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THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MILITARY INSTITUTE

SITREP

The 2024 Year End Special Edition



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From the Editor's Desk

Welcome to our SITREP 'Year End Special' edition. What makes it special? First, our contributing authors. Every one of the articles has been submitted by an author who has previously contributed to SITREP (some multiple times), and was specifically invited by me to write a short piece on an issue, idea or concern that they would like to highlight going into the new year of 2025. And what a year it will be.

Depending on which armchair quarterback you follow, the election of Donald Trump to a second term as President of the United States was either a foregone conclusion, or a massive surprise. In either case, this development has, once again, upended all global security and economic predictions and calculations. There was a sense in 2024 that the crises occurring in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, and elsewhere were in some way evolving towards a denouement. How those conflicts might have ended is now simply food for thought, as President Trump will no doubt want to act decisively, both to fulfill his election promises, and to cement his control of the global security and economic narrative as soon as possible.

Given the underlying complexities which are driving these conflicts, how the US decides to intervene in them (or not) has the potential to further destabilize already unstable regions and states. The well-known transactional propensities of the new President may seek trade-offs that will stifle conflicts in the short run, but not resolve core issues that will likely re-emerge at some point in the future. To the extent that he may be willing to negotiate with authoritarian leaders in order to achieve conditions favorable to his security and economic goals for the US, many allies and friends of the US, particularly those who have come to rely on it for their own wellbeing, are very nervous, to say the least.

With the free rein offered to our contributors this time around, it is not surprising that we have an eclectic assortment of topics for your consideration. Two articles by James Trottier and Eric Morse address a very concerning development which is morphing from a seeming haphazard series of events to an outright threat, namely, the coalescing of an alliance between Russia and North Korea. This situation has the potential to not only upend the war in Ukraine in favour of Russia, as North Korea provides large numbers of troops, but may result in significantly increased military and technological capabilities for North Korea which could alter the balance of power on the Korean peninsula.

This situation will be exacerbated to the extent that President Trump views US relations with (currently) key allies, such as South Korea and Japan through an economic lens. If he chooses to follow through with his promise to place tariffs on partners that have an unfavorable trade imbalance with the US, this will have a shock effect on the international economic system, and potentially weaken those states (and the US itself as it experiences inflationary pressures as a result).

Many of these scenarios are causing world leaders to try and figure out how to adapt to the new Trump administration, not least of which includes our own Canadian leadership. The pressure for Canada to keep its promise to achieve 2% of GDP for national defence expenditures is now rising to a fever pitch, with openly hostile criticism from incoming US politicians and officials, as well as Canadian organizations such as the Business Council of Canada which is urging the government to meet or exceed that target as soon as possible. While the government has rebuffed these ad-



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Charitable Registration Number 878734110 RR 0001

monitions by arguing that Canada is on the 'right path' to achieve that target by 2031, it is unlikely that this approach will succeed for long, particularly as the Canada-US-Mexico trade agreement may be linked to a Canadian commitment to significantly and quickly increase its defence spending.

While all of this is going on, the political situation in Canada has all but ground to a halt. By the time this edition of SITREP is published, it may well be that Parliament has been prorogued, as it is unable to pass any new legislation due to the ongoing filibuster related to the unwillingness of the government to turn over documents related to the so-called 'green slush fund.' While the Conservatives remain well ahead in the polls, and are generally viewed as having a better chance of dealing with the Trump administration going forward, the next federal election is not scheduled to happen before October. Although it is assumed the Conservatives will lean more favorably towards a robust national defence posture, no commitment to the holy grail of 2% has yet been made, as the massive national debt and repeated deficits will weigh heavily on any attempt to significantly reorder the Canadian economy. That said, even the Canadian population itself appears to be more favorable towards improving our national defence while recognizing that some social expenditures may need to be sacrificed in order to achieve it.

On a brighter note, at this time of year, a committee headed by RCMI member James McReynolds reviews all SITREP articles published in the previous year and selects the winner and runners up for the annual Hamilton E. Boulter Editorial Award (also known as the 'Hammies'). The year's award is very special because the winner and first runner-up was awarded to the same author, Cam Telch. The winning article is **The Historical Legacies of Shell Shock in the Ukraine War** (Vol 83, No 4), and the first runner up article is **He Suffered for Nothing in the Great War: The Aftermath of the Shell-Shocked Soldier in the Post-War Western World** (Vol 84, No 1). The second runner up was awarded to Richard Shimooka for his article **While War Rages in the Middle East and Europe, Canada's Military is less capable than ever** (Vol 83, No 6). Congratulations to Cam and Richard!

2025 promises to be an 'interesting' year indeed, and I cannot predict what our next year-end special will offer for 2026. Will we look back on chaos or calm? Threats actualized or attenuated? Perhaps I may take the liberty of signing off this column with a quote from the great man Winston Churchill: *This is no time for Ease and Comfort – it is time to Dare and Endure.* ♣

The Battlefield's Terrifying New Threat

by Christopher Banks

Drones, small remotely piloted vehicles, have been a familiar addition to the modern battle space. Drones, in one fashion or another, have been part of military training and operations since the UK's Queen Bee radio-controlled aerial drone in the 1930's, however, recent advancements have taken the capabilities of drones into the realm of near science fiction. Science fiction often becomes science fact, it's no secret that imaginative science fiction such as Star Trek has led to real-world developments, including automatic sliding doors and teleconferencing. And, in our 21st century, science fiction has once again come to the battlefield.

The early versions of military drones were used for targets, then the 1990's saw the deployment of the RQ2 drones in the Gulf War and the development of the MQ-1 Predator. The RQ and MQ series were replacements of traditional military aircraft, deployed as airborne weapons and surveillance platforms. They brought their own capabilities over traditional aircraft: they were smaller and less visible to radar, being controlled from the ground allowed crews to rotate for longer sorties, and they eliminated the risk to pilots.

However, with the addition of newer drone technology, 3D printing, and the availability of Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) drones, drone warfare has taken a leap toward science fiction. These newer drones are small, some as small as a sandwich, and some the size of a table. The larger drones are capable of supply drops, casualty evacuation, and can even deploy smaller drones as well as complete traditional roles such as surveillance and weapon deployment. These larger drones have merely advanced the capabilities of drones towards traditional aircraft capabilities. The smaller drones, however, have become weapons themselves.

Sgt Christopher Banks (ret'd)
CD, ABCP began his military career as an Army Cadet in 1995, then in 2000 he enlisted in the Lorne Scots infantry regiment in Brampton, Ontario. He deployed to Zgon, Bosnia in 2003 in the Royal Canadian Dragoon Battle Group as a peacekeeper. In 2008, he deployed again to Kandahar, Afghanistan in the 3rd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group; Chris fought as a machine gunner in numerous battles across Zhari and Panjwayi districts and returned home with PTSD. Chris continued his career advancing to Regimental Quartermaster at the rank of Sergeant before he was medically released. (cont.) »

Advancements in drone technology and battlefield 3D printing means tens of thousands of drones are built or deployed everyday. Most drones employed in combat are on 3D printed frames supported by motors and other components supplied to Ukraine, while others are COTS, such as the popular DJI brand. They are controlled from a common controller or can be flown in First Person View (FPV). These drones will either be configured as suicide drones, aimed at dismounted personnel, flown into a vehicle or even another drone, or they can be fitted with a release mechanism to drop grenades or explosives from a height. Drones have been extremely successful eliminating armored vehicles by flying inside before detonating or dropping a charge into an open hatch. Drones have been entering tents, buildings and trench systems to deliver their payload. And development continues, newer footage from Ukraine shows drones on both sides have begun using flame throwers, spraying thermite, and even deploying thermobaric munitions, clearing out entire treelines. Suicide drones have become so cheap that they have begun to target dismounted soldiers, chasing them down, even accepting surrendering soldiers who saw the drone and knew their time was up.

There is not much that soldiers can do, for with every advancement comes a way to overcome it. Traditional anti-drone technology focused on electronic jamming, filling the frequencies they use with noise until the drone loses connection and lands, has been overcome with an old idea. The Russians have deployed drones in Ukraine which drop smaller suicide drones connected via a fibre optic cable, similar to TOW missile, which can be controlled from outside jamming range. And in development, AI controlled drones that can be assigned a target by the operator and the AI takes over without the need for a connection to strike its target, even if the target is evading. Personal detectors like the “Sugar Cubes” used in Ukraine can show a user if there are drones in the area and of what type.

One of better defences employed by soldiers on both sides of the war seems to be camouflage. Proper cam and concealment of vehicles, positions, and individuals has proven that they can hide and survive drone attacks. Shotguns are a soldier’s best friend when drones are flying nearby. Tight wires and chains laid out over vehicles or positions can tangle a drone, thereby disabling it. Vigilance is also one of the best defences; it is possible to evade a drone strike, for all their advantages they are still easy enough to see flying nearby, they are loud, and they are slower than projectiles.

As the world watches and takes note of these developments, many nations are taking steps to invest in their drone and counter-drone capabilities. Nations are heavily investing in electronic jamming and detection capabilities as well as developing their own offensive capabilities. However, the need to promote basic soldier skills, such as camouflage and shotgun use, have been proven effective by soldiers in Ukraine. However, while the clear need has been demonstrated, Canada has once again decided to lag. Budget cuts continue to negatively impact training and equipment procurement, and the government announced that the CAF will not be purchasing FPV drones.

This new evolution of drones is terrifying, which is not an exaggeration. The availability and lethality of small maneuverable drones on the battlefield, their successful strikes recorded in staggering numbers, their accuracy and ability to enter vehicles or buildings, and especially the fear they put into the hearts of warriors in Ukraine make the drone threat one of the biggest developments on the battlefield in years. Traditional tactics for defence are doing little to overcome the threat. Soldier skills are the best defence, and they require extreme vigilance on the part of the soldier to maintain. Nations, or terrorist organizations, will have a distinct advantage over those without offensive drone capabilities or, at the least, defensive capabilities. The future of the battlefield has forever changed. ♣

Chris now lives in Ottawa and advocates on behalf of those who serve and those who have served directly to Members of Parliament. He has been a witness to the House of Commons Committees for National Defence and Veterans Affairs. He speaks and writes on mental health, veterans’ issues and defence issues.

The production of SITREP is made possible in part by the generosity of the Langley Bequest, which is made in honour of Major Arthur J Langley CD and Lt (N/S) Edith F Groundwater Langley

“Action This Day”: A Climate Security Update

by *Daniel Eustace*

My interest in the subject of climate security was tweaked during my attendance at the Harvard Kennedy School course ‘Senior Executives in National and International Security’ in December 2020. One of the expert speakers, Dr. Sherri Goodman, had served as the first Deputy Undersecretary of Defence (Environmental Security) in the US Department of Defence, and is now the Secretary General of the International Military Council on Climate and Security. Dr. Goodman’s presentation made the argument that climate change was a global security threat multiplier, and she offered numerous examples, scenarios and case studies to support that argument. Until that moment, I had not considered the nexus between climate change and security threats, although it was already evident that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was being increasingly tasked to respond to various weather-related emergencies, such as floods and forest fires, and this was having a negative effect on the CAF’s managed readiness plans and preparations, including training.

Following a short, but intense, period of research, it was clear that climate security had gained sufficient relevance and importance such that I decided to focus the next RCMI annual defence and security studies conference on that subject. The conference, held on April 20, 2021, was entitled ‘Climate Change: Impacts on Canadian National Security and Beyond’, and featured high-level speakers from DND, NATO and the US Centre for Climate and Security, amongst others. One of the interesting developments that came to light just prior to the conference was the publication of a new DND-sponsored paper entitled ‘A Climate Security Plan for Canada’. This document was modelled on the same paper as that published in the US, and was, in fact, co-written by one of the conference speakers, John Conger, who, at the time, was the Director of the Centre for Climate and Security.

On October 29 and 30, 2024, I attended the Montreal Climate Security Summit. This event, held at the Montreal Congress Centre, was sponsored by The NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (www.ccascocoe.org), and the Conference of Defence Associations Institute (<https://cdainstitute.ca/>), of which, the RCMI is a member. Invited delegates were drawn from across various militaries, industry, academia, think tanks, government agencies, and NGOs, and represented a large number of countries; I represented the RCMI. The 2024 Summit was the third iteration of such conferences, and I was advised by one of the organizers that while there were approximately 200 delegates on hand, there was something on the order of another 200 that were not able to attend due to the maximum possible number having been reached. Clearly, this subject had gained a very large and committed international audience.

For background, “the opening of the [NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence \(CCASCOE\)](#) in October 2023 and its accreditation to NATO in May 2024 are a milestone for NATO to address the security implications of climate change. The CCASCOE was established to support the efforts of NATO Allies and partners to adapt to the implications of climate change on their security and mitigate their own impact on climate change, while strengthening operational effectiveness.

Canada, the framework nation, was joined in this effort by CCASCOE’s sponsoring nations: Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxemburg, Norway, Romania, Türkiye and the United Kingdom. CCASCOE works with governmental and non-governmental organizations, think tanks, academia and industry to stimulate innovative solutions, encourage closer collaboration among NATO Allies and partners and across different types of organizations, gather and streamline knowledge and expertise in one dedicated hub, and increase the awareness of decision-makers and the broader public on the pressing need of taking concrete actions to preserve Allied security. CCASCOE’s efforts support the implementation of the NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan and contribute to NATO’s overall military readiness, deterrence and defence posture.” The Summit included presentations by a wide range of experts and organizations and was organized primarily around a series of panel discussions, including:

- The State of Climate Security Today
- Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier (this presentation was given by the aforementioned

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Dr. Sherri Goodman)

- Climate and Human Security
- Greening Defence and Military Readiness
- Operational Resilience: Adapting to Climate Change
- Climate Security in Multilateral Diplomacy
- Data and Climate Security
- The Arctic Evolving Security and Melting Landscapes (the moderator for this panel was Dr. Whitney Lackenbauer who spoke at the RCMI 2019 annual conference on the subject of Global Challenges to Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic) and
- Strategic Foresight

Clearly, climate security is a complex and multi-faceted subject, and the impact of climate change on militaries, and the global security environment writ large, has morphed into a top-level priority for most, if not all, western governments.

While I have already noted Canada's role as the 'framework nation' for the CCASCOE, the climate change threat figured prominently in the recently published defence policy update "Our North, Strong and Free: A renewed vision for Canada's defence." Of three key trends that are identified as having an impact on Canadian security and prosperity going forward, "a more open and accessible Arctic and northern region driven by climate change" was top of the list.

"Our Arctic is now warming at four times the global average, making a vast and sensitive region more accessible to foreign actors who have growing capabilities and regional military ambitions. By 2050, the Arctic Ocean could become the most efficient shipping route between Europe and East Asia. Canada's Northwest Passage and the broader Arctic region are already more accessible, and competitors are not waiting to take advantage— seeking access, transportation routes, natural resources, critical minerals, and energy sources through more frequent and regular presence and activity. They are exploring Arctic waters and the sea floor, probing our infrastructure and collecting intelligence. We are seeing more Russian activity in our air approaches, and a growing number of Chinese dual-purpose research vessels and surveillance platforms collecting data about the Canadian North that is, by Chinese law, made available to China's military." (North, Strong and Free p. 4)

The sheer volume of information proffered during the Summit was daunting, and so I will only relate five key takeaways that I found to be most significant.

1. There is a need to develop a climate security 'common operating picture'. Because climate change is having different effects in different parts of the globe, various nations are working in isolation to try and develop prevention, adaptation or mitigation strategies. It is hoped that the CCASCOE will evolve towards that objective. That evolution will be assisted by better 'climate intelligence' supported by artificial intelligence.
2. The risk of securitizing climate change has implications for militaries who may be seen as the best tool to 'fight climate change'. While there are roles for militaries to respond to serious weather events (and there are opportunities to 'green' military infrastructure and equipment), the pre-eminent role of the military must remain as a warfighting force. If trade-offs are to be made between maintaining warfighting capability and capacity versus achieving a lower carbon footprint, or responding to disasters, warfighting must take priority.
3. With respect to energy transition, while there is a significant impetus to move our economies away from fossil fuels, we must be careful not to build new layers of dependency, for example, shifting from Russian oil to Chinese solar.
4. Canada lacks a sufficient level of Arctic expertise, and this has led to a general state of inertia as to how to address the rapidly changing nature of the Arctic region. There are many competing visions about the Arctic, for example, while most Canadians view the Inuit peoples as Arctic 'stakeholders', the Inuit view themselves as Arctic 'rightsholders'. At the same time, the need for vastly increased and improved Arctic infrastructure and technology of all types is typically viewed through a lens of 'costs' rather than 'investments.'
5. Climate change is a highly politicized concept, and some actors in the defence and security realm remain skeptical about the idea of pursuing climate security actions and goals. That said, one



does not need to be a climate change zealot to appreciate that the number of weather-related disasters and climate-induced conditions, such as the loss of Arctic Sea ice, are affecting militaries themselves, including how, when, why and where they may be force generated, equipped, trained and employed. As Dr. Goodman would contend, if climate change itself is not a threat, it is indeed a very significant ‘threat multiplier’.

As we now head into 2025, I believe that the incoming US administration may take a position that downplays climate change and, therefore, the need to build on the climate security institutions and expertise that has been developed over the past decade. For Canada, the time to undertake a concrete Arctic defence and security strategy has already past, and we are seeing the results in the form of increasing Russian and Chinese activities, including increased military presence in the Arctic region. Therefore, the lesson is clear: if we don’t act to control our Arctic space, someone else will. As Churchill insisted: *Action This Day!* 🍁

From Liberalism to Realism—A Needed Shift in a Volatile World

by Alexander Landry

As 2025 approaches, global security concerns are indisputably mounting. In seeking to define the key threat facing the Canadian and global security sphere next year, authors within this collation of submissions will highlight the ongoing war in Ukraine, the conflict in Israel, and rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific. In fairness, all of these topics continue to dominate discussions within the security domain, and rightly so considering their impact on the future not only of Canada, but of the fragile stability arguably established since the end of the Second World War.

Yet, beyond these headlines lies a more fundamental issue linking them together that specifically places the nation’s future security at risk: Canada’s reluctance to accept realism in an increasingly realist international environment. While we continue as a nation to extol the virtues of a “rules-based international order,”¹ the stark reality is that the world no longer plays by these rules. Canada’s adherence to liberal internationalism, once perceived as a strength in the days of peace-keeping and even the early new millennium, now risks sidelining it in a world dominated by hard power and geopolitical competition.

The rhetoric surrounding the “rules-based international order” is emblematic of Canada’s liberalist leanings.² While this framework underpinned global stability following the Second World War, its foundations are now crumbling. The United States, once its chief architect, is increasingly divided and isolationist³ —a trend epitomized by the return of Donald J. Trump to the presidency following the 2024 election. Institutions like the United Nations, conceived as pillars of collective security and liberalism, have become hollowed out by geopolitical rivalries and internal dysfunction. Their failure to address crises meaningfully, as seen in the frustrations of Ukraine and Israel—both recently barring the UN Secretary-General from visits—further illustrates this decline.⁴ For another recent example, one need only look to COP29, where the focus shifted from earlier iterations predicated on actionable climate solutions towards divisive debates on reparations,⁵ highlighting the growing inefficacy of these institutions to address what former NATO Secretary

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1 The Honourable Melanie Joly, “Address by Minister Joly on Canadian Diplomacy Amidst Geopolitical Uncertainty,” Global Affairs Canada, October 30, 2023.

2 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000): 616–645.

3 Carlos Roa, “[Don’t Look Now, But Isolationism Is Winning](#),” Institute for Peace & Diplomacy, October 21, 2024.

4 Reference planned visits in October 2024 to both nations following a visit of Guterres to Russia and failure to condemn Iran’s earlier missile attacks on Israel.

5 David Vetter, “[Developing Nations And NGOs Reject ‘Disaster’ COP29 Climate Deal](#),” Forbes, 24 November 2024.

General Jens Stoltenberg has described as the “defining challenge of our time.”⁶ All said, this erosion underscores the limits of liberalism in a world that now prizes power over principle.

Adding fuel to the metaphorical fire are authoritarian states such as China and Russia, who actively exploit these weaknesses, reshaping norms and undermining democratic processes to their advantage. Even Canada, the “fireproof house,” has felt the impact, with allegations of foreign interference in its recent elections that have led to more than a year of debates in the House of Commons.⁷ These developments reveal a grim reality: the mechanisms Canada has championed for decades are faltering in a world increasingly governed by hard power and strategic self-interest. Clinging to outdated ideals without adapting to this new paradigm leaves Canada vulnerable and isolated.

In this context, General Cavoli’s remarks as NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe last year following the invasion of Ukraine resonate deeply. He asserts the return of hard power as the primary currency of international relations, urging NATO allies to rise to the occasion.⁸ For a nation like Canada, which has long championed multilateralism, peacekeeping, and soft power, this shift is deeply unsettling. Yet, the lesson must be clear: ideals alone cannot preserve influence. Hard power now dictates global stability, and Canada must modernize its policies to engage meaningfully within this reality.

It is worth noting that, historically, Canada has not always been so deeply tied to liberal internationalism. David Haglund’s “*The Paradigm That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Canadian Foreign Policy’s Uneasy Relationship with Realist IR Theory*” reminds us that, although there is a reluctance within Canadian foreign policy discourse to openly embrace realist principles, Canada has often sought to balance pragmatism with idealism⁹. Early contributions to NATO during the Cold War demonstrated that Canada recognized the interplay between power and principle, including with permanent stationing of troops in Europe, and participation in the Korean War. Over time, however, Canada became increasingly reliant on liberal ideals, even as other nations adapted to a more competitive, realist global paradigm.

The challenge now is whether Canada can recalibrate its approach to embrace realism as a complement to its values. This is not a call to abandon principles like multilateralism or diplomacy but rather to ground them in pragmatic realities. Tangible steps must follow: strengthening defense capabilities, modernizing procurement, and ensuring strategic readiness are essential. Canada must also clarify its priorities, aligning its foreign and defense policies with its resources and influence. It has notably done so to some degree in *Our North, Strong and Free*, yet we must go beyond “committing to exploring” the future of security investments¹⁰. This is not merely about militarization—it is about projecting credibility and ensuring that Canada remains relevant in shaping global affairs.

Adopting a realist posture will not be easy. It demands difficult political decisions, including increased defense spending, trade-offs between values and strategic interests, and a commitment to sustained action rather than rhetoric. However, failing to adapt risks relegating Canada to the margins of a fractured and competitive global system. Undoubtedly, the liberal internationalism that guided Canada for decades served its purpose in a more cooperative era. Today, it must be tempered by realism. Only by embracing a pragmatic approach can Canada navigate the complexities of a world that no longer plays by previously established rules. 🍁



⁶ NATO, “Environment, climate change and security,” NATO, last modified 18 July 2024.

⁷ Timeline for the combatting of foreign interference in election actually dates back to 2016 - [Timeline: Measures to combat foreign interference in elections – 2016-2024 - Canada.ca](#)

⁸ Christopher G. Cavoli, “Hard Power is a Reality” (speech to Rikskonferensen, Salen, Sweden, January 9, 2023).

⁹ D. G. Haglund, “The Paradigm That Dare Not Speak Its Name: Canadian Foreign Policy’s Uneasy Relationship with Realist IR Theory,” *International Journal* 72, no. 2 (2017): 230–242.

¹⁰ Government of Canada, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada’s Defence*, Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2024.

Orcs, Norks, Cash Cows and Red Lines: The North Korean presence in Ukraine globalizes the war

by Eric Morse

In the somewhat chaotic year of 2020, Professor Bettina Renz, a German political scientist of the University of Nottingham was a visiting scholar at the Canadian Forces College. At that point, all interactions were virtual, and I ‘attended’ one such talk.

Professor Renz’s specialty over 20 years has been—broadly framed—the Russian military and its policies, and what she had to say was startling. She was very dismissive of Russian military capacity, considering it ossified, corrupt, and deeply incompetent. In early 2023, following the disastrously bungled Russian invasion of Ukraine, she gave another lecture at the RAF Museum in London UK and returned to the same theme. As she noted in her talk, former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in June 2022: “We have clearly overestimated the strength of the Russian military.” That is putting it mildly, and at one point around 2019, even Renz fell into the trap for a little while.

From the very start the problem in the West has been an ingrained tendency, especially but hardly exclusively, in the DC Beltway, to see Russia as far more powerful than it is. Mental shorthand—to use a more technical term, ‘wishful thinking’—has equated the Russian Federation to the Soviet Union of which it is really a rump. Put bluntly, in the eyes of too many Western policy-makers, Russia is an eternal geopolitical verity that must not be humiliated at any cost ([Emmanuel Macron, 2022](#)), while Ukraine is a geopolitical inconvenience to be disposed of—thus the deplorable tendency to negotiate Ukraine’s fate over the heads of Ukrainians.

In his recent talk at RCMI (viewable [here](#)), Dr Aurel Braun of the University of Toronto has referred to this as a problem with ‘right-sizing Russia’. It is a serious problem. A state of about 145 million (now) is not a state of 290 million (in 1990). Much of the USSR’s military production capacity was concentrated in Ukraine (thus Putin’s desire to repossess the Donbas in particular) and Ukraine’s 2022 population was 38 million with an unusually high standard of technical education.

Specifically, Putin is desperate to camouflage the cost (especially the human cost) of his ‘Special Military Operation’. Therefore, he is resorting to every expedient, including a sustained disinformation offensive aimed at the West, to avoid mobilizing ethnic Russians, especially from urban areas (i.e. Moscow and St Petersburg).

The election of the Trump/Vance ticket in the USA has thrown everyone’s calculations into a cocked hat. In spite or because of Trump’s known affinity for Putin, and because of his preference for rule by chaos, how the new Administration will come down on Ukraine when it assumes power is really very foggy. Biden (and the UK and France) recently announced the lifting of restrictions against Ukraine using US long-range munitions (basically anything with US components) to strike deeper into Russian territory. When the policy became known (it was never announced) on November 17, sources linked it explicitly to the presence of North Korean troops—about 12,000 according to Ukrainian intelligence, mainly in the Kursk (inside Russia) theatre. It is reported that Kim Jong-un has promised 100,000 troops to Putin and is supplying munitions of questionable quality, in exchange for over one million barrels of oil ([Institute for the Study of War Nov 22](#)).

The history of this war on all sides has been studded with ‘red lines’ that have been overrun sooner or later; usually sooner. This has already led to the globalization of the war: commentator Claire Berlinski, also on November 22, has said that “It’s time to call this World War III” with a very insightful interview with Trump’s former National Security Advisor [LGen H. R. McMaster](#).

The consensus among Western analysts is that the North Korean troops (colloquially called ‘Norks’ in the trade, an ironic paring with Russian ‘Orcs’) will not perform well in an entirely alien environment (e.g., they don’t speak Russian, and the Russians don’t speak Korean). It is assumed that they will be used in ‘human wave’ attacks which will incur massive casualties. These assumptions may be correct or not, but they do underline Putin’s desperation to avoid bringing the war home to Russians.

It is worth underlining that neither Putin nor the North Korean regime place any value on human life. And mercenaries are *always* expendable, until and unless they turn and bite, as Prigozhin and the Wagner Group finally did (unsuccessfully).

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For the North Koreans, they are merely trade tokens. They are being paid for by the Russians, but even the surviving troops will never see the money—that goes straight into North Korean coffers (and incidentally, it poses a problem for Ukraine of what to do with any North Korean prisoners, who if ‘repatriated’ will be immediately shot for not having fought to the death). They might well be given asylum and turned.

Putin has found a supply of disposable ‘off the books’ soldiers. Kim Jong-un has found a cash cow, and it is a reasonable supposition that North Korean soldiers will begin popping up anywhere that the local regime can pay for them.

And Beijing must be getting *very* nervous. ✳

To Stop the Killing: The Complexities of Implementing a Demilitarized Zone in Ukraine

by **Sergiy Sydorenko**

Throughout the presidential election campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly stated that he would quickly end the war in Ukraine if elected.¹ Following his victory in the 2024 election, there is much speculation about how the incoming Trump Administration will fulfill this campaign promise. One option being floated in some circles is the creation of a heavily fortified demilitarized zone (DMZ) along the current frontline in Ukraine, publicly proposed by Trump’s running mate, now Vice-President-elect, JD Vance.² At first glance, a DMZ seems plausible, assuming Moscow and Kyiv agree to one.³ However, at closer examination, there is a myriad of obstacles to implementing it. These snags can be categorized into two groups: the geographical extent of the DMZ; and its operationalization.

The first question pertains to the DMZ’s boundaries. Naturally, one can expect the DMZ to run parallel to the current frontline, which stretches over 1,600 kilometers.⁴ However, considerations would have to be made for the 800 kilometers of the Russo-Ukrainian border in Ukraine’s Kharkiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv oblasts (provinces) where there is minimal fighting.⁵ An agreement would also have to be reached to demarcate the Black Sea. Russia now occupies the majority of Ukraine’s coastline, and the Russian Black Sea Fleet (RBSF) will almost certainly return to its homeport of Sevastopol after hostilities cease.⁶ Since a maritime DMZ is logistically impractical, Kyiv would need other solutions to deter possible continued Russian aggression against its maritime trade and security.

Considerations would also have to be made for Ukraine’s border with Belarus. While this frontier has seen little fighting, Kyiv is leery of Minsk’s relationship with Moscow. Though not officially a party to the conflict, President Alexander Lukashenko has been an accomplice to the

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1 Edith M. Lederer, “Trump says he can end the Russia-Ukraine war in one day. Russia’s UN ambassador says he can’t,” *Associated Press*, July 2, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/trump-russia-ukraine-war-un-election-a78ecb843af452b8dda1d52d137ca893>.

2 Thibault Spirlet, “Trump’s advisors are laying out plans on how to end the war in Ukraine,” *Business Insider*, November 7, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-advisors-peace-plans-ukraine-demilitarized-zone-no-aid-russia-2024-11>; Shawn Ryan, “JD Vance - Why Have a Government if it’s Not Functioning? | SRS#130” Sean Ryan Show, September 11, 2024. Talk Show, 14:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrgmwtpAsWc>.

3 Türkiye Today Newsroom, “Kremlin rejects Erdogan’s proposal for cease-fire in Ukraine as ‘unacceptable,’” *Türkiye Today*, November 18, 2024. <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/world/kremlin-rejects-erdogans-proposal-for-cease-fire-in-ukraine-as-unacceptable-80518/>. On November 18, 2024, the Kremlin dismissed President Erdogan’s reported proposal to freeze the conflict as “unacceptable.” Considering Russia’s gains and operational momentum at the time of writing this article, it seems unlikely that Moscow will settle for a ceasefire and DMZ anytime soon. However, this text will uphold this assumption for the sake of examining a theoretical DMZ.

4 Ірина Лаб’як, “Сирський повідомив, як Курська операція вплинула на Покровський напрямок [Syrskyi explained how the operation in Kursk affected the Pokrovsk axis],” *Телевізійна служба новин [Television News Service]*, August 27, 2024. <https://tsn.ua/ato/sirskiy-povidomiv-yak-kurska-operaciya-vplynula-na-pokrovskiy-napryamok-2648289.html>

5 Not counting Russia’s salient in the northern Kharkiv oblast nor Ukraine’s salient in the Kursk oblast.

6 Since February 2022, the RBSF dominated the Black Sea and threatened Ukraine’s maritime trade. After the collapse of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023, Ukraine kept its maritime trade open by increasing aerial attacks on Crimea, which forced the RBSF to withdraw to Novorossiysk.

Kremlin's hybrid warfare against the West and to Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. One of Russia's initial objectives in the invasion was the capture of Kyiv using troops premeditatedly stationed near Belarus' border with Ukraine. Furthermore, Belarus and Russia have been strengthening military ties. Aside from various joint exercises, in March 2023 Russia extended its nuclear umbrella and, four months later, claimed to have deployed tactical nuclear weapons into Belarus.⁷

Even if Russia and Ukraine can agree on the outlines of a DMZ, it is unlikely they will settle the fundamental questions at the heart of the war: Ukraine's NATO aspirations; official recognition of Russia's annexations; and the size and capabilities of Ukraine's Armed Forces. These issues will likely be kicked down the road, as neither party is currently willing to bend to the other's demands.⁸ To ensure these issues are not resolved through a reignition of hostilities, a DMZ by itself would not suffice. It would require Kyiv receiving solid security guarantees to deter any future Russian aggression.

This brings us to the second question – the DMZ's operationalization. Some may point to the Korean DMZ as a practical solution that can be replicated in Ukraine. However, the Korean DMZ works due to a strong American deterrent, which provides Seoul with ironclad security guarantees. The two states have a bilateral alliance pact, with South Korea falling under the US nuclear umbrella and tens of thousands of American troops stationed south of the 38th Parallel. However, unlike the existing Korean DMZ, it appears unlikely that the US will send troops to take part in a hypothetical Ukrainian DMZ. In November 2024, an anonymous member of Trump's transition team reportedly said the US would not be sending its forces to uphold peace in Ukraine, and that "the barrel of the gun is going to be European."⁹ It is unclear if Europe will pick up this mantle. Europe has so far been reluctant about sending its forces to Ukraine.¹⁰ However, in November, France and the UK indicated they are not ruling out sending troops to Ukraine.¹¹ Whatever the case, one thing is clear: operationalizing the DMZ would need a tangible Western commitment, an eventuality that seems uncertain at present.

A viable, operational DMZ would need concrete security guarantees from Kyiv's partners. The West has taken some steps to reassure Ukraine of its support recently. At the 2024 NATO Summit, Allies agreed on Ukraine's "irreversible" path to NATO membership.¹² Furthermore, dozens of countries have signed bilateral security agreements with Ukraine, including most NATO Allies, all G7 Members, and the EU.¹³ These agreements are meant to support Ukraine for the long-term and demonstrate as much to Russia. However, unlike Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, these are non-legally binding agreements, and that raises questions about the magnitude and



7 David Ljunggren, "Putin says Moscow to place nuclear weapons in Belarus, US reacts cautiously," *Reuters*, March 26, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-moscow-has-deal-with-belarus-station-nuclear-weapons-there-tass-2023-03-25/>; BBC News, "Ukraine war: Putin confirms first nuclear weapons moved to Belarus," *BBC News*, June 17, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65932700>.

8 Anton Troianovski, Adam Entous and Michael Schwartz, "Ukraine-Russia Peace Is as Elusive as Ever. But in 2022 They Were Talking," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/15/world/europe/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-deal.html>. Russia and Ukraine were negotiating a peace settlement in the early days of Russia's full-scale invasion. At the time, Kyiv was open to meeting most of Moscow's demands, including dropping its NATO membership aspirations and declaring neutrality. However, neither side could agree on two things: 1) the size of Ukraine's armed forces, whose capacity and capabilities Russia was hoping to substantially limit; and, 2) Kyiv's refusal to recognize Russian sovereignty over Ukraine's occupied territories. As the war has dragged on, both countries' positions have drifted even farther apart. Russia now expects international recognition of four more Ukrainian oblasts in annexed in September 2022. On the hand, Ukraine is more determined than ever to join NATO.

9 Roland Oliphant, "Trump mulls Ukraine peace plan: British troops patrolling an 800-mile buffer zone," *The Telegraph*, November 7, 2024. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/11/07/donald-trump-ukraine-peace-plan-british-troops-buffer-zone/>.

10 Patrick Wintour, Angelique Chrisafis and Miranda Bryant, "Macron faces EU backlash after suggesting sending troops to Ukraine," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/sweden-rules-out-sending-troops-to-ukraine-after-nato-membership-agreed>. In spring 2024, France's President Macron floated the idea of sending NATO troops to Ukraine to deter further Russian territorial gains. However, most NATO members rejected the proposal.

11 Chloé Hoorman, Elise Vincent and Philippe Ricard. "Discussions over sending European troops to Ukraine reignited," *Le Monde*, November 25, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/11/25/discussions-over-sending-french-and-british-troops-to-ukraine-reignited_6734041_4.html

12 North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, *Washington Summit Declaration*, July 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm

13 Mykhailo Soldatenko, "Getting Ukraine's Security Agreements Right," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 8, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/07/getting-ukraines-security-agreements-right?lang=en>

fidelity of Western support for Ukraine.¹⁴ Time will tell how effective these measures are. However, if fighting was to break out at the DMZ, odds are these instruments would be of little efficacy.

Following Trump's election, one of his campaign advisors stated that the US priority in Ukraine was "peace and to stop the killing."¹⁵ While Trump's transition team distanced itself from these remarks, these words echo the President-elect's previous rhetoric.¹⁶ A ceasefire and the implementation of a DMZ in Ukraine is theoretically possible. However, as the incoming Trump Administration examines this option, it must remember that peace will not be maintained through a pinky-sworn ceasefire, but by the West's comprehensive, unwavering, and demonstrable commitment to Ukraine's security. ♣

14 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Collective defence and Article 5," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 4, 2023. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm#:~:text=Article%205%20provides%20that%20if,to%20assist%20the%20Ally%20attacked.

15 Sofia Ferreira Santos, "Trump ally says Ukraine focus must be peace, not territory," *BBC News*, November 9, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czxrwr078v7o>.

16 Jack Forrest, "Trump won't commit to backing Ukraine in war with Russia," *CNN*, May 11, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/10/politics/ukraine-russia-putin-trump-town-hall/index.html>.

Risks to East Asia Security

by James Trottier

North Korea; China; the struggle between China and the USA for paramountcy in Asia; and the incoming Trump Administration pose the greatest risks to East Asia security. Each separately would be cause for concern. Taken together, they have the elements of a perfect storm in 2025.

North Korea

North Korea (DPRK) is flexing its muscles in the region and beyond, upping its threats and provocations, enhancing its missile capability and possibly preparing for another nuclear test.

The North Korean threat is no longer confined to East Asia. In June 2024, DPRK signed a mutual defence treaty with Russia. DPRK has sent some 20,000 containers holding artillery guns and millions of artillery shells, as well as short-range ballistic missiles, multiple-rocket launchers and anti-tank weapons to Russia for its war against Ukraine. The DPRK has also sent a military contingent over 10,000 strong—including military engineers to support launches of North Korean KN-23 missiles—to fight alongside Russian forces. These actions have provided Russia with a significant battlefield advantage.

DPRK soldiers are gaining valuable combat experience and knowledge of how their weapons work in war. This could be applied on the Korean Peninsula in the future.

In return, Russia has supplied North Korea with food, fuel, hard currency, and, reportedly, anti-aircraft missiles. Most troubling is that Russia may provide technological military support. North Korea would like assistance regarding nuclear-powered submarines, satellites, missiles and nuclear weapons. This would risk upsetting the strategic balance on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

The Russian-North Korea alliance and DPRK's armed involvement in a war in Europe raise the risk of Russian involvement in a future conflict on the Korean Peninsula and highlight the interconnectedness of international issues and crisis points.

China

China's rapid military modernization and provocative actions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea pose serious risks to Taiwan and countries in the region as well as to international rights of navigation.

China's behaviour threatens Taiwan's security and the global economy. Taiwan's TSMC has a virtual monopoly in the production of the world's most essential high-end microchips, ubiquitous in every industry. Interruption of TSMC operations as a result of a conflict would disrupt international supply chains and pose a serious risk to the global economy.

James Trottier is a Fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, a lawyer and a former career Canadian diplomat who led four Canadian diplomatic delegations to North Korea in 2015 and 2016, served for four years at the Canadian Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and directed Political/Economic (Diplomatic) Affairs at the Canadian Embassies in South Korea, Thailand (while concurrently serving as the Chargé d'affaires to Myanmar) and the Philippines. He speaks and writes extensively on North Korea and international security and diplomatic issues at expert conferences and as a media commentator and is considered a foremost Canadian expert on North Korea.

Struggle for Paramountcy Between USA and China

North Korean and Chinese actions take place against a background of the fierce rivalry for paramountcy in Asia between the USA and China, and their respective allies. That struggle is waged on multiple fronts—military, security, political and economic. Asian states are concerned about having to choose between their security reliance on the USA and their economic dependence on China. They fear being collateral damage.

All the above causes insecurity and unpredictability.

On top of this is a further concern.

Trump 2.0 Administration

The elephant in the room is the incoming Trump 2.0 Administration. With his disruptive and often reckless approach, Donald Trump may upend existing alliances, provide military and security benefits to adversaries and wreak havoc to the economies of friend and foe alike.

The fear in Asia among US allies is that Trump will break things of value from a security, political and economic perspective.

US allies would prefer the mantra “if it is not broken, don’t fix it”.

Unfortunately, Trump does not distinguish much between friend and foe. He devalues alliances and sees countries through the lens of trade surpluses and military expenditure and his weapons of choice are punishing tariffs.

While the heaviest tariffs will be levied against China, Trump has also called for substantive tariffs on all other trading nations including staunch US allies like South Korea and Japan. The extent of these tariffs may vary depending on trade surpluses that countries have with the USA and the level of their defense expenditures.

South Korea as Case Study

South Korea (ROK) provides a case study of the dilemma faced by US allies.

ROK must deal simultaneously with provocations and threats from North Korea and severe challenges to its economic and security interests from the incoming Trump Administration.

ROK spends 2.8% of its GDP on defence—a number greater than the 2% target for NATO members, and surpassing defence spending as a percentage of GDP of all but four US allies, namely Israel, Greece, Poland and Ukraine. This will please Trump.

However, in 2023 ROK also had a record \$44.4 billion trade surplus with the USA. This places it in Trump’s tariff crosshairs.

At the same time, South Korean companies invested over \$21 billion in the US in 2023 and created 20,000 new American jobs, more than any other foreign investor.

South Korean shipbuilding provides commercial benefits and is of strategic significance to both the USA and ROK. While China produces the majority of the world’s ships, more than 200 times what the USA produces, South Korea is a close second, producing about a quarter of global deliveries and is known for swift production “on time, on budget”. A South Korean company has a major shipbuilding facility in Philadelphia.

A promising indication of Trump’s awareness of this is that the President-elect raised shipbuilding cooperation with ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol in a phone call after the US election.

ROK officials hope that this awareness of the value of cooperation can extend to other areas such as semiconductors, batteries, automobiles, AI, quantum technology for military applications and civil nuclear power.

The degree to which this will reduce Trump’s tariff obsession remains to be seen. If it is insufficient, the US and ROK economies, their alliance and their security will be damaged.

Under the Biden Administration, the USA strengthened and established alliances bilaterally with ROK and trilaterally with ROK and Japan respectively. A dense array of consultative mechanisms and a trilateral secretariat were established to deter aggression and promote peace and stability on the peninsula and in the region. An ancillary unspoken aim of the elaborate mechanisms and range of policies was to “isolationist-proof” the alliances from an isolationist US administration.

But all that will not stop Trump if he decides that these agreements are irredeemably tainted by their origins in the Biden Administration.



Likewise, he will not accept the new five-year funding agreement to share the cost of maintaining US forces in South Korea, an agreement reached just prior to the US election. At the least, he will demand a hefty increase in the ROK contribution.

That would be painful but livable for ROK. What would be devastating for its ability to defend itself against North Korea would be a decision to withdraw or substantially reduce US troops in South Korea in a cost-cutting move by Trump, or as a result of a deal worked out with DPRK by the USA.

ROK fears that it could be collateral damage in a bilateral negotiation between the USA and DPRK with concessions by North Korea on its missile and nuclear programs traded off for elimination of sanctions and reduction of the US presence in South Korea and its security guarantees to ROK.

Such action could set off a train reaction including emboldening North Korea vis-à-vis ROK and China vis-à-vis Taiwan and increasing support in South Korea for its own nuclear weapon capacity.

Conclusion

The international community needs to be prepared for simultaneous crises erupting in multiple places, be it the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, the South China Sea, the Middle East or Ukraine and for connections between these flashpoints.

Key to stability will be the ability to persuade the Trump Administration that its alliances are the cornerstone of peace and stability in Asia and elsewhere, that these alliances serve US interests not only against North Korea but in US competition with China and in the defence of Taiwan and other US allies, international shipping routes and maritime security.

In this regard, former South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se recently suggested adding another A to MAGA so that it would read MAAGA—"Make America & Alliances Great Again" ♣

On Our Own: Canadian Security and Prosperity in 2025

by Simon Waring

Canadians are in for a rude awakening once President-elect Donald Trump takes office on 20 January 2025. As many already realize, Trump's election to a second non-consecutive term as President of the United States—an unprecedented feat in the modern era—is an ominous harbinger of things to come. Although most Canadians are unattuned to nuanced issues of foreign affairs, it is important for them to understand that two important factors that affect their daily lives—the security and economic prosperity of their country—are at greater risk today than they have been since the 1980's. For decades, the foundation of Canadian security and prosperity has been its close relationship with the United States. As a great power, the United States has historically been extraordinarily deferential to the interests and concerns of its allies, especially Canada. If the previous decade and the November 2024 election have demonstrated anything, however, it is that Canadians cannot take their relationship with the United States for granted, and the public should brace itself for a tough new reality.

Throughout his political career, Donald Trump has consistently questioned the utility of the United States' global alliance system, singling out North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states for special condemnation as leeching off American economic and military might without contributing their fair share to collective defence. Trump maintained this view during the past year's presidential campaign, even revealing that he once told a NATO ally that if they did not spend more on defence, "No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them [Russia] to do whatever the hell they want."¹ Trump's primary dispute with NATO has been the lackluster defence spending of some allies, including Canada. In the wake of Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea,

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¹ Vanessa Gera, "Fact-Checking Trump's Comments Urging Russia to Invade 'Delinquent' NATO Members," PBS News, published February 12, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/fact-checking-trumps-comments-urging-russia-to-invade-delinquent-nato-members>.

member states agreed to spend at least two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence, an idea originating as back as far as 2006.² Importantly, this commitment was reaffirmed in 2023 at the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.³

What President-elect Trump gets wrong with his rhetoric about NATO burden-sharing is not his desire for NATO allies to spend more on collective defence—that is a positive goal. But by publicly chastising NATO and suggesting that the United States would not honour its security commitments should Russia, one of the United States’ great power adversaries, attack an ally, he creates ambiguity in the minds of allies and adversaries about American resolve when there should be clarity, thus hurting NATO’s first objective: nuclear and conventional deterrence of Russian aggression. From Canada’s perspective, Trump’s apparent willingness to refuse military support to NATO allies in times of crisis is extremely serious. Even if Canada spent two or three percent of its GDP on defence, the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force would still face the titanic challenge of establishing a formidable presence in Arctic waters and airspace, for example, without American support. Of course, this is not an excuse for Canada to underperform its own obligations on defence, but to be realistic about defence is to recognize the indispensable role of the United States for Canadian security.

Likewise on the economic front, Trump’s rhetoric is often specific rather than generalized, and Canada is frequently caught in his crosshairs. From 2017-2021, then-President Trump and his officials gave their Canadian interlocutors a difficult time on questions of trade. Canadians may remember the unprecedented tension in the bilateral relationship during the North American Free Trade Agreement renegotiations. After thirteen months of strained discussions and the United States’ imposition of tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum imports, Canada, the United States, and Mexico finally signed the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement in November 2018, which went into effect in 2020.⁴

Although the public relationship between Canada and the United States improved during the subsequent Biden Administration, observers have noticed that the days of preferential treatment for Canada did not necessarily return during 2021-2024.⁵ Those who manage the bilateral relationship at a local, day-to-day level have felt a perceptible decline in the goodwill that their American counterparts extend to them. For decades Canadians and their leaders have grown accustomed to receiving preferential treatment from the Americans, whether that treatment has been substantive or merely attitudinal. It seems that the policy and attitude changes introduced by Trump in his first term were not transitory, but instead have seeped into the structure of the U.S.-Canada relationship. Instead of bouncing back to normal after Trump departed the White House in January 2021, the trade and defence spending irritants within the relationship are more permanent than Canadians hoped.

In President-elect Trump’s second term, Canadians need to expect this trend to continue and intensify. There will be no preferential treatment for Canada. When America’s farmers demand certain Canadian goods be shut out of the U.S. domestic market, Canada’s leaders will not only have to fight vigorously on behalf of their producers but will be forced to make concessions in other areas. Not only will issues arise more frequently and be punctuated by more hostility, but disputes will not remain compartmentalized. Economic disagreements over tariffs, for example, will become linked to defence spending. Canadian reticence to support an American diplomatic initiative or approaches to immigration and refugee policy may cost the country on other fronts. Given that Canada needs the United States more than the reverse, Canadians should expect many headaches and costs over the next four years and beyond.

Thankfully, there are things that Canadian leaders can do to help smooth over rough edges in the U.S.-Canada relationship. Although the structural characteristics of the bilateral relation-



2 NATO Official Text, “Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 2% Guideline,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated June 18, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm.

3 NATO Heads of State and Government, “Vilnius Summit Communiqué,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last updated July 19, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm.

4 The Canadian Press Staff, “Trump’s Tariffs on Canadian Steel and Aluminum: A Timeline of Key Events Since 2017,” Global News, published August 7, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7258571/trump-tariffs-timeline-since-2017/>.

5 Laura Dawson, “The Ride Will Not be Easy for Canada No Matter Who Wins the U.S. Election,” Policy Options, published September 12, 2024, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2024/u-s-canada-trade-security/>. This article touches on the theme that the days of free-trader dominance in American political discourse are over.

ship have changed and it is unlikely that Canada and the United States will 'go back to normal' no matter who occupies the White House and Prime Minister's Office, the unchangeable fact of what Canada is and where it is situated in the world limits its options, which ironically simplifies the path going forward. Canada needs the United States. Its businesses and employers need preferential access to the U.S. domestic market. The country also needs support from American military power to defend its waters and airspace, and Canadians occasionally need American diplomats to advocate for their interests, such as when foreign governments commit assassinations on their soil.⁶ That means Canada's leaders need to work harder than ever before to alleviate American concerns and work together: in short, Canada needs to help the United States help Canada.

Practically, this means reducing trade irritants and competing (and sometimes undercutting) other countries—such as Mexico—for better trade deals with the United States.⁷ It means pursuing economic decoupling with China and doing our part to help allies and partners do the same. Canada must also improve its defence spending, ideally exceeding the two percent of GDP mark well before 2030. Canada should also identify an operational defence burden that it can realistically bear, thus alleviating pressure on the United States' armed forces. Logically, the Arctic is the best place to start. Not only would greater Canadian naval and air force deployments within the Arctic allow the Americans to deploy their own assets in more active theatres, but doing so would assert sovereignty in the true north's own backyard.

Regrettably, the dynamics that helped make Canada prosperous and secure—our extraordinary relationship with the United States and the unlikelihood of great-power conflict—no longer exist. The world is a dangerous, cutthroat place; hopefully Trump's re-election will force Canadians to not just recognize this, but act. 🍁

6 Sahar Akbarzai, Rhea Mogul, Helen Regan, "Western Intelligence Led to Canada Accusing India of Sikh Activist's Assassination, US Ambassador Says," CNN World News, last updated September 24, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/24/americas/canada-five-eyes-india-hardeep-singh-nijjar-intl-hnk/index.html>.

7 Allison Jones, "Ford Says All Premiers Aligned on Push for Canada to Have a Bilateral Trade Deal with the U.S.," CBC News, last updated November 20, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ford-premiers-mexico-1.7388644>.



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