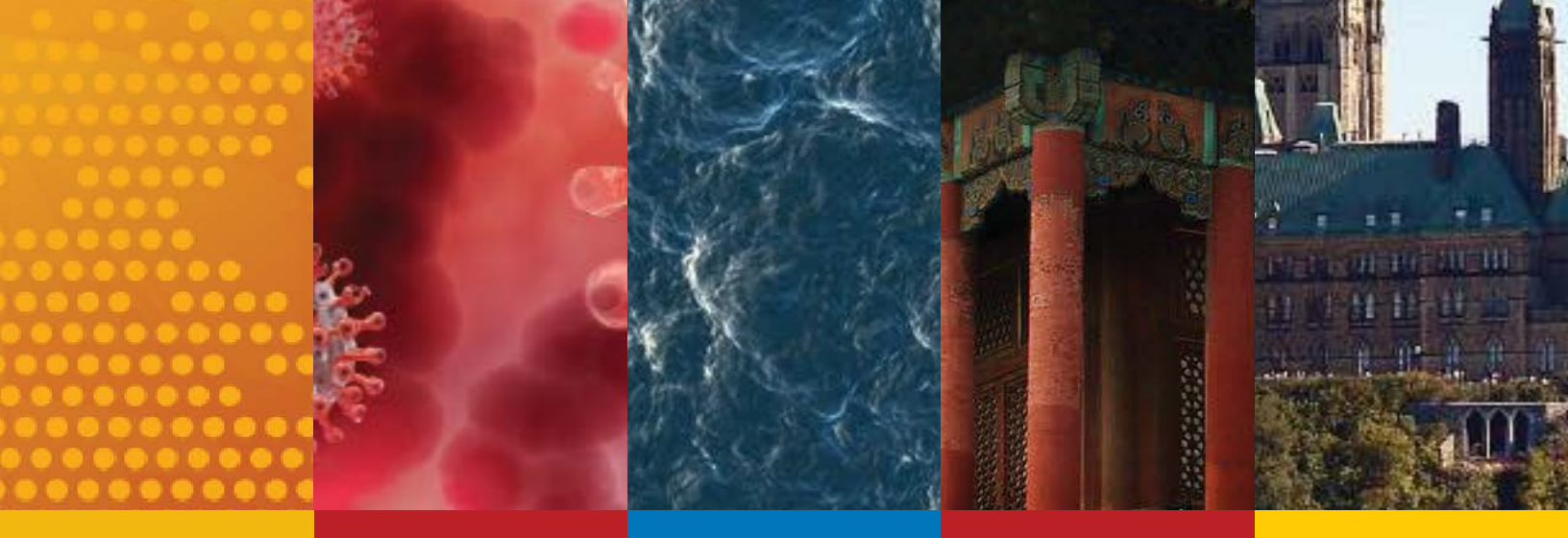


# What's next?

International Cooperation and the Management  
of Traditional and Emerging Threats

**COMPENDIUM FROM THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
OF THE NETWORK FOR STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**





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# INTRODUCTION

The theme of the second annual Network for Strategic Analysis (NSA) conference, held December 9-10, 2021, focused on transitions in international policy. At the outset, several countries have begun a post-pandemic transition, opting to ease public health restrictions. Throughout the year, our experts have noted the significant impact of COVID-19 on many security and defence activities, such as the operations of the Canadian Armed Forces in Canada and abroad.

Conversely, 2021 has also seen more pronounced and disturbing trends in great power competition and a weakening of democracy worldwide. It is clear that Canada must deal with an increasingly complex security environment. As noted in this compendium by Kerry Buck, Canada's former ambassador to NATO, this environment has several challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic: "First, most countries have turned inward; second, democracy and social cohesion in many countries have been undermined; and third, the world order is becoming more unpredictable, with shifting power dynamics among key players and new sources of instability."

Taking these major players into account, the increased competition between great powers narrows Canada's room for manoeuvre as a middle power. By the end of 2021, Russia's military presence near Ukraine's borders was a concern. A few months later, China expressed its "unlimited" friendship for Russia, clearing the way for its February 24, 2022 aggression. The signs of this security downturn were visible at the conference, and last-minute diplomatic efforts, whether by President Biden or President Macron, bore little fruit thereafter.

Zachary Paikin's article notes that these events place even greater constraints on Canada: "The narrowing of policy options now limits Canada's ability to pursue its national interests, even as the international landscape has shifted from a gradual transition from order to outright instability and insecurity in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine." Yet, Canada's posture toward Ukraine is surely one of the few issues where foreign and defense policy had genuine strategic coherence. If, for years, we could



**Stéfanie von Hlatky**



**Justin Massie**

question the effectiveness of a mission focused on military training in Ukraine, there is no longer any doubt as to the validity of this mission.

Similarly, Canada's strategic alignment with NATO, and retreat from the UN, may have been the right move. However, the one area where Canada is still uncertain about its strategic direction is in the Indo-Pacific region. Although a Canadian strategy for the region is being developed, tough choices will need to be made given that Canada is not a power with global reach, despite the rhetoric that sometimes comes from Ottawa. Srdjan Vucetic furthers this point by stating that Canada's commitments are difficult to reconcile with its means: "Indeed, the alliance burden-sharing promises Canada makes to keep the Indo-Pacific 'free and open' by definition affect similar promises made in other contexts - from NORAD modernization to NATO's next Strategic Concept and the Climate Change Action Plan."

At the very least, Canada must clarify its strategic orientations and make choices that are better aligned with the diplomatic, economic and military capabilities at its disposal. It is now necessary for Canada to identify who the main threats are, as its allies have done. Russia has removed any ambiguity about its status, but what about China? Identifying a threat contributes to greater strategic clarity. Beyond the threat posed by Russia, one of the first steps is to recognize, both at the governmental level and in the public sphere, that Canada is attacked below the threshold of war on a daily basis, whether in cyberspace or outer space. Indeed, the Canadian government can be counted on to provide clear direction in times of war but is unprepared for a crisis in the grey zone and the information domain. It must, therefore, improve its capacity for anticipation by clearly articulating its interests and priorities prior to crises.

Now that a defence policy review has been announced, the NSA will advocate for this process to open the door to real debate and reflection on Canada's strategic direction, accompanied by public engagement, which should be heightened in the context of the war in Ukraine. The goal is to break down the walls within government between the political level and the public service, between political parties, and between government and academics, experts and the general public - a goal that is central to the NSA's mandate.

An updated defence policy is also an exercise in public diplomacy, both internationally and domestic, signaling which foreign policy issues and objectives are important to Canada. As such, it is necessary to select issues Canada has a particular interest and comparative advantage in, to arrive at a coherent government-wide approach to Canada's international engagement. There is a need to move away from a performative approach to international policy, as Canada has successfully done with the crisis in Ukraine. But in other regions, Canada's engagement does not have such credibility. For example, if Canada decides to renew its engagement on the African continent, or in the Middle East, it must offer more targeted contributions by better understanding the diversity of local contexts.

It is also important to note that Canada is not immune to security threats on its own territory. On the contrary, it is increasingly the target of cyberattacks, requiring the mobilization of resources to protect critical infrastructure. Moreover, it is imperative to develop a new cybersecurity strategy, along with a reflection on the future of NORAD as part of an innovative vision to redefine continental defence. The investments are visible, and they were enhanced in the 2022 federal budget announcement, but they remain insufficient and are not supported by a coherent and clearly articulated strategic vision. Émile Lambert-Deslandes' paper develops a range of questions to inform these reflections, including "what the relationship with the United States should be, whether [Canada] is prepared to invest in becoming a

productive member of its alliances, and whether its values should be used as objectives of its international policy.” Answering these types of questions is a significant challenge to which the NSA can contribute, as it prepares for its third annual symposium on September 22, 2022.



# THE POST COVID WORLD (DIS)ORDER:

A Playbook for Canada's  
International Engagement  
for the Year Ahead

This is the first time in just under two years I have been in a room, face-to-face with a group of people. For most of those two years, we have all been living a surreal, disconnected existence, trying to protect ourselves and our families from an existential threat to our health. Many of us have lost people to the disease. Many have lost jobs. The public service worked 24/7 for months on end to try to protect Canadians from the health, economic and social impacts of the virus. And while we are not yet completely out of the most serious pandemic seen in a century, we are slowly returning to a new normal. So, I would like to reflect on what that new normal might be for the world and propose a prescription for Canada's international engagement over the next few years.

I joined Canada's Department of External Affairs in 1991. At the risk of sounding like the "aged voice of wisdom"/ "*la voix âgée de la sagesse*," my work as a Canadian diplomat touched on most of the events international relations scholars cite as having fundamentally reordered post-war global politics – periods like the breakup of the former Soviet Union, the 9/11 attacks, the Arab spring or the 2008 financial crisis. I like to say I am the Forrest Gump of the Canadian foreign service – having been witness to and worked on Canada's response to most of these transformative events.

The question I have been reflecting on is how the pandemic will change our world – are we again witness to a 'hinge in history', where the fundamental building blocks of international relations will change in a dramatically short period of time? And the more difficult question I have been pondering is how Canada fits into this new world; how might this change Canada's international engagement, and whether Canada has the tools, policies and people we need to continue to protect and promote Canadian interests internationally.

Turning to the first big question then: what does Covid mean for the world order? Academics tend to gravitate between one of two poles – for some, the pandemic is a crisis that will reshuffle the decks, producing a fundamental re-ordering of the global system, while for others the basic principles of the international order will remain much the same. From my perspective, while COVID has laid bare and accelerated some trends, the major building blocks of the international order are still intact. I see three broad trends during



Kerry Buck

the pandemic: first, most countries have turned inward; second, in many countries democracy and social cohesion have been shaken and, third, the world order is becoming more unpredictable, with shifting power dynamics among the major players and new sources of instability. So while the global order hasn't been upended, we are living through an unpredictable period of flux and strategic surprise. And my view is that Canada is not as prepared as it should be to continue to influence and lead in this 'New normal' of the post-COVID world.

Let me turn to the question of countries turning inward. In the immediate aftermath of each of the earlier big, transformative events I mentioned, there was quick and deep international cooperation, and this was largely channelled through multilateral organizations. For example, after the fall of the Former Soviet Union, there was tight coordination amongst western states on things like foreign policy positioning, on the recognition of new states and democracy support and on cooperation with Russia. A lot of this coordination was bilateral but it more was channelled through the EU, NATO, and the G7. A second example – as the risks of the 2008 economic crisis became apparent, coordination among G20 nations helped fend off collapse of the international financial system and ensured governments did not only fortify their own economies, but also worked together on solutions. And, in the aftermath of 9/11, there was a quick action at NATO to invoke collective defence and send aerial surveillance in support of the U.S. In the years after 9/11 in response to the rise of organized terrorist groups, there was tight coordination through NATO, the UN, regional counterterrorism initiatives, and ad hoc cross-regional groups, like the counter-Daesh coalition. Canada benefits when crises are multilateralized, since it gives us a seat at the table, and in structured bodies like NATO, a voice and a veto.

So, what happened on COVID? Given responses to previous events, I would have expected two related things to have happened inside Canada – and in most countries: first, a realization that this threat was global and, second, then making the logical connection that solutions need to be global. But COVID was very different. For Canada, procurement of vaccines had to be global since we shut down our own domestic capacity decades ago – but our immediate reaction was not to take a global approach to the rest. We focused on vaccinating our own people first and making our own unilateral decisions on borders. The politics of this are self-evident. What leader would or could do otherwise? And our government did this brilliantly: delivering more doses than Canadians needed, ahead of schedule and ahead of most of the rest of the world. But stopping the virus in other countries is also in our self-interest: variants of the virus develop in populations where the disease is allowed to run rampant. These variants then come back and pose an immediate and direct threat to Canadians. So, sustainable solutions ultimately have to be global. However, it was not until relatively late in the pandemic that Canada's focus started to shift to multilateral channels to coordinate international sharing of doses and countering vaccine hesitancy. Other donor countries largely followed the same trajectory as Canada.

What does this mean for the global world order? Does the fact that countries turned almost entirely inward, at least for the first year of the pandemic, mean cooperation and multilateralism are no longer the default? The fact that countries turned inward in their immediate response to COVID is, I think, due to three factors: first, COVID posed an existential threat to entire populations, requiring governments to focus on their own populations, fast. This is unlike the previous big, transformative events I mentioned like 9/11 or the 2008 financial crisis, where the threat was real but more diffused. COVID also hit different countries at different times, so the international momentum created with an external, discrete, catastrophic event was slower to form. This differs from earlier Ebola outbreaks or 9/11, for example, where there was quick international consensus on the gravity of the threat. The third reason countries

were slow in turning to multilateral channels was the inability of the WHO to cope with the speed and scale of COVID. Although, post-Ebola, the WHO had improved its capacity as a first responder to global health emergencies, it was overwhelmed. And practical coordination and cooperative diplomacy at the WHO were slowed in the early days by other geopolitical factors, including the China-U.S. dynamic.

International relations scholars have been talking for a few years about the fraying of the international liberal rules-based order, and the slow death of multilateralism. So, is what we are seeing with COVID yet another nail in the coffin of the post-war International architecture? I think we're not ready to write an obituary for multilateralism yet.

On COVID, countries are starting to slowly shift their focus to international cooperation and globalized solutions, through initiatives like the COVID Treaty at the WHO, agreements at the G7 to share more doses internationally or to tackle supply chains. Perhaps the fact that waves of COVID variants are lasting longer than any of us would want or expect, will reinvigorate the idea that only global solutions, shared across countries and channelled through multilateral bodies will dig the world out of the pandemic?

I think that will be the case. What we are seeing on Covid is just another example of a trend in multilateralism that has been underway for quite some time. And this is a shift where states will increasingly, and pragmatically, “forum shop” for the right time, the right international organization and the right negotiating bloc within those institutions to protect their interests, promote their values or find solutions. I call this “messy multilateralism,” with states able to choose *à la carte* among multilateral or plurilateral groups. Negotiating blocs that might once have been fixed have become much more fluid. States increasingly work across regions in interest-based coalitions and the divide between ‘the West and the rest’ is much less clear or distinct than it was even 20 years ago. And while in international negotiations it has become more difficult than it was in the 1990s or early 2000s to secure consensus on some key elements of the “liberal international order” – human rights for instance, or larger scale peace support missions – there is still room for progress. For example, at the last NATO Summit, all allies agreed that climate security should be a focus – in my experience, this consensus would have been unachievable even 5 years ago.

While all of these developments make multilateralism more complicated, it does not necessarily make it less effective. The fact is that most states still seek out cooperative solutions. Very few states choose to completely act alone – the disincentive or the cost of unilateralism is still too high for most. This is the case, even for superpowers. President Biden is paying a reputational price at home and abroad for the U.S. unilateral timeline on withdrawal from Afghanistan, and President Trump before him damaged U.S. credibility by his unilateral approach to a flawed Afghan peace process. When states do choose to act unilaterally, as Russia did in 2014 when it invaded Ukraine, multilateral channels and norms are then used to call them to account and to apply pressure to alter behaviour.

For states like Canada, the continuing incentive of multilateralism is that it amplifies our influence. The more we turn inward, the more Canada will be forced to follow others' lead. For these reasons, the majority of countries, including Canada, still consistently look to multilateral bodies for solutions. My main point is that States *aren't* walking away from multilateralism, rather they are participating in it differently. It's just an untidier version – with many more states, many more stakeholders and many more complex issues – than in the earlier years when international organizations were first being set up. In this new, post-COVID, normal of messy multilateralism, states like Canada need to be able to do a



few things well:

- They have to clearly articulate their interests, so as to make strategic choices about what international fora and what partnerships to leverage; I note that the last integrated Canadian international policy review was in 2005, 17 years ago.
- They also have to diversify their range of partnerships to be able to count on a wider set of friends, across regional divides. While Canada has a unique asset in its cross-regional network of partner states, it does less well in identifying priority relationships based on our interests and does not systematically maintain them – South Korea or Mexico are two examples. There are others.
- States also have to be invested and continuously engaged in priority international organizations to create apertures and relationships so they can protect their interests when the next crisis hits. This requires growing and retaining the professional diplomatic corps, with multilateral knowledge and networks and deploying them strategically to organizations like the UN or NATO. Canada does not do this well.
- A broader point about the importance of knowledge and networks. In a world of flux and strategic surprise, for Canada to be better able to anticipate and respond, we have to do a better job at diplomacy. Professional diplomats understand issues, countries and regions in-depth and this allows them to identify early on opportunities for Canada to influence and lead. They then use their international relationships built over time to turn these opportunities into action on the ground, whether it is bolstering peace, creating new markets or development. Too many key jobs at Global Affairs are filled with temporary staff, and promotion and retention don't sufficiently value diplomats' international knowledge or their international networks.
- I would recommend not only a reassessment of our international policy priorities but thinking about how we do foreign policy better on the ground. We need a top-to-bottom functional review of Global Affairs, by those who have the background in international affairs to assess whether we are building the skills, the people and the international presence we need to position Canada to flourish in a world where we could quickly lose relevance, influence and an ability to foresee and prepare for international transformative events.

Let me turn to the second effect of COVID I mentioned in my introduction – that of increasing polarization and political destabilization. The Economist this month cited a study of 133 countries that experienced pandemics or public health crises between 2001 and 2018. It found that political unrest is a fairly typical consequence of a pandemic, and that unrest usually peaks two years after. In fact, over millennia plagues and pandemics have consistently led to serious political upheavals. In ancient Athens, Thucydides' described the ways the plague shattered social norms: "Men, not knowing what was to come of them... just did what they pleased, coolly venturing on what they had formerly done only in a corner." In that case, the plague caused not only a rise of recklessness and a lack of societal restraint, but the decline of empire. Think about this when trying to figure out what might be happening with anti-vaccine mobs in Canada or political unrest south of the border.

As with my point about countries turning inward, the trend of countries diverging from democracy was already well underway before the pandemic. Freedom House's annual index shows democracy has declined for the fifteenth year in a row, and nearly 75% of the world's population lives in a country that faced deterioration this past year. So, while during the Cold War there might have been a shared belief that the Soviet Union and China would eventually succumb to the forces of liberalization and democracy, democracy is no longer seen as the default. Instead, we are seeing rising autocratic tendencies, including among close allies of Canada. We are also seeing increasing polarization within countries, often as a

result of disinformation campaigns designed to create societal divisions, some launched from abroad. I also expect that we will see more and more countries putting forward competing visions of non-liberal democracy: a campaign from Chinese sources started to appear in the last couple of weeks that makes the case for China's "more efficient" version of democracy, in contrast to the U.S. I think the conclusion to be drawn is the new normal is one where democracy is more vulnerable. And one where competition and conflict over democratic norms increasingly occur in information spaces, marked by digital tribalism and widening polarization.

In this new normal for democracy, what do states like Canada need to do to be successful in shoring up democracy? Canada has considerable assets when it comes to stable, functioning democracy. As one example, just think of the debates about vote counting during the last American presidential election and give thanks to Elections Canada. But when it comes to shoring up democracy abroad, we have been less deliberate. So, my prescription for Canada is the following:

- In our diplomacy and security and development programming, we need to take a deliberate, coordinated whole-of-Canada's approach to support for good governance abroad. Engage provinces, municipalities, media and parliament; Focus on the things Canada is relatively good at, like building the institutions essential to democracy.
- In doing so, prioritize vulnerabilities, like building credible, independent media, election oversight, or countering corruption.
- Learn from others, like the Baltics or Taiwan, about how to educate populations, including our own, to recognize disinformation and counter it using digital tools; build our own regulatory and promotional tools to protect the internet while blunting the societal divisions it creates.

Finally, I'll end on my third point, by looking at which countries are leading and which are falling behind, what instability and new threats this introduces and whether Canada is prepared. On international power dynamics, for some time now, China and Russia, in different ways, have been acting in ways that are less predictable and markedly more dangerous than in the past. Beginning in 2008, Russia reinvested in its military and started crossing European borders with armed force, beginning in Georgia in 2008 and continuing in Ukraine in 2014. It also started engaging in grey zone tactics; activities like election interference, disinformation, or propping up autocrats in its immediate neighbourhoods. And now it is testing again, massing troops on Ukraine's border. China under President Xi Jin Ping has also become more muscular, more visible and more bellicose on international economic, military and diplomatic fronts, but with a global reach and an economic base that far exceed Russia's capacities. At the same time, the U.S. has been relatively weakened – first by President Trump's rejection of alliances and embrace of dictators, but also by its relatively poor performance on Covid. Trust in competence and good governance are in some respects a basis for power at the international level, and the U.S. had been falling behind on both. It remains to be seen whether this is a trend or an aberration that will right itself. And as the major players are jockeying for position, a complicated backdrop has been building for decades, with a larger number of states from the South engaging in their own right on global issues. Unlike earlier decades, no one country or small group of countries has sufficient dominance to set the rules largely on their own and in their own image. In other words, while the power dynamics might be shifting, this is not your grandfather's Cold War. It's a world filled with many more players, some acting unpredictably and much more dangerously, and where Canada's closest neighbour might end up carrying less weight internationally.

My prescription for Canada in relation to these shifting geopolitical power dynamics and new security

threats is threefold:

- First, we need to take a hard look at Canada's specific security vulnerabilities, prioritize and invest. This would mean investing in the assets needed to protect our sovereignty in an Arctic that will be made more accessible by climate change, and at the same time, working with allies and rivals to keep warming below 1.5 degrees and to keep the Arctic a conflict-free zone. It would mean dusting off our expertise and credentials in non-proliferation and arms control to reinvigorate weakening international norms in the face of new technologies. It would mean bolstering our intelligence capacities and our cyber resilience. It would mean working inside Canada and with other countries to build societal resilience to political instability and polarization.
- To do this, we need to increase security literacy across the federal government, the provinces and the private sector. I would recommend regular integrated threat and risk assessments that look across security, social, environmental, and economic sectors. If national security threats can emerge from non-traditional areas like climate change, pandemics, or mass migration then our intelligence analysis needs to be able to predict longer-term trends, and our national security architecture needs to be flexible enough to bring in players across all sectors and all levels of government beyond the core national security actors. Here, as with our international policy, I note that Canada has not had a national security policy review since 2006.
- Finally, Canada's response to security threats has to be complemented by our international engagement policies and posture, and vice versa. There is no single security threat at home that doesn't have global roots or global solutions. The more we turn inward, the more Canada will be forced to follow others' lead internationally. And it would be a mistake to default to an American lead – that would not only make us a client state, but it would also be risky if U.S. leadership – or even its political stability – were to wane.

We've carved out our own space in the world before. In the period after World War II, we did the work to define our policy goals and make a distinct space for Canada in the international architecture being constructed at the time. Since then, we have managed to consistently lead and influence. Canada has significant assets but is not a major power. We have learned that an approach to international engagement of "walk softly and carry a big stick" does not work for us. Megaphone diplomacy – "walk loudly and carry a small stick" or take too long to deliver on commitments – has limited results and damages credibility. So while, in some instances, Canada's international strength has been in numbers, more often Canada has made its mark by leading with "Canadian" ideas and effective diplomacy, backed up by action: more than a few examples come to mind – Canadian leadership on the Ottawa Landmines Treaty, Human Security, Protection of Civilians, Women, Peace and Security, our deployments to Kandahar and the Haiti earthquake, our Maternal and Child Mortality initiative or our Battle Group in Latvia.

The two years we have spent locked inside our houses and inside our countries dealing with COVID now present us with a window of opportunity. Canada can maintain our long-standing position of influence and leadership. But we have to adapt to this new normal of a world in flux and be ready for strategic surprises. For this, we need to reinvest in our capabilities, people and networks.

# FROM THE ATLANTIC TO THE PACIFIC:

A new strategic posture for Canada

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau famously declared that Canada was “back” on the world stage. Yet more than six years into his premiership, the limits of Canada’s foreign policy have become apparent.

In addition to having only 58 UN peacekeepers deployed as of October 2021, a second consecutive failed bid for a Security Council seat has raised questions about the future of Canada’s multilateral influence. The country’s diplomatic corps has also suffered a decade of decline: only in 2021 did the number of employees at Global Affairs Canada finally return to 2010 levels. And contrary to some expectations, Canada-US relations have not become rosy after Donald Trump’s departure.

Reduced policy options now constrain Canada’s ability to pursue its national interests, even as the international landscape has shifted from a gradual transition of order to outright instability and insecurity in the wake of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. This calls for a more clearly delineated national strategic posture, commensurate with Canada’s limited resources. To the end, Canada should (1) reorient its contribution to NATO toward the defence of North America and (2) outline a vision for regional order in Asia centred on trade and inclusive diplomacy.

## Framing the challenge

While Canada should strive to maintain a diplomatic presence in every country, there are verily only three regions of strategic significance for Canada: Europe, North America (including the Arctic) and Asia.

In particular, the independence of Canadian foreign policy this century will be predicated on Ottawa’s ability to emerge as a term-setter in Asia, the world’s central geo-strategic theatre from which Canada’s population is increasingly drawn. Although the US-China competition currently looms large in the region, Asia’s natural balance of power is multipolar, creating space for many states to play a role in writing the rules of the game. This contrasts with the longstanding NATO-Russia binary struggle in Europe, which may



Zachary Paikin

now calcify into a fully fledged cold war following Vladimir Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine.

The emerging multipolar structure of global affairs enhances the salience of regionalism. This is even truer given the existence of nuclear weapons, which constrain the ability of great powers to exert military force against one another and therefore make regional powers more influential almost by default. Moreover, while a binary understanding of great power competition – pitting a US-led democratic world against an authoritarian Sino-Russian axis – may be appealing, Moscow and Beijing do not hold identical strategic doctrines or visions of international order. The war in Ukraine may ultimately push Russia and China closer together, but Beijing has thus far sought to balance its deepening strategic partnership with Moscow with a desire to preserve economic and technological links with the West.

These dynamics all favour the emergence of Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific security systems which operate according to distinct dynamics and principles. Simply put, there is no single “rules-based international order” for Canada to defend. Ottawa’s strategic imperatives will vary from region to region, just as Canada’s relations with Russia and China should be considered separately rather than lumped together. China is a rising power; Russia is not. Canada is home to a sizeable Chinese community but not a significant Russian community. And unlike the question of relations with China, Canada’s two largest political parties do not substantially differ when it comes to Russia, rendering any foreign election interference less potent.

Despite this, Ottawa appears unable to rank its international priorities or develop a cross-partisan consensus about its national interests. For instance, Canada retains a military presence in theatres of peripheral importance to Canadian security such as the Middle East. At the same time, a reduced global profile has encouraged Canada to retreat into a form of “North American isolationism”. An overwhelming proportion of Canadian foreign policy is now focused on three Ns: NAFTA, NORAD and NATO.

This lack of strategic clarity has left Canadian foreign policy on autopilot. Ties with China, India, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States, in one way or another, have all faced substantial challenges in recent years partly due to Ottawa’s reactive posture. Moreover, the “North Atlantic anchor” of Canadian foreign policy has left Ottawa poorly positioned to adapt to new imperatives. Historically, NATO provided Canada with an opportunity to constrain Anglo-American unilateralism, and thus enhance its national independence, by bringing several Western powers around a single table. Yet as global power has shifted to the Pacific, the transatlantic alliance has come to deepen Canada’s dependence on the US by locking it into the Euro-Atlantic dimension of Washington’s “dual containment” approach toward Moscow and Beijing.

Changes in the international security landscape call for an updated approach toward both Europe and Asia, tailored to the specific security dynamics of each region. Together, these should form the basis of a new national posture aimed at imbuing Canadian foreign policy with greater strategic coherence.

## Canada in Europe

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has shattered the illusion that Europe’s steadily eroding security order was somehow sustainable. Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Western and Russian officials have

talked entirely past each other, with the former citing principles and the latter reiterating grievances. Incompatible visions of regional order and declining mutual trust, with both sides proving unwilling or unable to resolve their differences at the negotiating table, could only last for so long before resulting in a military conflagration.

Viewed from Moscow, Russia was excluded from the core of Europe's post-Cold War political and security order centred on NATO and the EU, giving it little stake in upholding that order. As such, the question of Russia's place in Europe remains unresolved. Even if a sharp break in ties between Russia and the West forces Moscow to pivot even further toward Eurasia, the issue of Russia's relationship with Ukraine (and therefore with Europe) will remain pertinent for some time, overlapping as it does with persistent dilemmas regarding Moscow's security concerns, Russia's desire to be recognized as an equal great power, and the contested boundaries of the Russian national and spiritual community.

Canada retains an interest in a stable European security system. However, tying NATO's credibility to developments in a country for which it was not prepared to fight did not serve that end. And although they may have a punitive and signalling effect, sanctions against Russia have failed to change its behaviour where it perceives its core interests to be at stake. Even a palace coup in Moscow would likely replace Putin with another member of the existing security establishment, albeit one who values a more restrained approach toward Ukraine. Canada now finds itself facing a prolonged Russia-West confrontation in Europe, which risks distracting it from the need to shift its focus toward Asia.

While a degree of mutual restraint will undoubtedly be required to prevent the war in Ukraine from spiralling into a direct conflict between NATO and Russia, lifting sanctions may prove politically unpalatable as Russia's image is unlikely to be easily rehabilitated in the West. But perhaps perversely, worsening relations with Russia, the effects of climate change in the circumpolar region, and the strengthening of regionalism in world affairs may together provide Canada with an opportunity to retool its strategic posture. Specifically, once the dust has settled after the war in Ukraine and the confrontation between NATO and Russia (ideally) moves toward a semblance of an established pattern, Ottawa should articulate that its primary contribution to the transatlantic alliance will come through getting serious about the defence of North America.

Reducing the emphasis on NATO in the context of Ottawa's engagement toward Europe would align well with Canada's commitment to deepening its partnership with the European Union, emphasizing that European strategic autonomy is not incompatible with robust transatlantic relations. Moreover, substantially strengthening Ottawa's contribution to continental defence in North America would reassure Washington that a more independent Canadian foreign policy in Asia does not present a liability for American security. And while Operation REASSURANCE does little to alter the balance of power in Europe, Canada's potential to set the policy agenda in its own region – where there are fewer actors – is greater. If mounting Russia-West tensions ultimately permeate the Arctic, a Canada that is more serious about continental defence might over time prove able to devise confidence-building measures between Moscow and Washington, with a positive knock-on effect for Euro-Atlantic security.

## Canada in Asia

In Asia, the United States has adopted a posture aimed at preserving its own regional primacy rather

than merely limiting China's ability to project power. David Cohen, the current US ambassador to Canada, has called China an "existential threat". This unbalanced, military-centric approach contrasts with Beijing's application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), announced just one day after the formation of the AUKUS defence pact. It also differs from the EU's China strategy, which – despite the obstacles facing the ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment and concerns over Beijing's punitive trade measures against Lithuania – has mostly attempted to blend political "systemic rivalry" with economic engagement.

Canada's dependence on the United States has already grown substantially, both in economic and in geopolitical terms, since the end of the Cold War. A prolonged confrontation on two fronts risks deepening that dependence at a time when American populism and protectionism are mounting. This renders it imperative that the mistakes of regional order-building in Europe not be repeated in Asia. Ottawa should therefore make clear that its interest lies in the construction of a regional order in the Pacific centred on inclusive trade and diplomacy, rather than military confrontation.

Unlike Russia, China is a major economic power. In contrast with the security-centric character of NATO-Russia relations, economic competition will be a much more salient feature of interstate relations in Asia over the long term. Moreover, accessing the Arctic is more easily achieved from the Atlantic to avoid circumnavigating Alaska, which imposes constraints on Canada's ability to project naval power in Asia. These factors buttress the rationale for Canada to advance a vision of regional order in Asia that explicitly emphasizes economic competition (and cooperation) over security competition.

Some commentators have lamented Ottawa's exclusion from AUKUS or the Quad. But the success of Canadian foreign policy should not be based on whether Ottawa is invited to join US-led initiatives, which do not always reflect Canadian interests and to which Canada often has little of substance to contribute. Rather, one of the most valuable contributions that Ottawa can make to regional order in Asia would be to take seriously Beijing's application to join the CPTPP trade bloc. This offers Canada an opportunity, as the second-largest economy in the accord, to push China hard to pursue reforms that could – if successful – bring it more in line with the pact's established norms and standards.

Such a task may seem daunting and even unrealistic, especially given that China's GDP is greater than that of the CPTPP's existing eleven members combined. But Beijing becoming a party to the CPTPP might clear a path for Washington to return to the pact, either when political conditions in the US change or due to an American desire to prevent China from obtaining an economic edge. The result would be a common regional economic architecture in the Pacific, which would be favourable to a Canadian economy that is heavily trade dependent. It would make little sense for Canada to reject China's bid preemptively: the failure of trade negotiations aimed at bringing China into the fold would come at little cost to Canada, while Washington is accused of violating WTO rules more often than Beijing.

The competition for dominance of the Western Pacific is inherently short-term in its logic: flashpoints in places such as Taiwan may ignite before the end of this decade. In contrast with the US approach, Ottawa should make clear that, to build a regional order that can feed Canada's economic prosperity, it views the question of how to manage relations with China as a long-term issue. Of course, attempts to contribute to an inclusive order in partnership with all regional actors (including China) do not preclude the possibility of periodically criticizing Beijing on its human rights record, taking action to combat Chinese political interference and cyber-attacks, or erecting barriers in the realm of technology.

What matters is articulating a clear and largely consistent strategic approach, from which there can be occasional deviation on tactical issues relating to security and values.

China will soon become the world's largest economy. Enlisting its cooperation is essential to avoid the existential perils of climate change. Simply put, engagement with China is unavoidable. Pursuing a strategy based primarily on confronting China will only make it more difficult to cooperate in instances where our interests align. Collaborating with partners such as Japan and ASEAN to foster a more inclusive regional order will not immediately solve the economic and political challenges that China presents. But sustaining islands of cooperation can, over time, attenuate the security competition that is partly the source of Beijing's increasingly assertive behaviour.

Canada must develop a national strategic culture which reflects its own unique interests. The US is a superpower and therefore has an immediate incentive to preserve its hegemonic status in the face of a challenger. By contrast, Canada's primary interest in Asia lies not in the continuation of American primacy but rather in the survival of an open and rules-based trading order. These are not to be confused: the fact that US hegemony and rules-based cooperation have been synonymous in the past does not imply that they will always be so. The Trump administration made no secret of its contempt for international institutions, while Joe Biden has not resurrected his country's previous ambitions to construct a liberal international order of global scope, choosing instead to place more emphasis on the revitalization of US-led alliances in a nascent great power competition.

## Conclusion

Given its geographic isolation from much of the world, one could contend that Canada's core interests are limited to continental defence and economic prosperity. But the latter depends not only on Canada's trading relationship with the US, but also on its ability to secure its long-term interests in a region that is fast becoming the centre of the global economy. Moreover, deeper strategic alignment with Washington will not resolve the question of how to manage relations with Moscow and Beijing – it will simply reduce Canada's ability to address these challenges on its own terms.

Strategy is about making choices. This is even more so the case when faced with limited resources. If being an independent and influential foreign policy actor remains an important component of Canada's national identity, then it needs to articulate a clear strategic posture based on defined interests rather than merely reacting to threats. To that end, Ottawa should retool its approach to European security issues, invest more substantially in continental defence, and develop a long-term plan to become a veritable Pacific nation.

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# CHINA'S HEGEMONY

and Canada's  
Indo-Pacific Strategy

While all eyes are turning to Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin's next move in the East, a number of Canadian foreign policy officials are looking at the opposite side of the world as they are getting ready to release Canada's new Indo-Pacific strategy. The document has been in the making since at least April 2019, with input from a whole range of experts and stakeholders. The vast region we now call the Indo-Pacific is central not only for world trade but also for "strategic competition" as well as for international cooperation on the planet's ecological catastrophe. The purpose of this brief is to add some context, theoretical as well as analytical, to discussions of Canada's strategy, with special reference to the concept of hegemony.

## Hegemony

Rhetorically, the government of Canada is committed to a "free and open Indo-Pacific," to use a phrase former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and others introduced well over fifteen years ago. This is in line with what Canada's allies and partners are saying as well – the US above all, plus Australia, South Korea, India, the United Kingdom (UK), and the European Union (EU) and its member states, among others. For this group of democracies, a free and open Indo-Pacific means protecting at least some aspects of the so-called liberal international order – trade, international institutions, and human rights, to name but three of its commonplaces.

The key context behind this rhetoric is the ongoing power shift away from the United States (US)-led "West" and towards "the Rest" and specifically China. The consequences of this power shift for international politics are tremendous, one possibility being a relatively quick transition to what International Relations (IR) say is a multipolar system, a system with multiple great powers jostling for influence. In it, "freedom and openness" will be at best an aspiration – and a matter of constant negotiation between and among rival blocs.

The other backdrop is the climate crisis – a point the Indo-Pacific strategies of Canada's allies discuss at various degrees of breadth and depth. Amidst current and future strategic competition, a degree of international cooperation will be sorely needed to meet this and other global challenges. The fact that China emits more greenhouse gases than the entire developed world combined means the world's future depends on Beijing's ability and willingness to



Srdjan Vucetic

progressively cut emissions towards reaching carbon neutrality before 2060, which is in fact what the Chinese leadership promised in 2020.

IR scholarship can help us think through these processes. Defined as a mobilization of leadership of an international order, hegemony can help us understand the rise and decline of US global supremacy. Same goes for the rise of China mentioned earlier: by about 2030, the Chinese economy is set to become the world's most powerful on most key measures.

Beijing has made a series of moves that challenge many aspects of the US-led Western hegemony: the vaunted Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the modernization of the nuclear arsenal, the rollout of new stealth, cyber and artificial intelligence warfare technologies, the construction of the world's second-largest blue-water navy, and the pursuit of permanent overseas bases and vigorous "land reclamation" in the South China Sea. And all this comes on top of what the Canadian leadership calls "coercive diplomacy" – a good label for Beijing's pressure tactics against countries whose values, laws, and policies are clashing with the Communist Party of China's (CPC) idea of international order.

Most IR scholars think China's global hegemony remains well beyond Beijing's capabilities and interests. The situation in the Indo-Pacific is different – a fact that a continuing US attempt to "pivot" and "rebalance" to that region has put into sharp relief. So, how likely is China's regional hegemony, then? To begin to answer this question, let us consider recent geopolitical trends, focusing the analysis on "economic," "security" and "cultural" factors.

## Economic Trends

Twenty-five years ago, China's economy firmly lagged behind that of Japan. Today, it is poised to dominate the world, let alone the Indo-Pacific region – East Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania and even some parts of South Asia and the Eastern Pacific Rim. World Bank estimates that China's economy already accounts for more than half of Asian GDP, and that China's development financing in the region has already surpassed that of the World Bank itself.

Impressive as these developments are in both principle and practice, the fact is that predictions of China's economic hegemony in the region are premature. Consider total trade as a percentage of GDP between various Asian countries, on the one hand, and China on the other. Looking at imports, we see Myanmar and Cambodia consistently relying on China for more than a third of their imports every year since 2010, with a number of countries hovering between 10% and 30%. As for exports, Laos and Myanmar are sending between 30% and 40% of the total to China, with the figures for the rest being lower.

Moving on to FDI data, China is a major partner for Myanmar and Cambodia, where its firms make up between 20% and 30% of all foreign investment across the past decade. Chinese investment is all-important in the case of Laos, where the latest figures are in the 90% range. Elsewhere in the region Chinese FDI figures are lower, from around 15% in Thailand to less than 1% in Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Risk of debt-dependency that some say is at the heart of Beijing's BRI is observable only in the cases of Laos and Cambodia, given that around 20% of their GDP is held by the Export-Import Bank of China. Everywhere else in the region, Chinese-held debt is either small or negligible, the third-highest overall being in Myanmar, at 5% of GDP.

For a rough comparison, consider the character of US economic hegemony in its region, the Western hemisphere, in 1960s, which many argue was a very good decade for US power and influence in the world. Between 1962 and 1968 the US accounted for an average of 70% of Canada's total trade, and 60% of Mexico's. This level of average trade dependence is far higher than even the highest single year of trade dependence for Myanmar on China of 41%. Myanmar is thus comparable to Brazil, whose average dependence that decade was 35%, while the average dependence of Argentina and China, at 18% and 14% respectively, is roughly comparable to Singapore and Philippines in China's region today.

In short, it appears that China has some ways to go before it achieves anything resembling the economic hegemony the US achieved in its region in the middle years of the twentieth century. Add to this to persistence of so-called "dollar hegemony" – a label describing a fact that large portions of global finance, payments and credit rely on the US currency. The global financial system's inequity is likely to continue well into the 2020s, which means that the US government will continue to use US financial institutions to punish actors with whom it fights or disagrees, be they states, groups or individuals. China and its strategic partners are no exception.

## Security Trends

Last year we heard the news of a Chinese test of a hypersonic missile that many say is capable of evading US missile defense systems. We also heard US sources admit, for the very first time, that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would not lose to the US in a conventional shooting war along China's coastline, including over Taiwan. Chinese military power has indeed grown significantly. China accounts for half of all Asian military spending and PLA land, naval, air and cyber forces are all fielding new equipment, including some key anti-access/area-denial military technologies that keep US military planners awake at night.

Here, too, we should careful not to jump to conclusions. The US remains the world's largest military spender, accounting for almost forty percent of total military expenditure in any given year from 2010. China's spending, the world's second highest, amounts to about a third of US spending. Next, China's military power is hemmed in by a sprawling American system of alliances, permanent overseas bases, joint military exercises, training programs and other security arrangements. The opposing system built by China is much weaker in terms of both raw numbers and latent power. Furthermore, most countries in the region continue to prefer US-built weapons over those supplied by Chinese manufacturers. This is a good indicator of the hegemonic status quo. Apart from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, China's neighbours – all of which are much wealthier and more technologically advanced than this trio – are happy to integrate with China economically so long as they can maintain legacy ties in security. This yields a prediction that is at odds with typical media sensationalism: absent a sudden arrival of some as yet unidentifiable "fourth offset" – an insider Washington term for the next game-changing generation of military technology –, the US and its allies are likely to maintain a huge technological and operational ability lead over virtually any opposing coalition led by China.

## Cultural Trends

The relationship between culture and international hegemony is a complicated one, one reason being a fact that cultural geopolitics is not confined to a particular spatial scale. Officially, the PRC offers a set of ideological alternatives to Western-style liberalism by emphasizing, in the words of its leaders, "justice," "mutual respect," "inclusivity," and "peaceful co-existence," or, in the words of Western observers,

“authoritarian capitalism,” “techno-authoritarianism,” “sovereignism,” and “civilizationism.” But some of the “same” alternatives to liberalism also circulate within and across Western societies. The PRC’s commitment to “civilizational diversity”, for example, has a great deal of common ground with the position of radical conservative parties, think tanks, study groups, conferences, online platforms, and front organizations in the West that operate nationally and transnationally. How these different hearts-and-minds battles interact, and with what consequences for regional and global orders are two crucial questions, albeit ones that we must put aside here.

That being said, we know that the strength and stability of hegemonic orders depend on the values and identities held by the members of international society, the world’s great powers above all, but also the middle and minor powers. Studies of national identity discourses have suggested that China’s hegemonic potential is constrained because its authoritarian, insular and propagandistic identity is at odds with the identities of the most powerful states, with a partial exception being Russia.

Cross-national public opinion data point in the same direction. One commonly used source for estimating the legitimacy of competing hegemonic projects from a “soft power” perspective is the Pew Global Attitudes project. Considering over-time comparisons of the percentages of Asian respondents with favourable views of China and/or of Chinese leaders versus the equivalent figures for the US and US leaders, we see that between one half and two thirds of respondents – this is the median figure for most Asian countries in most years for which such data is available – favoured the US, versus one third to one tenth for China. We likewise see a sharp increase of negative evaluations of China over time.

Recent analyses of Asia Barometer data, Southeast Asian surveys by the National University of Singapore’s ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute and the University of Tokyo’s Asian Student Survey all confirm these trends. This in turn means that it is hard to see how the People’s Republic could craft an ideology or a model that would motivate Indo-Pacific nations to switch sides, so to speak.

## Conclusion

Many Canadians are rightly keen to see their government’s long-term plan for the Indo-Pacific. In principle, a good strategy first outlines key national interests and then rank-orders policy goals in light of those interests. This is hard for any state, but doubly so for Canada, a country where discussion of foreign policy goals tends to run well ahead of discussion of means and ways to achieve them. It is also important considering that the federal government says it is willing to spend \$3.5-billion dollars over five years to develop and implement this strategy.

Talk of the geopolitical consequences of China’s rise will shape the reception of this document. While this is healthy, it is important to keep in mind that China’s hegemony is not yet assured, even its own region. Certainly, this is only a snapshot in time amid a fast-moving action-reaction sequence. Prudent strategists remind us that Beijing will always have a greater long-term stake in Asian affairs than any number of “Euro-Atlantic” powers. Some might add that democracies are increasingly disoriented (and possibly inherently so). Should the US face come to face further political upheavals at home, Beijing will be much better positioned to persuade others that its idea of a social contract is better.

Whatever the future holds, a fact is that hegemonic systems work differently across different issue areas, as well as between regional and global levels of interaction. A growing security rivalry in Asia need not stop global cooperation on the climate crisis. This is why it is advisable for Canadians and their government

to treat the Indo-Pacific strategy document as but one step in a larger – and long overdue – conversation about Canada’s national interests and the foreign policy goals that derive from them.

Serious participants in this conversation will embrace policy dilemmas. This is especially evident in defence: Canada’s military lacks the equipment and personnel necessary for sustained operations on the home continent, let alone halfway across the world. And even if Ottawa could somehow generate new capabilities in a time-constrained fashion, a question of competing commitments would remain. Indeed, the alliance burden-sharing promises Canada makes to keep the Indo-Pacific “free and open” by definition affect similar promises made in other contexts – from NORAD modernization to NATO’s next “strategic concept” and climate change action plan. What would help blunt the sharp edges of these and other trade-offs is an actual strategic guidance document that covers for all aspects of Canada’s international policy.



# IN CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL POLICY,

Real Change Means Hard Choices

In 2015, Justin Trudeau announced that “Canada is back.” Almost seven years later, one cannot leave unacknowledged the fact that the country’s international standing has – at most – only marginally improved. Despite sustained efforts from then Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne and his predecessor Chrystia Freeland, the Liberal government lost its 2020 bid for a UN Security Council seat. The country’s reputation with its allies and the rest of the world is ambivalent. While it occasionally attempts to assert its independence from the United States, it remains deeply committed to its ‘special relationship’ with Washington. It is vocal in its support of human rights, but notably selective in its denunciations. It wishes to be a player in the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, but lacks the capabilities and does not actually engage in diplomatic talks with Russia. The list of contradictions goes on. In short, Canada seeks, in many ways, to be everything for everyone, all at once.

When this state of affairs is combined with the fact that the country’s last foreign policy review is now 17 years old, one should not be surprised that Canada’s international interventions are unfocused and that its strategic goals are sometimes contradictory. The concluding article of the compendium’s premise is that Canada should rethink its international engagement by making hard choices on what its interests are, how to promote them, and where to promote them. Re-investments in Canadian diplomacy and defence are necessary, but blind new spending will not be sufficient. To rebuild its standing within the international community in a way that is conducive to achieving its policy goals, Canada should become a more proactive, constructive, and coherent actor. While some have suggested that becoming a ‘model citizen’ committed to its allies would be the correct strategy, this article argues that to do so would require answers to three fundamental questions, which are analyzed in sequence below. If the government finally conducts a foreign policy review, or makes future policy decisions, these questions should be clearly considered.

## Recognizing the Limits and Costs of Independence

Managing the ‘special relationship’ with the United States is the most difficult and persistent challenge any Canadian prime



Émile Lambert-Deslandes

minister must face. To ensure the coherence of its international actions, any foreign policy review must carefully assess what Canada's relationship with the United States ought to be. Should it strive to gain more independence, as some have suggested in regard to China? Should it instead embrace its role as Washington's closest ally and commit its resources to matching American interests? While the proximity of the United States and Canada's reliance on its military for its defence make a break between the two undesirable and unrealistic, the rise of nationalist influences and the fickleness that marked the last Republican administration's foreign policy are worrying signs for Canadian interests. Even if it were to cast its lot with the United States, Canada could face the dangers linked with an unreliable ally with a democracy in potential decline.

Yet, independence cannot be considered to be a more appealing option. For one thing, it is more costly: charting that path means losing the United States' valuable material support. Furthermore, the importance of NORAD and NATO ensure that Canada can never truly leave the Americans' sphere of influence. This means that even if it were to embrace other countries, the international community would be unlikely to see Canada as a truly independent actor. Contrarianism against the United States' foreign policy would yield few tangible benefits. What is certain, however, is that Canada cannot equivocate. Doing so would mean remaining in an unenviable position akin to the worst of both worlds: a lack of trust from the United States' as to Canada's commitment as an ally, and suspicion from other international actors. This fact was on clear display during the detention of the Two Michaels, when China considered Canada to be subservient to American interests. Maintaining the status quo would require careful diplomacy, with investment in promoting Canadian interests in the United States at every level of government, in order to limit future backlashes in case of disagreements. Such strategy, for example, was used during the arguably successful re-negotiation of NAFTA.

## **Becoming a Real Partner – In NATO, NORAD and Elsewhere**

According to Chrystia Freeland's 2017 foreign policy speech, Canada steps up when faced with international crises that shake the foundations of the rule-based international order. This rhetoric is ever-present within the government's public declarations, as in the case of the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Yet, despite the government's strong statements, its sanctions have been deemed performative due to their limited impact. Its behavior within NATO is not particularly different: while Canada contributes to diverse military actions, particularly to operation REASSURANCE in Eastern Europe, it has yet to meet the 2% defence spending goal while Denmark and Germany, among others, have recently re-committed. Similarly, the country's contributions to NORAD are limited due to low investments in defence and its inefficient procurement process, prompting some to label Canada a "freeloader." Simply put, Canada is a great talker but a little doer, which bears important consequences. It was likely excluded from the new AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States in part because of doubts about its status as a serious ally. Begging the question: is Canada actually willing to invest in its defence to match its rhetoric?

If it were to be, important steps would need to be taken. Since NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that the alliance would shift its strategy toward "deterrence by defence," the timing for a broad re-thinking of Canada's international policy could not be better. The first obvious step to take would be to finally meet the 2% spending goal. While the metric itself is arbitrary, it remains a powerful signaling tool regarding the country's commitment to share the burden of collective security with its allies. As suggested

by Professor Timothy Sayle, one area in which Canada could become a credible partner is in the defence of North America. To do so, it would need to invest wisely in strengthening its armed forces and defence capabilities. Making spending and procurement choices aimed at accomplishing that goal would also serve the accompanying goal of increasing Canada's investments in NORAD's modernization. Rethinking the procurement process might also allow Canada to be more flexible in its defence investments and better at securing new equipment for its armed forces. Bringing back its armed forces to full capacity could be two first steps in accomplishing this goal. To accomplish the second objective, committing more resources to enacting a culture change within the armed forces is essential.

## **Aligning its Policies With its Values**

During the late 1990s, a value-based international policy centered on human rights was embraced by Canada. In 2004, Professor Jennifer Welsh argued that Canada should become a “model citizen” within the international community to renew its influence. In 2017, Canada launched its Feminist Foreign Policy. Calls for Canada to become the defender of international law have also been abundant in the media. Yet, at the same time, the country has repeatedly compromised on its values in the past. Where should the line be drawn? Should Canada actually direct its international policy according to its stated values, or instead only seek the promotion of its own interests? If Canada were to adopt a pro-American posture, a value-based international policy could be problematic and hypocritical. However, abandoning it would mean giving up the mantle of neutrality and of commitment to multilateralism. Even if Canada were to decide to commit fully to its “special relationship” with Washington, there may be room for targeted engagement that would allow it to defend its feminist and inclusive values on the world stage, separate from the United States' interests, without suffering from brand failure.

Exercising leadership on non-polarized issues could be one way for Canada to advance in values while at the same time skillfully maintaining its close relationship with the United States. By engaging with other countries in multilateral mechanisms such as the G20 on economic and environmental questions, while at the same time maintaining distance from great powers, the choice of a “middle politic” could yield significant benefits. One strategy for gaining more leeway and autonomy could be to invest in defence and prove to the United States that it is a trustworthy partner. Despite this, Canada should remain cognizant of the fact that any claim of being defender of international law will be met with suspicion in the Global South, where it is often perceived as a tool of the Global North. Finally, in the aftermath of its exclusion from AUKUS, Canada may prioritize multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific, as other non-Western countries could also be willing to accept new partnerships in balancing the influence of China. A choice needs to be made to make Canada's international policy more coherent, and there are many opportunities for the country to maintain breathing room while seeking to build its multilateral credibility.

## **Choosing Where Canada Engages – And Sticking to It**

As argued in this article, Canada cannot be everywhere nor everything to everyone. It needs to prioritize where it involves itself. A foreign policy review should be urgently conducted to decide on three important questions: what the relationship with the United States should be, whether the country is willing to invest to become a productive member of its alliances, and if the country's stated values should serve as goals for its international policy. Those questions are interrelated. For an international policy solely aligned



with that of the United States cannot be totally value-based. Likewise, an international policy that places values and international law above everything is sure to create friction with the country's southern neighbor. Instead of being reactive, Canada should become proactive, constructive, and coherent. This requires targeted re-investments in diplomacy and defence. Even if it decides not to conduct a review, the government should at the very least conduct consultations on all of those questions in order to develop foreign policy plans similar to its in-development Indo-Pacific strategy. In any case, it should pay close attention to the dialogues taking place in academia and in civil society on these issues, and the contributions they could make in informing a more robust and cohesive international policy. More than ever, the government should take advantage of the country's extensive expertise.

