate region: ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific."[26] It also sets new strategic objectives: shape Australia's environment, deter actions against Australia's interests, and respond with credible military force. The Update makes it clear that, while the ADF must remain prepared to intervene globally, such as taking part in a U.S.-led coalition, that should not be considered as important for force structure as ensuring credible capability in its immediate region. As a result, Australia's involvement in the Middle East is bound to remain limited.

The 2020 Update specifies the need for new capabilities, such as cyberweapons, A2AD and long-range strike capabilities to respond to grey-zone threats and to hold adversary forces and infrastructures at risk farther from Australia. This leads to a fundamental shift in Australia's force posture, moving from a defensive to a more offensive posture. In other words, Australia is gearing towards deterrence by punishment in addition to traditional deterrence by denial.[27] The reasoning behind such a change is that a purely defensive force is insufficient to deter attacks against Australia.

Australia's 2020 Force Structure Plan emphasises the need for critical enabling capabilities and all-do-

main integration.[28] The 2020 Update specifies that the new frigate program will concentrate on anti-submarine warfare (ASW) rather than general multipurpose. It further identifies key capabilities needed to face a challenging immediate environment, such as intelligent submarine mines, unmanned above and under the surface vehicles, and a new class of submarines. Amphibious capabilities are also set to be enhanced, presumably to intervene in the archipelagos north of Australia. In the air domain, the main focus is high-speed and long-range strike capabilities.[29] In the space domain, investments are planned to ensure autonomous access to space, a paradigmatic shift for Australia. Finally, in the cyber domain, the 2020 Cyber Security Strategy plans to invest in hardware and software infrastructure, increase collaboration with the private sector, and to be able to conduct operations in the areas of cyber, electronics and information both defensively and offensively.[30]

France

The last two French White Papers on Defence and National Security (2008, 2013) used a CBP approach. Although this is still the case, the new strategic documents published by the French authorities since 2017 demonstrate significant changes in terms of budget, threats, and force generation.[31] This is illustrated by a significant increase in the defence budget, in the size of the armed forces, and an increasingly explicit designation of current and potential adversaries.

The risk of a high-intensity and symmetric conflict is now clearly seen as a serious and possible threat for the post-2030 period. This is a consequence of the use of power politics by some states. These states now overtly use hybrid and multifaceted strategies, leading to ambiguous aggression. The French authorities do not expect their metropolitan territory to be threatened, but nevertheless believe that France could be involved in this type of conflict. The strategic documents also identify other threats, such as terrorism, hybrid warfare (including in the fields of cyber, space and information), demonstrations of force that could lead to a "fait accompli" policy, and the risk of technological military breakthroughs. The Islamic State and Boko Haram are clearly designated as adversaries. More implicitly, Russia, China and Turkey – since the updated strategic review – are mentioned as revisionist states. France considers key regions worthy of particular attention: the Sahel, sub-Saharan Africa, the Near and Middle East, Eastern and Northern Europe, the South China Sea, as well as the national maritime space.[32]

To address these threats, the French government decided to increase the defense budget, including in the area of research and development. It notably plans to acquire additional refuelling and strategic transport aircraft, new-generation naval patrol vessels, sea-refuelling tankers, and recently announced the commissioning of a future nuclear aircraft carrier in 2035. The modernisation of the French Armed Forces is aimed at maintaining France's capacity to penetrate non-permissive environments in the face of increased A2AD capabilities. In addition, a Cyber Defence Command was created in 2017. The strategic documents stress the need for France to rely on its allies within the transatlantic community (through NATO, the EU, and the European Intervention Initiative) and to develop Europe's strategic autonomy. Therefore, they also emphasize the need to strengthen European defense industries, particularly in the field of cyber and artificial intelligence.

Finally, the French authorities plan to maintain the two components (air and submarine) of nuclear deterrence, to reinforce the military reserve and to rely on three troop-projection capabilities: an intervention force (5,000 personnel) on permanent alert that can be deployed in 7 days up to 3,000 km; crisis management intervention capabilities comprising approximately 7,000 personnel to intervene simultaneously in three theaters of operation; and a force that can be engaged in a coalition in the context of a high-intensity and symmetric confrontation.[33] This force would have the size of a division

(15,000 personnel), that is 1000 combat vehicles and 80 aircraft. It could be reinforced by other allied brigades. France thus seeks to preserve its global level of ambition through an increasingly threat-informed capabilities-based planning.

Israel

Israel's Defense Forces (IDF) doctrine states that the force building process is conducted through a "concrete scenario of fighting a sub-state enemy."[34] Israel's strategic planning was born out of having limited resources in an environment characterized by uncertain and rapid changes. After having fought eight recognized wars, two intifadas, and multiple other low-intensity conflicts, Israel has created what is described as a hybrid military strategy combining offensive and defensive elements.

There have been a few shifts in Israel's hybrid military strategy.[35] The first shift is increasing the emphasis on civil defence and precision attacks rather than deterrence. The second is a shift from protecting territorial integrity to emphasizing border defence, which used to be considered a secondary military objective. The third is a larger focus being placed on the "Campaign Between Wars" rather than decisive military operations. This ongoing campaign decreases the ability of potential adversaries to inflict harm in the inevitable "next round of fighting," whilst not trying to reach a "specific political end goal" in all-out confrontations. Here, we see things like covert operations, aerial attacks, and a much greater focus placed on the cyber field (i.e. the implementation of a Cyber Defence Division). The fourth shift is the focus being placed more on counterterrorism than eliminating terrorism, which also sees a greater focus on "generating intelligence in order to restore their early warning abilities" and an expansion of combat role definitions to include cyber warfare, ballistic missile defence and search and rescue operations.

Israel's threat-based planning is strictly regional.[36] A major threat that is getting increased attention is Iran and its nuclear capability. Over the years, Israel's missile-defense system has developed in response to the Iranian threat of long-range missiles.[37] Israel has also acquired offensive capabilities in the face of the Iran threat that will allow for better "second strike capabilities" (i.e. F-35 stealth warplanes and German-made submarines). Other offensive actions taken by Israel include covert operations like cyberwarfare, damaging supply chains, and assassinations.

The new IDF plan, "Momentum" or "Tenufa," seeks victories before enemies can retaliate by investing in increasing the collection of mid-sized drones, precision guided missiles, and additional defences batteries.[38] Chief of Staff Avi Kohavi is also meant to create a task force, which will see the collaboration of Military Intelligence, the IAF, and three regional commands, as well as the expansion of technology (i.e. AI and big data) to identify targets for military strikes. This focus on AI has also been seen with Israel's turn to counterinsurgency as a measure of developing better prediction abilities in the realm of terrorist threats.[39] On the defensive side, the plan sees an investment in air defence systems to continue protecting key infrastructure and civic centres from missiles.

Italy

Italy does not clearly identify specific threats to the country's security. Rather, Italy refers to the uncertainty, instability and unpredictability of the international environment.[40] These undefined threats are accompanied by a broad definition of the future challenges for Italian defence, such as the emergence of a multipolar order and great-power competition, asymmetric and hybrid threats, and cyber and space security.[41] Consistent with a CBP, the broadly defined core tasks of the Italian Armed Forces are to simultaneously contribute to the defence of the Italian state, collective defence through NATO and

the European Union, and participate in stability and international peace operations.[42]

Italy's defence objective is to develop a synergetic capability to prevent and manage situations of international instability and uncertainty. It plans for a full range of capabilities that can operate effectively in all stages of a conflict while remaining flexible enough to adapt to changing needs over time. However, this flexibility does not necessarily require the development of the full range of capabilities, but rather a combination of what can be generated and sustained.[43] In this context, Italy has developed the concept of "expressed capability" to explicit its CBP: when preparing for the future, the system places emphasis not so much on the centrality of specific weapons systems or levels of forces necessary to counter a defined threat, but rather on the tasks that the armed forces have to perform and the skills that they require to be able to carry out their tasks.

Specifically, Italy plans to develop capabilities in all areas while bridging the gaps by conforming to NATO's *Defence Planning Capability Review*.[44] The Italian Ministry of Defence believes that future military operations will be multi-domain operations, specifically in an urban environment, and therefore wants to develop multi-domain units.[45] Furthermore, Italy wants to focus on inter-force integration through Integrated Command and Control, Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, and the strengthening of cyber capabilities.[46]

The Italian Air Force general concept for transformation is to be light, agile, flexible, interoperable, projectable and advanced technologically. Italy needs an Air Force that knows how to combine the performance of traditional tasks, such as the defence of national airspace, with defence against new threats, and to meet the new expectations and security needs of the country that "derive from the general context of international relations and alliances in which it is inserted."[47] The main objective of the Italian Air Force is to develop capabilities on Information Superiority and Strategic Awareness. For the Navy, the objective is to develop the ability to project a specific military capability abroad, "fundamental for the activity of the fleet whose commitments are today distributed in a very wide area, recognized and identified as the Enlarged Mediterranean, today, even more than in the past, a geopolitical and geostrategic continuum as well as geoeconomic with the Black Sea, Indian Ocean, Arabian-Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Guinea."[48]

Finally, due to limited resources, Italy feels a need to identify a geopolitical area of interest that will allow optimization of its force posture. Italy seeks to concentrate its capacities in the Mediterranean area, which represents a region of vital national interest.[49] However, Italy faces some resistance from France, which has a different strategy in the region, and there is a lack of consensus in NATO on the importance of the southern flank.[50]

Norway

CBP remains Norway's dominant approach to defence planning due to the uncertainty of the security environment and the variety of future threats.[51] However, Russia is increasingly viewed as the primary threat, resulting in Norway placing a focus on defending the High North. Norway adopted a capabilities-based approach to establish its most recent long-term defence planning in 2020. *The Defence of Norway – Capability and Readiness* is an update from the 2016 long-term defence plan and has been developed to guide force development for the next four years. The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) role is based on nine general tasks, including to: ensure credible deterrence of NATO's collective defence, defend Norway and allies against aggression in an allied framework, ensure national situational awareness through surveillance and intelligence, and participate in multinational crisis management, including peace operations.[52] The deterrence, reassurance and crisis management missions must be met across the full spectrum of conflicts.

There are noteworthy changes in threat assessments between the 2016 and 2020 defence strategies. Both documents note a global power shift towards Asia, the modernisation of Russian military capabilities, growing nationalist movements, and new military technologies as major threats. However, great-power competition is now considered much more serious, with an increasing "risk of state-to-state conflict."[53] Chinese ambitions have created new challenges for Norway, especially in the High North.[54] Russia is again considered a threat to European security and the Arctic, as well as to the USA. Nationalist movements in Europe and in the United States are expected to generate additional pressures on the international system. New technologies are becoming simultaneously a source of conflict and a strategic advantage. Lastly, hybrid warfare and climate change are formally identified as threats that could potentially disrupt Norwegian military and society. Moreover, the 2020 defence plan ignores previous concerns from other regions (the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel), which suggests that peace operations are no longer a top priority for the NAF.

The defence plan emphasizes the necessity to maintain robust and adaptable NAF to address current and future challenges. It also highlights Norway's plan to reduce the gaps in NATO's capability targets and operational plans, notably in terms of electronic warfare, joint targeting procedures, and synchronized information operations.[55] Planned acquisitions include long and mid-range A2AD, command and control information systems for the land domain, air surveillance radars, naval mine countermeasures system, upgrading the Nansen-class frigates, as well as a new main battle tank capacity. Thereafter, the procurement of new F-35 fighter aircraft, submarines and maritime patrol aircraft have priority.[56]

The Norwegian long-term defence planning is regionally focused. Norway considers itself responsible for NATO's northern flank.[57] The growing interest in the High North for the great-power competition context has significant implications for Norwegian security. Since the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Norway has increasingly called out Russia as a provoking military threat and expressed concerns with its growing conventional and nuclear military capabilities and their modernization.[58] The Ukrainian crisis has notably led Norway to increase its rapid response capacity in the High North.[59] The NAF and key NATO allies are currently considering different strategic options to strengthen collective deterrence in Norway.[60]

Sweden

Sweden's current defence policy is based on the concept of Total Defence. Total Defence was the defence posture during the Cold War, when Sweden was one of the more militarized European states, due to the threat of aggression arising from its proximity to the USSR.[61] Following the annexation of Crimea and escalating cyber interference and spying from the Russia Federation, Sweden began to reinvigorate the concept of Total Defence.

The driver of Sweden's strategic planning is threat, primarily regional threat from the Russian Federation. The key elements of the Swedish vision for defence are deterrence, availability, co-operation, and credibility. According to their strategic vision, the Swedish Armed Forces assess both threats and capabilities, but start with global developments in line with governmental policy decisions. The model relies on making attacks on Sweden costly to adversaries.[62]

Sweden's latest Strategic Outlook emphasizes threat scenarios such as grey zone, non-linear or hybrid warfare situations and armed land and sea attacks on Swedish territory. These scenarios often involve cyberattacks, psychological operations, as well as electromagnetic radiation attacks on defence capabilities.[63]

Sweden reintroduced conscription in 2017, after a mere seven years of professionalized defence forces. The decision to bring back conscription in 2017 as a response to Russian drills in the Baltics, came after an evaluation that determined that voluntary service alone was not meeting Swedish needs.[64] Due to escalating tensions in the Baltics and the annexation of Crimea, Sweden felt it was necessary to continue a posture of loosened neutrality and to re-evaluate the investment in the defence and the capabilities of the Swedish Armed Forces. Since 2015, there has been a focus on closer cooperation with Finland as a strategic priority, as well as increased cooperation with the EU, NATO, and all Nordic partners as part of a regional threat-based approach.[65]

The Total Defence 2021-2025 bill substantially increased defence spending to re-establish five regiments and one air wing, and invested in mechanised and motorised brigade, an additional amphibious battalion, reinforcements of cyber defence, ammunition, and foreign intelligence capabilities, as well as new submarines, surface combat vessels, along with additional missiles and electronic warfare capabilities.[66] The size of the Swedish Armed Forces is planned to increase from 60,000 in 2020 to 90,000 in 2025. Cyber capabilities are of particular importance for Sweden, as the government believes Russian embassies have spies embedded within them, and cyber-attacks in 2016 were attributed to Russia.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is currently undertaking "the most radical reassessment of [its] place in the world since the end of the Cold War."[67] With ambitious objectives and a large budget increase, the UK is looking to reaffirm itself as a great power, with the power projection capabilities such a claim entails.[68] While the House of Commons Defence Committee recognized the argument for a TBP, it stated that "threat-based assessments used in isolation were insufficient to predict seismic systemic change (e.g. the collapse of the Soviet Union)."[69] It concludes that the UK should maintain a CBP by first establishing the nation's priorities, then assessing the threats and risks to achieving them, and then determining the capabilities needed.

Consistent with a CBP, the 2018 National Security Capability Review judged the international security environment to be "more complex, intertwined and dangerous as the world has become more uncertain and volatile."[70] It identified six challenges to British security interests: terrorism, state-based threats, the erosion of the rules-based international order, cyber threats and wider technological developments, organized crime, as well as diseases and natural hazards. Among those, great-power competition has risen in importance. The commander of the new UK Space Command recently justified acquiring new strike capabilities with the threat posed by China and Russia.[71]

The U.K. Armed Forces are expected to maintain full-spectrum capabilities. In the context of the Government's new vision for post-Brexit, Global Britain, the very meaning of what "full spectrum" means will expand to encompass more capabilities, both in geographical and force domains terms.[72] According to the Ministry of Defence's Permanent Secretary, "We are mainly Euro-Atlantic, but clearly we will do more in the Asian Pacific."[73] The growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region is exemplified by a new basing strategy, defence agreements with Japan and India, and the deployment of the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth in the region.

The Ministry of Defence released an Integrated Operating Concept, a new approach aimed at integrating all domains of the U.K.'s armed forces, all branches of the State, and all actions undertaken by the U.K. and its allies. The main objective is to deter possible adversaries, but the importance given to below-the-threshold capabilities and to societal resilience expands the scope of deterrence. This entails

a new force posture, one which is more assertive, dynamic, and forward deployed. An important part of this document remains the modernisation of the armed forces from industrial-age platforms to an information age of systems.[74] In practice, this has led to investments in the space and cyber domains, including the creation of a Space Command, as well as in enabling technologies such as AI.

The Royal Navy is working towards building a "balanced fleet" through its purchase of eight Type 26 and five Type 31 frigates, and two new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers.[75] The U.K. is also committed to the Type 32 next-generation frigate, and seven nuclear submarines are also in development. For the Royal Air Force, the U.K. has focused on the acquisition of F-35 fighter jets, but it may halve its target of 138 and focus on the development of a sixth-generation fighter which would have high speed radar and artificial intelligence technologies.[76] Despite a significant planned increase of the U.K.'s defence budget, the MoD is expected to cut the Army's capabilities.[77]

Considerations for Canada

Canada's Five Eyes allies are revamping their defence policy to address the threat of a high-intensity war between great powers. The CBP approach that was adopted following the end of the Cold War remains the dominant force planning method, but it is increasingly threat-informed. This trend is visible among and beyond NATO allies, with variations between global levels of ambition (France, the U.K.) and regionally-focused force planning (Australia, Israel, Italy, Norway, Sweden). Variations exist within the latter, with some assessing immediate state-based threats from Russia (Norway, Sweden), China (Australia) or Iran (Israel), while Italy's defence planning is the least concerned by specific threats.

Drawing upon this broad overview, we recommend that Canada's capabilities-based force planning integrate a wide array of threat-informed scenarios, including pan-domain and hybrid aggressions in the Indo-Pacific, Northern and Eastern Europe, as well as the Middle East. This inclination towards an increasingly hybrid force planning should be undertaken in close coordination with the Five Eyes and NATO allies. Canada's limited resources compel it to seek participation in allied operations in the case of armed conflict in these regions. As such, highly valuable niche capabilities integrated in an alliance-wide framework should be considered.

With regards to Canada's immediate periphery, i.e. the Arctic, Canada should consider following Australia's paths towards greater self-reliance, deterrence and resilience capabilities. The United States' three-theater grand strategy with a one-war force planning suggests that Canada should give priority to defending Canada's immediate periphery, evidently in close collaboration with the United States. Here again, a wide array of threat-informed scenarios should be examined in this regard, including high-intensity pan-domain state-based aggressions, hybrid attacks, and low-intensity support to civilian authorities.

Finally, Canada should be cognizant of the fact that maintaining all-domain, multi-purpose capabilities can be prohibitively costly and hard to sell to a domestic audience in the absence of clear and present threats to national security. As such, we recommend that efforts be spent at prioritizing regions of focus and at coordinating force planning with key allies.

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