Canada at a crossroads:
security, defence, and strategic recalibration in an era of great power competition

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ABSTRACT

Canada finds itself at a pivotal juncture in its national security and defence trajectory. After years of under-investment in its armed forces and an increasingly tenuous relationship with its NATO allies over burden-sharing, the country is now confronting a compounding set of strategic pressures: a resurgent Russia, an increasingly assertive China, a contested Arctic, fractured transatlantic relations under renewed American unpredictability, and deep structural problems within the Canadian Armed Forces itself. This paper argues that Canada's security and defence challenges are not merely fiscal or bureaucratic — they reflect a deeper ambivalence about Canada's role in a competitive, multipolar world. Drawing on recent defence policy developments, including the 2024 defence policy update Our North, Strong and Free, the Carney government's commitment to reach NATO's 2% of GDP spending target, and Canada's evolving Indo-Pacific and Arctic postures, this paper assesses where Canada currently stands and what meaningful strategic recalibration would require.

Keywords: *Canada, defence policy, NATO, Arctic security, Indo-Pacific, military procurement, Canadian Armed Forces, great power competition.*

I. INTRODUCTION: THE WEIGHT OF STRATEGIC INERTIA

For much of the post-Cold War era, Canada operated under a comfortable – if strategically questionable – assumption: that geography, alliance membership, and goodwill would serve as adequate substitutes for hard power and credible military investment. Nestled between two oceans, sharing the world's longest undefended border with the most powerful military nation in history, and wrapped in the legitimacy of multilateral institutions, Canada seemed insulated from the kind of strategic pressures that pushed other states to maintain robust defence establishments. That assumption has now run out of runway.

The post-2022 security environment - shaped in large part by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, accelerating Sino-Russian alignment, and a more unpredictable United States under the Trump administration - has forced a long-overdue reckoning for Ottawa. The country that once

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prided itself on peacekeeping and good-international-citizenship now faces hard questions about whether it has the capabilities, the industrial base, or indeed the political will to defend its own territory, contribute meaningfully to collective defence, and project influence in a world that no longer rewards good intentions without commensurate investment.

This paper examines the key dimensions of Canada's current security and defence predicament. It explores the structural dysfunction in military procurement, the persistent gap between political commitments and actual defence spending, the growing strategic importance of the Arctic, the challenges posed by the evolving Canada-US relationship, and Canada's attempt to carve out a meaningful role in the Indo-Pacific. The picture that emerges is of a country that has begun to take its defence obligations more seriously, but where ambition still outpaces execution, and where systemic problems remain stubbornly unresolved.

II. THE LONG SHADOW OF UNDERFUNDING: NATO COMMITMENTS AND CANADA'S CREDIBILITY GAP

Canada's fraught relationship with the NATO defence spending benchmark of 2% of GDP is not a recent phenomenon. For decades, successive governments – Liberal and Conservative alike – treated the commitment more as a rhetorical aspiration than an operational target. At the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO members pledged to move toward the 2% threshold within a decade. Canada was among the signatories. By 2024, the country was spending approximately 1.37% of GDP on defence, ranking it 27th among 31 NATO allies – an embarrassing position for a country that presents itself as a leading liberal democracy and responsible global actor.

The political dimension of this gap became impossible to ignore when leaked intelligence documents in 2023 revealed that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had privately told NATO officials that Canada would never reach the 2% target. As defence analyst Richard Shimooka observed at the time, this was "anything but a surprise to seasoned defence observers" – but the candour of the admission pierced through years of carefully managed messaging that presented Canada as a constructive, if modestly resourced, ally (Shimooka, 2023). The revelation damaged Canadian credibility at a moment when allied solidarity was being tested by the war in Ukraine.

The April 2024 defence policy update, titled Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence (ONSAF), represented the Trudeau government's attempt to get ahead of this narrative. The policy announced $8.1 billion in new spending over five years and $73 billion over twenty years, with a commitment to reach 1.76% of GDP by 2029-30 and 2% by 2032. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), however, was unsparing in its assessment. Using independent GDP projections, the PBO found that ONSAF's own figures were based on an erroneous GDP forecast, and that the actual trajectory pointed to 1.58% by 2029-30 – leaving a gap of 0.42 percentage points to be closed in just three years (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2024).

Philippe Lagassé, one of Canada's most incisive academic voices on defence policy, was equally measured in his assessment of the update. Writing in his Substack newsletter, Lagassé noted that while 2024 saw some meaningful movement – particularly the Arctic pivot and renewed attention to NORAD modernization – the government's credibility on spending timelines remained hamstrung by a procurement system ill-equipped to absorb new capital quickly, and by structural debates within cabinet about prioritization (Lagassé, 2025a). The gap between announcement and delivery has been Canada's defining problem in defence for at least two decades.

The political and strategic environment changed substantially with Mark Carney's election as Prime Minister in the spring of 2025. Facing an emboldened Trump administration that had explicitly linked trade tariffs to alliance burden-sharing, and with NATO itself beginning to discuss a new 3.5% "hard target" for defence spending at the 2025 Hague Summit, Carney moved quickly. In June 2025, he announced $9.3 billion in additional defence funding for the 2025-26 fiscal year – enough to push Canada to the 2% mark for the first time since 1990. It was a significant political moment, and a recognition that decades of deferred spending had become geopolitically untenable (RBC Economics, 2025).

But meeting a threshold and sustaining it are very different things. The NATO Summit in The Hague agreed to a new benchmark of 3.5% of GDP on core defence plus an additional 1.5% on defence-related investments by 2035 – a target that would require Canada to roughly triple its current defence budget within a decade. The fiscal arithmetic is daunting, and it raises the question not just of how much Canada will spend, but of whether its procurement machinery can spend it effectively (NATO, 2025).

III. PROCUREMENT DYSFUNCTION: A SYSTEM UNFIT FOR PURPOSE

If there is one area of consensus among Canadian defence analysts, it is that the country's military procurement system is deeply dysfunctional. The war in Ukraine, as Shimooka has repeatedly argued, has made painfully clear that the ability to acquire capabilities quickly and at scale is not a technical nicety – it is a core component of strategic deterrence and warfighting capacity (Shimooka, 2024b). Canada's procurement system, by contrast, is built for caution, not speed.

The structural problems are well-documented. A fragmented decision-making process spreads responsibility across the Department of National Defence, Public Services and Procurement Canada, and the Treasury Board, creating bottlenecks at every stage. Requirements-setting is often misaligned with operational need. Industrial offset requirements – which mandate that foreign manufacturers invest back into the Canadian economy for contracts over $100 million – add complexity and delay without proportionate strategic benefit. And a chronic shortage of experienced procurement specialists, many of whom have left the public service to work as contractors, means that institutional knowledge is leaking out of the system faster than it can be replenished (Shimooka, 2024b).

The consequences are visible across virtually every major capability program. The replacement for Canada's aging CF-18 fighter fleet – a process that began in earnest more than fifteen years ago - is only now arriving, with 88 F-35 aircraft contracted but delivery years away. The Royal Canadian Navy's frigate replacement under the Canadian Surface Combatant (CSC) program carries a projected lifecycle cost that Shimooka has noted represents only about 0.1% of GDP over its fifty-five-year lifespan when properly contextualized – yet it has attracted disproportionate political controversy that distracts from more fundamental questions (Shimooka, 2024a). Meanwhile, Canada's Victoria-class submarines – themselves inherited from Britain in 1998 – are approaching the end of their serviceable life, and the new Canadian Patrol Submarine Project (CPSP) faces a timeline so compressed as to leave almost no margin for the delays that characterize every major Canadian procurement.

The Carney government's answer to this challenge has been the creation of a Defence Investment Agency (DIA), a new special operating agency within Public Services and Procurement Canada designed to streamline major defence procurement. Lagassé has cautiously welcomed the initiative while noting that its actual authority to shape DND's requirements-setting – the upstream part of procurement that most drives delays and cost overruns – remains unclear (Lagassé, 2025b). The risk, as he has argued, is that the DIA becomes another layer of institutional architecture without the power to change the behaviour of the departments that feed into it.

For Balkan Devlen of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, the procurement problem cannot be separated from a broader question of strategic culture. Canada has long approached military investment, as Leuprecht and Sokolsky have put it, like a Walmart shopper - hunting for deals on established, off-the-shelf platforms rather than investing early in capability development. This approach minimizes risk on individual programs but erodes Canada's industrial base, limits its interoperability in emerging technology domains, and reduces its leverage in alliance burden-sharing discussions (Shimooka, 2025). The shift Carney has signalled toward domestic defence industry development and toward joining allied capability programs at earlier stages is the right direction; the test will be whether political commitment survives the friction of bureaucratic implementation.

IV. PEOPLE AND READINESS: THE HIDDEN CRISIS IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Beneath the debate about percentages of GDP and procurement timelines lies a more immediate and, in some ways, more alarming problem: the Canadian Armed Forces are badly short of people. The CAF was already running a deficit of roughly 10,000 to 16,000 personnel below authorized strength before the 2024 defence policy update announced new roles and expanded capabilities that would require an additional 14,000 members to crew and sustain. The mathematics of this shortfall are unforgiving. As Shimooka has pointed out, Canada is buying new F-35s for an air force that cannot reliably recruit and retain enough pilots - a situation in which expensive equipment risks being parked for want of the people to operate it (Shimooka, 2024a).

The roots of the personnel crisis are multiple. Compensation has failed to keep pace with the public sector and private sector alternatives available to skilled Canadians. The military's rigid promotion and career structures are poorly adapted to recruiting mid-career professionals with specialist skills in areas like cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and space systems - precisely the domains where modern militaries most need talent. A series of high-profile misconduct scandals in the senior ranks damaged the institution's reputation and accelerated departures. And the demanding lifestyle associated with military service – frequent postings, deployment cycles, separation from family – is an increasingly hard sell to a generation of Canadians who have more options and different expectations than their predecessors.

Shimooka has argued that one of the most immediately available levers is compensation. Bringing CAF members' pay into line with comparable public service positions would cost an estimated $4-6 billion per year – a significant sum, but one that addresses the most direct cause of attrition (Shimooka, 2024d). The broader cultural and structural reforms needed to make the institution attractive to a 21st-century workforce are harder and slower, but no less essential. Without solving the people problem, Canada can announce all the procurement programs it likes and meet every spending target on paper while its actual warfighting capacity continues to erode.

Lagassé has also drawn attention to the readiness dimension of this crisis. The CAF has historically struggled to maintain serviceable equipment across its fleet - at various points, fewer than one in four Victoria-class submarines has been seaworthy. New capabilities take years to reach operational status after delivery. This gap between acquisition and readiness is a function of inadequate personnel and maintenance funding, of a procurement model that prioritizes capital acquisition over lifecycle sustainment, and of an institutional culture that has tended to conflate having equipment with being able to use it effectively (Lagassé, 2025c).

V. THE ARCTIC IMPERATIVE: SOVEREIGNTY, STRATEGY, AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Nowhere is the convergence of Canada's strategic interests and its historical under-investment more visible than in the Arctic. The North has always been central to Canadian identity and sovereignty, but it has only intermittently been treated as a first-order strategic priority. That is changing, driven by three simultaneous developments: climate change is making the Arctic dramatically more accessible; Russia and China are deepening their cooperation in the High North; and the United States – under the Trump administration – has raised explicitly provocative questions about sovereignty over Greenland and the Northwest Passage.

The December 2024 Arctic Foreign Policy, released in the final months of the Trudeau government, represented a meaningful step toward treating the Arctic as the strategic frontier it has always been. The policy acknowledged that Russia and China are aligned in their desire to undermine the liberal rules-based international order, and that their cooperation in the Arctic – including joint military exercises in the Russian High North in July 2024, joint coast guard patrols

in the Bering Sea, and bomber patrols near Alaska - constitutes a serious challenge to Canadian interests (Government of Canada, 2024a). China, though not an Arctic state, has explicitly designated itself a "near-Arctic state" and is developing what it calls a "Polar Silk Road" to leverage shortened maritime routes between Asia and Europe as sea ice retreats.

In a September 2025 piece for Policy Options, co-authored with Alexander Dalziel of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, I argued that Canada needs to move beyond rhetorical recognition of the North Pacific as part of its strategic neighbourhood toward concrete partnerships – particularly with Japan and South Korea - built around Arctic science, joint shipbuilding, and maritime domain awareness. Tokyo has steadily deepened its Arctic engagement as part of its free and open Indo-Pacific vision, and there is genuine appetite in Seoul for the kind of practical collaboration that could give Canada's Arctic strategy real operational weight (Miller; Dalziel, 2025). The idea of a North Pacific-Arctic strategic framework is compelling; what it still lacks is a Canadian government willing to resource it adequately.

On the hardware side, the 2024 defence policy update committed Canada to acquiring up to twelve conventionally powered, under-ice-capable submarines for the Royal Canadian Navy - a capability gap that has been glaring since the end of the Cold War. The government also initiated procurement of eight new icebreakers, including two polar icebreakers capable of year-round Arctic operations, and joined an ICE Pact with the United States and Finland to coordinate Arctic icebreaking capacity (Government of Canada, 2024b). These are real investments, but they are also decade-long undertakings in a domain where the competitive clock is already running.

NORAD modernization – the overarching framework for Canada-US continental air and maritime defence – is the most consequential near-term priority. The $40 billion commitment announced in 2022 to modernize NORAD-related capabilities, including over-the-horizon radar networks, surveillance satellites, and ground-based air defence, is the single largest defence investment in Canada's recent history. As Shimooka has noted, NORAD renewal represents Canada's most credible path toward a multi-domain approach to deterrence – and it is one area where the procurement system has shown some capacity to move at a pace commensurate with strategic need (Shimooka, 2024c). Even here, though, delays lurk, and the political sustainability of the program under a potentially shifting US posture toward burden-sharing remains a live question.

VI. THE CANADA-US RELATIONSHIP: ALLIANCE STRESS AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The relationship between Canada and the United States has always been the load-bearing wall of Canadian security and defence policy. Geography, economics, intelligence-sharing through Five Eyes, the bilateral NORAD command, and deeply integrated defence industrial supply chains have made the two countries more structurally intertwined in security terms than any other bilateral relationship on earth. For most of the post-war period, this intimacy was viewed in Ottawa almost

entirely as an asset. Under the Trump administration's second term, it has begun to look like a vulnerability.

The Trump administration's use of tariff threats, its explicit suggestions that Canada should consider joining the United States as its 51st state, and its consistent messaging that European and Canadian allies are free riders on American security guarantees have forced a fundamental reassessment in Ottawa of the assumptions underlying Canadian defence policy. As Miller has argued in his work on Canada's strategic hedging, the country now faces the challenge of middle powers that have historically relied on a benign hegemon: when the hegemon becomes unpredictable, the middle power must develop alternatives – but cannot do so quickly or cheaply (Miller, 2026a).

Prime Minister Carney has been notably direct in his framing of this challenge, telling Canadians in the spring of 2025 that the old security and defence relationship with the United States was "over" and that Canada would need to build and buy more at home. This represents a significant rhetorical shift, even if the practical implications take years to materialize. Shimooka has cautioned against an overcorrection toward European procurement partnerships, arguing that while the impulse to diversify is understandable, Canada's defence industrial base is too deeply integrated with American suppliers, platforms, and interoperability standards to pivot quickly – and that European defence programs tend to require earlier commitment and larger purchase quantities than Canada's Walmart-style procurement approach can accommodate (Shimooka, 2025).

Lagassé has noted a particularly awkward dynamic: Canada has argued to the Trump administration that it cannot reach the 2% spending target faster without US cooperation in processing Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases through Congress more quickly. This argument – essentially that Canadian defence spending depends on American administrative goodwill – captures something important about the depth of bilateral entanglement. It is simultaneously a reasonable technical point and a politically uncomfortable one, since it concedes exactly the kind of dependency that critics of Canadian defence passivity have always warned about (Lagassé, 2025a).

The intelligence and security dimensions of the relationship add further complexity. Canada's membership in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing community – alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand – represents one of its most valuable strategic assets. This relationship has been robust across administrations and political cycles because it serves deeply aligned interests. But it exists in a broader political context that is now more fraught than at any point since the 1970s. Maintaining the Five Eyes relationship while diversifying Canada's strategic partnerships more broadly - with Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Australia – is a delicate act of alliance management that Balkan Devlen and others have flagged as among the most consequential strategic tasks facing Canadian foreign policy in the coming decade.

VII. THE INDO-PACIFIC DIMENSION: AMBITION WITHOUT ARCHITECTURE

Canada's 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy was, in many respects, a landmark document. For the first time, Canada articulated a coherent framework for engagement with a region that accounts for an enormous and growing share of global trade, where two of its most important security challenges - China's military rise and the North Korean nuclear program – are centred, and where its key allies – the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia– are investing enormous diplomatic and military capital. The strategy committed $2.3 billion over five years and identified China, notably, as a "disruptive power"– a formulation that was more candid than Ottawa's previous hedging on Beijing.

In his 2023 discussion with the Council on Foreign Relations, Miller noted that Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy was notable as much for what it signalled about Canada's evolving threat assessment as for its specific programmatic commitments (Miller, 2023). Naming China as a disruptive power was a political choice that carried real costs in the bilateral relationship, and it reflected a broader recognition in Ottawa – still somewhat reluctant – that the era of commercial engagement with Beijing as the primary frame of the relationship was over.

Three years on, the implementation record is mixed. Canada has expanded its diplomatic footprint in the region, posting over seventy new diplomats, upgrading offices to full embassies in remaining ASEAN states, and deepening defence partnerships with Japan and South Korea (Government of Canada, 2025). The Royal Canadian Navy has participated in freedom of navigation operations in the Taiwan Strait alongside allied partners, and HMCS Ville de Québec has been committed to join a United Kingdom Carrier Strike Group deployment in the Indo-Pacific in 2025 (Atlantic Council, 2025). These are real contributions, even if they are modest by the standards of Australia, Japan, or the United States.

The more fundamental question is whether Canada has the sustained military and diplomatic capacity to be a credible Indo-Pacific actor rather than a periodic contributor. The CAF's personnel crisis limits what it can deploy. The procurement delays mean that the next generation of surface combatants, submarines, and maritime patrol aircraft - all critical to an Indo-Pacific presence - remain years from delivery. And Canada's defence industrial base, with notable exceptions like Irving Shipbuilding, Bombardier, and CAE, lacks the sovereign manufacturing depth to support expeditionary operations without heavy dependence on allied supply chains.

Devlen's work on transatlantic security and great power competition provides a useful comparative frame here. The same structural challenge that limits Canada's contribution to European deterrence – the gap between political commitment and material capacity – applies with equal force in the Indo-Pacific. Pledges of partnership are important signals, but they are not substitutes for credible capability. Japan and South Korea are looking for allies who can contribute meaningfully to their security environments, not simply endorse shared values at bilateral summits

(Devlen, 2024). Canada's Indo-Pacific ambitions will only acquire strategic weight when they are backed by a military that can consistently show up, and stay.

VIII. THE DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL QUESTION: BUILDING SOVEREIGN CAPACITY

One of the genuinely new elements in Canadian defence discourse over the past two years has been the emergence of defence industrial strategy as a first-order policy question. For most of Canada's post-war history, the country's defence industrial base was treated primarily as an economic variable – a source of regional employment and industrial offset opportunities – rather than a strategic asset. The war in Ukraine, the tariff dispute with the United States, and the broader recognition that supply chain security is inseparable from defence readiness have changed this calculus.

The Carney government's 2025 Budget and associated Defence Industrial Strategy represented, as Lagassé noted, "the most ambitious attempt in decades" to develop a sovereign defence industrial capacity. The strategy promised billions in new defence spending directed specifically toward Canadian firms, and the creation of the Defence Investment Agency was partly designed to give Canadian companies a better entry point into defence procurement (Forster, 2025). The government also spoke explicitly about creating a new class of "neo-prime" defence companies – software-driven systems integrators that could compete with American platforms like Anduril in domains like artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and Arctic surveillance.

This ambition runs up against real structural barriers. Canada's defence industry has historically been oriented toward niche components and subcontracted work for American and European primes rather than independent platform development. Building the kind of companies that can develop, manufacture, and export complete defence systems takes time, capital, and a consistent domestic demand signal – all of which have been unreliable in Canada. Shimooka has noted that the pivot away from American defence suppliers toward European alternatives, while politically attractive in the current climate, would likely harm the many Canadian firms embedded in American defence supply chains without generating comparable European opportunities quickly enough to compensate (Shimooka, 2025).

The more promising path may be in domains where Canada has genuine comparative advantages: Arctic systems and cold-weather operations technology, cybersecurity, maritime surveillance, and critical minerals processing. Canada sits on some of the world's largest deposits of the rare earth elements and critical minerals that underpin modern defence technology – from semiconductors to battery systems to advanced propulsion. As Miller and others have argued, the critical minerals file represents one of Canada's most significant strategic assets in negotiations with both the United States and Indo-Pacific partners, and it is one area where defence investment and economic development can be mutually reinforcing rather than in tension (Miller, 2026b).

IX. DEMOCRATIC OVERSIGHT AND STRATEGIC CULTURE: THE GOVERNANCE DIMENSION

The procedural and institutional dimensions of Canadian defence policy deserve attention alongside the capability and spending debates. Lagassé's extensive scholarship on civilian control of the military, parliamentary oversight, and executive authority in defence matters has illuminated the structural features of Canadian defence governance that shape – and sometimes constrain – what is possible in practice (Auerswald; Lagassé; Saideman, 2025).

Canada operates under a Westminster system in which the executive branch – the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet – holds extensive prerogative powers over defence and foreign policy (Lagassé; Massie, 2025). Parliament plays a limited formal role in authorizing military deployments or defence spending decisions. This concentration of executive authority can be an advantage in moments of strategic decisiveness, but it also means that Canada's defence posture can change significantly with political leadership – and that long-term capability development, which requires sustained commitment across election cycles, is particularly vulnerable to political discontinuity.

The culture of the security and defence community itself matters. As Devlen has observed, Canada has historically struggled to develop the kind of strategic culture - the internalized set of beliefs and assumptions about the role of force, the nature of threat, and the requirements of credible deterrence - that drives sustained investment and serious military planning in states like Australia, France, or Poland. The combination of geography, alliance dependence, and a political culture that has often treated defence spending as something between a luxury and an embarrassment has produced a military establishment that is capable and professional but chronically under-resourced relative to the country's strategic ambitions and international commitments.

There are signs that this culture is beginning to shift. Public opinion polling shows that Canadians' support for defence spending has grown substantially since 2022, with a majority now favouring the 2% target and a significant minority willing to go higher (Angus Reid Institute, 2025). The Trump administration's provocations – particularly the 51st state rhetoric and the tariff campaign – have had the counterproductive effect, from Washington's perspective, of generating unprecedented Canadian public appetite for defence investment and sovereignty protection. Carney's election was in part a referendum on Canadian strategic identity, and the results suggest that Canadians are readier than they have been in decades to support a more serious defence posture.

X. CONCLUSION: FROM POSTURE TO PRACTICE

Canada is, for the first time in a generation, making genuine movement on its defence commitments. The political will exists at the highest levels of government in a way it demonstrably

did not under a decade of Trudeau-era Liberal governance. Spending is increasing, procurement programs are being accelerated, the Arctic is being treated as a strategic priority, and the Indo-Pacific framework has given Canada a coherent (if still under-resourced) architecture for engagement in the most consequential theatre of 21st-century competition.

But the gap between posture and practice remains wide. The procurement system has not been fundamentally reformed – the Defence Investment Agency is a promising start, but it is not yet a solution. The personnel crisis is being acknowledged but not yet reversed. The industrial base that would give Canada strategic resilience and reduce its dependence on American supply chains is years from maturity. And the geopolitical environment will not stand still while Canada catches up: NATO is now discussing targets that would require Canada to sustain defence spending at levels not seen since the early Cold War, and the window for meaningful contribution to the evolving security architectures of both Europe and the Indo-Pacific is narrowing.

What Canada's allies - including Brazil's own strategic community, which has a sophisticated understanding of the challenges facing middle powers navigating great power competition – most need to understand about Canada is that the country's strategic awakening, while real, is still fragile. It is driven in part by external shock rather than by a deeply internalized strategic culture. It can be reversed by a change of government, by economic pressure, or by a perception that threat levels have subsided. Sustaining it will require not just more money, but better institutions, stronger industrial foundations, and a public that understands the relationship between military investment and the kind of international order in which Canadian interests and values can thrive.

The Brazilian Defense College's interest in Canada's strategic evolution is well-placed. Canada and Brazil share the predicament of vast geographies, complex sovereignty challenges, and the need to position themselves credibly in a world restructured by great power competition. The Canadian experience - its failures as much as its recent progress - offers lessons for any state navigating the distance between strategic aspiration and strategic reality.

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