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# CANADA'S DEFENCE POLICY RENEWAL: BROAD CAPABILITIES IN AN ALLIES AND PARTNERS FRAMEWORK

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**Alexander Moens**

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## Introduction

The new Liberal government's call for a defence policy review is sensible and timely, as the previous defence vision of the government of Canada is nearly ten years old.

The most fundamental parameters of Canadian defence policy are almost definitional. Three unchanging prioritized tasks stand firm: the defence of Canada, the defence of North America, and the pursuit of international peace and security.<sup>1</sup> Canada does not have the option of dropping one of these three or re-ordering them. How can Canada have a defence policy that does not aim in the first place to defend its own people and territory, and how can Canada not choose to defend North America with the United States? Yet, ironically, because the first two priorities are so clear, the bulk of attention in Canadian defence policy tends to fall on how we envision the third leg of our trio: international security.

Although these three are beyond choice, there is a 'genuine range of choice' for Canadian defence policy. The first choice is between specialized or generalized capabilities; between concentrating on a limit array of tasks with the highest quality tools versus covering a wide array of tasks with adequate tools. The second choice of options pertains to the political vision of Canada's foreign and security policy. One option is to place Canada's international security task mainly inside a United Nations-based framework. The other is to place Canada's international security policy mainly inside an Allies and Partners Framework. I will argue that both Canada's mix of values and interests as well as the present dangers we face call for strong emphasis on the Allies and Partners Framework.

## The Case for a Maximum Range of Modest Capabilities

What should be the scope of Canadian defence capabilities? What should be the range of equipment and abilities across the services? Canada is not a superpower in terms of demography, economy, and military. Only its geography falls into the class of super-big. The technological complexity and cost of military systems makes it very difficult for even large states to afford a broad scope of equipment and abilities.

This conundrum has led to many debates whether Canada should keep a fairly broad and wide scope of military capabilities or whether it should concentrate on a narrower range of capabilities, sometimes the latter are called 'niche capabilities.' In the former, the outcome would mean, proverbially speaking, that Canada's capacity is a mile wide but an inch deep while in the latter option Canada's capacity would be strong in some areas but near absent in others. Case in point: we have four submarines, but more ocean front than all of Europe. Another example: we thought tanks offered a capability we could skip, until we needed them in our International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations

in Afghanistan.

Geographically small and politically integrated countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands may well find that the bulk of the evidence leans towards specialization of defence tasks. For them, high degrees of specialization embedded in larger multi-national military units with the Germans, the French, or the British are increasingly replacing the old concept of national defence. Due to being geographically ground zero for both the European Union (EU) and NATO, they feel that their security guarantees in these political and military alliances are nearly waterproof. What is more, the

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need for such defence integration flows both ways. The large European powers – Germany, France, and Britain – struggle to maintain broad-based militaries themselves. Hence, for these larger states specific niche capabilities add value and save costs, such as Dutch artillery units inside a German armoured division. We are thus seeing in Western Europe the gradual development of functional military integration.

The Canadian situation is different. Military cooperation and ‘embeddedness’ of Canadian components in American military formations is common and often at deeply integrated levels. Canadian and American military units, including at the Reserves and National Guard level, do things together all the time. A well-known operational example is that of a Canadian Frigate working inside a US naval task force. Few Canadian overseas operations take place without a range of US support.

But there are several reasons why the Canadian situation remains different from the smaller West European allies. Canada cannot simply go the way of specialization in terms of military capabilities. Even if niche capabilities may be sufficient in very few cases, the bulk of Canadian defence must remain based on broad capabilities and a wide scope of action.

The first reason is that Canada’s geography compels broad capability. It allows no short cuts. Defence tasks regarding our three oceans, our airspace, and in our own vast land mass requires us to do all. Conducting defence operations, including training and emergency response inside Canada, often amounts to near-expeditionary activities. As we project this logic into the far north the challenges multiply.

Secondly, our political relationship with the United States is different than the relationships in the European Union and European NATO. In certain areas of trade and commerce and border security, Canada and the United States are in practice quite integrated. The same holds true in many areas of military cooperation. Interoperability levels are often higher than one would find among NATO allies in Europe. One part of our defence cooperation (NORAD) is binational at the military level.

However, the bilateral defence relationship is essentially ad hoc. It is not federated and institutionalized into shared sovereignty and community law, as we find in the European Union. This is not a critique. Sometimes Europe's deeply integrated political structures do not produce good outcomes while our North American 'ad hoc-ism' does.

Third, unlike the multilateral dynamic in Europe, the Canadian Armed Forces can bring little added value to the super-sized American armed forces, even as American soldiers and officers realize the high quality of Canadian personnel and the tasks they perform. US military preparedness remains essentially American, period. Even if the logic of more military integration existed on Canada's side, it does not mean the American side would see it the same way. An American military commander can see it, but an American decision-maker most of the time does not.

The sum of the matter is this: our geography and ad hoc defence relationship with the United States call for broad-based capabilities. When we have them – even when they are a bit thin – we can work together with the US military on a wide variety of things. US capabilities can then augment what we are doing. Submarines is an example of a maritime awareness and self-defence task we cannot leave out and the Americans can readily augment. If we cut back our broad-based and overall capabilities too much, we eliminate American opportunities to augment what we are doing. This scenario not only risks Canadian security but also difficult political relations with the United States.

### **The Case for Putting the Framework of Allies and Partners First**

In a variety of direct and indirect references, spokesmen in the new government have let it be known that they envision Canada's third task – regarding international peace and security – to feature a return to United Nations peacekeeping. "A renewed commitment to UN peacekeeping is an important part of 'Canada is back!'"<sup>2</sup> This is issue that may look like 'small potatoes' to those doing specific military tasks or to the public which has no time to sort through the worldviews and philosophies of policy-makers. Military decision-makers plan to do both UN-type tasks and NATO-type tasks. Still, how Canadian political decision-makers envision Canada's third objective (international peace and security) will determine many of the actual policies and actions in defence policy and also spill over into many North American defence issues.

Canadian security and defence policy plays out in two arenas of international politics, which are neither diametrically opposed nor contradictory. The first is based on the UN system, broadly defined, and the pursuit of a rules-based international order by means of international law. The second, in accordance with the United Nations and permitted by the UN Charter, is the pursuit of international order by means of a coalition of Allies and Partners. I capitalize these words because they refer to proper

names. By Allies I mean the United States, the NATO Allies, and EU Partners that are not in NATO. Finally, through NATO's Partnership relations with various countries across the globe, Canada also has specific Partners in other parts of the world. One important area is Asia-Pacific, where our Partners include Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. There are also democratic Partners in South America with whom stronger defence relations can emerge.

The UN and international law system is a primary-level structure in which all nations recognize basic rights, including sovereignty, legal equality, independence, and non-interference. On this structure

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various broad policy areas are based, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The security and peace competence of the UN is of course channeled through the Security Council. But that council is effectively blocked by the deep rifts between China, Russia, and America. It is important for us to apply great diplomatic effort to help unblock that structure, but that is the realm of diplomacy and not defence policy. To be sure, we do need well-resourced, clever, and ambitious diplomatic effort at the UN, at NATO, and in the Asia-Pacific.

For the pursuit of our peculiar mix of interests and values in security and defence policy, Canada needs more means than the UN system can offer. This has been true for many years and is coming back with particular intensity in the last decade. Despite our knack for articulating our moral missions, Canada does not have unique values and principles in international security. We have values and interests along with many other democracies world-wide. Lord Palmerston's famous expression that states have “no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies” may well hold true when worst comes to worst, but most of the time liberal democratic states align themselves with a certain peer group. This consort of democracies does things together in missions abroad, and in so doing create specific synergies on how defence is done in general. All states have interests and embedded in these are values. This holds true for democratic states, but also for all others. Russia and China also pursue values inside their interests. However, these values are different from liberal democratic values.

The crux of the values of the Allies and Partners Framework is reflected in the preamble of the Washington Treaty. The phrase that sums up the values of this framework is: “the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”<sup>3</sup> The same values connects non-NATO EU states such as Sweden and Finland into the framework as well as the democratic states that are NATO Partners across the globe, namely Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand. Most of Eastern Europe wanted to join the NATO-EU organizations because they provide a path towards economic prosperity and offered collective defence. In so doing, these states also joined the values network. For some this will be

a multi-decade process. As a case in point, the Euro-Atlantic region is still helping the Balkan region come fully into this democratic community.

States that share the preamble values do not automatically have the same interests. Shared values and shared interests must be combined to form common positions and this in turn creates the ability to coordinate actions. To do so, the Allies and Partners rely on organizational means such as NATO and the EU and Partnership arrangements and ad hoc coalitions.

Canada is not in this Allies and Partners Framework because we want to do our share, or we want to be taken seriously, or because we feel shamed or pressured by certain allies to ‘do something.’ Canada is in this coalition of Allies and Partners because the very values we want as Canadians enjoy substantive content overlap with these countries.

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Why, ultimately, do we consider it crucial to defend our rights in the far north and our democratic peers such as the Baltic States against Russia? Why do we share the deep concern with our democratic friends that China’s political and military build-up should not overthrow the existing system of international law? The core rationale is that the systems of governance we call autocratic form a fundamental challenge to who we are and how we want to live. Our defence policy is part of our overall foreign policy, an integral part of which is our opposition to the tyranny of illiberal government and society. Just as we did not want to fall under the tyranny of totalitarian regimes like the Soviet Union, we do not want the lesser tyranny of autocratic rule under Vladimir Putin. And neither do we want Xi Jinping’s China to re-write world order or to turn our Asia-Pacific Partners into neutralized vassal states. We do not want the tyranny of a violent Salafist Caliphate to overtake one Muslim-majority country after another.

Canada is in the Allies and Partners Framework because we find our values there and we find the multiplier effect for our capabilities. Together this forms our core interest. We do not find the same efficiency and effectiveness of values and capabilities in the UN framework. Important UN obligations and ad hoc peacekeeping operations may arise from time to time, but Canada’s core defence policy must be designed and equipped for working with Allies and Partners. If we aim for such a Framework, we would retain our capability to do ad hoc UN operations. But, if we make ad hoc UN operations our main way of thinking, we lose clarity about our values and we lose efficiency for our multiplier effect. In sum we lose our compass.

### **The Case for Dealing with Known Threats and Challenges**

Defence policy reviews must in one sense be very broad. Who can tell what military contingencies

the future will call forth? In another sense, defence policy reviews must be specific. Canada's current defence policy cannot help having to connect at once with the 'present danger.' Of course the 'present danger' can morph into unexpected events. Even so, we still need to address the three big problems facing Canadian decision-makers. There is no use being clever about defence technologies for 2025 if we have no policy for lowering the rising risk of war in Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East and North Africa.

I am not suggesting a specific order among these known threats and challenges, but the relatively sudden and radical changes in Russian and Chinese policy and the spreading violent ideas and actions by Islamic State do lead to a world order in which our peace and security are significantly diminished. The threats are of a different nature and require different responses.

We are at a tenuous juncture with Russia. The government in Moscow is now disposed to forceful solutions and considerable risk-taking, including with stealth and conventional forces as we saw in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014 and recently in Syria. Except for the case of Georgia in 2008, we had not seen such consistent use of Russian force since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Russia has ignored eight years of President Obama showing US restraint and looking for cooperation. Moscow used a European Union partnership agreement with Ukraine as cause for military aggression and territorial aggrandizement, even though then president Victor Yanukovych had by law placed Ukraine in military neutrality status and the Obama administration and NATO had both walked away from the brash George W. Bush position of adding Ukraine and Georgia as NATO members.

In both cases of conventional defence and nuclear deterrence, NATO is in a weak position. If Russia did, for example, instigate or exploit a civil conflict in the Baltics and use that situation to occupy this area, NATO would face a *fait accompli* with large politico-military consequences. With the Russian advantage of holding large force numbers nearby, air and area denial capacity, and more than a 10:1 ratio of advantage in theatre nuclear forces, early Russian gains would be nearly impossible to reverse, especially if Moscow immediately placed a nuclear threshold on its gains as it has said it would. A Swedish defence expert concluded: "The Obama administration's trip-wire strategy is faced with the prospect of not having any plausible conventional options to strike back against a Russian aggression. In this sense, I would argue that the situation is more dangerous than during the Cold War."<sup>4</sup>

NATO's collective defence is a "no fail task."<sup>5</sup> If we lose the shared purpose and the collective defence mechanisms of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union we will have set European security back not by 25 years, but back to the uncertain 1950s. Rolling NATO and the EU back to the German border, as some who accept Russia's *casus bellum* about NATO enlargement have implicitly argued, is not an option. It is against our values because Eastern European states were not swallowed up by the

West, but opted to join NATO and the European Union on their own free will. Both by law and international agreements, we have no basis to exclude them. At the same time, the United States and its EU and NATO partners have signalled to Moscow that they are not turning Ukraine into a battleground. De-escalation is the policy on Ukraine.

The defence of the line running from the Baltics to the Black Sea is also Canada's defence challenge. It is not a dormant line, but a hot, active one. So, the current defence review needs to answer whether a "leaner, more agile" Canadian military would be helpful for our Baltic friends? To be more agile is usually possible, but to be even leaner than what the Canadian Forces are already is hardly fair. Perhaps only if it truly has "less tail, and more teeth."<sup>6</sup>

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Would not a weak military posture by the Allies and Partners in Europe risk re-designing political relations in Europe to spheres of interests and buffer zones in which various countries are degraded to semi-sovereign because the nearby autocratic great power is afraid of democratic influences or believes it is entitled to such a division of the globe.

The coalition of which Canada is part stands at the junction of deciding whether it will add military capacity to back up the declarations made since the 2014 NATO Wales Summit. This military capacity as it pertains to Canada must be addressed in the current defence policy review. Russia has been the largest military spender in Europe since 2009 and has declared NATO and the West its prime security risk in 2014. That includes us.

Canada's values prompt two interests. We want to help defend the line from the Baltics to the Black Sea by making the calculation of risk even starker for Moscow. Secondly, we want to overcome the political and security divisions that have arisen with Russia. We want rapprochement and peace. But, at this juncture, we also realize that we must aim for military strength in order to have peace. Thankfully, our interests stand in very close alignment with the Obama administration and most of our Allies and Partners in NATO and Europe.

In the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, Obama responded cautiously and constructively. The American side did not escalate the tension but worked closely with the German government and the European Union to respond by means of economic sanctions. At the same time, the United States increased its defence spending in Europe by around \$800 million to underscore that the collective defence of NATO members stood fast. It made sure not to violate the language of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, in which the NATO Allies promised to refrain from "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces."<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile the anti-NATO rhetoric promulgated by the Russian government for domestic consumption and the information warfare against the Euro-Atlantic region has increased. Large-scale Russian military exercises without notice continue. Robust nuclear weapon talk and continuing military build-up including in Kaliningrad may be only political, but even that is not entirely certain.

The budget request by the Obama administration in 2016 to increase US defence spending in the European region to \$3.4 billion is a reaction. Obama is no warmonger. The US is responding because the security of Allies and Partners (including Sweden and Finland) is on the line. What about the other Allies and Partners, and what about Canada? If we play for relative gains in the Allies and Partners Framework, we diminish its absolute gains.

What specifically must be done by Canada? NATO's Spearhead Force alone does not pack enough practical deterrence. It is not a trip-wire and likely does not have enough follow-on forces. It may act too slowly. NATO Allies and Partners need to boost the conventional defence posture in Europe. The American plan to pre-position equipment for another combat brigade and to keep deployments rotating among several NATO states offers the best current option for trip-wiring the Baltic to Black Sea line. Canada could then join CAF components alongside a US combat brigade or with the British initiative as 'framework nation' to set up a hub of expeditionary capability with several Northern European countries. Our defence review has to make the case for Canadian air, sea, and land capabilities to be put to use at a higher rate and with more intensity (but rotationally like US forces) in Northeast Europe and the North Atlantic.

The defence review must also clarify the military challenges we face regarding the Islamic State. The first response to terrorist threats and attacks on civilians in our societies lies with police forces, homeland security, intelligence, border patrols, and other instruments such as financial controls. However, Islamic State poses a bigger challenge than terrorism. It is more than Al-Qaeda writ large. It is a by-product of political turmoil in Iraq and Syria, but again, it is even bigger than that. Islamic State is an attempt to merge a world-wide violent Salafist movement with the resources of an empire. It is a totalitarian ideology that is trying to create a permanent foothold and presence, if not in Syria, then in Libya, or Nigeria, or in Saudi Arabia.

If Islamic State in collaboration with local recruits were able to stage a mass casualty event that killed 1,000 civilians in a European city, to what extent would the Allies and Partners Framework be ready not to under-react and not to over-react? How would it organize itself? The Allies and Partners Framework needs to be used proactively on this issue. Canada has recently upgraded and increased its Special Operations Forces. The number at the end of 2015 was estimated at 1,745.<sup>8</sup> Just as Allies had to learn to do conventional forces collectively in Cold War, so we now face a strategic scenario in

which Allies and Partners need to plan, organize, and make operational more deeply integrated action by Special Forces. The Islamic State cannot drive a column of tanks into Paris and kill 130 people, but it can still kill 130 Parisians by its own tactics. What kind of forces, interoperability, and command needs does the Framework require to prevent such attacks abroad and if unable to respond effectively? There are various tools and means available in the NATO Alliance that should be used to counter this peril.

The final big challenge Canada's defence review must consider is the risk of a significant conventional conflict arising from the territorial and resource disputes in Asia Pacific.

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The relations between NATO and its Asia-Pacific partners are important and deserve better attention than they get from many NATO members. Let's be clear what we mean and dismiss two red herrings. Of course Asia does not need the Euro-Atlantic to come and tell it how to do security, and of course NATO cannot expand into Asia. The definition of a red herring or strawman argument is that you set up a bad premise to dismiss the entire debate. But let us not dismiss a fundamental point: NATO allies and Asia-Pacific democracies share the preamble values mentioned earlier as well as deep commercial links. How can their security not be part of our values and interests?<sup>9</sup>

We can imagine a call from the United States and some of our Asia-Pacific Partners for involvement and assistance, or a US call for European Allies and Canada to take on much more of the burden of defence in the Euro-Atlantic region. In a nightmare scenario, if a conflict breaks out near the first island chain in the Western Pacific, what if Russia picked this exact time to breach Article 5 of the Washington Treaty?

We cannot expect the American public or Congress to accept that Euro-Atlantic Allies sit idly by as the United States is embattled in a conventional conflict in the South China Sea. Just as with Russia, the Obama administration has managed relations with the new assertive Chinese defence policy as constructively as possible. The United States is not trying to contain China. Rather, its goal is for China's rise to be paired with the overall acceptance of the international system. It was not the United States that invented this system. It arose from the European experience going back to 1648. When the United States overtook Britain as the leading world power, it adapted the system but did ultimately keep it and strengthen it. The same approach is what the world expects from China.

In order for China to understand better how important this is to the Allies and Partners, they need to become involved. At this point that means mainly ships. For Canada's defence review it means that we need to articulate why Canadian ships need to be present and possibly join multilateral freedom of navigation operations in the area. Beijing needs to know that it is not dealing with an isolated US he-

gemon or a revanchist Japan. Rather, the Allies and Partners Framework needs to be present to show the vital importance of future world order in which China will be a key global player.

## Conclusion

Canada's 2016 defence policy review is confronted by two arduous challenges. The Canadian economy is under duress and the external threat to Canada's values and interests is higher than it has been since the close of the Cold War. The pressure to find 'savings' in Canada's defence budget will be high even as the need for Canada to maintain broad military capabilities has gone up. Every new government wants to examine a range of options to formulate its defence policy vision.

The new Liberal government has indicated that it is leaning towards a blend of multilateral diplomacy and UN-based peacekeeping. Such 'internationalist' tools are always needed. However, the means available in the UN are ill-suited to reduce acute danger in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and the growing risks in Asia-Pacific. The Russian, Chinese, and Islamic State challenges Canada faces today, can only be mitigated in the context of an Allied and Partners Framework. This framework offers a sorely needed military policy to present strength in the face of encroachment on global world order. The top priority for Canada's defence policy is to add strength to this framework and to do so quickly.

## About the Author

**Dr. Alexander Moens** ([www.alexandermoens.com](http://www.alexandermoens.com)) is a professor of Political Science at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. He was the Eisenhower Fellow at the NATO Defense College in Rome in 2015. Moens is the co-editor (with Brooke Smith-Windsor) of *NATO and Asia Pacific* (Rome: NDC, 2016), and co-editor of *Immigration Policy and the Terrorist Threat in Canada and the United States* (2008). Moens is the author of *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy, Loyalty* (2004), and *Foreign Policy Under Carter* (1990) as well as co-editor of *Disconcerted Europe: The Search for a New Security Architecture* (1994), and *NATO and European Security: Alliance Politics from the Cold War's End to the Age of Terrorism* (2003). Recent publications include "George W. Bush Decision Maker: Take Two," in Donald R. Kelley and Todd G. Shields, eds., *Taking the Measure: The Presidency of George W. Bush* (College Station Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2013); "Ukraine, NATO and Moral Realism," *Atlantisch Perspectief* (*The Hague*), No. 3, Summer 2014, and *Alexander Moens, Seychelle Cushing, and Alan W. Dowd, Cybersecurity Challenges for Canada and the United States* (Fraser Institute, 2015).

## Notes

1. The usual formulation is as follows: “Defence of Canada; Defence of North America in collaboration with the US; and Defence of Canadian interests abroad by contributing to international security, stability, and peace initiatives.” Charles Davies, “Taking a Long-Term View of National Defence – Part 2: Advice for Members of Canada’s 42 Parliament,” *CDA Institute Analysis* (November 2015), p. 5.
2. Richard Cohen, “Sunny Ways in a Darkening World: A Critical Look at Emerging Canadian Defence Policy,” *ON TRACK* 20, 3 (Winter 2015-16), pp. 7-11.
3. Preamble, Washington Treaty, 4 April 1949, available on the Avalon Project website: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/nato.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/nato.asp).
4. Magnus Christiansson, “Deterrence Concepts in the Baltic Sea Region,” *ON TRACK* 20, 3 (Winter 2015/2016), p. 43.
5. Canadian NATO Official, interview, Brussels, September 2015.
6. Phrases originate respectively from the Liberal Party’s 2015 election platform and from Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie’s 2011 Report on Transformation. Both are cited by John Ivison, “Public unlikely to sway DND,” *National Post*, 8 March 2016, pp. 1 and 5.
7. Article 4 of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act states: “NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces” (italics added).
8. David Pugliese, “Number of Canadian Special Forces soldiers increases,” *Ottawa Sun*, 26 January 2016 [http://www.ottawasun.com/2016/01/26/number-of-canadian-special-forces-soldiers-increases?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm\\_term=%2ASituation%20Report](http://www.ottawasun.com/2016/01/26/number-of-canadian-special-forces-soldiers-increases?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report)
9. For a wide-ranging discussion of the relationship between NATO nations and their Asia-Pacific Partners see: Alexander Moens and Brooke Smith-Windsor, eds., *NATO and Asia-Pacific* (Rome: NATO Defense College and Simon Fraser University, March 2016).

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151 Slater Street, suite 412A  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3  
613 236 9903  
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151 rue Slater, bureau 412A  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1P 5H3  
613 236 9903  
[www.cdainstitute.ca](http://www.cdainstitute.ca)

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