



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
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by Blae Hansen
September, 2016

POLICY UPDATE

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▶ **Executive Summary**

Canada does not face an existential threat that is directly addressed through increased defence spending. The most significant threat confronting Canada originates in the persistent – and growing – perception that Canada is unfairly benefiting from collective security agreements at the expense of its allies – particularly the United States. The modern security environment is fluid, and the future of Canada’s traditional relationships is in question. Whether or not claims of ‘free-riding’ ring true, one of Canada’s premier defence policy concerns should be mitigating the undesired consequences of being seen as unreliable, irrelevant, and inconsequential by our allies.



CANADA'S STRATEGIC REALITIES

The Task At Hand: Defending Canada

At present, and for the near future, Canada does not face any existential threats that can be directly addressed through increased defence spending, due primarily to a unique geostrategic position.¹ In fact, geography defines Canada perhaps more than any other country in the world.² With only one contiguous neighbour, Canada benefits from close integration with the world's sole military superpower in whose interest Canada's continued freedom and friendship remains. Additionally, three oceans border Canada – Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic – making Canada virtually an “island attached to a giant.”³ No other country in the world is in the same situation and these geostrategic circumstances form the foundation for Canada's defence policy needs. Defending Canada is by nature a joint operation involving the Americans. In other words, Canadian defence is North American defence – a task that Canada cannot accomplish alone.⁴

A Dangerous Perception

“When our friends and allies tell us “the world needs more Canada,” it is both a compliment and a criticism.” ~David Pratt⁵

The accusation of defence policy “free-riding” levied against Canada stems from the complaint among leading NATO members – mainly the United States – that Canada is not spending in accordance with the NATO guideline expenditure of 2% of gross national product (GDP) on defence, established by member states in 2006 and reaffirmed in 2014.⁶

Tied into the question of ‘free-riding’ is the question, “How much of it is a perception of political elites and how much of it is a reality?”⁷ Firstly, it is important to recognize that alliances form with an acknowledgment by the more powerful members that some degree of free-riding will occur – such was the understanding of the United States at the formation of NATO.⁸ Secondly, ‘free-riding’ is a “perfectly rational choice” because states should only spend on defence what a threat assessment warrants.⁹ Thus, many argue that Canada's current level of defence spending is adequate.¹⁰

So, is Canada a ‘free-rider?’ Much has been written on the topic, and the answers vary. For experts such as Benjamin Zyla and Jean-Christophe Boucher, the notion that actual contribution to defence can be measured in percentage of GDP spent is overly reductionist.¹¹ Other experts take issue with inconsistencies in the way in which governments choose to account for their defence spending, such as the inclusion or exclusion of paramilitary forces, for example.¹² The principal rationale behind setting a percentage of gross domestic product spending target for defence was to create an indicator to measure a country's “political will to contribute to the Alliance's common defence efforts.”¹³

When criticized for not spending enough on defence, the common response of Canada is to highlight the visible, “high splash demonstrations” of commitment.¹⁴ These displays create the appearance of practical assistance to joint operations without addressing the underlying issue.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the sacrifice of blood and treasure in recent operations has not gone far enough to encourage allies that Canada is an able supporter of collective defence. David Perry, speaking to the *National Post*, noted that while what you do with your military is more important than



what you spend, Canada still made a commitment to spend 2% GDP on defence: “That’s what we signed up to. That’s the metric we’re measured against.”¹⁶

In short, it does not matter whether Canada is actually a ‘free-rider’ or a ‘right-rider.’ What will have the greatest impact on Canada’s overall well-being and international interests is the ability of Canada to be taken seriously in both bilateral and multilateral forums, and that seat at the bargaining table comes at the price of substantive, meaningful, and capacity-building contributions to collective defence agreements with our closest allies in NORAD and NATO.

THE GREATEST THREAT TO CANADA–U.S. RELATIONS

When considering the political dangers of free-riding, Canada’s unique relationship with its sole contiguous neighbour is central to understanding Canada’s security environment. Addressing the Canada 2020 Conference held on June 23, 2015, future Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put the Canada-U.S. relationship pragmatically when he said:

“Canada’s special relationship with the United States is not automatic. Like any strong relationship, you have to put a lot of work into it, and earn it. There is nothing pre-ordained about our influence or value in Washington’s eyes. Policy that fails to acknowledge this basic fact will fail.”¹⁷

America’s post-WWII foreign policy assumes the presence of free-riding occurring and understands this as being part of the price of American post-war dominance. For the Americans currently embattled in a heated electoral cycle, however, the position of the United States as “lone superpower” has come at a steep cost without the anticipated benefits. Nearly 15 years of continuous war has left the American public fatigued and looking for assistance in sharing the burden of collective defence.¹⁸ The topic of free-riding has been a speaking point of both central candidates for the White House, bring the attention to the American public the notion that America’s allies are not doing enough.¹⁹

The Republican party nominee, Donald Trump, has been outspoken in his criticisms of NATO, referring to the alliance as “obsolete” with the U.S. spending more than their share of the cost, while many allies enjoy membership as “freeloaders”.²⁰ The United States, as a major financial contributor to NATO, is resentful towards states such as Canada which are seen as “free-riders” who wish to participate in “out of area” interventions yet fail to meet NATO defence spending targets of 2% GDP.

So, what does America want from Canada? The future of conflict abroad appears to be ever more rooted in coalition politics – much like what occurred in Afghanistan and Iraq following the attacks of 9/11, and more recently in Syria, Libya, and Islamic State held territory.²¹ Exemplified by recent events, the United States historically has not wanted material from Canada, but rather the optics of political support as validation of American operations abroad in which “any contribution to the collective defence is going to be seen as helpful.”²²

In addressing the issue of Canada as security and defence “free-rider,” Canadian policy makers have the opportunity to improve relations with their closest and most necessary ally while simultaneously fulfilling their primary responsibility of protecting Canadians. In other words, as Canadian defence policy more closely mirrors the strategic realities facing the country, so too, does Canada fulfill its security requirements as an ally and contributor to global peace and



security. Canada-U.S. defence cooperation should “deepen and widen”²³ through improved, relevant Canadian contributions to Canadian (North American) defence, and continued participation in international peace and security operations.

“The Americans need to know that we’ve got their back in North America, and that means NORAD, that means going over and assisting them in NATO, it means all this...and it doesn’t matter if you’re a Liberal, NDP, or Conservative – that’s just the reality.” ~ Dr. Rob Huebert²⁴

“SOFT” AND “HARD” LINKAGES

“We will not be ripped off anymore. We’re going to be friendly with everybody, but we’re not going to be taken advantage of by anybody.” ~Donald Trump²⁵

It is important to note that the United States is not a unitary body of actors, but a vast collection of bureaucracies and local, state, and federal authorities. When speaking about Canadian-U.S. relations, the bodies of most concern are the United States Congress – who must consent to any trade agreements. Canadian policy makers are specifically vigilant towards Congressional attitudes towards U.S.-Canadian bargaining. This is due, in large part, to recognition in Ottawa that as an international “bit player,”²⁶ Canada is vulnerable to American clout at the trade bargaining table. For this reason, Canadian-U.S. bargaining must be based on rules rather than outright power so that Canada can appeal to a framework of agreed standards when dealing with the United States.²⁷ The fear that Canadian politicians have is that a policy misstep may produce a situation in which the Americans employ economically damaging linkages.

Linkages are “efforts to break an impasse or otherwise improve one’s bargaining position on a particular issue by tying it to another, unrelated issue.”²⁸ They can be cooperative or coercive, and they can be prospective (promises, threats) or retrospective (rewards, retaliation).²⁹ Congress has not historically used direct, coercive linkages to force Canada to change its policies. In other words, Canada-U.S. bargaining has historically not been conducted via coercive measures or quid pro quo linkages; rather, it is carried out by moves that are “subtle but powerful” such as cancelled visits from political leaders, or adopting the stance of “when Canada calls, don’t pick up the phone so quickly...”³⁰

American policy makers have opted for “soft,” rather than “hard” linkages (“when the aggrieved party makes a threat, or actually lashes out, in a way that is immediate, direct, and unambiguous”): they can hold grudges against Canadian governments, or even against Canada more generally, and therefore refuse to expend political capital in issues that are more important in Ottawa. Such was the case in the post-9/11 years with issues such as beef, lumber, and border security measures in which the Bush administration was not quick to address these items as a direct consequence of Canada’s refusal to participate in Iraq 2003.³¹

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has suggested implementing a policy of coercive linkages if his calls for allies to contribute more to defence and security operation are ignored. In Mr. Trump’s worldview, the United States has become a diluted power, and the primary mechanism by which he would re-establish America’s central role in the world is economic bargaining.³² In contrast, a possible Clinton administration may privately complain about Canada’s lack of defence spending, but in public would exercise a more diplomatic approach.³³



The historical lack of coercive linkages employed against Canada suggests that there is much more policy “wriggle” room than currently anticipated by many in Ottawa. The undeniable presence of “soft” linkages, however, as a tool in the American diplomatic arsenal means that Canada should not push the American’s too hard.

NORAD

To alleviate the concern among American’s that Canada is free-riding, Canada needs to put forth an effort that demonstrates that North American security is a priority.³⁴ If North American defence is Canadian defence, then NORAD offers Canada the strongest platform to work cooperatively with the United States to ensure Canada’s safety. The Government of Canada understands this to be the case, calling the alliance “essential to Canada’s domestic defence strategy.”³⁵

In the immediate aftermath of Canada’s announcement that it would not be participating in the U.S. ballistic missile defence program (BMD) in 2004, Canada’s political marginalization was palpable for some. “One instance, in particular, involves Canadian military personnel assigned to NORAD, working in offices responsible for missile defence. For political reasons, Canada has been forced to remove its staff officers from those agencies.”³⁶

Labeling material concerning the defence of our shared continent as “for American eyes only” was a symbolic blow, but the harm ended there. This is due mainly to the fact that the U.S. does not see Canada as essential – politically nor territorially – to the present system. American patience may wane, however, if the U.S. decides to expand its systems. In such an event, a failure to reverse Canada’s policy could have a direct impact on the future of NORAD; a continued policy of non-participation from Canada would almost undoubtedly signal to American policy makers that Canada rejects continental defence cooperation.³⁷ Furthermore, since Canadian defence is North American defence, BMD needs to be brought back under the umbrella of NORAD so that Canada can become a shareholder in its own defence.

If Canadian policy were to change today, it is unclear whether the BMD mission would change hands from USNORTHCOM to NORAD, but if Canada wanted a seat at the North American defence bargaining table, an agreement to place NORAD early warning systems on Canadian soil without an agreement to formal participation could result in direct access to the U.S. system’s information and operational planning. Such action would empower Canadian policy makers with vital information regarding Canada’s abilities and with a majority government in Ottawa, such a move would be done with almost no political cost.³⁸

Cyber Security

“We don’t know how great the vulnerability is, and we don’t know what the resilience is.” ~Dr. Gavin Cameron, speaking on Canada’s cyber-security³⁹

Colin Robertson observes that the greatest threat that the Americans see for themselves is in the realm of cybersecurity, citing a statement made by National Security Intelligence Director James Clapper, and because of North America’s integrated infrastructure (power grids, pipelines), issues of cybersecurity should be added to NORAD’s mandate.⁴⁰



Experts agree that conducting a large-scale cyber-attack is relatively easy, and “you can bring whatever you want to a grinding halt.” That a cyber-attack like this has not yet occurred is puzzling. In theory, the vulnerability exists – in practice, it has yet to manifest the true impact of what is at stake. In addition to the puzzling reality that for the most part, cyber threats a significant *theoretical* possibility, relatively little has been done to improve cyber defence in Canada’s public sector.⁴¹

Cyber-attacks have yet to truly make themselves manifest in terms of large-scale destruction. There is no precedent⁴² yet cyber-attacks against Canadian firms and ministries, both state-sponsored and otherwise, have continually increased over the past decade.⁴³ There are ongoing discussions about cyber defence occurring between the public and private sectors, but we don’t know much about that due to the lack of widely disseminated information.⁴⁴

In demonstrating a clear plan of action to bring Canada’s cyber-security strategy in line with that of the United States, the American security and defence community will take note of Canada rising to the occasion in protecting vital areas of North American economic security – all at a relatively low cost.

NATO

“In terms of ‘free-riding,’ I think the assumption is wrong. Canada is not free-riding. Canada is “right-riding” because it provides and brings to NATO the amount of contribution that is equal to its interest in NATO. It is not about defence. It is not about collective security. It’s about engaging in relations, and maybe that’s only worth 0.8% GDP.” ~Dr. Jean-Christophe Boucher⁴⁵

Hawkish members of the security and defence communities in Canada and the U.S. have been lamenting Canada’s inability to meet NATO’s suggested defence spending target of 2% GDP for some time, while concluding that a failure to do so must inevitably result in the Canadian Armed Forces being unable to fully participate in future peace operations. “This is a story going back to the 1990’s when some analysts suggested that Canada was not a good NATO ally: it was “asleep,” lived through a “decade of darkness,” its military was “killed by politicians,” or pursued a “pinch-penny diplomacy.”⁴⁶ According to the guidelines set out by NATO, the defence capacity of each member is critical as it directly affects the “overall perception of the Alliance’s credibility as a political-military organization.”⁴⁷

Contributions to NATO during the Afghanistan mission were never called into question because one could see the casualties coming home. Yet, at the conclusion of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan, and in light of increased governmental fiscal restraints, some experts such as Jonathan Paquin rightfully question whether Canada should reduce its NATO commitment.⁴⁸ Calls for Canada to spend more on defence from countries other than the U.S. are interpreted as calls to spend more on their individual defence – in the case of NATO, it’s about Europe “outsourcing” its defence.⁴⁹

Canada’s NATO membership is a good forum to interact with other allies, while still interacting with the United States, but on a multilateral level. Canada’s relationship with NATO is thus more about reputation and relationships rather than military affairs.⁵⁰ If Canada is not seen to be able to make meaningful contributions to NATO, then “Canada will be forced to raise its voice and ask to be heard upon the basis of its past contributions to NATO, rather than upon its current ability.”⁵¹



“The bilateral U.S.-Canada relationship is way more important than the relationship that [Canada has] with NATO. What [Canada gains] out of NATO is a relationship with other countries. In this context, it doesn't matter what we bring to NATO because we contribute more to European security than they...contribute to [Canadian] security.”⁵² According to Dr. Barry Cooper, the premise that NATO is a multilateral counterbalance to the bilateral relationship of NORAD – which heavily favours the U.S. – is “deeply flawed.” This is because of the reality that Canada only has one significant ally: the United States – to say otherwise is a denial of Canada's geostrategic reality. “Like it or not, they are our best friends.”⁵³

“Let's be clear: NATO does little to increase Canada's defence...Canada does not need NATO to defend itself; Canada needs the United States to defend itself.” ~Dr. Jean-Christophe Boucher⁵⁴

The Future Role of the Canadian Armed Forces

The previous defence policies of maintaining a “multipurpose combat operational force” was irrational and mislead procurement because in Canada, the issue of economic offsets, regional development, and employment can become more important than the military operational requirement.⁵⁵ Once ‘Fortress Canada’ is established – air interdiction and coastal support, and cyber defence – all other contributions should be understood as being arbitrary and contingent upon immediate needs and policy objectives.⁵⁶

“0.8% GDP is enough – if we specialise.” ~Dr. Jean-Christophe Boucher⁵⁷

If the Canadian Armed Forces cannot operate outside of a joint operation, almost always in concert with the United States' armed forces, then defence policy must take American material needs into consideration and “what the Americans need,” rather than token contributions, is a substantive, value-added contribution.⁵⁸

The Canadian defence policy community should focus on enhancing areas of the CAF which best act as a force multiplier for allies: logistics, Special Forces, communications, engineering, medical support, and local capability-building. This means that you have to get rid everything not in these categories. “It's going to be hard.”⁵⁹

Canada is still a sovereign nation, and rightly exercises the power to determine our policies but decision makers need to devise a defence policy that contains clear and concise objectives in order to avoid Canada's specialization choices being made for us.⁶⁰

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Safeguarding Canada's Interests

Canadian defence spending is sufficient for our needs. No amount of increased spending can compensate for a failure in defence policy to allocate resources effectively. The following recommendations aim to reduce inefficient spending while simultaneously realigning Canada's focus on key areas of defence in order to maximize the return on investment. In so doing, Canada will both mitigate fiscal and material mismanagement while at the same time alleviate ally's concerns of Canada's ‘free-riding.’



Canada's first priority should be effective homeland defence, followed by improving relations with our most significant defence partner, the United States.

1. Canada must continue to assert itself in North American defence:
 - a. Focus on territorial and provincial capacity building rather than merely placing Canadian Armed Forces "boots on the ground".
 - b. Augment the capacity of the Canadian Armed Forces to "lead from behind" in cooperation with local authorities:
 - i. Continued investment in civilian assistance and capability-building equipment to carry out missions at the request of civilian institutions, such as:
 1. Disaster relief;
 2. Real-time patrol and Surveillance; and
 3. Search and Rescue.
 - c. Recognize the strategic need for air interdiction and procure the necessary interceptor aircraft.
2. Canada needs to discontinue inadequate cyber-security policies and increase vital systems' resilience to cyber-attack as a demonstration of taking national defence more seriously. This is relatively inexpensive and a strategic reality of the modern security environment and is long overdue.
3. Canada should reconsider its position on ballistic missile defence (BMD) and cooperate with the United States immediately. This need not be prohibitively expensive regarding material or political capital, but will go a long way in assuaging bad feelings. For example:
 - a. Allow for the construction of surveillance sites on Canadian soil as an informal part of an expanded BMD system. This will allow for Canada access to American operations and intelligence.
4. Reinvent the Canadian Armed Forces to be more in line with Canada's needs first, and then need of Canada's allies:
 - a. Specialize Canada's Armed Forces into niche capabilities that act as value-adding, force-multiplying components of a coalition effort such as:
 - i. Special Forces;
 - ii. Logistics and Transportation;
 - iii. Local forces training and capacity-building; and
 - iv. Patrol and Surveillance.
5. The Royal Canadian Airforce plays a cornerstone role in the defence of North America and should be reliably equipped with the necessary tools in order to effectively:
 - a. Assist civilian authorities in Search and Rescue operations;
 - b. Provide real-time surveillance; and
 - c. Intercept/interdict threats as part of a concerted effort to fulfill Canada's NORAD commitment to North American defence.
6. Continue to build off recent successes in the Caribbean in order to ease the burden of the United States and local governments in the region. The Royal Canadian Navy, in particular, if well-suited to carry out operations in concert with allies such as:



- a. Combating human trafficking, the transport of illicit goods, terrorism, and organized crime;
 - b. Assisting local governments in stabilizing politically vulnerable areas through training and capacity-building operations; and
 - c. Disaster relief.
7. Canada should continue to invest in the Royal Canadian Navy to achieve blue water capabilities:
- a. Continue to focus naval procurement on vessels which excel in patrol and surveillance;
 - b. Keep improving the Royal Canadian Navy's at-sea logistics capabilities to enable operations further from home such as:
 - i. Freedom of Navigation patrols in the Pacific;
 - ii. Anti-Piracy operations in East Africa; and
 - iii. Regional stability in the East Indies and South America.



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