

STANDING GUARD
on the NATO frontier

1

On the Baltic Watch

The Past, Present and Future of Canada's
Commitment to NATO's Enhanced
Forward Presence in Latvia

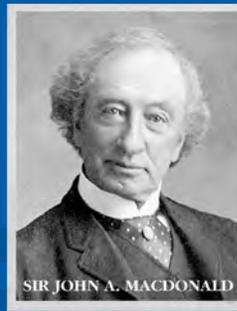
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Executive Summary

“Why do we spend billions on defence, if we are not immediately threatened?” Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland asks rhetorically in Canada’s defence policy statement, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*.

Although no foreign adversary is poised to threaten Canadian sovereignty or territorial integrity and, as such, one could conceivably turn inward, Canada is nonetheless confronted by Russian military adventurism and expansionism that threatens the liberal-democratic world order. And Freeland went on to reinforce the country’s commitment to NATO, stating that “the Canadian Armed Forces will be prepared to make concrete contributions to Canada’s role as a responsible international actor.”

Conspicuous by its presence, Canada would be even more conspicuous by its absence.

A commitment to NATO has been central to Canada’s foreign and defence policy for almost 70 years. The Atlantic Alliance always entailed much more than providing a countervailing balance to Soviet power, and now to Russian aggression. The interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world demand an alliance that stands and falls on its unity. The dissolution of the Soviet Union may have altered the rationale for NATO, but the fundamental principles that comprise the foundation of such a relationship remain intact: the defence of shared values and interests.

As part of that shared approach, Canada recently deployed 450 troops as the lead Framework Nation in the “enhanced Forward Presence” (eFP) mission in Latvia. This mission began one year ago and comes due for

renewal in 2019. Yet renewal is hardly a foregone conclusion. The government has four basic options: (1) maintain its status quo as the eFP’s Framework Nation in Latvia, (2) draw down its commitment from Framework Nation to a mere NATO member-country contribution, (3) scale up its commitment, or (4) not renew at all.

As this paper demonstrates, Canada should renew its commitment to the eFP, both because it is in Canada’s strategic interest to do so, and because of the dilemma in which Canada, allies, and fellow NATO members would find themselves were Canada not to renew.

Canada has a strong interest in keeping the United States engaged in Europe. Making a credible commitment of its own is a crucial way for Canada to entice Washington to stay engaged in NATO and in the region. The Americans are much more likely to commit when the burden that commitment brings is shared effectively among allies.

For Canada, NATO has been first and foremost about security, particularly European security. And the eFP is an integral part of NATO’s framework for deterrence and defence along

Europe's eastern flank, in so far as it signals that NATO is resolute in its stance against any aggression that threatens the Alliance.

Our commitment also benefits from being low risk, low cost, low domestic visibility, and high payoff with our allies. Yet the costs for Canada to defect from the eFP, let alone its commitment as a Framework Nation, are high: closing doors, letting down old and new friends, wasting human and political capital along with political-military credibility.

Yet future trends will certainly play a role in whether Canada decides to renew its commitment. If Russia places pressure on the Alliance and the Trump administration asks for additional support in response, Canada would be placed in an uncomfortable position – if only due to the opprobrium of Trump in Canada. Yet Canada would still likely acquiesce (with our European allies' response perhaps being more uncertain).

For Canada and Europe, the most worrisome possibility is US disengagement - a spectre raised by President Trump's behaviour at the Singapore Summit with North Korea, where he offered to sacrifice US-Korean military exercises while floating a general pull-back of US forces. If that happens along NATO's frontier with Russia, Canada would have to consider whether to recommit alongside European allies to show its faith in NATO - but without America's supporting presence. That, in itself, would raise questions about the very future of NATO.

The eFP Framework Nation commitment is a genuine Canadian international "peacekeeping" operation: conspicuous by its presence, Canada would be even more conspicuous by its absence. Renewal is thus in keeping with Canada's steadfast approach to alliance politics: pay "just enough" of an insurance premium to show that "we're back."

Canada's prosperity hinges directly on trade. So, any threat to trade and open trade routes runs counter to Canada's interests, in part because countries that are at war tend to consume fewer resources and thus depress demand for trade. Strategically, then, it is thus much more efficient and effective for Canada in the short- and medium-term to incur the financial and political cost of a modest contribution to reassure a NATO member ally.

Defence policy in general, and the eFP in particular, need to be understood as an insurance policy: you buy the amount and extent of coverage you need for the risk you anticipate. Thus, with the rise of Russian aggression, the need to protect against an uncertain future has become entrenched in NATO's mandate. If the past is prologue, then there should be little doubt that Ottawa will and ought to continue to support NATO's collective efforts on the Alliance's north-eastern frontier.

Sommaire

« **P**ourquoi dépensons-nous des milliards de dollars dans la défense nationale si nous ne sommes pas directement menacés? », voilà la question rhétorique posée par la ministre des Affaires étrangères Chrystia Freeland relativement à l'énoncé de la politique de défense du Canada : *Protection, Sécurité, Engagement : la politique de défense du Canada*.

Bien qu'aucun adversaire étranger ne s'apprête à mettre en péril la souveraineté ou l'intégrité territoriale du Canada, et qu'en l'occurrence, il serait facile de tourner le dos au monde, le Canada n'en est pas moins confronté à l'aventurisme militaire et à l'expansionnisme de la Russie, qui présentent tous deux des menaces pour l'ordre mondial libéral démocratique. Madame Free-

land a d'ailleurs poursuivi en soulignant l'engagement du pays envers l'OTAN, lorsqu'elle a déclaré que les Forces armées canadiennes seront prêtes à contribuer concrètement au rôle du Canada comme acteur responsable sur la scène internationale.

Le Canada n'a peut-être pas beaucoup brillé par sa présence, mais son absence attirerait, de toute évidence, encore plus d'attention.

L'engagement envers l'OTAN a été au cœur de la politique étrangère et de défense du Canada pendant près de 70 ans. L'Alliance atlantique a également toujours signifié beaucoup plus qu'un contrepoids au pouvoir soviétique, contrepoids qui équilibre en ce moment l'agression russe. L'interdépendance et l'interconnexion au sein du monde moderne exigent une alliance qui tient et repose sur la cohésion. La dissolution de l'Union soviétique pourrait avoir modifié la raison d'être de l'OTAN, mais les principes fondamentaux à la base d'une telle relation demeurent intacts : la défense de valeurs et d'intérêts communs.

Souscrivant à cette approche commune, le Canada a récemment déployé 450 militaires en Lettonie, agissant comme nation cadre dirigeante de l'opération de présence avancée renforcée de l'OTAN. Cette mission a commencé il y a un an et arrivera à échéance en 2019. Pourtant, sa reconduction est loin d'être acquise. Le gouvernement peut exercer quatre options principales : (1) maintenir le statu quo en demeurant la nation cadre de la Présence avancée renforcée en Lettonie; (2) diminuer son soutien en remplaçant son engagement en tant que nation cadre par une contribution à titre de simple pays membre de l'OTAN; (3) intensifier son engagement; (4) ou ne pas reconduire son engagement.

Comme ce document le démontre, le Canada devrait reconduire son engagement envers la Présence avancée renforcée de l'OTAN, tant parce que cet engagement répond à ses intérêts stratégiques qu'en raison du dilemme que poserait tout retrait pour le Canada, nos alliés et les autres pays membres de l'OTAN.

Le Canada a tout intérêt à garder les États-Unis engagés en Europe. Tout engagement crédible pris par le Canada de sa propre initiative peut s'avérer décisif pour inciter Washington à rester engagé

envers l'OTAN et la région. Les Américains sont beaucoup plus susceptibles de participer lorsque le poids de l'engagement est partagé de manière efficace entre les alliés.

Pour le Canada, l'OTAN a offert avant tout une garantie de sécurité, notamment en Europe. En outre, la Présence avancée renforcée est partie intégrante du cadre de l'OTAN en appui à la position de dissuasion et de défense le long du flanc est de l'Europe, dans la mesure où elle signale la ferme intention de l'OTAN de repousser toute agression qui menace l'Alliance.

Notre engagement tire également parti du bas niveau des risques, des coûts et de la visibilité sur la scène publique nationale, tout en entraînant d'importants bénéfices pour les alliés. Il reste que les coûts pour le Canada d'un retrait de la Présence avancée renforcée, pour ne rien dire de son engagement en tant que nation cadre, sont élevés : des portes se refermeraient, des amis anciens et nouveaux seraient laissés à eux-mêmes, du capital politique et humain serait gaspillé parallèlement à la crédibilité politico-militaire.

Pourtant, les tendances à venir vont certainement jouer un rôle pour déterminer si le Canada décide de renouveler son engagement. Si la Russie exerçait une pression sur l'Alliance et que l'administration Trump réagissait en demandant un soutien supplémentaire, le Canada se retrouverait dans une position inconfortable ne serait-ce qu'en raison de l'opprobre à l'égard de Trump au Canada. Néanmoins, il serait toujours probable que le Canada y consente (compte tenu de la réponse peut-être plus incertaine de nos alliés européens).

Pour le Canada et l'Europe, ce qui inquiète le plus, c'est la possibilité d'un désengagement de la part des États-Unis un spectre brandi par le président Trump au sommet de Singapour avec la Corée du Nord, lorsqu'il a offert de sacrifier les exercices militaires sud-coréens et américains tout en laissant planer la possibilité d'un retrait des forces américaines. Si cela se produisait le long de la frontière de l'OTAN avec la Russie, le Canada aurait à envisager s'il doit renouveler son engagement aux côtés des alliés européens afin de témoigner sa confiance envers l'OTAN, mais sans le soutien de l'Amérique. Cette seule situation soulèverait des questions quant à l'avenir même de l'OTAN.

L'engagement du Canada en tant que nation cadre constitue une véritable opération de « maintien de la paix » internationale : le Canada n'a peut-être pas beaucoup brillé par sa présence, mais son absence attirerait, de toute évidence, encore plus d'attention. La reconduction est donc conforme aux efforts durables du Canada à l'appui de la politique d'alliance : cotiser « juste assez » pour démontrer que « nous sommes de nouveau présents ».

La prospérité du Canada dépend directement du commerce. Par conséquent, toute menace au maintien du commerce et à l'accès aux voies commerciales nuit aux intérêts du Canada, et ce, en partie du fait que les pays en guerre ont tendance à consommer moins de ressources et à réduire leurs échanges commerciaux. D'un point de vue stratégique, pour rassurer un allié membre de l'OTAN sur le flanc nord-est, il est alors beaucoup plus efficace pour le Canada, à court et à moyen terme, d'assumer les coûts financiers et politiques d'un engagement modeste.

La politique de défense en général et, en particulier, l'opération de présence avancée renforcée doivent être considérées comme une police d'assurance : vous achetez la quantité et l'étendue de couverture dont vous avez besoin compte tenu des risques à prévoir. Par conséquent, devant la montée de l'agression russe, la nécessité de se protéger contre un avenir incertain s'est profondément enracinée dans le mandat de l'OTAN. Si le passé est un prologue, alors il ne fait pratiquement aucun doute qu'Ottawa doit continuer et continuera d'appuyer les efforts collectifs de l'OTAN à la frontière nord-est de l'Alliance.

Introduction¹

Canada's 450-troop, \$134 million a year commitment as a Framework Nation for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia began in earnest in June 2017, when eFP Battlegroup Latvia was stood-up, and comes due for renewal in 2019. Yet renewal is hardly a foregone conclusion given the domestic attention and political debate that attended Canada's initial commitment to the eFP.

The federal government will have four options: maintain its status quo as the eFP's lead Framework Nation in Latvia, draw down its commitment from Framework Nation to a mere NATO member-country contribution, scale up its commitment, or not renew at all.

As this study will detail, Canada had specific interests for signing up as a Framework Nation to begin with; those interests have not changed. Since then, however, there has been a change in presidential administration in the United States. Whether the US, the UK, and Germany will simply extend their Framework Nation commitments in Poland, Estonia, and Lithuania, at what

contribution level, who else comes forward, and whether and which other NATO-member countries are prepared to step up and how – Latvia is already the most colourful of the four eFP countries – will have a significant bearing on Canada's decision. Additional considerations include domestic political constraints in Canada during an election year, let alone possible Russian action in the region in the meantime.

Canada had specific interests for signing up as a Framework Nation to begin with; those interests have not changed.

This study examines the prospects for renewal of Canada's Latvian deployment; just how enduring is Canada's commitment to the eFP in Latvia likely to be? Much will hinge on the extent of mis- and dis-information about the eFP; so, this study starts by explaining the all-important nuance between the NATO-member country supported eFP model as distinct from an actual NATO mission. After reviewing of the origins of this allied initiative the study turns to an examination of Canada and the eFP's command and control structure. It then focuses on the Canadian commitment in Latvia, plac-

ing this deployment in the context of the history and character of Canada's defence policy and, in particular, the central role of NATO in that policy for nearly 70 years. An assessment of the external and internal factors that will influence Ottawa's decision whether or not to renew its eFP commitment in 2019 follows.

While the size of the Canadian deployment is unlikely to increase, it can be expected that Ottawa will, in the interest of its own security, inseparably tied as it is to that of the transatlantic region, continue to maintain the Baltic watch. Canada is likely to renew its commitment to the eFP, both because it is in Canada's strategic interest to do so, and because of the dilemma in which Canada, allies, and fellow NATO members would find themselves were Canada not to renew. The eFP Framework Nation commitment is Canada's major international "peacekeeping" operation:

conspicuous by its presence, Canada would be even more conspicuous by its absence. Renewal is thus in keeping with Canada's steadfast approach to alliance politics: pay "just enough" of an insurance premium to show that "we're back."

Canada is Back – in Europe at least

Canada's last permanent mission to Europe dates back exactly 25 years, when Canadian Forces Europe closed down its Army and Air Force bases² in 1993, after 36 years. Its mission: keep the forces of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact at bay. At first glance, the eFP looks deceptively familiar. Strictly speaking, however, it is not a NATO operation or mission. And there is, as the Bard would say, the rub.

With this innovative model, NATO-member countries provide a Forward Presence in another Alliance member that is enhanced, but not led, by NATO; it all hinges on the lower-case "e" in the acronym. The eFP command structure is anchored in member countries, not NATO; but, in the event of a crisis, NATO could take over. Although the eFP is a NATO action governed by a stipulated set of NATO policies, principles, and rules, it is different from the missions conducted in Afghanistan or Kosovo, in which NATO was formally in command of all aspects of the mission. For the eFP, NATO has a degree of authority and autonomy over certain aspects of the mission. However, Framework Nations are responsible for the implementation of force generation, strategic planning and training, and logistical support, among other duties.

In 2014 NATO's member states were taken by surprise when the Kremlin deployed military force in Ukraine to disavow Europe's post-Cold War borders. The world's greatest crisis of the political order since the end of the Cold War ensued. NATO was caught off guard by a resurgent and emboldened Russia ready to flex its military muscle (De Luce 2016).

Russia's aggression against Ukraine disrupted nearly a generation of relative peace and stability between the Kremlin and its Western neighbours. President Putin's ulterior motives remain uncertain (Shlapak and Johnson 2016). In violation of international law, the Kremlin followed with a one-two punch by formally annexing Crimea – less than half the size yet slightly more populous than Latvia. Ever since, Russia has been insisting on its "military assertiveness, showcasing its conventional power and rattling its nuclear saber" (Arnold 2016; see also Pifer 2015).

NATO's north-eastern flank is conspicuously exposed; the only territory that connects NATO's European members to the Baltics is at the geo-strategically important Suwalki gap – a 100 km border between Poland and Lithuania that adjoins the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in the West and Belarus in the East. Being surrounded by countries that are not members of NATO makes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania especially vulnerable.

A series of war games conducted by the RAND Corporation Corporation (Shlapak and Johnson 2016) probed preemptive steps that the NATO Alliance could implement to avoid a disastrous

*But how to deter
without being
aggressive?*

military defeat and shore up NATO's eastern defences. This is the logic of deterrence: signal commitment to your adversary and demonstrate the necessary capability to follow through. But how to deter without being aggressive? While NATO's defence ministers were divided over renewing dialogue with Russia, there was a consensus on four battalions – one for each of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – as the minimum capability to signal a credible commitment along NATO's north-eastern flank.

True to the sometimes frustrating, but ultimately necessary form of seeking political consensus before undertaking major initiatives, long negotiations ensued before the inception of what would eventually become known as NATO's enhanced Forward Presence. Negotiations had to resolve three fundamental issues: strategy, operations, and tactics. First, there were strategic concerns: would an enduring NATO presence in the neighbourhood needlessly antagonize Russia?

Second, there were operational concerns: how, then, to have a NATO commitment without formal NATO ownership over the mission? Third, if it was not to be a NATO mission, what would the command structure look like and who would lead and contribute?

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Canada made.*

There was to be no permanent NATO mission. But NATO members would still retain a presence in the form of a battalion and headquarters. However, multinational headquarters capability and leadership experience is hard to come by. Without NATO leadership, a Framework Nation would have to step up for each of the four battalions in each of the four countries.

The Afghanistan experience came in handy: The UK had already worked with Estonia, and Germany with Lithuania. Poland has long had close military and security relations with the United States. Also, given

Poland's size, the complexity of leadership there meant that the United States was really the only suitor. That narrowed down the options for Latvia to four: France, Spain, Italy, and Canada. France was busy on NATO's anti-terrorism front: engaged in Mali and on the home front, after terrorist attacks in November 2015 in Paris. Spain was in the midst of an election. Italy was preoccupied with NATO's southern flank: the Mediterranean. So, all eyes turned to Canada.

Eastern European allies had made no secret of their desire to see Canada commit to the eFP in Latvia. Canada had already vowed to defend the interests of the Baltic states in the event of an armed attack; thus, NATO's mutual defence clause, in which an attack on any single ally will be deemed an attack against all, as per Article Five of the Washington Treaty. *Operation Reassurance* had enlisted a Canadian presence in the region for nearly two years, conducting exercises and interoperability training in Poland and the Baltic states. This included four CF-18s taking part in Baltic Air Policing and regular frigate deployments in the Baltic Sea. Given Canada's presence and experience in the region, Allies anticipated that Ottawa would surely take an interest in contributing to eFP.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had requested Canada's participation; but the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau was concerned that such a relatively large (by Canadian standards) military undertaking could get in the way of the new elected government's promised commitment to return to peacekeeping. Discussion was then underway on a prospective mission in West Africa. But Canada would not have the capacity to sustain two such major missions in two very different

parts of the world. A day after US President Barack Obama explicitly courted a larger NATO commitment from Canada in a speech before the Parliament of Canada, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan announced Canada's commitment as the eFP Framework Nation for Latvia: "Canada stands side by side with its NATO allies working to deter aggression and assure peace and stability in Europe" (quoted in Dzadan 2016).

Overtures by any US president are difficult to withstand, let alone a Democratic one who could trade on his popularity to remind Canadians of their collective-defence obligations. In the end, the eFP would stand or fall on whatever decision Canada made: without Canada committing to Latvia, the US would not commit to Poland. With the chips down, Prime Minister Trudeau (2016) placed his bets as any Canadian prime minister would under the circumstances: "Canada is playing a strong and constructive role in the world. We are ready to respond to support NATO with some of the most effective soldiers, sailors, and airmen and airwomen in the world. We will continue to work closely with our Allies and partners to create a safer and more prosperous world for everyone."

In an alliance of 29 members, whether NATO-member countries would commit to shoring up the land domain along NATO's north-eastern flank ultimately came down to Canada.

NATO's Readiness Action Plan: Origins of the eFP

NATO's political decisions require consensus among its 29 member states. The eFP was formally agreed upon at NATO's 2016 Warsaw Summit "to unambiguously demonstrate, as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression" (NATO 2016c, paragraph 40) that Russia might precipitate. In the event of a conflict in the region, the battlegroup is the tip of the spear in the early phases of the conflict before any concerted NATO response (Luik and Praks 2017, 9).

For the first time in history, combat-ready "boots on the ground" from NATO allies are now stationed on Baltic territory. Multinational battalion-sized battlegroups are deployed in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, under the leadership of four Framework Nations:³ the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany respectively – a deployment of forces that took less than one year. (see chart 1).

The Framework Nations provide the core of the battalion-sized battlegroups; other NATO allies complement the task forces with combat-ready troops and equipment on a vol-



Source: Republic of Estonia 2017.



**CHART 2: BATTLEGROUP LED BY CANADA,
OPERATING WITH LATVIAN FORCES IN ADAZI, LATVIA**

CONTRIBUTOR	TROOPS	FORCES
Canada	450	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x mechanised infantry Battalion in armoured fighting vehicles • Reconnaissance Platoon and Support elements
Albania	18	Mobility (EOD) engineers
Italy	160	1 x mechanised infantry Company in armoured fighting vehicles
Poland	160	1 x Tank Company and support elements
Slovenia	50	1 x Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Platoon and support elements
Spain	300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x mechanised infantry Company in armoured fighting vehicles • Mobility engineers and support elements

Approximate total troop number: 1,138

Source: Sargs 2018a.

untary and rotational basis. The multinational component of eFP is a concerted show of cooperation, especially with new NATO members, in a relatively safe theatre. Generally, no contribution from a NATO member to the eFP is too small to be turned back. However, unlike Canada (see chart 2) and Germany, the US and the UK have declined smaller contributions on the grounds that it detracts from the overall combat capability of their eFP units.

The eFP was in part designed to address the shortcomings of the NATO Response Force (NRF), launched in 2002 and then enhanced through the establishment of a “spearhead force,” known as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF),⁴ through the Readiness Action Plan from NATO’s 2014 summit in Wales.⁵ Notably, while the NRF would require time to deploy to the field, the eFP allows for a pre-emptive deployment of credible capability on the ground to deter an attack from occurring in the first place, and not just to respond to a crisis that is already underway. However, this “mobile tripwire” was not actually positioned along the eastern flank, and how quickly and effectively this force could be deployed to the field was anyone’s guess (Zapfe 2017, 148).

The Kremlin’s annexation of the Crimea and incursion into Ukraine in 2014 drove home the point that the NRF/VJTF was not suited to its aim and needed to be enhanced “to symbolise allied solidarity at potential points of conflict” (148). At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO agreed to strengthen its defence and deterrence posture with an enhanced forward presence in the eastern and southern region of its territory: tripling the size of the NRF, a new VJTF able to begin deployment within two to three days, and enhanced Standing Naval Forces.

To facilitate readiness and the rapid deployment of such forces, eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs)⁶ were established in Central and Eastern Europe. This follows a decision taken at the 2014 Wales Summit as part of NATO’s Readiness Action Plan. Six of the eight NFIUs – based in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania – have been active since September 1, 2015, and thus became fully operational ahead of the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The latest NFIUs – in Hungary and Slovakia – have been active since September 1, 2016 and have been fully operational since 2017.

With NATO’s core mandate being the security of its members through collective defence, these small headquarters represent a visible and persistent NATO presence in the aforementioned allied states. In turn, NFIUs foster collaboration between domestic armed forces and help to facilitate the rapid deployment of the NATO High Readiness Forces in times of military-political crises (NATO 2018).

Canada and the eFP's Command and Control Relationship

As a part of the NATO Force Structure,⁷ the deployment of the NRF is leveraged to provide a rapid demonstration of force and the early application of a NATO military presence in support of Article Five of the Washington Treaty. In the current NRF structure, VJTF and IFFG (Immediate Follow on Forces Group, composed of 2 separate brigades at varying readiness) together form a division-sized unit, with Follow on Forces Group as reinforcements. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) is responsible for the NRF, which has no authority to deploy without the approval of the North Atlantic Council. In turn, the NFIUs are under operational command and control of Headquarters Multi National Corps North East which is a headquarters within the NATO Force Structure.

However, the multinational eFP framework is unique in the nature and complexity of its command and control⁸ relationship. To ensure that decision-making process and lines of communication on the potential employment of the eFP are nonetheless seamless, at the 2016 Warsaw Summit it was decided that individual eFP battalions will be integrated into their respective host-state brigades, which in turn will fall under the authority of SACEUR. NATO will only exercise limited control, given the responsibility of each Framework Nation to manage their own battlegroup and the relationship with their respective host nation. Still, the idea is to increase the Alliance's ability to respond effectively and more flexibly to limited Russian aggressions (156). By way of example, the Canadian battlegroup has links to three lines of command: the national lines of command of the contributing nations; the line of command in the host nation (in Canada's case Latvia); and the NATO command structure (Zapfe 2017).

Although the authorities of SACEUR have been broadened to include the staging and preparation of military forces, any considerable manoeuvre beyond such measures – such as a military campaign to support and relieve the eFP – would require a unanimous vote of the North Atlantic Council. That decision-making process could take time (Arnold 2016, 79). Senior NATO officials are well aware of this constraint. As Secretary General Stoltenberg pointed out: “it doesn't help to have a force which is ready to move within 48 hours if we need 48 days to take a decision to make it move” (Pop 2015; see also Arnold 2016, 86).

The eFP is colloquially referred to as a “tripwire.” Yet, any response to Russian aggression requires it to be a part of a larger force framework, which has the capacity to react to perceived threats with speed and requisite military assets. Absent these capabilities, the “trigger” – as described in the Warsaw Summit communiqué – does not trigger much. Ergo, the eFP is integrated

The multinational eFP framework is unique in the nature and complexity of its command and control.

into overall NATO operational planning for contingencies in the Baltic area and is “underpinned by a viable reinforcement strategy” (Luik and Henrick 2017, 11).

The structure and command and control arrangements for the eFP may appear somewhat complicated and, indeed, perhaps unnecessarily convoluted; but this is nothing new for NATO. As with other aspects of the Alliance’s collective strategic posture, political compromise takes precedence over military efficiency. Yet operational efficiency has not been altogether neglected. Rather, the posture of the eFP, along with the command and control structure, will continue to be refined as needed to maintain its operational objectives. Namely, credible protection of Alliance territory, populations, sea lines of communication, and airspace meant that the “tripwire” had to be “in the right place: NATO’s Baltic battalions are unequivocally intended to help deter Russia” (Zapfe 2017, 148). This is why Canada aptly refers to this as *Operation Reassurance*: it is an insurance posture.

Ultimately, the eFP serves as an integral part of NATO’s framework for deterrence and defence along Europe’s north-eastern flank. It signals that the Alliance is resolute in its stance against any aggression that threatens its members. Canada’s contribution is a function of our deep and continuing commitment to NATO – one that goes back to the very beginning of the Alliance, of which Canada was a founding member (Jockel and Sokolsky 2016).⁹ The eFP is but the latest evidence for Canada’s tangible and unwavering commitment to transatlantic security. For Canada, NATO has been first and foremost about security, particularly European security.

While Canadians have at times facetiously observed that Europeans like to fight their wars down to the last Canadian, the eFP is yet another example why Canada, irrespective of the government of the day, is a “closet realist”: an unwavering commitment to peace and stability in Europe is integral to Canadian grand strategy for reasons of national as well as collective interest.

This explains why Canada, as the Framework Nation for Latvia, contributes more than 450 of the 1,138 foreign NATO-member state ground troops: a headquarters component and parts of a battlegroup with a Canadian infantry battalion as well as reconnaissance and support elements (NATO 2017a).¹⁰ On the one hand, that amounts to almost 10 percent of the total non-indigenous troop strength contributed by NATO allies to the eFP in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. On the other hand, Canada has the smallest – and arguably the least combat capable – contribution among the four eFP Battlegroup Framework Nations. In terms of total troop strength, command and field units, Canada’s commitment is also not comparable to Canada’s Cold War deployment to Germany. On a per capita basis, however, Canada’s commitment to the Baltics in general and Latvia in particular actually surpasses the proportion of Canadian troops stationed in Europe during the Cold War.

Canada’s Path to and Support for the eFP

When representatives of the original 12 members of NATO signed the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949, the US Marine Band played two selections from George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*: “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” and “I Got Plenty of Nothin’.” As then-Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1969) dryly observed in his celebrated memoirs, *Present at Creation: My Years at the State Department* the choice of music “added a note of unexpected realism” (284). For the Canadians “present” at this “creation” though, the new Atlantic Alliance already reflected a decidedly realistic approach to the country’s foreign and defence policy objectives.

Canada has long sought to avoid any single power dominating Europe – first Germany, against which Canada went to war twice, then the Soviet Union, and now Russia. As some harsh critics of Canadian engagement in NATO once put it: “In many ways Canada’s role in NATO was a form of atonement for our lack of broad foreign policy objectives after the First World War” (Hertzman, Warnock and Hockman 1969, 15).

Having tried to retreat into isolationism after 1918 only to be dragged back into another European war in 1939, Canadians said in 1949 “never again,” and thus were prepared to join in, to address the Soviet threat before it got out of hand. As one articulate Canadian diplomat put it during the negotiations that led to the North Atlantic Treaty, “[t]his link across the North Atlantic seems to me to be such a providential solution to so many of our problems that I feel we should go to great lengths and even incur considerable risk in order to consolidate our good fortune and ensure our proper place in this new partnership” (Reid 1977, 312).

Though much doubt attended its birth, the seemingly always “troubled” and fractious Alliance has defied its sceptics and continually puts to the lie predictions of its imminent demise: As it was at the “creation,” throughout the Cold War, into the 1990s, post-September 11 – which saw the Alliance play a significant role in Afghanistan – to today’s rapidly evolving threat environment; Canada remains prepared to go to great lengths and incur costs to ensure its “proper place” in the now enlarged NATO alliance.

Canada can do so because it has capacity. In authorized troop strength, Canada fields the eighth-largest military in NATO. Canada ranks among the top 20 militaries in the world. Although ranking in the bottom third on military spending as a percentage of GDP within NATO, Canada consistently ranks around 15th in the world in total military expenditure. In NATO, only the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy spend more on defence, all of which are more populous and have larger economies than Canada. On a per capita basis, only the United States, Norway, United Kingdom, Denmark, Netherlands, France, Germany, and Greece spend more than Canada (NATO 2016a).

Canada is roundly criticized for spending too little on defence, but as these figures and Canada’s contribution to the eFP in Latvia show, such crude reductionism is misleading: in fact, Canada is one of only five NATO-member countries that maintains a full-spectrum military, one that that is prepared to be deployed in support of collective defence, regional stability and international security. Canada offers a military that is popular, robust, competent, and well-equipped. After all, Latvia and Canada spend about the same percentage of GDP on defence, and neighbouring Estonia is widely held up for spending two percent of GDP on defence. Yet both Latvian and Estonian spending has very different yields than Canada’s military expenditure.



Source: Sargs 2018b.

In a letter sent on 19 June 2018 to Prime Minister Trudeau in the run-up to next month's NATO Summit in Brussels, President Trump once again singled out Canada for underspending on defence. Trump's demand for Canada to spend more on defence echoes that of numerous presidents before him, including by Mr. Trudeau's close friend Barak Obama. Mr. Trump is probably unaware of the "fully costed" spending projections in the 2017 Canadian defence policy statement, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* – and, even if he was, his mind is probably made up anyway. However, US Secretary of Defense James Mattis is no doubt familiar with Ottawa's approach to military spending, having lauded the importance and value of Canada's contributions to American and allied security in the past.

To be sure, the Prime Minister could surge defence spending; but it is not clear Trump would take notice, let alone be satisfied with whatever Canada could reasonably inject, especially given the federal government's highly fiscally constrained environment. Even if Canada were to change course and up its game on defence spending, the nature of the budgetary cycle means that would have little bearing on the decision to renew the Latvia mission, since it comes due before the next

federal budget in spring 2019 – which will necessarily set the tone for the looming general election: domestic priorities are bound to trump international and defence spending. To the contrary, the Prime Minister may well decide that Trump's recent imposition of tariffs on some Canadian goods and his disparaging *ad hominem* remarks gives him licence and domestic support to resist US pressure to ramp up defence spending.

Canada consistently ranks around 15th in the world in total military expenditure.

For militaries, quality and quantity are complementary, and context matters. Defence is ultimately about balancing cost, capability, and commitment. Canada's mantra has always been not to get hung up on expenditure, and to focus on capability and commitment instead, notwithstanding a significant decline in total troop contributions over 10 years ago. Canada also likes to tout its steadfast diplomatic and political support of NATO all the same – a "soft-

power" contribution, in unison with those of other medium and small allies, that some scholars argue helps to underpin the credibility of the Alliance's hard power (Greco and von Hlatky 2018).

But why should Canada spend on the military at all? What explains the level of military spending in Canada? And why would Canada incur the financial and political cost of deploying troops to the Baltics, notwithstanding its continued strong support of NATO and desire to remain an active member of the Alliance? These questions arose in the Canadian public discourse as the government deliberated on how to respond to the request from NATO allies, including the United States, that elements of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) take an active, significant and visible role in the eFP intended to reassure and bolster Baltic security. Canada, after all, was still dealing with the consequences of its prolonged and costly engagement in Afghanistan, while at the same time dispatching forces to deal with the threat from the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

As with other allies, including the United States, it should not be surprising that this specific Canadian deployment was not made without some measure of debate (Chase 2016). The 2016 request for Canadian participation came early on for new Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. During

the fall 2015 election campaign, Mr. Trudeau indicated his preference for a larger Canadian role in the United Nations and other collective security, multilateral peacekeeping operations in contrast, it seemed, to the NATO and US-led collective defence operations that had characterized Canadian defence policy and CAF deployments since the end of the Cold War. Many expected the defence policy review promised by the Trudeau government to reflect this shift in emphasis (Sokolsky and Jockel 2016). And yet, as often happens, Canada's musings about some significant change in defence policy were overtaken by events.

Faced with a growing Russian threat, a strong and clear NATO consensus and a direct request by Canada's favourite US President Barack Obama, Canada defaulted back to its bedrock support for NATO – and did so even before it had publicly reviewed and composed its new defence policy. It not only dispatched forces to Latvia but, at the urging of the US and other allies, assumed the mantle of a Framework Nation. As in the past, the enduring commitment to collective Western security, principally through NATO, trumped any other momentary inclinations. NATO viewed Canada's decision to commit to the eFP as a signal of Canadian re-engagement in transatlantic defence and security, which meant influence, respect, and credibility for Canada on the international stage. In light of President Donald Trump's early public castigations of the Alliance for its failure to share the burden, this reaffirmation of transatlantic solidarity took on even greater significance.

The Politics and Prospects of Renewal

For Canada, the current commitment to the eFP in Latvia meets a number of the traditional Canadian foreign and defence policy objectives. The Liberal government's new defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* that was eventually released in June 2017 – a year after Canada had already committed to the eFP (Sokolsky 2017) – underscores the Canadian government's commitment to engage in and lead NATO efforts to deter and defeat adversaries as a way of fostering global stability. Just as was the case with the Harper government so, too, has the Trudeau government kept with its traditional foreign and defence objectives and effective participation as a firm NATO ally, which has been built on the precedents of previous commitments.

“Why do we spend billions on defence, if we are not immediately threatened?” Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland asks rhetorically (quoted in Shadwick 2017, 79). Although no foreign adversary is poised to threaten Canadian sovereignty or territorial integrity and, as such, one could conceivably turn inward and say “Canada first,” we are nonetheless confronted by Russian military adventurism and expansionism that threatens the liberal democratic order (79).

Given the uncertainty and complexity of the global security environment and, with that, its intricate implications for Canadian security, “Canada will pursue leadership roles and will prioritize interoperability in its planning and capability development to ensure seamless cooperation with allies and partners, particularly NATO. The Canadian Armed Forces will be prepared to make concrete contributions to Canada's role as a responsible international actor” (Government of Canada 2017, 61). The political benefit of this approach to engaging in eFP Latvia demonstrates Ottawa's willingness to deploy its military assets in support of common defence objectives, notwithstanding Canada's defence expenditures being well below the objective of two percent of GDP for NATO members.

The latest US national security and defence strategies put a premium on renewed great-power competition. Yet, unless Russia steps up the pressure, American attention will be elsewhere; in the words of US Secretary of Defense James Mattis: “Make no mistake: America is in the Indo-Pacific to stay. This is our priority theatre” (Berlinger 2018). Compared to its previous role in NATO operations and its preoccupation with Iran, North Korea and China, the US is taking a rather limited role in the eFP. The status-quo vis-à-vis the Baltics and the eFP appears to be working well and it has become an opportunity for the US to pressure other NATO allies – including Canada – to deploy and assume limited leadership roles.

Although the eFP may not be a top priority for the current US foreign and defence policy agenda, the role of the US as the Framework Nation for the eFP in Poland is nonetheless consistent with deterring Russian aggression, in accordance with the US National Defense Strategy. Yet, of greater significance in this context are growing US measures to enhance NATO military plans

and defence capabilities along with a persistent presence under *Operation Atlantic Resolve*, and the recent shift from reassuring allies to deterring Russia under the US European Deterrence Initiative. It has grown from US\$1 billion at inception in 2015 (then as the European Reassurance Initiative) to US\$6.5 billion in 2019 (Bartels and Kochis 2018).

The latest US national security and defence strategies put a premium on renewed great-power competition.

NATO is more than just a military alliance. It has long been a mechanism to overcome two insidious collective-action problems (Keohane 1984). One is the incessant risk of US isolationism, such as the current wave of potential retrenchment under the premise of “offshore balancing,” which would see fewer US troops stationed abroad and a greater emphasis on favoured regional powers to check the hostile ones (Layne 1997). The other is the long-standing US concern about collective burden-sharing. In contrast to the US, Ottawa has no other

high priority military commitments abroad that compete for CAF resources. The eFP operation has a relatively low public profile in Canada, which decreases the political costs often associated with an increase in military commitment or renewal of a NATO operation.

However, if the current security environment in the Baltics were to deteriorate and the US were to take on a more substantial direct role, either through NATO or in leading a “coalition of the willing,” this could complicate Ottawa’s current commitment to Latvia. Were Russia to improve its hybrid warfare tactics in the Baltics, perhaps seeking to take advantage of US preoccupation elsewhere or attempting to exploit the rift that has emerged recently between major European NATO allies in response to US defections from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as well as from free trade, then the US could possibly find itself returning to Europe with a more direct, larger, and publicly visible role in the eFP.

If Washington called upon NATO allies to share more of the burden on Europe’s north-eastern front, the eFP could take on the trappings of a US-led “coalition of the willing.” Canada would be hard pressed to decide whether to increase its already relatively substantial commitment in response to US pressure. Akin to other NATO allies, Ottawa may find enlisting under a Trump

foreign military campaign politically difficult, notwithstanding Canada's robust commitment to NATO. For NATO allies, the increase in US funding for more US troops and military hardware in Eastern Europe and its bolstering of training and drills with NATO "are all reassuring. But an alliance is not just about weapons and budgets. And the president's tone and words have planted serious doubts about whether the United States will deliver in a crisis" (De Luce, Gramer, and Tamkin 2018).

Accordingly, the Americans are much more likely to commit when the burden that commitment brings is shared effectively among allies. Like all countries, the United States pursues its self-interest and has always done so. It has always been "America First," but at least since the Second World War, it has not been "America alone."¹⁰ Commitments to collective defence, such as the eFP, are a way for allies, such as Canada, to temper US unilateralist inclinations because they afford Canada a greater say over the means and ends of a mission. In the words of NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay (1952–1957), the purpose of the alliance is "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."

Yet, Germany is now the eFP Framework Nation for Lithuania. Indeed, NATO has long been an instrument to solve inherent commitment problems of easy-riding among member countries tempted to spend too little on defence and to contain the temptation of over-reliance on the US security umbrella. That risk is real: during the initial years of the millennium, European NATO allies reduced their defence budget by some 50 billion euros collectively. As a result, Canada has an interest in keeping the United States engaged, as do all other NATO-member countries. But only a handful of members have the spectrum of capabilities Canada can bring to bear. Making a credible commitment of its own is also a way for Canada to entice the United States to stay engaged in NATO and in the region.

Since the Ogdensburg Declaration of 1938 and the Kingston Dispensation of 1940, the United States and Canada have pursued a continental grand strategy whose objective is to keep security threats and instability away from North American shores. That explains why the strategic culture of the United States and Canada is inherently expeditionary. Canada's grand strategy is premised on two seemingly contradictory dimensions of its strategic culture. The first is that Canada has historically embraced an expeditionary approach when it comes to defence policy and the posture and deployment of Canadian military power. "From Paardeberg to Panjwai," as eminent historians Bercuson and Granatstein (2012) have written, "Canadian governments . . . have believed that one of the key missions of the Canadian military is to deploy abroad."

These deployments have served the national interest because, in imperial wars, world wars, the Cold War and myriad limited conflicts that have characterized the post-Cold War and post-9/11 period, Canada has contributed extremely useful and highly regarded forces to NATO's efforts to contain global threats and lesser challenges posed by regional instability to the security and stability of the West and, therefore, to Canada. As such, Canada's national interest was served. But

The Americans are much more likely to commit when the burden that commitment brings is shared effectively among allies.

in addition to meeting a common threat, forces have been dispatched overseas to send a message and, by so doing, to guarantee Ottawa “a seat at the table” along with a sense of status and prestige (Sokolsky 1989; Massie 2016). This expeditionary strategic culture allowed Canada – which was never regarded, nor saw itself, as a great power – to nonetheless:

show larger nations (e.g., Britain and the United States), international organizations, such as the United Nations, or allied nations such as the members of NATO that Canada is ready and able to put a shoulder to the wheel when military forces are needed to defend allies, deter aggression, or keep or enforce the peace. In other words, Canada has been willing to do its share of the hard, dirty work. Doing so wins Canada diplomatic recognition, political acceptance, entrée into arrangements, treaties, and alliances that are important to Canada and Canadians, and a voice on how future international policies will be pursued. Were Canada not to take part in such missions abroad, friends and enemies alike would have concluded long ago that Canada is of no consequence, does not deserve to be heard and ought not to be accorded any favours in bilateral or multilateral negotiations over matters of consequence. (Bercuson and Grantatstein 2012)

This approach to allied commitments guarantees that Canada “will always prefer to undertake less of an effort than its great-power partners want it to, but not so little as to be eliminated altogether from their strategic decision making” (Haglund and Roussel 2007).

And that is why Canada ought to be doing its fair share in strengthening the deterrence and defence posture of NATO. Yet, “[w]hy invest billions to maintain a capable, professional, well-funded and well-equipped Canadian military” (Freeland 2017)? The answer is obvious, states Freeland: “To rely solely on the US national security umbrella would make us a client state.... [s]uch a dependence would not be in Canada’s interest.... It is by pulling our weight... in all our international partnerships, that we, in fact, have weight.” In that regard, given current fiscal constraints, the eFP is a manageable international commitment to the NATO Alliance. In turn, it is a commitment that advantages the Canada-US relationship by demonstrating a willingness to “share the burden” without significantly increasing current defence spending, which is at \$25.5 billion for the 2018/2019 fiscal year. Yet, as we have written about elsewhere (Leuprecht and Sokolsky 2015), in the larger public policy context governments cannot easily escape the dilemmas, problems and paradoxes of defence spending, especially for unanticipated foreign deployments.

On one hand, funds spent on defence are then not available to enhance economic prosperity and social well-being. In domestic politics, there is little electoral payoff to spending on defence relative to the disproportionate payoff for spending on economic growth and social programs. That explains why as a percentage of GDP and overall government expenditure, democracies spend not just very little on defence; by and large, they actually spend (significantly) less on defence than other types of regimes.

On the other hand, NATO collectively accounts for about 75 percent of global defence spending. Ergo, democracy needs to be defended; but because democracies tend to be disproportionately prosperous, they can afford to outspend other regimes on defence without breaking the bank. In fact, military spending among democracies is not just instrumental but also strategic: In the case of Russia, for instance, sanctions hamper the economy while the security dilemma has Russia spending more on defence, which has a compound deleterious impact on regime’s ability to spend on economic and social issues and thus on its legitimacy in the eyes of a population that bears the brunt of the consequences.

Canada's Options

In the face of Russian aggression, Canada has to decide: be a viable partner within the alliance or an easy-rider. As declared by the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney (2016b), “The simple reality is that, if Canada expects NATO to do more on global security, we must decide to do more for NATO. That should be a top defence priority. What we cannot do is talk about Canada ‘being back’ in the world without making tangible commitments that will anchor our aspirations.” Certainly, the world may need “more Canada,” and if we truly expect to rejuvenate Canada’s role in NATO, “our deeds will need to match our words. We need forces that can engage in tasking by NATO and we need new, interoperable equipment for our troops to engage swiftly and effectively along with our allies” (Mulroney 2016a).

Aside from Canada’s bilateral relationships with the United States and its transatlantic NATO partners, Europe is Canada’s most important partner. For strategic reasons, then, Canada is intent on a stable, united, prosperous, harmonious, and powerful Europe in general, and European Union in particular. Measured as a function of the crises it and its member countries are called on to solve, the European Union is an emerging superpower. Any threat that compromises the sovereignty of any European and EU member state is thus a direct threat to Canadian interests.

For Canada, its prosperity hinges directly on trade, notably its ability to export resources across the world. So, any threat to trade and open trade routes runs counter to Canada’s interests, in part because countries that are at war tend to consume fewer resources and thus depress demand for trade. Strategically, then, it is thus much more efficient and effective for Canada in the short- and medium-term to incur the financial and political cost of a modest contribution to reassure a NATO-member ally on the north-eastern flank, relative to the cost and consequences of local and regional instability. As far as the eFP is concerned, the current military commitment is about the extent to which Latvia is likely to get.

Alternatively, the Trump administration, given its other defence and security priorities and questioning the need for alliances, could lose interest in the Baltics and the eFP, declaring that it was a European problem, and thus should be dealt with by the Europeans. President Trump’s characteristically blunt language says to Europe: “We Americans are busy. You Europeans sort it out!” (Atlantic Treaty Association 2016, 9). Yet “European forces are too hollowed out, lack key enablers, and vital logistics, and their leaders are too lacking in political will to respond in force” (9).

How Trump recently gave short-shrift to allies on North Korea may be a bad omen for the Atlantic Alliance (Mead 2018). After all, he jettisoned the six-country talks in favour of negotiating

Trump’s decision to put US need and self-interest ahead of collective and allied interests should be cause for trepidation in Europe and Canada.

with North Korea bilaterally through the Singapore Summit, while signalling that his priority was to “bring the troops home” – one of a total of ten US divisions of 32,000 soldiers that has been stationed in South Korea since the end of the war. Even more worrisome, Trump also unilaterally conceded long-standing military exercises with South Korea.

In style and substance, Trump’s decision to put US need and self-interest ahead of collective and allied interests should be cause for trepidation in Europe and Canada. Trump may well decide to cut a similar deal with Putin, since he does not believe Russia to pose a (genuine exist-

tential) threat to the US. In other words, he could stop burying transatlantic differences for the sake of anti-Russian unity, defect from the NATO consensus on deterring Russia, and dispense with perceived defence free-riders by putting a premium on offshore balancing to “bring the troops home” while withdrawing from US and NATO exercises along the eastern flank. That would spell the likely end of the eFP. France might opt to keep the eFP on life support by back-filling for the US as a Framework Nation in Poland; but as a wholly European mission without US backing, the eFP’s deterrent effect would be much diminished.

Such a move by Trump would be in keeping with the tenor the US had initially struck in the post-Cold War period, which was to revert to the status quo ante from before the Second World War. Voices from across the ideological spectrum had heralded the “end of in-

ternationalism” at the end of the Cold War (Tonelson 1991). However, they ended up getting caught up with the “end of history” and a desire to preserve the “unipolar moment.” Neo-conservatives advocated US “primacy” – especially now that they felt it could be preserved on the cheap.

The Clinton administration set out to capitalize on the “unipolar moment” with the mission of global “engagement and enlargement” to remake the world in America’s image – much to Russia’s eventual chagrin, as the world would find out soon enough. The rationale Clinton administration officials and “their political allies offered for moving the organization eastward.... [was in] keeping with the missionary spirit of post-Cold War American foreign policy [in which] they declared NATO membership to be a vehicle for promoting democracy in Eastern Europe” (Mandelbaum 2016, 70).

George W. Bush initially cast doubt on America’s internationalist expeditionary zeal and called for a more “humble” approach. However, 9/11 offered yet another rationale for American-style internationalism. As the president proclaimed, “You’re either with us, or against us.” The Bush administration disdained multilateralism, especially the United Nations and traditional American allies for blocking of US efforts to wage war in Iraq (Bacevich 2008, 10). An unwavering belief in military superiority to spread the traditional American resolve in the pursuit of life,

Obama and his critics on the left and the right argued from within the broad internationalist tradition; they did not cast doubt on the fundamental need to remain globally engaged.

liberty, and happiness saw the US confidently taking the lead unilaterally and inviting others to join in – and they did, including every “new” NATO member across Eastern Europe, intent on currying favour in return for the US extending its security umbrella. At the same time, the Bush administration’s broader efforts to counter terrorism, especially in sharing intelligence and monitoring financial flows, relied on cooperation from abroad and received wide multilateral support from allies new and old.

Yet, whether unilateral or multilateral, the war on terrorism became a burden for the US. In reaction to the high human and financial toll of the approach during the Bush era, President Obama signaled that he would adopt a “smart power approach” and exercise more restraint, especially when it came to the use of American military power:

The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it – when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger... On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake – when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us – then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilize allies and partners to take collective action. (Obama 2014)

Obama’s alternative approach was evident in his decision not to use force against Syria in 2013, an exercise in restraint for which he was roundly criticized. Indeed, his administration was accused of having retreated from America’s position as leader of the Western collective defence coalition (Cohen 2015). For the most part, though, Obama and his critics on the left and the right argued from within the broad internationalist tradition; they did not cast doubt on the fundamental need to remain globally engaged.

That could be changing. As in Southeast Asia, Trump may yet signal that he is prepared to fold the US security umbrella that covers Eastern Europe from Russian rainmakers.

In his famous “clash of civilization” thesis, Samuel Huntington (1993) sounded a prescient warning that the world – Russia, China, and Iran first and foremost – was not going to bend to the US. And Washington would have to eschew its global cosmopolitanism and rein in its imperial impulse. It appears that Trump may have arrived at the same conclusion: the US is as prosperous and secure in the world as it has not been since before the Second World War. Cognizant of the limits of US military power, Representative Jim McGovern made the pitch to “bring them home” from Afghanistan, echoing the 1972 Vietnam-era election slogan of Democratic presidential candidate Senator George McGovern (no relation): “Come Home America.”

Trump’s policies may not play well with either the Republican or the Democratic foreign policy elites, but they resonate across middle America – which has aligned with environmentalists, human rights activists, and labour and regional political leaders in a popular coalition that rejects free trade as the organizing principle of the global economy. “Superpowers don’t do windows,” John Hillen warned US allies in the 1990s; to which Trump might add “and we’re done handing out squeegees.” It is an approach which, as Walter Russell Mead (2017) argues, draws deeply upon the long-dormant, but nevertheless deeply rooted and continually powerful Jacksonian tradition in American foreign policy.

According to Graham Allison (2018), while many in the US and abroad are now concerned for the future of the US-led liberal international order, Trump’s policies and rhetoric, however

unsophisticated, have exposed the “myth of the liberal order” in its economic and military dimensions. Created and sustained during its Cold War heyday, this so-called rules-based order was not primarily about creating a new international order per se, but was instead all about containing and deterring Soviet global power – a threat that no longer exists. “Rather than seek to return to an imagined past in which the United States molded the world in its image,” he argues, “Washington should limit its efforts to ensuring sufficient order abroad to allow it to concentrate on reconstructing a viable liberal democracy at home” (125).

A “limited” American effort abroad would no doubt entail a diminished US involvement in NATO’s collective military posture, including the most recent iteration of that commitment: the eFP. President Putin knows that if he can overcome the American commitment to be the cornerstone for NATO’s framework of conventional deterrence, the Alliance would face a long war to recover the Baltics and many Western leaders would surely lack the resolve to confront such a war effort. The errors of the EU in responding to its migration crisis, European NATO allies’ enduring war in the Middle East, and the UK’s contentious Brexit vote, have given rise

to states that are too politically divided and militarily cautious to act as effective first responders in the event of a crisis. But such a move by the US would indeed indicate a larger and more profound problem within the framework of the Alliance than the fate of the eFP, or even the security of the Baltics. Rather, it would mark the beginning of America abandoning the transatlantic relationship – one of the central pillars of Canadian defence and foreign policy – and consequently the fulfilment of “America First.”

Moreover, a US decision to hand the eFP and the security of the Baltics over to the Europeans, entirely outside the NATO structures, would put Canada in a bind. Although Canada is one of four states playing a leading role in NATO’s eFP, it lags at 23rd in spending as a portion of GDP in NATO, and currently contributes 0.99 percent of GDP

to defence. Perhaps the withdrawal of the US as a Framework Nation would “just be a salvo by a self-styled hard-bargainer to push more countries to increase their defence spending” (Blanchfield 2017). But, if it is taken literally, it would be bad news for the alliance, which “means countries like [Canada] will have to step up to the plate,” Liberal MP Bob Nault has stated (Blanchfield 2017).

Although a US decision to step back from the eFP and the Baltic states would call into question the future of the Alliance, Ottawa is in a position to assure its European partners that it will hold firm to its current policy, affirming Canada’s commitment to its solidarity with allies in the region, and remaining committed to the 29-state alliance.

According to some American analysts, Trump’s policies and rhetoric...have exposed the “myth of the liberal order” in its economic and military dimensions.

Whilst Trump's rhetoric has shaken the confidence of American allies across the Atlantic, the Alliance is still standing and the Trump administration has taken tangible steps to bolster it and counter Moscow by approving the sale of military hardware to Ukraine in its struggle with pro-Russian separatists and deploying more US tanks to NATO's eastern flank (De Luce, Gramer, and Tamkin 2018).

NATO is at its best when the United States accepts the burden of leadership because the failure to assure the security of the Baltic states could surely mark the failure of the Alliance itself. For this reason, "there are no allies in Europe calling for US disengagement or a retreat to an offshore position. The real concern in Europe is that the United States will remain engaged but heavily focused on burden-sharing" (Ringsmose and Rynning 2017, 142). The status quo of the US with regard to the eFP suits Canada and the Trudeau government's foreign and defence policy objectives just fine and suggests that this commitment to Latvia will be – and ought to be – renewed in 2019.

Conversely, the costs for Canada to defect from the eFP, let alone its commitment as a Framework Nation, are high: closing doors, letting down old and new friends, wasting human and political capital along with the political-military credibility Canada's commitment to the eFP has generated. We would be abandoning a low-risk mission that generated big payoff in developing Canadian and partner military capability, interoperability, training, and readiness.

In the vernacular, the eFP is often characterized as a tripwire. If the sovereignty of any NATO ally were compromised, that would pose an existential threat to them all, and trigger a collective response. NATO-member countries have an immediate collective interest in ensuring the territorial integrity of member countries. Yet, NATO troops confront an adversary that has orders of magnitude the number of troops stationed on the other side of the border. Moreover, that adversary has the advantage of being a unitary actor, whereas NATO functions more like a federation. In fact, three of the four Framework Nations are federations, and the fourth has a devolved unitary system of government. If NATO wanted to deter against all-out invasion, many more troops would be required.

Instead, defence policy in general, and the eFP in particular, need to be understood as an insurance policy: you buy the amount and extent of coverage you need for the risk you anticipate. Thus, with the rise of Russian aggression, the need to protect against an uncertain future has become entrenched in NATO's mandate. The eFP was never designed to provide all-perils coverage; instead, it is meant to provide specified perils coverage against sovereignty violations of a NATO-member country's air, sea, land, and even cyber domain, especially irregulars in the form of "little green men" as NATO likes to refer to those that appeared in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The eFP changes the calculus: it makes Russian adventurism in the Baltic states more costly and occasions greater military effort, all of which imposes a dilemma on the adversary to take ownership of the escalation of conflict.

Latvia made a strategic, sovereign choice: to join NATO, the most powerful military alliance in history. Conversely, NATO-member countries made a strategic choice in having Latvia join.

The eFP was never designed to provide all-perils coverage.

NATO is an exclusive club: not all who knock shall enter, and some take much longer to be admitted than others. For NATO, the eFP is as much about reassuring the sovereignty of the host nations as it is about securing NATO's north-eastern flank, which is inherently vulnerable by dint of geography, history, size, and the fact that adjoining Finland and Sweden have thus far opted to stay out of NATO.

Conclusion: Maintaining the Baltic Watch

The Atlantic Alliance has always entailed much more than providing a countervailing balance to Soviet power, and now to Russian aggression. The interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world demands an alliance that stands and falls on its unity. The dissolution of the Soviet Union may have altered the rationale for the Alliance, but the fundamental principles that comprise the foundation of such a relationship remain intact: the defence of shared values and interests.

To a considerable extent, NATO has evolved into a community of like-minded states, united by their determination “to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law” (Daalder 1999).

Shared values, such as peace, prosperity, and security, “endure as a north star for otherwise diverse nations to find commonality” (Seidman and Stavridis 2016). Without a NATO of such shared values, the Alliance would collapse and the security of Europe would be jeopardized, thus putting at risk Canada's vital national interests.

What really is the future of the Alliance, let alone of the eFP, with waning US support and new fissures such a move is bound to open up?

As the now enlarged Atlantic Alliance faces a revived Russian threat, particularly to the newer allies on its eastward frontier, NATO appears to be undergoing a process of a rejuvenation consistent with its founding purpose of providing for the collective defence of all its members (Jockel and Sokolsky 2016). As in the past, this will entail a good deal of political and military uncertainty and complications that will challenge the management and unity of the Alliance, demanding adjustments and compromise.

The Cold War and post-Cold war success of NATO was due in no small part to the fact that a flexible response has not only been its long-standing strategic doctrine but has profoundly shaped the way the Alliance approached its seemingly intractable and inherently contradictory problems of a strategic and, above all, political nature. True to the messy nature of democratic government itself, this collection of democracies has managed to surprise and confound its critics by continually adopting a series of initiatives that placed political considerations at the centre of its strategic calculations. Amongst those wise policies was

the importance attached to military contributions from its members, no matter how limited they might be in relative terms. This approach provided Canada with a security community to which, by any assessment, it could (and did) make a successful, significant, and appreciated military contribution.

We are witnessing a continuation of Canada's long-standing commitment to NATO – once again dispatching forces to Europe and lending its albeit modest (yet not inconsiderable) capabilities and highly sophisticated military expertise to bolster the stability and security of a region that remains essential to Canada's national interests. This commitment to the protection of security on the European continent has become a testament to the success and the strength of the NATO Alliance.

But just as Canada's current commitment to the eFP is deeply rooted in the character and purpose of the strategic and political environment in which the NATO Alliance operates, so, too, will the outlook for that commitment be influenced by future trends of which three alternatives seem likely:

1. *Status quo.* There are no major Russian provocations. If Russia consolidates its gains instead and allied anxieties subside, Canadian renewal is both politically easy and readily manageable in terms of resource requirements.

2. *Russia steps up its pressure on the Baltics.* The eFP becomes a higher priority on the US agenda which calls on NATO allies to double down on their commitments. That would exert pressure on Canada to do more. Coming from the Trump administration, such a demand may cause the Canadian government – irrespective of political stripes – some discomfort. Canada might hold its nose but it would quietly renew. However, under this scenario, Ottawa's main problem will be getting European allies to agree first and contribute as well; many are far more irritated by Trump than Canada. To curry favour, for the sake of allied unity, and to incentivize decision-making, Ottawa may add more resources, although possibly in the sea and/or air domains rather than on land.

3. *American disengagement.* Based on Trump's surprise adoption of North Korean rhetoric about American military "provocation" and his offer to sacrifice US-Korean military exercises while floating a general pull-back of US forces in the Asia-Pacific, America may well retrench from NATO-enabling commitments in Europe, especially those Russia has long deemed an affront, the eFP first and foremost among such "provocations." This would reflect a major shift in US national security and foreign policy toward the status quo ante before the Second World War: that approach was already detectable at the end of the Cold War but delayed by the temptation of unipolarity, Clinton's internationalist engagement and NATO enlargement, and the neo-imperialist moment precipitated by 9/11.

This third alternative future would be the most difficult for Canada because it would give rise to a serious predicament. Should Canada re-commit, even increase its contribution to show its

As long as there is a need, Canada will likely remain standing guard on the Baltic watch.

continued faith in NATO? If the US decision were to weaken NATO to the point where it could no longer play the role of eFP enabler, should Canada still join in an EU-only show of effort in the Baltics as a way of demonstrating the most credible commitment possible for the sake of deterrence? But what really is the future of the Alliance, let alone of the eFP, with waning US support and new fissures such a move is bound to open up? And is the EU in a position to take over the eFP given the challenges it is already facing? Even if it were in a position to backfill for a US draw-down along the north-eastern frontier, would that be high enough a priority on the EU's agenda? Even if it were, would there be enough resources to go around to scale up in Poland, especially without compromising competing EU security operations along its southern flank, across the Middle East and Africa?

If the past is prologue, then there should be little doubt that Ottawa will and ought to continue to support NATO's collective efforts on the Alliance's north-eastern frontier. Contributions by other allies may replace specific Canadian contributions from time to time on an agreed-upon rotational basis: At some point domestic politics and competing military demands may allow – or necessitate – France, Spain, or Italy to relieve Canada, the UK, or Germany from their commitments as Framework Nations.

Ottawa will nonetheless remain engaged in Baltic security as long as the threat remains and as long as the Alliance, its frequent internal disagreements notwithstanding, remains ultimately unified in its determination to provide collective security for all its members. This unique combination of flexibility and unity has sustained NATO and Canada's commitment and ability to contribute to European security whenever and wherever it has been at risk.

The eFP is a symbol of strength that reminds us that only the commitment and the unity of the Alliance – not the tripwire itself – will ultimately deter Russian aggression (Zapfe 2017, 157). As long as there is a need, Canada will likely remain standing guard on the Baltic watch.

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Endnotes

- 1 Earlier versions of this paper appeared in Andres Sprudes and Maris Andžans (eds.), 2017, *Security in the Baltic Region: Realities and Prospects*; the Dutch magazine *Atlantisch Perspectief*, and NATO, 2017, *Canadian Defence at 150 and Beyond*.
- 2 Save for a hiatus between 2011-2018, Canada has long participated in the NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). Canada also made a substantial commitment to European security in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, first to United Nations and then to NATO operations: “Ironically, Ottawa found itself almost as entangled militarily with the new Europe as it had been with the old. The Canadian military played a major role in the tough peace enforcement operations in the Balkans throughout the 1990s and fought in the Kosovo War against Serbia in 1999. At one point at the end of the decade, there were almost 4000 Canadian military personnel in the former Yugoslavia as the number of Canadians there approached the numbers once stationed in Germany” (Jockel and Sokolsky 2009).
- 3 Within the structure of NATO, “Framework Nations Concept” is one of the predominant paradigms of multinational defence cooperation. All states retain full sovereignty, with no presence of a “NATO army.”
- 4 The NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was established with the aim of “responding to emerging security challenges posed by Russia as well as the risks emanating from the Middle East and North Africa” (NATO 2016b).
- 5 The 2014 NATO Wales Summit was a meeting of the heads of state and heads of government of the North Atlantic Treaty, held in Newport, Wales on September 4-5, 2014.
- 6 NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) are small headquarters established in Sofia (Bulgaria), Tallinn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Bydgoszcz (Poland), Bucharest (Romania), Bratislava (Slovakia), and Székesfehérvár (Hungary).
- 7 “The NFS is composed of allied national and multinational forces and HQs placed at the Alliance’s disposal on a permanent or temporary basis under specific readiness criteria. These provide a pool of forces in order to allow for a high degree of flexibility to meet the requirements of conducting and sustaining operations.” (NATO 2015).
- 8 NATO’s command and control structure is the system that empowers designated personnel to exercise lawful authority and direction over the use of deployable combined and joint HQs, to command and control multinational and multiservice forces, and to conduct NATO-led non-Article 5 crisis response operations. In turn, Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC-NE), led by Denmark, Poland, and Germany, is responsible for command and control of NATO’s high-readiness forces if deployed to the north-eastern flank of Europe.
- 9 For a broad historical analysis of Canada’s approach to NATO see also, Joseph T. Jockel and Joel J. Sokolsky 2009, “Canada and NATO: Keeping Ottawa in, expenses down, criticism out . . . and the country secure,” *International Journal* 64 (2).
- 10 The precise number of actual Canadian personnel remains undisclosed and fluctuates as a function of temporary surges in support of training and exercises.

- 11 On the “un-Lindberg” and “un-Trumpian” meaning of a true “America First”, see Andrew J. Bacevich, 2017, “Saving America First: What Responsible Nationalism Looks Like,” *Foreign Affairs* 96 (5).



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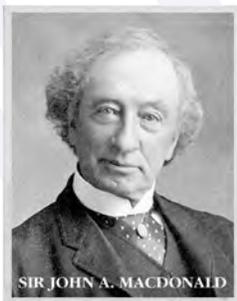
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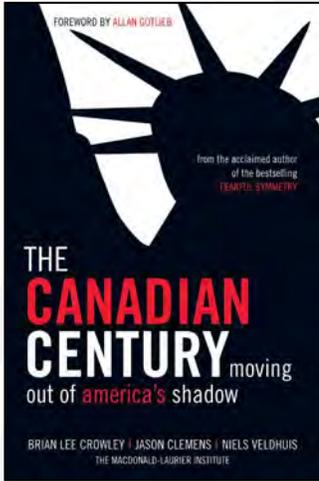
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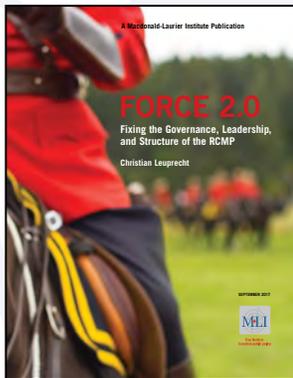


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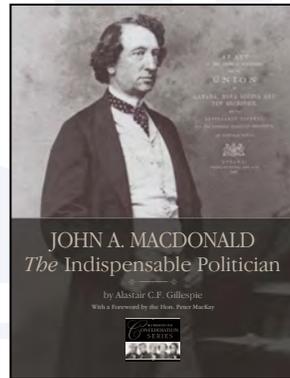
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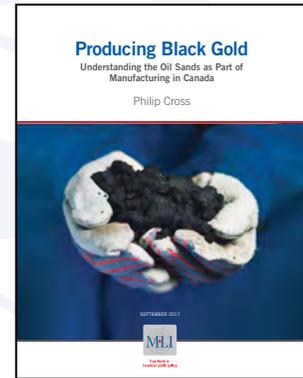
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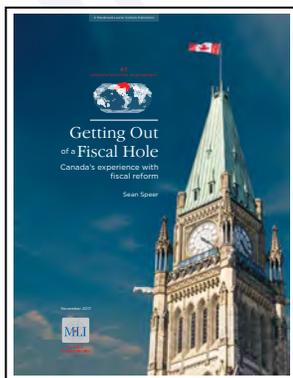
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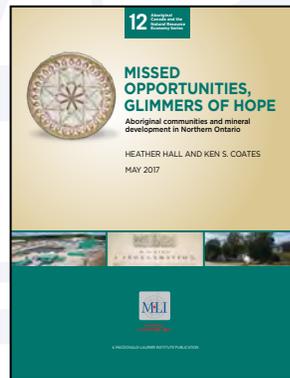
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True North in
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