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Policy Brief

Rethinking Canada's Defence Strategy: What Lessons Can We Learn From the UK and Australia?

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The mandate of Donald Trump confirmed a strong trend since the financial crisis of 2008: the American hegemon is in decline. Furthermore, the [international order](#) the United States built is threatened by the resurgence of revisionist state actors. Recognizing the implications of such a transformation, the United Kingdom and Australia, two of Canada's close allies, are making an important update in their strategic posture. By taking similar steps, they seek, on the one hand, to revise the role they intend to play in an international system marked by a return to competition between great powers. On the other hand, they are restructuring their armed forces and associated spending to better cope with new types of threats.

The British and Australian examples should serve as models for Canada. To this end, the focus must be on three areas: the navy, aerospace and cyber, but above all on their "pan-domain" integration. A reinvestment in

the capabilities and an organizational review of the armed forces also appear necessary. This type of action must, however, follow from upstream reflection to develop a coherent and holistic vision of what Canada aspires to be in the 21st century.

The UK and Australia's Strategic Revision

Originally scheduled for 2020, the [UK Integrated Security and Defense Review](#) will finally be released in 2021 due to the [COVID-19](#) crisis. The broad outlines of the Review are, however, known through a [report](#) published by the parliamentary defence committee. This is the [most comprehensive](#) security document produced by the UK since the end of the Cold War. The Integrated Review combines the limited scope of defence reports published in [2010](#), [2015](#) and [2018](#). The aim is to define the UK's place in the post-Brexit era. Boris Johnson's vision at this level is summed up in the term [Global Britain](#), namely the idea of categorically re-establishing its place as a great power. To achieve this, the main commitment is to increase and maintain the defence budget at 2% of GDP. Additionally, a commitment was made to spend [\\$21.9 billion US](#) over four years for new acquisitions.

Australia published the [2020 Defense Strategic Update](#) and the [2020 Force Structure Plan](#) last summer, following the [white paper](#) released in 2016. The latter predicted a deterioration of the

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international security environment, a forecast that was confirmed and explains the important process that Australia is embarking on. Indeed this is not just an update. [Prime Minister](#) Scott Morrison is clear on that point: Australia is experiencing its most important strategic realignment since 1945. The objective is threefold: to shape the regional strategic environment, to deter actions against their interests and to respond to threats with credible force. In financial terms, these ambitious goals are supported by a regular budget of 29 billion US dollars, or 2% of its GDP, which is set to [increase](#) further. Investments of 270 billion US were also [announced](#) in capacity building.

The new lens through which to conceive of the use of the armed forces is the [multidomain](#) operation. For [Vice Admiral Kyd](#) of the Royal Navy, the fusion of naval, air, space, and cybernetic capabilities forms the basis of this vision. It is precisely in these areas that the measures announced by the United Kingdom and Australia are concentrated.

Naval Domain

A significant portion of the investments made by the UK and Australia are directed to their naval forces. This is not insignificant as several states are redefining their idea of what a [balanced fleet](#) is. For the Royal Navy, this means regaining a global power projection capacity, one where the offensive is preeminent. The British plan involves the purchase of [13 frigates \(the target is a fleet of 24 frigates\)](#) and the development of a new multi-use model that can act as a platform for the boarding of [drones](#). New surface-to-surface [missiles](#) and seven [submarines](#) are also in development. It was also [recently](#) confirmed that new submarines dedicated to nuclear deterrence should be operational within 10 years.

The key to this naval reconfiguration is the commissioning of their two new *Queen Elizabeth*-class aircraft carriers, whose

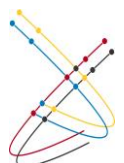
eponymous ship is expected to deploy with its carrier strike group, and allied ships, starting [next year](#) in the Indo-Pacific. Deploying maritime, air, cyber and electronic capabilities, an aircraft carrier and its carrier strike group remain, [for the Royal Navy](#), “a metaphor for a nation-state that intends to remain strategically relevant on the world stage.”



Australia is going through a similar thought process. It implies the adoption of increased operational capacities for its regional theatre. Australia’s unique geographic location, and proximity to China, guides its [acquisition plan](#). It is investing in the purchase of 9 frigates (for a total of 17) equipped with surface-to-surface and surface-to-air drone and missile systems. There are particularly large-scale projects in the [submarine warfare](#) domain. In this area, 12 submarines, and mining, surveillance, autonomous and remotely controlled combat systems have been announced. With these acquisitions, Australia aims to develop a credible autonomous deterrence force. Great emphasis is placed on the development of communications systems, satellite surveillance, electronic and cyber combat, and acoustic analysis. Everything indicates that these new capacities will be used, among other things, to increase the Australian presence in the South China Sea, in [collaboration](#) with the United States.

Aerospace Domain

On the aviation front, the continued acquisition of the F-35s is central to the British and



Australians. However, the former could cut the number of planned purchases [in half](#) and start developing a sixth-generation fighter. A key component of the future air capabilities of both states is massive investment in unmanned vehicles. Note that they are working to incorporate artificial intelligence technologies into [combat aircrafts](#) and [drones](#). Australia is also counting on the massive deployment of high speed and long-range [missiles](#).

The tone used in dealing with space is serious and urgent. It is now an integral part of the [global commons](#) and is emerging as a potential conflict theatre. Modern society and armed forces increasingly rely on the communication and information capabilities enabled by satellites. For the British and the Australians, these facts mean that investment must be made, on the one hand, to protect oneself from space threats using land or space based systems. On the other hand, to ensure autonomous access to space. This last element is a significant paradigm shift. On both sides, it involves the joint [participation](#) of the armed forces, space agency and private firms. The [British](#) and [Australians](#) are therefore planning increased cooperation with the United States in this area. On the Australian side, the implementation remains imprecise. In the United Kingdom, a [space command](#) has just been created with the mandate to allow the launch of rockets starting in 2022.

Cyber Domain

It is fair to say that the biggest changes are taking place in the cyber domain. In Australia, a cybersecurity [policy](#) was launched this summer to oversee this specific area, including a budget of \$1.67 billion US. This is in addition to the measures announced in the 2020 Strategic Update, where \$15 billion US is planned over the next 20 years to develop hardware and software infrastructure. Australia has never invested so much in cyber defence. [The bulk of the funds](#) go to the armed forces, the Australian Signals Directorate and the Australian Cyber Security Center. Despites

this, increased [collaboration](#) between the civilian and military branches of the state, as well as with the private sector is deemed necessary to respond effectively to cyber threats. As in other areas, close cooperation with the United States is [already in place](#).

The ultimate goal is to be able to conduct operations in the areas of cyber, electronics and information, both defensively and offensively. The distinction made between hardware and software infrastructures is an important one. One of the [key elements](#) to justify the government's refusal to join Huawei's 5G network is the risk of hardware control. The risks associated with manufacturers and supply chains are real. Australia must also focus on [important points](#) such as innovation, the development of new standards, as well as access to and deployment of infrastructure. Australia recognizes all of these challenges, as well as the need to focus on [higher education](#) to achieve its goals. This is a big leap since its last strategy filed in [2016](#).

In the UK, innovation is mostly found at the level of institutional reorganization. The creation of the [National Cyber Force](#) (NCF) is a step towards greater integration of all areas affecting cybersecurity. It is unique because it brings together elements of the armed forces (including a [new regiment](#) dedicated to cyber warfare), intelligence and civilian departments of the state. It therefore provides an undeniable advantage by making it possible to respond effectively to "[gray zone](#)" threats and challenges. The institutional agility of the NCF means that all resources can also be put to the service of offensive operations. Greater importance is also attached to offensive capabilities and tactical support. The government is combining a new research centre dedicated to defence [artificial intelligence](#) with the NCF. This is all backed by an [initial investment](#) of £1.5bn to bring the armed forces up to date with the latest technological advances.



Rethinking Canada's Defence and Giving itself the Means to Achieve its Ambitions

Canada must conduct a similar process to those carried out in the United Kingdom and Australia. All three states currently face the same threat: the return of competition between great powers as authoritarian states threaten the international order and seek to destabilize liberal democracies. Canada took a step in the right direction last year with the release of the [Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept](#). This document recognizes several imperatives. The first is modernizing capabilities to adapt to an age dominated by information, data and the end of a clear distinction between war and peace. The second is seeking to optimize [integration](#). This must be applied between the civilian and military branches of state, between areas of operations, and between Canada and its allies. The third is a sustained effort on the North American continent. This does not mean to rule out participating in operations with our allies in other theatres of operation.

In naval matters, Canada is currently following the same direction as Great Britain and Australia, with a project to acquire 15 frigates. All three states have selected the same [Type 26 BAE System](#) model. However, shortcomings persist with regard to the capacity to project Canadian power in its region. First, it is imperative that Canada develop a fleet of icebreakers capable of accessing the Arctic Circle in all seasons. In addition to reaffirming Canadian sovereignty over this territory, the number of [new issues](#) that are emerging in this strategic region justify moving forward on this matter which has been discussed for too long. Canada is lagging behind Russia, which has just [launched](#) a new icebreaker. The [United States](#) is also considering acquiring new ones and building a port in the Arctic. Second, Canada must renew its fleet of submarines. This process will be [long](#) and should have already started. Canada's latest [defence policy](#) only spelled out the modernization of the four

Victoria-class ships so that they would remain operational until 2040. There is, however, a [limit](#) to what can be achieved overtime as updates to submarines built in the 1980s. They were all [out of service](#) in 2019 for maintenance. Canada is therefore already losing operational capacity, a phenomenon that will accelerate with the age of the fleet. Ultimately, it is impossible to ensure the integrity of our territorial waters and our commitments to our allies without the acquisition of new submarines.

In the air sector, it is obvious that the fighter jet saga must end. The F-35 should be chosen because it alone provides interoperability, but most importantly because of its adequate stealth and [data integration](#) capability. Canada also adopted a [space strategy](#) in 2019 that signals the importance given to space, but its scope and related investments remain [limited](#). Among other things, it puts forward a new regulatory framework for the private sector in order to develop the capacity for national innovations. Unlike Canada's two allies, it does not consider developing an [autonomous](#) launch capability. This issue should be the subject of a real discussion today as our allies adopt a strategy of greater autonomy of action.

Canada must keep in mind that by rethinking their role, the United Kingdom and Australia have also given themselves the means to achieve their ambitions.

The [modernization](#) of NORAD is also urgent to respond to geographic imperatives and for multi-domain and inter-allied integration. The North Warning System is now [outdated](#) and needs to be replaced. Ideally, it would be by a system integrating all existing radar capacities and capable of real-time data processing. This is the promise of the [SHIELD](#) system, and especially of the [Joint All-Domain Command and Control](#) developed by the US military. This



is the path Canada should promote in modernizing NORAD. Note that Australia is pursuing a similar approach in the modernization of its own [radar system](#). A new [space](#) component is planned and it is all supported by an [industrial policy](#) to develop sovereign radar technologies.

In the area of cybersecurity, the British example should serve as a guide. The integration of elements of the armed forces, intelligence, public security and other branches of state appears to be the way forward to respond to the complex range of threats and challenges posed by the exponential growth of connectivity and of the cybernetic domain. It could overcome the tendency of public administration to work in silos.

Last but not least, Canada must keep in mind that by rethinking their role, the United Kingdom and Australia have also given themselves the means to achieve their ambitions. Achieving the NATO recommended target of 2% of GDP was done despite the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and the costs associated with Australian bushfires. The underfunding of the armed forces is a recurring [subject of tension](#) between Canada and its American ally. While a [poll](#) suggests that public opinion is in favor of investing in the military, it is time for Canada to seriously consider this option.

