

COUNTRY CHAPTER ON CANADA

by Dirk Peters

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THE CANADIAN DISCOURSE ON NATO'S FUTURE

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OVERVIEW

Canada is a founding member of NATO, which has always played a central role in Canadian defence policy. Even though the government's 2017 strategic document *Strong, Secure, Engaged* emphasizes that »Canada is also a Pacific nation«,¹ the main focus of Canada's defence policy since the Second World War has been European security. After the experience of two world wars, successive Canadian governments have been interested in preventing a single dominant power from rising in Europe again and escalating conflicts in Europe from drawing Canada into another large-scale war. Besides that, NATO membership has had the added benefit of helping Canada to manage relations with the United States. The alliance has enabled Canada to keep its big neighbour close without being locked into a thoroughly unbalanced bilateral security relationship with it. In addition to providing security, NATO membership has also enhanced Canada's international influence.

A major concern with the security of Europe is also visible in today's discourse on the future of NATO among Canada's leading think tanks. According to most analyses, the key threat that NATO faces today emanates from Russia, which challenges NATO both militarily and through its attempts to destabilize the alliance and its members by non-military means. Some voices point to China as a rising challenger, and the Asia-Pacific as an area of increasing strategic interest, but usually Russia is regarded as posing the more immediate threat to NATO. Relations with China are viewed as providing more space for constructive political engagement.

The key internal challenges facing NATO, according to this Canadian discourse, are maintaining cohesion and keeping the United States committed to the alliance. The latter translates into the problem of burden-sharing and most Canadian think tanks focus particularly on how Canada can contribute to burden-sharing in order to keep the United States on board. By and large, they agree that a mix of at best moderately increased defence spending (which

finds little political support) and continued commitment on the ground in NATO missions would be the best way forward for the Canadian government.

This approach to the burden-sharing debate reflects another major characteristic of the discourse reviewed here. It is very much a discourse about Canada's role in NATO rather than a discourse about NATO and its future per se. Questions of European autonomy, for example, as important as they may appear for NATO's future, do not trouble Canadian think tanks as much as they do European ones.

THE DISCOURSE ON NATO'S FUTURE

THE KEY THREAT TO NATO: RUSSIA

Russia is clearly seen as the major threat facing NATO today and for the foreseeable future. Geopolitically, Russia threatens NATO on its Eastern flank as well as in the Arctic, the North Atlantic and in the South, through its engagement in conflicts in the MENA region (Segal 2018). The fact that Russia appears intent on »discarding established arms control and political agreements pertaining to the European theatre« adds to this military threat (Moens/Turdeanu 2018: 4). Moreover, Russian efforts at destabilizing the Alliance and its members through disinformation, cyber attacks and the like are also viewed with concern.

The threat on the Eastern flank in particular is undisputed. NATO's most visible response to this threat, its enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic countries and Poland, receives particular attention in the Canadian discourse because Canada serves as the Framework Nation to the eFP in Latvia. Observers view this commitment and its renewal in 2019 favourably (for example, Banka 2019; Leuprecht et al. 2018a, b; Hilton 2018). They consider it both an important contribution to defending NATO against threats from Russia and a prudent investment that helps Canada to demonstrate its commitment to the alliance despite its relatively low level of defence spending (see also the section on burden-sharing below). Hence it signifies »Canada's steadfast approach to alliance politics: pay ›just enough‹ of an insurance premium to show that ›we're back‹« (Leuprecht et al. 2018b: 9).

¹ *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*, <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf> (5 May 2021), p. 90.

Besides the Eastern flank, the Arctic also receives some attention as a region in which Russia challenges Canada's and NATO's security. The threat assessment here is somewhat more controversial, however. To start with, scholars point out that, from a security organizational perspective but also from a threat perspective there are two Arctics. There is the European Arctic, which the United States considers part of its European Command. And there is the North American Arctic, which, from the Canadian perspective, is a NORAD and, from the US perspective, a NORTHCOM responsibility. Canadian scholars argue that military threats are more virulent in the European Arctic. In this area of strategic significance for the sea lines of communication, the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom gap was notorious for Soviet submarine activities during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, NATO not only dismantled the Supreme Allied Command Atlantic (SACLANT) with responsibility for coordinating NATO defences in this crucial area, but NATO states also significantly reduced anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities and training operations. The Royal Canadian Navy, for example, has largely lost its formerly exemplary ASW expertise. As Russia is rebuilding its submarine capabilities and presence in the region, NATO, too, should upgrade its command structure, capabilities and training operations.

With regard to the North American Arctic, scholars see fewer military threats. Collins (2018: 10), for example, argues that the Arctic is an issue that is »less about hard security and more about resource development, tourism, and commercial shipping«. Canada has invested mainly in civilian infrastructure to enhance the Canadian presence there without militarizing the region. During a parliamentary hearing, Andrea Charron, Director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies at the University of Manitoba, stated that Russian activities in this part of the Arctic have been fairly constructive, which she attributed to the functioning of the Arctic Council. Accordingly, involving NATO in the security of the North American Arctic is not necessary, might be counterproductive and should be discouraged.² Michael Byers added on the same occasion that »there is very little prospect (...) that the United States is going to let NATO into its NORTHCOM domain«.³

Others warn that, in general, Russia's Arctic policy poses a real danger and needs to be addressed accordingly. They point to the build-up of forces, coupled with Russian attempts to lay legal claim to vast areas of the region and China's apparent willingness to engage in the Arctic alongside Russia. Hence, Braun and Blank (2020: 15–17), for example, advise the Canadian government to respond to what can be viewed as Russia's militarization of the Arctic by building up military capabilities, especially by acquiring adequate aircraft and ice breakers. Overall, however, the

issue is considered an issue mainly for Canadian defence policy rather than for NATO as a whole. This is in line with the government's position, which seeks to avoid, for example, NATO exercises related to the region (Charron 2017; on the implications of exercises in the Arctic, see also Hughes 2019).

Apart from these regional challenges in the East and the North, how should Canada and NATO respond to Russia? The advice is somewhat varied. On one hand, there are commentators who emphasize the desirability of a political answer rather than a military one. NATO should not »combat hybrid warfare with more hybrid warfare« (Carment/Belo 2018: 11). This approach requires investments in societal resilience to make influence campaigns and hybrid attacks less threatening. Inclusive and non-confrontational approaches can then be pursued especially with regard to problems that fall under the remit of organizations to which Russia also belongs, in particular the OSCE, and in cooperation with the EU (Carment/Belo 2018: 12–13). This also ties in with recommendations that Canada not take an unnecessarily confrontational approach towards Russia and explore possibilities for cooperation, especially in the Asia-Pacific, even if this may be at odds with US policies (Paikin 2021). Erika Simpson (2021: 11–12) advises NATO to learn from Canada and pursue multilateral approaches in its dealings with Russia.

But there are also advocates of much more robust responses to Russian policy and of demonstrating strength vis-à-vis Moscow. Moens and Turdeanu (2018: 16), for example, argue that NATO members should invest in their capabilities and demonstrate »proportionate strength to ensure that Russia sees the boundaries of its own plans and actions«. Others support this approach and recommend that NATO »deter possible Russian aggression by fielding robust military forces« and extend deterrence to the cyber realm (Bercuson 2019b: 10). Cyber defence can take the form of NATO's Co-operative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (Kimball 2019: 9–10). But it can also require launching similar »non-kinetic NATO attacks« on Russia to deter it from future attacks (Segal 2018: 3) and thus actually countering hybrid warfare with more hybrid warfare. None of this, however, is seen as excluding the possibility of seeking cooperation if Russia can prove its willingness to cooperate (Bercuson 2019b: 11).

CHINA AS A RISING CHALLENGER?

Whereas there is widespread agreement that Russia poses an active threat to NATO, China's role is somewhat more controversial. Some regard China primarily as an economic power that is increasingly enhancing its ability to project influence. This appears to be reflected also in the Canadian government's approach, which has begun to address China as a security issue a little more actively, for example through cautious Freedom of Navigation operations in the region, although it also seeks cooperative relations with Beijing (Collins 2018: 14–15).

² Statement by Dr Andrea Charron at the Hearing of the Standing Committee on National Defence, House of Commons, 22 November 2017.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

Recently, however, Sino-Canadian relations have taken a turn for the worse since Canada arrested Huawei's CFO on a US warrant and China retaliated by arresting two Canadian citizens on charges of spying. There are also a number of observers who argue that the potential for cooperation with China is inherently limited given the divergence of values between China and the West (Smith-Windsor 2020: 26). Collins et al. (2020: 11) even claim that »China has replaced Russia as the West's principal rival« as it combines dynamically growing economic power with a willingness to significantly increase its military capabilities and an assertive foreign policy. What adds to the challenge is the fact that China has begun to cooperate more closely with Russia and that it is as active in the area of hybrid and grey-zone conflict as Russia (Carment/Belo 2018). From this point of view, it is time for Canada to give up its almost exclusive focus on transatlantic relations and to look more towards the Pacific (Collins et al. 2020: 21).

Advice for NATO and Canada on how to deal with China obviously hinges on this threat assessment. The general problem NATO members face is that of striking a »balance between countering China and remaining open to cooperation with Beijing where that is possible on reasonable terms« (Cottey 2021: 15). But there are different opinions on where that balance lies. Some observers highlight the opportunities for cooperation and argue that a careful cooperative approach, which could even include Russia, might help stabilize security relations in the Asia-Pacific and enable Canada to benefit from economic opportunities there (Paikin 2021). A useful addition to such a strategy would be attempts to build resilience, just like against Russian hybrid threats, and to respond politically to conflict with China (Carment/Belo 2018). Others advise NATO members to safeguard their economies from Chinese influence and to be clear about the value difference by openly criticizing the human rights record of the Chinese government (Collins 2018: 15–16). Concerning these recommendations, the role of NATO as an organization may well be constrained to that of a forum in which member states find a common approach towards China (Cottey 2020: 15).

However, for some, NATO may also play a more active role. Expanding NATO's network of partners to the Asia-Pacific is a popular recommendation. Ideas range from boosting cooperation with partners in the region (Collins 2018: 14–15; Jenne 2020), for example by expanding the number of »Enhanced Opportunities Partners« (Lai 2020), to institutionalizing such cooperation, for example through a »NATO Asia-Pacific Forum« (Moens/Smith-Windsor 2016: 244–246; similarly, Lorenz 2020). Certainly the most far-reaching suggestion in this context is the idea of bringing countries from the Asia-Pacific into NATO as new members, for example, Australia or Japan as associate members (Bercuson 2019b: 10) or broadening membership »to include partner countries, starting with Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand« (Robertson 2019: 8).

Finally, there are also some calls to be ready for a military presence in the region. Canada is being called upon to

enhance its presence in the Asia-Pacific, for example, through naval and air patrols (Collins et al. 2020: 24). And there is even speculation about the possibility of extending the NATO area of operations to engage in military crisis management there (Smith-Windsor 2020: 27–30).

POLITICAL COHESION: NATO AS A COMMUNITY OF VALUES OR SHARED INTERESTS?

Apart from these external challenges, the Canadian discourse also deals with the core internal challenge for NATO: cohesion. What is it that holds NATO together, or should hold NATO together, from the perspective of participants in the Canadian discourse? Tensions among NATO allies are obvious. The Canadian discourse centres especially on the Trump administration's confrontational approach to burden-sharing as the main challenge (see below). Emmanuel Macron's comments about NATO's »brain death« receive less coverage here than elsewhere as an indication of, and contribution to, NATO's political problems (Leuprecht 2019).

For the question of how political cohesion can be enhanced, shared values are a popular reference point in this discourse. This may be considered a reflection of the general orientation of Canadian foreign policy, which is often perceived as multilateral and value-driven. At NATO's founding, the Canadian government sought to make the alliance not only into a military alliance but a forum of liberal, democratic states. Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which emphasizes the shared values of the allies, has been dubbed the »Canada Clause« (McKay 2021: 38).

According to many contributions to the Canadian discourse it is these shared values that keep the diverse set of nations in NATO together and ensure the security of Europe and, by extension, Canada (Leuprecht et al. 2018b). Shared values are also what can create unity vis-à-vis China (in contrast to economic interests, which are more diverse) and provide a crucial link to partners in China's neighbourhood (Smith-Windsor 2020: 17–19).

This directly leads to concerns about tendencies in some member states to turn away from those values. Turkey and some Central and Eastern European allies display a growing tendency towards authoritarian rule. In many member states, nationalist and populist tendencies are becoming increasingly influential. This poses a double danger as it creates disunity between allies and within individual states. For one thing, this disunity can make NATO less effective in its international dealings (Bercuson 2018). Second, it makes NATO and its allies more vulnerable to influence campaigns as the disunity can be exploited by outside powers, especially Russia and China, or by non-governmental actors (Charron 2021). In turn, building resilience to counter Russian and Chinese influence campaigns will require a reliable commitment to a set of shared values (Carment/Belo 2018: 12).

Not everyone agrees with this analysis. Some observers emphasize the enduring strength of NATO despite European populism and the appearance of disunity created especially by the Trump administration (Bercuson 2019b). Others, who see a problem, disagree about the solution. Moens and Turdeanu (2018: 17), for example, recommend that allies de-emphasise disagreements (especially about the significance of minority rights) and instead focus on their common heritage. This would allow them to »dry up the vulnerable debate inside the West on who we are« and to »rein in Moscow's ability to play foul on our mobiles and in our minds«. Bercuson (2018), by contrast, sees NATO as caught in a dilemma. Ignoring authoritarian tendencies in its member states would undermine the credibility of NATO's commitment to democratic values. Addressing these tendencies head on and suspending or even throwing out the members in question, however, would threaten NATO's effectiveness.

Occasionally, commentators argue that allies might be brought together not just by shared values but also by a common external threat. In this sense, Russian attempts at undermining NATO might actually serve to make the alliance stronger (Bercuson 2019a). Likewise, allies' increasing concern about the rise of China might contribute to alliance cohesion (Hautecouverture 2021).

BURDEN-SHARING

Burden-sharing in NATO is a highly significant topic for Canadian think tanks and it is so for reasons similar to those that underlie the debates in other countries. Burden-sharing was identified by the Trump administration as the single most important issue for NATO. Consequently, US allies need to address it somehow in order to keep the United States engaged in the alliance.

For European NATO members, the problem of burden-sharing is intimately linked to the question of European autonomy within and outside NATO. Unsurprisingly, the issue of Europeanisation is not nearly as prominent in the Canadian discourse. Notwithstanding individual views that Macron's quest for European strategic autonomy and his criticism of the state of NATO pose the »greatest threat« to NATO (Leuprecht 2019), the issue is usually considered of minor importance (Hautecouverture 2021).

Contributors to the debate agree that Canada needs to demonstrate its commitment and its willingness to carry a fair share of the burden in the alliance. Canada's contributions are regarded not only as insurance against US disengagement from Europe (which would shift even more of the burden for defence against Russia on Canada and European allies). It is also regarded as a way of securing Canadian influence in the alliance (Kimball 2019; Robertson 2017).

However, contributing to burden-sharing is not regarded primarily as a matter of defence spending. In fact, commentators

basically agree that the 2 Per Cent Goal is not an adequate measure of commitment to the alliance. For one thing, rising defence budgets come with opportunity costs, that is, lower expenditure for other ways of ensuring international peace and security, such as environmental programmes and international organizations (Simpson 2021: 4–7). Secondly, allies' contributions to the alliance's capabilities and, in particular, to NATO operations should also be considered as elements of burden-sharing (for example, Bercuson 2019b; Cormier/McRae 2019; Collins 2018; Law 2018; Sokolsky/Leuprecht 2018). Canada is perceived to make particularly valuable (and outsized) contributions to NATO missions, starting with the war in Afghanistan. The country participated from the very start in the coalition-led war in 2001 and played an important role in transforming the post-war stabilization mission ISAF into a NATO-led mission. Canada's engagement in Afghanistan has been »revolutionary« (Moens 2008: 571) for Canadian security policy as it represented a turn away from an emphasis on human security and peacekeeping to a more robust use of force that cost the lives of more than 150 Canadian soldiers alone. The engagement was maintained until 2014 with a view to bolstering the country's position in NATO, even though public opinion increasingly turned against the mission after the death toll began to rise in 2006 (Massie 2016). Today, Canada again plays a prominent role as the framework nation for the eFP in Latvia. Besides Canada, only the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany serve as framework nations to reinforce NATO's Eastern flank. Alongside Canada's leading role in the NATO mission in Iraq, this can be viewed as offsetting a comparatively low level of defence spending (currently at around 1.4 per cent) and is viewed favourably in the discourse, as described above (for example, Leuprecht et al. 2018b).

ARMS CONTROL

Playing its role as a »good citizen« (Becker-Jacob et al. 2013), Canada has traditionally been a staunch and very active supporter of arms control, non-proliferation and the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Canada's diplomacy, as Canada's former Disarmament Ambassador Paul Meyer put it, »seems to have nuclear disarmament in its DNA« (Meyer 2021). Nuclear arms control and disarmament resonates with the Canadian public,⁴ and experts are generally in favour of this orientation. There is a broad consensus behind Canada's support of bilateral arms control endeavours like the New START treaty and multilateral arms control and non-proliferation initiatives such as the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Differences emerge with regard to unilateral initiatives in general and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in particular.

The contentious issue at stake in debates on the TPNW arises from tensions between two possible consequences of

⁴ A strong majority of Canadians, for example, support the TPNW. See: <https://pugwashgroup.ca/canadians-want-nuclear-disarmament-and-our-government-should-act/>

Canada's self-conception as a »good citizen«: Canada's loyalty to NATO and its inclination to support nuclear disarmament. Government representatives and more conservative scholars defend the official policy of eventually siding with its NATO partners. Initially, Canada was rather positive toward the initiative to prohibit nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds and participated in all three conferences on the TPNW and in the UN Open Ended Working Group. After the conclusion of the negotiations, however, Canada sided with its NATO partners. The logic of this turn-around has best been captured in a statement by Leslie Andrew, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at a 2017 Parliamentary Hearing: »as members of NATO, we have relied on and stood on the shoulders of others who have nuclear weapon deterrent capabilities«. On the same occasion, Mark Sedra, President of the Canadian International Council, suggested a continuation of the traditional arms control approach in order »to prevent states like North Korea, Iran, and others from acquiring nuclear weapons, but at the same time working with major states like Russia and the United States to reduce their stockpiles«. Robert Huebert, senior researcher at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, warned that with worsening relations between Russia and NATO, »the effort is better spent trying to develop new ways to ensure that the Russians understand our commitment to the ongoing issue of deterrence«. ⁵

Some commentators accept that NATO allies won't sign the TPNW but still urge NATO to do more in terms of nuclear disarmament. Erika Simpson (2021: 16–20), for example, points out that the TPNW serves to highlight the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and will increase the pressure at the next NPT Review Conferences to move beyond the deadlock of the last Review Conference. It may also increase the pressure to adapt NATO's Strategic Concept accordingly. Progressive think tanks, such as the Rideau Institute⁶, and NGOs such as the Canadian Pugwash Group (Meyer 2021) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom⁷ even lend enthusiastic support to the TPNW. Canada should build on its tradition of pursuing unilateral disarmament even in opposition to the US. During the Premiership of Pierre Trudeau, Canada terminated its nuclear weapons-related role within NATO and ended the deployment of US nuclear weapons that had been stationed on Canadian soil in the context of the bilateral North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).⁸ Thus, Canada is the first nuclear-armed country that has chosen to divest itself of nuclear arms. Today Canada should continue this policy. Peggy Mason, Direc-

tor of the Rideau Institute and former Disarmament Ambassador proposes a kind of two-step compromise. In a first step, Canada should absent itself from NATO's nuclear policy and sign the TPNW. In a second step, Canada should begin a dialogue within NATO »with the aim of convincing other non-nuclear weapon states within NATO to similarly renounce NATO's (...) nuclear posture«. ⁹ In addition to adopting a No-First-Use policy, which is overdue and actually demanded by the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, NATO should also renounce the deployment of US nuclear weapons in Europe.

OTHER CHALLENGES FOR NATO

Some issues that play a prominent role in other countries receive relatively little attention in Canada. This holds not only for the issue of Europeanisation (see above) but even more for the problems that NATO faces on its Southern flank (but see Holmboe 2017). Yet Canadian think tanks do address some issues that do not have a prominent place in the political debate. These are often individual contributions that highlight particular issues, such as the prevalence of national caveats in NATO operations and its implications for operational effectiveness (Bercuson 2018); or the standardization of ammunition (Zhou 2018). Gender issues, however, receive somewhat more attention across different think tanks. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000 gave the issue of gender international visibility in security policy. In 2007 NATO began to take gender issues more seriously. Hlatky and Hughes (2018) provide an overview of gender mainstreaming efforts in NATO and identify a set of problems. Their recommendations focus especially on moving away from framing awareness of gender issues as a contribution to operational effectiveness. They advocate a general inclusion of gender in policy and operational design. Hlatky has also led a project that developed a Gender Training course package for NATO.¹⁰ Wählen (2020) argues that Canada, in particular, would be well-suited to pushing the WPS agenda within NATO.

5 House of Commons: Canada and NATO: an alliance forged in strength and reliability, Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence, June 2018, p. 86; <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/NDDN/Reports/RP9972815/nddnrp10/nddnrp10-e.pdf>.

6 See: <https://rideauinstitute.ca/2021/01/25/welcoming-the-tpnw-and-supporting-a-progressive-american-foreign-policy/>

7 See: https://www.ceasefire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Acehson_Canadian-Senate-19.01.21.pdf.

8 Between 1963 and 1984, Canada participated in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements and deployed F-104 Starfighters as delivery vehicles for US nuclear weapons in Europe.

9 Statement Peggy Mason, Hearing, Standing Committee on National Defence, House of Commons, NDDN No. 71, 1st Session 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2017, p. 5.

10 See *Tailor-Made Gender Awareness Applications for the NATO Community*, https://www.queensu.ca/cidp/nato_gender_apps (16 February 2021).

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