

PJBD Suspension: What Should Canada's Reaction Be?

Policy Forum Politique is a publication format that aims to stimulate debate by presenting a wide range of expert opinion on a topic of national security significance to Canada. For this sixth edition, we ask three experts for their perspectives on the following question: *How should Canada react to the recent announcement that U.S. Department of Defense is suspending its participation in the Permanent Joint Board of Defence?* Established during WW2 between the United States and Canada with a broad mandate to advise on any continental defence and security issue, the PJBD convened civilian and military practitioners to recommend advice to the two executive branches. It was the starting point of the bilateral defence relationship between Ottawa and Washington.



Nicholas Glesby | Trent University

Nicholas Glesby is a Ph.D. Student in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University, Administrator of the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), and Student Fellow at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies (CDSS).

Prior to this newly announced official [pause](#), the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) was already on *de-facto* hiatus given that the US did not host any meeting in 2025. However, there are other binational institutions working at the daily operational level, such as the Military Cooperation Committee (MCC), NORAD, and daily communication between National Defence Headquarters and the Pentagon. Canadians need more information to assess the full intentions behind the pause, beyond the historic narrative that Canada is weak on defence. Canada is now spending 2% of GDP on defence (and committed to 5% by 2035), is moving at speed to implement NORAD modernization projects such as the Arctic Over-the-Horizon Radar, and RCAF pilots are training on F-35 airframes which are set to be delivered imminently. Canada is making its territory “[immune from attack or possible invasion](#)” that would threaten American security, which continues to guide Ottawa’s approach to continental defence thinking.

The PJBD is an enduring symbol of the special relationship. Accordingly, the pause in such a public manner is notable. While the Board’s secretive nature keeps conversations away from the public spotlight, which means that most North Americans are unaware of its quiet existence, Canadians should consider the pause as a signal that Washington’s broader view of the relationship is evolving. The pause “[could eventually be softened or quietly reversed](#)” to grapple with “[the most complicated and rapidly evolving threat environment we have seen](#).” Until then, Canada will need to focus on other channels to maintain its perpetual commitments with its neighbour to defend North America.

**Justin Massie | UQAM**

*Justin Massie is full professor and director of the department of political science at UQAM. He is also director of the Network for Strategic Analysis and co-editor of *Le Rubicon*. He held the Fulbright Research Chair in Canada-U.S. Relations at Johns Hopkins University in 2019.*

The Trump administration's suspension of the JDP sends a troubling political signal regarding the future of Canada-U.S. relations. The Trump administration [justifies](#) its decision by citing the lack of details surrounding Canada's military spending plan. This criticism is not unfounded: Ottawa has still not presented a detailed plan explaining how Canada will reach 3.5% of GDP in defense spending by 2035. However, U.S. demands reflect a desire to impose Washington's strategic and industrial choices on Canada.

U.S. officials [criticize](#) Canada for lacking a credible plan that concretely outlines how Ottawa intends to align with their continental defense priorities, including the long-delayed decision regarding the acquisition of 62 F-35s. The suspension of the JBDP thus appears to be political pressure intended to remind Canada of the potential costs of greater strategic autonomy.

If Ottawa rejects this logic and pursues strategic diversification—as the [acquisition](#) of Saab's GlobalEye appears to demonstrate—tensions could spread to other areas. In the most extreme scenario, this could call into question NORAD, considered the heart of continental defense.

Yielding to U.S. pressure would not, however, solve the problem. A concession would encourage new demands tomorrow. Prime Minister Carney's idea of a "[North American fortress](#)" rests on a fragile assumption: that of a convergence of Canadian and American interests. The White House's strategy, rather, aims at [U.S. reindustrialization](#) at the expense of its allies, combined with a desire to [impose the purchase of U.S. platforms](#) as a condition for strategic cooperation. The prospect of a North American "*grand bargain*" therefore seems unlikely.

In this context, the best response from the Canadian government would be to release a coherent ten-year military reinvestment plan that clearly commits to the goal of diversifying its defense industrial partnerships.

**Richard Shimooka | Macdonald-Laurier Institute**

Richard Shimooka is a Senior Fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. He was a Senior Fellow at the Defence Management Studies Programme at Queen's University from 2007–2012, and a Research Fellow at the Conference of Defence Associations Institute from 2012–2017.

There is a good chance that Undersecretary of Defense Elbridge Colby's efforts represent an example of policy entrepreneurship on his part and may not signal a wider administration effort to change bilateral relations. The Trump administration's interagency process has been ineffective at times, to say the least. Its priorities are clearly elsewhere: the war with Iran, the bungled troop deployment to Poland, the passage of the reconciliation budget, and the upcoming midterm elections. Given the PJBD's low salience to existing bilateral relations between the United States and Canada, Colby may have been able to suspend it without meeting much, if any, bureaucratic resistance.

We should thus not overreact to Colby's announcement. Rather, Ottawa should try to address the roots of the problem that ostensibly provoked Colby's decision: the government's limited military capabilities and slow modernization process. Canada's military capability is far below that of most other allies and relies heavily on the United States to assist in the defence of North America. Members of both parties, the U.S. national security establishment, as well as other partners and allies, take this view of Canada. Though the Carney government seems intent on bundling defence issues with trade in some sort of agreement, the unstructured nature of the Trump administration makes such an approach difficult. To it, security and defence are unlinked and remain non-negotiable aspects of bilateral relations. It would be prudent for Ottawa to work collaboratively with the Department of Defence and allay its worries about the Canadian Armed Forces in a concrete manner.