



**CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE**  
**INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES**

# **Keeping the Americans In**

by Colin Robertson  
August, 2017

# NATO SERIES

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Prepared for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cgai.ca](http://www.cgai.ca)

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ISBN: 978-1-988493-55-8



**T**he most useful role that Canada can play in sustaining the international order is to keep Donald Trump's America engaged in NATO.

NATO continues to be the insurance policy that has guaranteed peace and security for generations of Canadians. Instrumental in NATO's creation, Canada needs to step up again and do its part.

In the impudent phrase of Hastings "Pug" Ismay, NATO's first secretary general, the organization was designed to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Today, NATO needs a fully committed Germany. Keeping the Russians out continues to be a sad reality, but keeping the Americans in is imperative.

Americans are doubting the role that they have played since 1945 in bearing the burden of global primacy. Successive presidents and secretaries of defence have become increasingly explicit: Having the U.S. shoulder approximately 70 per cent of NATO's defence expenditure is not sustainable. It undermines the core of the transatlantic relationship and makes a mockery of the "collective" in collective security.

Trump's campaign claim that the world order is not in the U.S.'s interest and that the world is taking the American people to the cleaners has found resonance. This attitude goes beyond Trump. It is also shared by growing factions on both sides of the aisle in Congress. A recent Pew Foundation survey shows that Americans are increasingly wary about how much the U.S. should be involved globally.

We need to tell Americans that they are our most important ally, that we do not take them for granted. The recent Norwegian drama, *Okkupert* (Occupied), is a fictional depiction of a decoupling of American and European security interests and a NATO without the U.S. Bringing in climate, energy and cyber concerns, it is grim but gripping.

### **What do we need to tell the Americans?**

First, they need to know that we will shoulder our share of the security burden.

Defence investment is at the core of the defence dilemma and the U.S. has carried a disproportionate share for too long. After generations of free-riding, we and the rest of the Alliance cannot expect the U.S. – nor is the Trump administration prepared – to invest in collective security when we are not willing to make the necessary investments ourselves.

Keeping to the schedule in the building of our new warships and purchase of our new fighter jets is as important a commitment as our leadership of the new multinational brigade in Latvia. We need to do more – it is time to think about the next generation of submarines, the ultimate stealth



weapon which is essential to a maritime nation bordering on three oceans. We should also restore our AWACs capacity as part of our NATO contribution.

Second, commitment means taking a greater share of the political burden.

The pace of deterioration in global security demands an increased presence in the world beyond Europe. This means greater involvement, for example, in hemispheric affairs. Can we be useful in Central America, Cuba or Venezuela? Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promises a renewed Canadian involvement in peacekeeping. What better demonstration that “Canada is back” than helping in humanitarian responses and then in the longer-term relief operation? Why not build a couple of hospital ships, staffed and ready to sail to disasters?

Third, commitment means demonstrating a greater interest in U.S. security concerns.

War today is as much about cyber-hacking, fake news, subversion and espionage as it is about fighter jets and tanks. NATO needs a minimal baseline for members’ readiness to meet the requirements of hybrid defence, including police services, counterintelligence services, emergency preparedness and public affairs.

Public affairs are mostly neglected, but NATO’s citizens need to understand what NATO does and why it matters to them. Perhaps the Harper government’s smartest strategic public affairs initiative was the creation of the Halifax International Security Forum. Wisely, the Trudeau government has reinvested in this annual gathering of global democratic leaders, with a particular focus on the transatlantic, to discuss current and pressing security threats.

Fourth, commitment means helping with threats beyond NATO’s traditional theatre of operation. Today, it is the interplay of Eurasian and Asian powers that threaten global instability.

Global commerce is made possible by U.S. ships and submarines securing the sea lanes and its air and space command keeping safe our airspace. When there is a natural calamity, the U.S. is the first responder, but it needs help.

As friend, neighbour and ally, we understand Americans better than anyone else. Let us use this understanding to keep the U.S. engaged.

For now, the more America turns inward, the greater the requirement for Canada to broaden its foreign policy options and to deepen its investment in our diplomatic and defence capabilities. These capabilities serve our national needs as well as contribute to NATO’s ability to execute collective defence and out-of-area crisis response operations.

What middle powers like Canada cannot do is sit on the fence or play it safe. Canada, in league with other middle and like-minded powers who value representative government, human rights and freer trade, needs to again step up and reassert our interests in sustaining and preserving the rules-based liberal international system.



NATO, by Canadian design, is a community of democratic values. Canada can be a champion in the articulation of values as long as we avoid smugness or what former U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson called the Canadian tendency to behave like “the stern voice of the daughter of God”.

In a practical sense, this means:

- Working in tandem with our European and Pacific partners.
- Burden sharing and ensuring readiness, capacity and capability. It is not just arms but a balance of capabilities: diplomatic, policing, development aid, military, trade, intelligence, public affairs, cultural outreach and so on.
- Explaining to our public why NATO, collective security and the rule-based international order matter. This advocacy and explanatory role is one into which elected representatives especially need to lean.

The global order that has defined the world in our age is in various ways challenged, crumbling, bursting at the seams or being transformed into something else. The situation is difficult but not unmanageable. No other organization has NATO’s unique combination of common defence planning, a common command structure and a North Atlantic council making political decisions on a 24/7 basis.

NATO’s fundamental role and purpose continues to be as the democracies’ collective-security insurance policy. Every member needs to shoulder its share. Canada can do more.

## ► **About the Author**

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The Institute was created to bridge the gap between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically Canadians have tended to look abroad out of a search for markets because Canada depends heavily on foreign trade. In the modern post-Cold War world, however, global security and stability have become the bedrocks of global commerce and the free movement of people, goods and ideas across international boundaries. Canada has striven to open the world since the 1930s and was a driving factor behind the adoption of the main structures which underpin globalization such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and emerging free trade networks connecting dozens of international economies. The Canadian Global Affairs Institute recognizes Canada's contribution to a globalized world and aims to inform Canadians about Canada's role in that process and the connection between globalization and security.

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