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RUSI VI

*To promote national defence and security issues
through discussion and engagement*

**Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute
of Vancouver Island**

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.



January 2022

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President's Message

Welcome to 2022!

Looking back at January 2021 it looked like the end of 2021 might see a return to something close to normal. Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to surprise us and create uncertainty, as we are now in the fifth wave with a more virulent variant called Omicron.

Included in this issue is an excellent article, on page 14, covering the buildup of Russian forces on the Ukrainian borders. Although a bit lengthy, this article is well worth a read as it covers, in some detail, the diplomatic and military situation in the Ukraine. It is also the most in-depth coverage I have seen to date. It appears Putin wants, and prefers, a diplomatic solution, and that an invasion would be his last resort, with the threat of invasion acting as leverage for his diplomatic manoeuvres. Putin has probably not even decided the invasion question yet, as so much depends on the results of any diplomatic talks. The article highlights the complexities of the issues and the delicate crafting required for any diplomatic solutions to avoid conflict. Regardless, as Winston Churchill once said "Jaw-jaw is always better than war-war." As long as discussions are still possible, an invasion seems unlikely in the next few weeks.

RUSI-VI now has a full stable of recorded webinars at our website <http://rusiviccda.org> with webinar attendance and YouTube viewings at almost 2,500!

Finally, get your booster shot as soon as you can, and take care!

Scott H. Usborne
President
Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island

Next speakers For RUSI VI:

12 January, 2022

Mr. Mark Zuehlke

*Terrible Victory: The Scheldt
Campaign 1944*

9 February, 2022

Mr. John Flanagan

Managing BC Wildfires

Op Lentus

[Operation LENTUS - Canada.ca](#)

Operation LENTUS is the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) response to natural disasters in Canada.

Provincial and territorial authorities are the first to respond when a major natural disaster occurs in Canada. If they become overwhelmed, they may ask the CAF for help. When the CAF responds to such a crisis, it is known as Operation LENTUS.

Operation LENTUS follows an established plan of action to support communities in crisis. This plan can be adapted to multiple situations. These might take the form of forest fires, floods, ice storms, or hurricanes.

The objectives of Op LENTUS are:

- to help provincial and territorial authorities
- to respond quickly and effectively to the crisis
- to stabilize the natural disaster situation

Op LENTUS Update - Dec 12 2021

Province of British Columbia - On November 17, 2021 the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were approved to assist with the significant challenges resulting from flooding in the southwest and central areas of the province. As part of a whole of government relief effort, CAF tasks were varied and included both air and land support.

In communities across the province, tasks assigned to the CAF were as follows:

- delivered food and supplies;
- delivered over 20,000 lbs of flood response equipment (sandbags, sand bag machines, HESCO bastion barriers);
- conducted sandbagging to protect critical infrastructure such as the Barrow Town Pumping Station and rail lines;
- helped in the construction of tiger dams;
- dike inspections;
- conducted reconnaissance and rapid damage assessments;
- evacuated British Columbians from danger areas, most notably 300 people, 26 dogs, and 1 cat from Hwy 7 when they were trapped on the roadway by mudslides on November, 15.
- evacuated 30,000 chickens from a poultry operation that had lost power;
- Transported 24,000lbs of Red Cross supplies from Calgary to Abbotsford;
- Transported Emergency Management BC and medical staff by air when land routes were blocked by flooding.

On December 6, 2021, CAF started drawing down support to flooding in B.C., with a domestic response company drawn from Canadian Army Reserve units in British Columbia remaining on standby to assist as needed.

The CAF started drawing down support to flooding in B.C., with a domestic response company drawn from Canadian Army Reserve units in British Columbia remaining on standby to assist as needed.

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador - On November 25, 2021 the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were approved to assist in the wake of record-breaking rainfall. The tasks for CAF members and aircraft, included air transportation of people and supplies in and out of affected areas, in addition to providing planning assistance to local authorities.

The response was completed on December 2, 2021, which included 70 persons transported and 1,550 pounds of cargo moved by the two CH-146 Griffon Aircraft allocated to this response.

City of Iqaluit, Nunavut. CAF personnel began supporting with Reverse Osmosis Water Purification equipment and crews. On October 22, 2021, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) received a Request for Assistance from the Government of Nunavut to support the City of Iqaluit's tainted water supply by providing two Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPU)'s units and operators. This request has been extended until December 22, 2021.

Here's How the Military Helped BC During Its Flooding Emergency

[Sarah Anderson](#) Dec 4 2021, 10:17 am - Daily Hive News



[Combat Camera/Flickr](#)

In November 2021, BC was hit hard by atmospheric river events that caused devastating floods and deadly mudslides.

The province declared a state of emergency and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was brought in to help.

If you've been curious about how exactly the armed forces have been at work in BC helping during the flooding, then this will give you a glimpse into what they've been up to on the ground and in the air.

Lieutenant Commander Tony Wright with the CAF told Daily Hive that Emergency Management BC (EMBC) has been responsible for prioritizing tasks for the 726 personnel from the RCAF, RCN, and Canadian Army assigned to Operation LENTUS 21-06 BC Floods.

The province asked for assistance for a time period of November 17 to December 17, 2021.

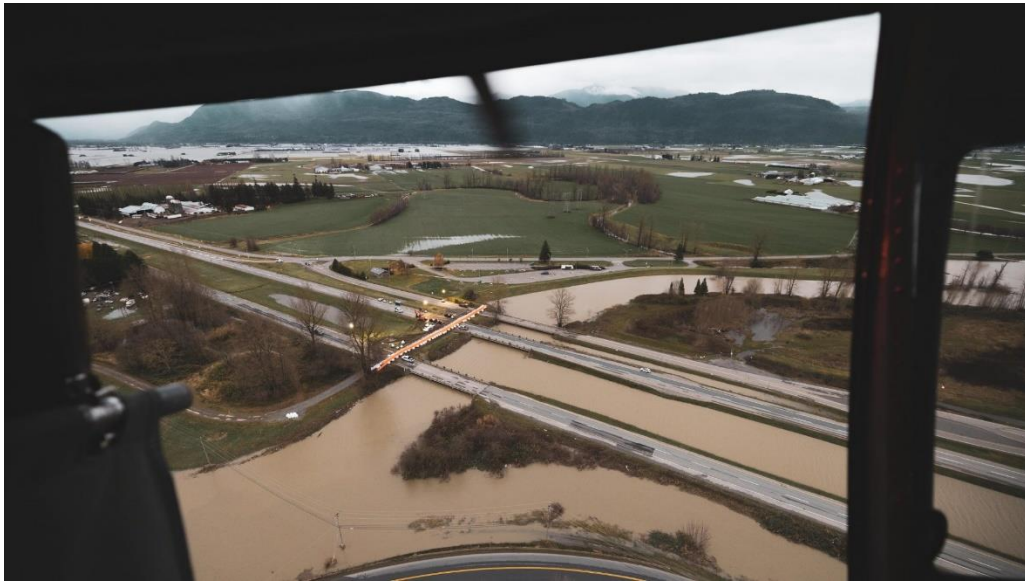
When the province decides it no longer requires the armed forces' help, then they'll redeploy to their home units.

The CAF has liaison officers in each activated emergency coordination and operations centre, working in tandem to support EMBC.

"Our primary objective is to help provincial and local authorities stabilize the situation and to reassure British Columbia residents in the affected areas," said Commander Wright.

Here are the tasks that they were assigned by EMBC:

- Delivered food and supplies, including 69,000 lbs of flood response equipment including sandbags, sandbag machines, and HESCO bastion barriers.
- Conducted sandbagging to protect critical infrastructures, like the Barrowtown Pump Station and rail lines.
- Conducted culvert clearance.
- Helped in the construction of tiger dams.
- Dike inspections.
- Conducted reconnaissance and rapid damage assessments.
- Evacuated British Columbians from dangerous areas, most notably 300 people, 26 dogs, and a cat from Highway 7 when they were trapped on the roadway by mudslides on November 14.
- Evacuated 30,000 chickens from a poultry operation that had lost power.
- Transported 24,000 lbs of Red Cross supplies from Calgary to Abbotsford.
- Transported EMBC and medical staff by air when land routes were blocked by flooding.



So far, here's a list of the communities, villages, townships, and First Nations that CAF provided direct support to:

- Cowichan First Nation (Vancouver Island)
- Halalt First Nation (Vancouver Island)
- Wsanec First Nation (Vancouver Island)
- Pentiwotoc First Nation (Vancouver Island)
- Boston Bar First Nation
- Chawathil First Nation
- Skawahlook First Nation
- Abbotsford
- Chilliwack
- Merritt
- Princeton
- Huntingdon
- Spences Bridge
- Clayburn Village

Derek Gagnon, Public Affairs Officer with EMBC, told Daily Hive that “EMBC, the First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS), First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) collaborated to support food and supplies delivery, including medications, into First Nations communities by air or by ground, depending on access into these communities.”

The CAF has also been complemented by civilian aircraft, coordinated by EMBC. “For example, flying community members in to retrieve cultural items or flying medical staff into stranded communities to provide services to community members,” said Gagnon.

The Politics of China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Africa

10 DEC 2021

By Steve Itugbu in *Australian Outlook* - The Australian Institute of International Affairs

COVID-19 vaccine distribution has become a new tool in the exertion of global diplomatic influence. Impediments to China realising its geopolitical objectives in Africa stem from apathy, distrust from Africa, and questions over China's vaccine's efficacy and safety.

The COVID-19 global crisis has significantly altered the influence of international diplomacy. Public health has become the key issue of discourse among states since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019.

However, this outlook of diplomacy has been characterised by mutual suspicion, secrecy, and determination by states to outwit the other in Africa. Having developed multiple vaccines in the absence of a coherent global momentum, some powerful states began using their jabs to strengthen regional ties and enhance their own power and global status. These states were China, the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and Russia, but it was China that had a significant lead when it successfully provided free doses to 69 countries, as of March 2021. Consistent with its public diplomacy objective, which has combined development aid and business activities since the 1990s, China focussed on Asia, Africa, and Latin American states.

While the US under Donald Trump lacked strategic initiative due to it playing the victim, Beijing on the other hand was a keen diplomatic player determined to avoid the direct blame by the West over the origin of the virus. China's diplomatic strategy involved the delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccines. This fit within its agenda of branding itself as a **global health leader**. Russia also explored soft power diplomacy by pushing its vaccine, named Sputnik V, that *Lancet* found to be 91.6 percent efficacious, which is very close to Pfizer's 95 percent efficacy rate. Russia claimed that some 1.2 billion orders have been made by 50 countries, as it targeted Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Africa.

These scenarios have raised the stakes in soft power diplomacy as contenders adopted propaganda to push their influence overseas. For instance, the information was out there that the EU and Iran were relying on Russia, and that Angela Merkel of Germany had expressed interest in Sputnik V and had offered to establish production units within Germany. The quest for nation branding through soft power diplomacy **acknowledges** that diplomatic goodwill connects more with the humanitarian nature of international citizenship.

China's Soft Power Opportunities in Africa

Since the 1950s, China has been using public diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy goal of rebranding its role on the global stage. From Mao Zedong to Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, this has always been the tradition. Chinese President Xi has adopted this model of soft power to deliver a rejuvenated China that wields more **global influence**. This aligns with Joseph Nye's conception of power that emphasises soft power and deemphasises military strength and conquest of the past.

But China opted for vaccine diplomacy after adopting a competitive identity, due to its relatively poor international reputation, and has consequently struggled to compete against

states with a **good reputation**. In deflating accusations over COVID-19, it became desperate to develop a new positive image, and the soft power vacuum in Africa became a geographical opportunity China wanted to fill at all cost. The vacuum arose because the US under the Trump administration retreated from the international stage.

In the summer of 2020, President Xi telephoned King Mohammed VI of Morocco, in addition to other world leaders, promising that Chinese vaccines would be a “**global public good**.” Wang Yi, China’s foreign minister, also embarked on a **tour of Africa**, offering jobs and investment for would-be allies. Wang visited Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana, Tanzania, and the Seychelles, indicating that Africa leaders were gravitating towards Beijing.

China utilises **smart power**, which combines soft power (culture and health diplomacy) and hard power (economic power) in Africa. Its public diplomacy connects aid projects, grants, and low-interest loans that build closer economic ties with African states. In the 2014 Ebola epidemic, China **successfully mobilised** in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Ghana, much in the same way it has donated Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine doses to African allies **like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Namibia**.

China’s forays into Africa are possible because the continent is an alternative space that always opens to Chinese business and economic engagement. This reframes its global perception, even though Africa has become a testing ground for China’s approaches. For instance, **donations of personal protective equipment poured** in through the Jack Ma foundation working with Ethiopian Airlines.

Fundamental Questions

Chinese vaccine diplomacy, which has functioned as a mixed model of business and politics, has utilised vaccine doses to reinforce established relations and to capitalise on **new opportunities**. But only a few of the doses were free, as some were offered for purchase through loans. The prices of the vaccines from China, against all expectations, were not cheaper than the vaccines from the West. **The costs** for the Sinopharm doses ranged from \$18.50 per dose in Senegal, to \$44 in China.

While China’s vaccine diplomacy contributed to friendly relations with many African states, this wasn’t the case with Nigeria. The news that Chinese medical personnel had arrived to aid the pandemic mitigation efforts resulted in swift backlash from medical practitioners in Nigeria, who felt they were far better than the **Chinese medical personnel**. China’s vaccine diplomacy does have as many positive stories as it does negative ones, as **some have questioned** China’s intentions and the quality level of the goods.

Vaccine diplomacy has also involved efforts to undermine trust regarding the intentions and efficacy of rival powers. The West has accused China and Russia of state-backed disinformation campaigns that undermine trust in Western vaccines. Russia supplied Sputnik V to Hungary in a move arguably designed to undermine EU unity, just as the West also cast doubts on the credibility of Chinese and Russian vaccine efforts.

Conclusion

Africa remained open to China because it does not have the luxury of choosing where to get their vaccines from, given the urgent situation created as a result of the pandemic. It is therefore an unimaginable twist of history that everyone still recalls where the virus originated from, and a

year on, China is trying to present itself as the solution to the pandemic, rather than the origin of it. This, understandably, is what the West is resisting.

The intense rivalries between these powers in exerting their global influence also provides significant gains. The eradication of smallpox was in part fuelled by the rivalry between the USSR and the US. When the SARS epidemic occurred in 2002, China provided support to affected countries to bolster its global power status, including Taiwan despite the tense relations between the two states. Vaccine diplomacy towards Africa is the re-enactment of Cold War rivalry and illustrates the scramble to gain influence in states within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM was founded to bring together those who wished to be outside the bipolar world of Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. It is these swing states in Africa that China and Russia are working on to minimise the global support for the US/West.

Despite Vladimir Putin's progress, it is China that troubles the West the most, as Beijing's growing influence in the world comes down to hard power. Vaccine diplomacy has proven to be the soft power that Beijing has been seeking for years. But China may be unsuccessful, if it turns out that its vaccines do not offer enough the same level of protection as the Western vaccines. Yet again, the fact that the uncooperative and divisive global response to COVID-19 has excluded many from the benefits of vaccine science and innovation, demonstrates the need for a global response to this issue. Concerns about China using vaccines to boost its geopolitical and global influence are indeed a mere preconception, as its intervention could also be a global public good.

Steve Itugbu is a teaching fellow at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London. Steve is a former presidential aide to Nigeria's former President, Olusegun Obasanjo.

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China Seeks Atlantic Ocean Military Base

SITUATION REPORTS - December 15, 2021

By **Geopolitical Monitor**

China is exploring the possibility of building its first military base on the Atlantic Ocean, according to classified intelligence reports viewed by the *Wall Street Journal*.

The proposed host for the military base is Equatorial Guinea, a small central African country of approximately 1.4 million people. Politically, Equatorial Guinea is a one-party state ruled by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasongo for the past 42 years. The country consistently ranks among the worst in the world on human rights, with Freedom House assigning a zero score on political rights, lower than Eritrea, Iran, or Chad. Its economy is dominated by resource extraction, with crude petroleum exports accounting for 90 percent of government revenues. China is Equatorial Guinea's largest trading partner.

The precise site is speculated to be the small deep-water port at Bata, the largest city in the country. The commercial port was overhauled and expanded from 2008-2014 with Chinese

financing. Another infrastructure project expanded the highway network from Bata to Niefang in the east of the country. Taken together, the projects helped lay the groundwork for greater commercial penetration of central Africa, notably into Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

A military base in Equatorial Guinea would represent a clear geopolitical win for Beijing by expanding its global network of sites for re-fueling, repairing, and re-supplying, thus increasing the blue water capabilities of the PLA Navy (PLAN). Currently there is only one such facility, located in Djibouti, a country that plays host to a slew of other foreign militaries, including those of Japan, France, and the United States. A second facility has long been rumored for the port at Gwadar, Pakistan, which serves as the linchpin of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. At this point the basic infrastructure has already been laid at Gwadar; all that's left is for PLAN vessels to start making port regular port calls.

Other attempts at converting civilian facilities (nearly always built by Chinese state-owned companies over the past two decades) into military sites have been rumored in the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, and Angola.

The US response

Unsurprisingly, the possibility of any new PLAN base is pushed back on by the US authorities, and this is doubly true in the case of Equatorial Guinea due to its relative proximity to Washington's backyard. However, the US response in this case outlines how the emerging 'Cold War light' dynamic between China and the United States might create problems for other US foreign policy objectives, notably the advancement of human rights and a 'rules based international order.'

First and foremost, US-Equatorial Guinea relations have been a fraught affair for the latter half of President Mbasongo's reign. Despite the ongoing presence of US oil majors, the country has often been cited for a litany of human rights transgressions, for example, torture, arbitrary detention, and severe limits on the media and peaceful assembly. Such issues have produced open breaches in bilateral relations, such as a long-running DOJ case against Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue – son of the president – where the vice president was found guilty of corruption while serving as minister of agriculture and forestry in 2011.

Bilateral relations with the United States contrast starkly with those of China, which, as elsewhere, are no-strings-attached on matters of good governance. China has provided valuable financing to meet Equatorial Guinea's infrastructure needs, and provided equipment and training for the country's (oft brutal) security forces, which happen to be headed up by the very same Vice President Mangue who is the frequent target of Western sanctions (the UK joined the DOJ earlier this year, applying unilateral sanctions for a slew of lavish purchases, including Michael Jackson's bejewelled white glove).

These divergent diplomatic priorities complicate US efforts to convince the government of Equatorial Guinea to rebuff Beijing's attempts to establish a military base. In a development highly reminiscent of the Cold War, Washington has changed tack recently, adopting a

conciliatory rather than scolding tone, likely owing to growing geopolitical concerns. The assets seized in the previous investigation of Vice President Mangue have been redistributed to the country in the form of COVID-19 vaccine assistance, and a recent improvement in State Department human trafficking ratings might pave the way to greater official maritime assistance from Washington.

There is another type of leverage that the United States and other Western countries hold: the ability to either crack down or look the other way on vast amounts of allegedly illicit wealth held by the president, his family, and his close associates. This wealth has already produced judicial reckonings in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom.

It is here where Washington could actually turn the screws on the regime if it wanted to. However, doing so would all but assure that Equatorial Guinea remains firmly in China's orbit for the foreseeable future. Herein lies the threat of this new Cold War dynamic to Washington's progressive foreign policy objectives: the better governance standards envisioned by initiatives like Build Better World may create geopolitical headaches for the Pentagon by alienating strategically valuable authoritarian regimes. This is a dynamic that we should get used to. Because even if Washington manages to beat back the Beijing charm offensive this time, there's no shortage of military-viable commercial ports in the world, and no shortage of states who will seek to gain by playing one superpower off against the other.

Canadian Armed Forces Current Operations

Where are our troops now? This CAF Web Page (<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/list.html>) summarizes where we are now and what we are doing there. For Your Info.



American Supply Chains Face a Dire Threat from China's Water Shortages

BY GOPAL REDDY, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 12/03/21 04:30 PM EST, THE HILL (US E-PUB)

There's no scarcity of reasons why your holiday shipments may not arrive on time. COVID-19 disruptions, congested ports, semiconductor shortages, stretched trucking capacity — [the list](#) goes on and on.

Water — or rather, the lack of it in China — may be the factor that pushes U.S. supply chains over the edge.

Water is an unseen, vital input for all economic activity. Beyond agriculture, water is critical for power generation, mining, industry and the consumer products we rely on every single day. Like the estimated 3000 gallons of water that it takes to make the typical smartphone.

As it turns out, China is drastically short of the water it needs to maintain its economy. China's per capita water availability is one-quarter of the global average, and nearly 700 million of its citizens live in regions considered highly water-stressed. Meanwhile, groundwater depletion has been so significant in the areas around Beijing that parts of the city are falling into the earth by more than 14 centimeters a year.

China's water shortages are showing up most acutely in electrical power generation, where the nation's hydroelectric and coal power producers are struggling with irregular water access. Authorities have responded to the widespread power outages by clamping down on industrial energy consumption, resulting in major disruptions to China's manufacturers.

And that's where America's supply chain comes in. The U.S. imports massive quantities of manufactured goods from China, including 70 percent of Walmart's store merchandise, and 40 percent of the clothing sold domestically. China is also a huge producer of key industrial products that end up on American shores, like steel, aluminum and polysilicon used to make solar panels.

Embedded in the manufacturing of these products is electricity generated through unsustainable water consumption in China. And as water supplies dwindle, the net effect is fewer products coming to the U.S. at significantly higher prices.

The long-term outlook for water availability in China is alarming, and has resulted in drastic measures by its government. These include a massive project to transfer water from South China to North China, shifting manufacturing away from water-stressed regions, and even widescale atmospheric interventions referred to as "cloud seeding" to boost rainfall. Given the scale of the problem, these amount to band-aid solutions to cover a gaping wound.

Desalination from the ocean is not a viable option, as it is a highly-energy intensive process, and half or more of the water produced from desalination can be lost to power consumption. In addition, given the current strains on China's power grid, it is unlikely that enough spare capacity can be found to desalinate and transport large quantities of water to China's dry regions.

None of this comes a surprise to Chinese officials. In 2005, former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao remarked that water shortages threatened "the very survival of the Chinese nation," while planning officials in Beijing have tried for decades to cap the city's population below 10 million due to limited water resources (Beijing's current population is 21 million). The difficulty is that

solving the water supply problem involves painful economic trade-offs between agriculture, industry and households that are politically challenging, even in a nation governed by a single party.

China's water shortages are also a major issue for energy markets and seriously complicate efforts to decarbonize the global economy. Electricity generated from natural gas consumes half as much water as coal-fired generation, and China's insatiable demand for imported natural gas is pushing up energy prices in the U.S. and abroad. In addition, numerous Chinese officials have stressed that wind and solar energy is not reliable enough to allow for the wholesale transition away from China's heavy reliance on coal power. When examined through the lens of its current water and power problems, it's easy to understand why China's presence at COP26, the recent UN climate summit, was half-hearted at best.

All of this is to say that the U.S. economy is at significant risk until a long-term solution is found for China's water problems. Recent discussions regarding the shift of U.S. supply chains away from China have focused on national security and domestic policy considerations. Given the severe challenges posed by China's lack of water, it may be a question of economic necessity.

Gopal Reddy is the founder of Ready for Climate, an independent, non-partisan research organization focused on the national security and macroeconomic risks stemming from climate change. Previously he was the founder and CIO of a long/short equity hedge fund and served as a portfolio manager at Fidelity Investments.

Responding to Russia's Buildup Near Ukraine

International Crisis Group -**BRIEFING_92** / EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA – 8 DECEMBER 2021

Stalled Ukraine-Russia peace talks and a recent Russian buildup of troops near the Ukrainian border are raising tensions in Europe and with the U.S. Kyiv and its Western partners should send Moscow a strong deterrence message while also proposing mutual de-escalatory measures.

What's new? A second large-scale Russian military buildup near Ukraine's borders in 2021 has raised fears of a major war between the two countries.

Why did it happen? With peace talks stalled, Moscow appears disillusioned with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy even as it has not abandoned its goal of an aligned Ukraine, which it sees as increasingly threatened by that country's ever closer military cooperation with NATO member states.

Why does it matter? Although Moscow may hope the threat of war alone will attain its goals, it has already proven its willingness to fight in Ukraine. A Russian military offensive would have horrific immediate effects and risk escalation as NATO countries that have vocally supported Ukraine respond with a range of tools.

What should be done? Western capitals and Kyiv should define how they would respond to Russian aggression and clearly communicate the danger of escalation to Moscow. If the Kremlin

backs down, renewed talks over Ukraine should be paired with agreements to limit military deployments and actions around European flashpoints.

I. Overview

A Russian military buildup near Ukraine's border coupled with the collapse of peace talks has raised fears that Moscow may soon attack its neighbour. The Kremlin is frustrated with Kyiv's reluctance to implement the 2014-2015 Minsk agreements, which call for it to reabsorb two separatist-controlled regions while affording them "special status" – measures that Ukraine argues would compromise its sovereignty. Russia also wants guarantees that Western states will cease encroaching on its perceived sphere of influence in Ukraine and elsewhere along its borders. Kyiv's Western partners should aim to deter further Russian aggression by continuing to make clear they will respond to any attack with harsh sanctions and the military buildup on NATO's eastern flank that Russia wishes to avoid. U.S. President Joe Biden appears to have conveyed that message to his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, when they spoke on 7 December. At the same time, Western leaders should quietly propose mutual de-escalatory steps that could bring the parties back to the table and prompt a broader conversation about European security.

The massing of roughly 100,000 Russian troops near eastern Ukraine has created genuine alarm in Kyiv and among NATO member states, not least the U.S., which has been warning for weeks that Russia may be planning a major military operation. Russian President Vladimir Putin may not yet have decided whether he will order an attack; for now, he could well be keeping his options open. Nor is it clear what a Russian military intervention would entail: while Ukrainian forces are no match for their Russian counterparts, Moscow likely underestimates the hostility it would encounter among Ukrainians outside separatist-held areas. Russia has, however, made no secret of its grievances. Moscow is frustrated with Ukrainian policies: it wants a more malleable partner in Kyiv than it has in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and is perturbed by Ukraine's deepening partnership with NATO. Moscow may hope that its military buildup alone will compel concessions from Kyiv and Western capitals. But as Russia has used force in Ukraine before, it would be a mistake to dismiss its actions as bluff.

How should Ukraine and its Western partners respond? They are, understandably, in no mood to offer major compromises on Ukraine peace talks or NATO and now, in response to intimidation, is not the time for them to do so. In any case, what Moscow wants in Ukraine – in effect, proxies in the east that can exercise a veto over the country's foreign and security policy – no Ukrainian leader could accept. In this light, a two-pronged approach that combines deterrence with efforts to reach agreement with Moscow on a sequence of mutual de-escalatory steps, in Ukraine and more broadly, would create the best odds of steering Russia away from an attack. Such an approach should be led by the U.S., which Moscow sees as the interlocutor with the most influence over Ukraine.

The first prong involves Western leaders clearly communicating to Moscow the costs it will face should it proceed with a fresh invasion of Ukraine. While the Kremlin has some sense of those costs, it may believe that Western states will hold back some of the most powerful tools in their non-military arsenal – namely crippling sanctions that genuinely worry Moscow – because of the fear of blowback in their own economies. The U.S. and its European allies should commit, as Biden appears to have done in his meeting with Putin, to ramping up those sanctions if red lines

are crossed and convey this decision in precise terms to Moscow. They should communicate plans to ensure that Ukraine is equipped to defend itself; better; new armaments will not fundamentally change the balance of power but can create additional costs for an invading and occupying force. Washington has already made clear that a consequence of any military intervention will be the need to reassure states on NATO's eastern flank, leading to just what Moscow does not want: more Western troops and weapons systems on Russia's frontier.

As negotiations continue, U.S. officials can also be frank with their Russian counterparts about escalatory risks that are less certain but could snowball outside their control. The most worrying of these is that training missions already in place in Ukraine will grow and that the NATO states near Russia's border such as Poland and the Baltics, which live in greatest fear of Moscow's influence, might feel impelled to send military personnel to aid Kyiv. Should their presence touch off an escalation that brings fighting onto the territory of NATO member states, the alliance as a whole could feel it needs to respond, and the situation would become perilous indeed. A further unattractive possibility is that hostilities will derail nuclear arms control talks and rekindle an expensive, destabilising arms race – again something Moscow wants to avoid.

The second prong, which the U.S. and its allies should discreetly propose alongside the deterrence message, would see the two sides embark on a choreographed sequence of mutual de-escalatory measures. The details need not be made public but could for starters include a quiet deal for both sides to refrain from military actions that the other finds especially provocative (likely to include a full Russian pullback from Ukraine's border and a dialling down by both sides of military deployments and exercises in the Baltic and Black Seas). Russia and the U.S. could each restaff the diplomatic mission in the other's capital. The two sides should also agree to restart Ukraine peace talks, with the U.S. assuming a greater role and with measure-for-measure steps to roll back sanctions on the table to reward de-escalatory steps by Russia. The parties should adopt a refreshed approach to Minsk, in which Kyiv and its Western partners show greater seriousness about carrying out the agreement's difficult provisions, while seeking creative options to address Ukraine's sovereignty concerns.

Finally, Western states should use this moment to offer a broader dialogue about steps that could help assuage some of Russia's security concerns. Such a dialogue might explore steps such as a reinvigoration of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. Among other things, the two sides could discuss how to reaffirm and build on the alliance's commitment under that Act to avoid the permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new member states. Reciprocal commitments from Moscow with respect to restraint in the use of force would of course be required. Both sides would also benefit from a discussion about limits and transparency commitments with respect to conventional force deployments in flashpoint areas. Toning down rhetoric about NATO expansion could allay some of Moscow's fears without necessarily revising the alliance's open-door policy or accepting the notion of a Russian sphere of influence.

Ideally, Russia would see on its own that further aggression in Ukraine will not yield the results it wants and would entail costs that reinforce some of the regional dynamics it most fears. But Western leaders cannot count on this happening. They should ensure a unified approach on deterrence, communicate it to Moscow and choreograph a way back from an increasingly menacing standoff.



II. A Military Buildup and Collapsed Negotiations

Based on intelligence data, Western capitals, NATO and Kyiv claim that Russia has once again built up its military presence at the Ukraine frontier, with some 100,000 soldiers, as well as aviation and other equipment, now stationed on the border or nearby. These deployments recall the situation in March and April, when Russia concentrated about 100,000 military personnel close to the Ukrainian border, saying it was conducting drills. It eventually moved many of the soldiers back to rear bases, declaring its exercises over, but left much of the infrastructure behind.

NATO calls the Russian military concentration “large and unusual”, and Western officials have asked their Kremlin counterparts to explain the troop movements. Ukrainian officials indicate that they believe Moscow is staging its forces to give itself the option of a large-scale military offensive. They say the scale of such an operation could be beyond the one Russia launched in 2014, when its forces annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine and helped separatists who seized parts of the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas, beginning a war that continues to this day. Washington has warned Moscow that renewed military aggression against Ukraine would be a “serious mistake”.

Moscow denies that it is planning to attack Ukraine and, instead, accuses Ukraine and Western states of “provocations”. President Putin singled out the ramped-up exercises and naval and air activity carried out under NATO’s Tailored Forward Presence initiative in the Black Sea. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has suggested that intensified fighting in Donbas between the separatists Russia backs and Ukrainian forces is Kyiv’s fault, and that it is trying to draw Moscow “into some kind of forceful actions”. Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov postulated that Ukraine, under cover of exercises with NATO, was itself planning a military offensive in Donbas alongside “American [and] British soldiers in the region, who are growing in number”. The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service compared the situation to that in Georgia in August 2008, just before war began. On 1 December, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claimed that Ukraine had moved 125,000 soldiers toward Donbas.

These statements come on the heels of others indicating that Moscow has toughened its line with respect to Kyiv's relationship with NATO. In 2008, the Western alliance committed to eventual Ukrainian (and Georgian) membership, a step Moscow has long indicated it would see as crossing a red line and requiring a Russian security response. While NATO leaders have reiterated the commitment since 2008, most European and Ukrainian officials privately agree that NATO's members are nowhere near admitting Kyiv to the alliance any time soon. Nevertheless, speaking at the Valdai Club in Sochi in October, Putin indicated that he saw the growth of what he termed "NATO infrastructure", in the form of member state training of Ukrainian forces and other efforts, as a threat above and beyond the prospect of actual membership.

Some months earlier, in July, Putin had published a piece laying out his views on Ukraine. In it, he accused Western states of trying to move Ukraine toward an "anti-Russia" posture. He also emphasised the interwoven nature of the two countries' economies and indicated that Ukraine's sovereignty depends on Russian good-will. In October, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev wrote about Russian-Ukrainian relations, asserting that dialogue with the present Ukrainian leadership is useless because they are, according to him, "weak", "ignorant", "faithless" and "unreliable" and have made Ukraine "completely dependent" on the EU and the U.S. "It's pointless for us to deal with vassals", Medvedev wrote, arguing that Russia had to "wait for the emergence in Ukraine of a sane leadership, which is aimed not at total confrontation with Russia on the brink of war ... but at building equal and mutually beneficial relations".

Russian officials also charge Ukraine with scuppering negotiations over the Donbas conflict, even as Moscow wants substantial concessions from Kyiv as a condition for continuing those talks. Moscow refuses to renew high-level four-party Normandy Format meetings – talks aimed at resolving the conflict that involve Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine. While Russia's Foreign Ministry accuses Ukraine of lacklustre implementation of commitments made in previous Normandy rounds, including a now-collapsed ceasefire, it has also made important new demands. On 18 November, Lavrov indicated that Russia would not meet in the Normandy Format until Kyiv provides a plan for implementing all the political provisions in the two Minsk agreements, concluded in 2014 and 2015, and which together brought the conflict's most intense fighting to an end.

These provisions have been a sticking point for years. Because the Minsk agreements were negotiated as Kyiv faced intense Russian military pressure, they favour Moscow's proxies in Donbas. Among other things they require Ukraine to change its constitution and state laws to guarantee "special status" for the breakaway regions, Donetsk and Luhansk, and to hold elections in these territories while they remain under the control of de facto leaders who have declared them independent. Through these measures, Moscow intends for the breakaways to enjoy not just substantial self-rule, but also veto power over aspects of Ukrainian foreign and domestic policy, and thus ensure continuing Russian influence. Vladislav Surkov, a former aide to President Putin responsible for the Kremlin's Ukraine policy from 2013 to 2020, has candidly described the required law on the special status of Donbas as a measure ensuring that Ukrainian laws do not apply to the region.

Kyiv thus sees the Minsk agreements as a Trojan horse for Russian influence. Its response has been to delay implementation, disagree on the terms of special status and blame Russia for failing to end military support to the separatists (which Moscow denies giving). Kyiv also argues that if

it does not control the border when polls are held, Russia will be able, via the elections, to cement in place a pro-Moscow government in Donbas. Moscow, in turn, points out that Minsk explicitly requires special status and elections to come before Ukrainian control.

Still, the Normandy talks exist in large part to define how to implement the deals struck in 2014 and 2015. In this light, Moscow's demand that Kyiv produce an implementation plan as a precondition for continued discussion is, as one Ukrainian diplomat told Crisis Group, a demand in advance of the meeting for what should be its result and, as such, amounts to a rejection of dialogue. Together with troop movements at the border and new sabre-rattling rhetoric, it gives the impression that Russia has become frustrated with the standoff over Ukraine, wishes to force a change, and is willing to abandon the existing negotiating formats – and possibly resort to armed force – to do so.

III. Russia's Intentions

Moscow's goal remains what it has long been: a Ukraine that is permanently in Russia's sphere of influence. To the Kremlin, Ukraine is the front line in its continuing battle to block Western inroads into its neighborhood, which it sees as a threat to Russia itself. This goal underlies the political provisions that Russian negotiators insisted upon in the Minsk agreements.

But Russia increasingly recognises that these elements of the Minsk deals, which Ukraine views as undermining its sovereignty, are unlikely to be fulfilled to its satisfaction. As a practical matter, Kyiv shows no sign of moving toward either special status or elections for the self-styled independent republics. According to one Ukrainian official: "Russia wants us to grant special status to those who now have power in Donetsk and Luhansk. But this is tantamount to legitimising Russian aggression against Ukraine". Meanwhile, Ukraine's ties with NATO and the European Union are growing, even if its actual membership in either of those bodies remains a distant prospect.

The paradox, of course, is that the harder Russia presses to prevent Western actors from deepening their links with Kyiv, the stronger those ties become. As Moscow acts and postures ever more aggressively toward Kyiv, Ukraine sees ever fewer alternatives to closer relations with the West if it is to have any hope of security. For their part, Western states are drawn in by this dynamic, fearing that if Russia chisels away at Ukrainian sovereignty, not only Ukraine but European security as a whole could suffer dire consequences, with Russia potentially emboldened to embark on further aggression elsewhere.

The Kremlin's view of President Zelenskyy, who was inaugurated in May 2019, has also evolved. At first, Moscow held out hope that he might deliver outcomes it seeks. But Russia's political influence in Ukraine is small and shrinking (outside the east it has few dependable allies), and Zelenskyy, now over two years into his term, has been unwilling to yield to Moscow's demands. "Under Zelenskyy, the situation has become much worse than under [his predecessor Petro] Poroshenko, all with the acquiescence of the West", said a Russian official. Zelenskyy's viable political opponents are even less open to what the Kremlin wants. Indeed, he has faced tremendous domestic resistance to even small steps, such as measures to encourage the disengagement of troops along certain front-line sectors, that he has pursued in an effort to scale back the fighting and mitigate the effects of war.

Moscow sees Zelenskyy's difficulties as evidence that he is beholden to Ukrainian ultra-nationalist interests. Sources close to the Kremlin say it would like to see him replaced by someone more amenable to their wishes, although here it appears to ignore the reality that any duly elected Ukrainian leader would face the same constraints.

But Moscow's goals appear to go further than adjusting Donbas' status and replacing Zelenskyy to secure a more malleable Kyiv. Addressing Russia's Foreign Policy Collegium in November, Putin characterised Europe as fraught with tension due to NATO expansion, on one hand, and Russia's actions to deter NATO aggression near its borders, on the other. He accordingly tasked his foreign minister with obtaining what he called "long-term guarantees that ensure Russia's security". Since then, Russian officials have spoken of their desire for legal guarantees that, among other things, NATO (and, in line with Putin's comments, its infrastructure) would not expand farther east.

Fundamentally, Russia is seeking Western recognition of what Dmitry Medvedev once termed "privileged interests" in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The idea is that Ukraine and these other states will not only remain outside the EU and NATO, but beyond their influence in perpetuity. Western capitals would have to walk back from their longstanding insistence that states can choose for themselves which alliances and organisations to join, which they have shown no sign of doing. Summing up Moscow's perspective, a Russian expert told Crisis Group: "Russia has made investments in Donbas, and now in exchange for peace it wants political dividends in the form of its zone of influence being guaranteed by the West".

It is possible that Moscow sees the military buildup as a means of pushing Brussels, Washington and Kyiv toward its overarching goals. As concerns the West, Russia may expect the fear of war to lead the U.S. and European countries to press Ukrainian authorities to be more flexible in the face of Moscow's demands, as well as to rethink NATO enlargement and European security. In anticipation of the virtual summit between Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden on 7 December, Moscow's messaging suggested hopes that the meeting could help lay the groundwork for a reshaped security environment. As concerns Ukraine, which is scheduled to hold its next presidential election in 2024, Russia may hope to coerce Zelenskyy into making unpopular concessions on Minsk that will end in his resignation or electoral defeat.

Against this backdrop, it would be a mistake to write off Russia's military buildup as bluff. While Moscow would surely be happier if it can get what it wants without bloodshed, it has repeatedly proven its willingness to escalate and use military force, including in Ukraine. The force presence near Ukraine is now substantial. Russians with ties to the Kremlin have been saying for months that if tacit threats fail to engender new policies, or perhaps a new government, from Kyiv, then the Kremlin is indeed prepared to take military action. As one such person told Crisis Group, "Putin is thinking that the Ukrainian issue will sooner or later be solved by force. He understands himself that the Minsk agreements cannot be implemented, and Russia will have to resort to a military scenario".

IV. Military Options and Their Consequences

What Russian military action might look like is unclear, though some Ukrainian officials warn of major operations. In a recent interview, a Ukrainian general described for the *Military Times* the possibility of a massive offensive that would involve "airstrikes, artillery and armor attacks

followed by airborne assaults in the east, amphibious assaults in Odessa and Mariupol and a smaller incursion through neighboring Belarus”.

Although Russia is capable of mounting such an assault, a fight of this sort would incur high costs. While Ukrainian forces are no match for their Russian counterparts, they are more capable than they were in 2014, and the Ukrainian population is even more hostile to Russia. A Russian invasion would likely involve heavy losses, which could risk backlash from the Russian public. Sustained occupation of even part of Ukraine would also be painful and expensive. Russia’s experience supporting proxy governments in Donbas, where industry has crumbled and the population has grown impoverished, should be a caution against the burdens it would take on.

If Russia does contemplate military action, then a more limited operation appears more likely. The objectives of such an exercise would perhaps be to expand the separatists’ zone of control to blockade or even capture Mariupol, a highly important Donbas industrial centre. Such an offensive could undermine Zelenskyy and intimidate the West. But this approach could also backfire, strengthening the Ukrainian president’s hand by boosting his popularity at home and drawing him closer to Western capitals.

Either way, it is difficult to imagine Russia’s strategy yielding the outcome it seeks. Moscow must realise that any new elected government in Kyiv will not be friendlier than the current one. Western officials are hardly likely to guarantee a new sphere of influence for Russia because it threatens or embarks upon a war. Moreover, a furious Western response to any military action is all but guaranteed. Even (or perhaps especially) if a Russian military operation results in some form of capitulation from Ukraine, Western states will surely impose heavy sanctions upon Russia’s financial system and exports to the U.S. and Europe. Moreover, the war could at least in theory also draw Western actors onto the battlefield and will almost certainly lead them to provide Ukraine with dramatically increased military assistance.

Still, so long as threats remain abstract, it is not at all clear that Russia will be put off. Russia has faced sanctions before. It likely judges a military response from Western states to be highly unlikely and assesses – correctly – that increased military assistance might up the costs of an invasion but will not swing the odds in Kyiv’s favour. It knows that NATO is not bound to come to non-member Ukraine’s aid and that the war-weary U.S. would prefer to focus on containing a rising China.

At the same time, Moscow acting on this basis would entail serious escalatory risk. A variety of NATO members, including the U.S. and France, and the alliance itself have reiterated their support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and quite vocally warned Russia that aggression would have serious consequences. This approach, in essence, relies on deterrence through strategic ambiguity – leaving Russia guessing as to what they might do. But having issued such warnings, NATO member states may feel they must now take action that would be escalatory in nature. As noted, several would almost certainly send more weapons, and perhaps trainers as well. It is plausible that some, perhaps including Poland and one or more of the Baltic countries, might want to do even more.

That would be a dangerous direction for events to take. Military action by NATO member states would pose substantial risks for all involved, including escalation to other parts of Europe. Even short of that, battlefield losses by a NATO member state would raise tough questions for the

alliance about how it should respond. The risks should either side come to believe that it faces an existential or nuclear threat are potentially enormous.

V. Detering a Russian Invasion

Moscow itself may not yet have decided whether or not to escalate, when and to what extent. It may want to see how events unfold in response to its troop build-up and keep its options open as long as possible. The Kremlin may also think that time is on its side, and that a sustained atmosphere of tension over the course of weeks or months will, in and of itself, encourage Kyiv, Washington and European capitals to make concessions.

Ukraine and its Western partners are, however, in no mood to offer major compromises on the Minsk process or NATO and now, in response to intimidation, is not the time for them to do so. Even were they to seek some form of accommodation, they would risk Russia simply pressing for more. Moscow would likely understand its victory both as a Western recognition of its rightful role vis-à-vis Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries and as an affirmation of the benefits of threatening and using military force to attain its goals. Nor is there any guarantee that Moscow would feel sufficiently secure as a result of such a settlement to curtail its aggressive behaviour, particularly if tensions persist in the Black and Baltic Sea regions and elsewhere.

It is precisely because NATO takes these risks seriously that Russia is playing with fire. NATO's posture of strategic ambiguity reflects an understandable reluctance on the part of Washington and its allies to extend the alliance's security umbrella to a non-member state. But the stance could actually lead Moscow to misapprehend the extent of the costs it will incur should it move forward. The U.S. – which Moscow sees as the key actor in this drama – should work quickly with its allies to finish defining what those will be and unequivocally commit to act if its red lines are crossed. It should also offer to Moscow its frank assessment of ways in which the situation could spin out of control.

With respect to threats that Washington and its allies can credibly make, severe sanctions are the starting point. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has already threatened “a range of high-impact economic measures that we have refrained from pursuing in the past”. A similar message, presumably with more specificity, was conveyed by President Biden directly to President Putin on 7 December.

As Crisis Group has previously noted, the “high-impact” measures might include a ban on lending to and business with Russian energy and metallurgical companies and state-controlled banks; cutting Russia off from the SWIFT banking network; and further limiting Russian access to Western financing through prohibitions on the purchase of Russian sovereign debt on the secondary market. Among the most worrying possibilities to Moscow is the spectre of secondary sanctions – i.e., measures through which the sanctioning country punishes third-party violators. While these have been enabled by the Combating America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), enforcement has been sparse. If Germany is amenable, shutdown of the near-complete Nord Stream II pipeline is also a prospect.

Being clear to Moscow about sanctions will remain critical. Russia may well calculate that the West will pull its economic punches, given that stepping up enforcement of CAATSA sanctions would hit European firms that do business in Russia hard. Moreover, even threats of strong sanctions may prove insufficient if Moscow judges it can counter (or weather) the most likely

economic steps by Western powers. “If the West hits the financial sector, Russia could use the gas market as a leverage, and then Europe would be severely affected”, one Russian expert on sanctions told Crisis Group. While it may be difficult to dispel Russia’s sanctions stoicism entirely, the U.S. and its allies stand the best chance of doing so if they coordinate precisely the measures they will apply, and clearly communicate their unified commitment both to implementing them should Russia attack Ukraine and to not doing so if it pulls back its forces. If they do impose these sanctions, they should be equally clear about the circumstances in which they will rescind the penalties so as to ensure that incentives for more constructive behaviour are in place.

A second consequence that the U.S. and its allies can credibly threaten would be to make clear that they will provide additional armaments and weapons to Ukraine. These almost certainly cannot be shipped in quantities sufficient to truly change the balance of power in the event of renewed major hostilities, but they can create additional costs that Russia will need to factor into its calculations. Ukraine continues to face shortages of secure communications equipment and complains of gaps and inconsistencies in its sniper and counter-sniper kit. If Moscow mounts a large-scale assault, Kyiv could also benefit tremendously from bolstered air defence capability.

In addition, Washington and Brussels should continue to underline that Russian escalation in Ukraine will leave them with little choice but to substantially ramp up deployments of troops, tanks and missile systems on Russia’s eastern flank. This message was conveyed on 7 December, and it should remain part of the Western narrative. Not only has Moscow already described this outcome as highly undesirable, but larger deployments and associated activities come with increased risk of dangerous incidents and escalation, both day-to-day and when the next crisis occurs.

A yet more delicate conversation that Washington should have with Moscow concerns the range of contingent costs and risks that might or might not be imposed, but that will become an increasingly real possibility if tensions continue to escalate. Directly relevant to the prospect of an eastern buildup is the prospect that some NATO states might themselves intervene in any conflict in Ukraine. While most member state governments will be unwilling to take such steps, some – perhaps including those of Poland and the Baltic states that sit on NATO’s eastern flank – may feel they must, especially if fighting drags on.

That would be dangerous indeed. NATO allies are not bound under the Atlantic Treaty to follow a handful of member states onto the battlefield in Ukraine, but if their presence there touches off a conflict that reaches their territory, then the alliance might well feel it needs to come to their defence.

Then there is the possibility that NATO members, whether those in the east or others, potentially even including the U.S., would send more of their own personnel – trainers or advisers – into the field, where they would in effect serve as a “tripwire” to deter a Russian incursion. To date, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Poland, Lithuania and non-NATO member Sweden have provided training, coordinated through the Multinational Joint Commission. Some prominent voices already suggest that this mechanism might be built upon with larger numbers. While the escalatory risks would seem to counsel against such a move, and the Biden administration has not yet shown any sign of interest in it, the idea could quickly gain currency if tensions continue to rise.

Another unwise and destabilising but nevertheless very possible consequence would be the breakdown of talks about, among other things, nuclear arms control and the rekindling of an arms race that Russia can ill afford. As a Russian arms control expert told Crisis Group, “Putin does not want a new arms race because Russia does not have the resources for it”.

VI. A Choreographed De-escalation

Although the NATO alliance as a whole must agree upon the deterrence package, in consultation with Kyiv, it is Washington that will need to explain the measures to Moscow, because it is Washington with which Moscow seeks to negotiate. The 7 December virtual summit between Presidents Biden and Putin is a step in the right direction.

Washington’s message, delivered through direct communication at the highest levels and supported by similar talking points from allies, should be that if Russia proceeds along its current path the combination of very high known costs and even higher potential costs is simply prohibitive. Even then, it may not be possible to shift Moscow off its course through deterrence alone, and even if Russia backs down in the face of NATO and U.S. counter-threats in this instance, the door will be left open for the next crisis.

Washington should therefore propose a sequence of mutual de-escalatory measures – including but not limited to a promise that NATO will stand down on its threats if Moscow de-escalates – that would help reduce immediate tensions, bring the parties back to the table and lay the foundation for a dialogue that can begin to address Moscow’s broader security concerns alongside those of NATO members, Ukraine and other states in the region. In the near term (though precise details may take some time to work out), there should be a choreographed de-escalation. While the details of the choreography need not be made public, they could be laid out along the following lines.

First, the U.S., European powers and Russia would strike a quiet deal – discreet enough that no government needs to appear weak before the public – that they will refrain from the military activities that the other side finds especially provocative. For Russia, such a deal would mean not just pulling its troops well back from the Ukrainian border but also dismantling the infrastructure and equipment that it left in place after its earlier mobilisation. For both sides, it would mean dialling down deployments and exercises in the Black and Baltic Sea regions. While the West should not relinquish its principled refusal to accept Russian annexation of Crimea, it could curb naval exercises that challenge Russia’s claims there. NATO and its member states might also agree to curtail their rhetoric about the possibility of Ukraine’s (and Georgia’s) accession.

Secondly, and in parallel, the U.S. should work with Russia to restaff their respective diplomatic missions, which have suffered from mutual rounds of punitive expulsions and limitations. At present, the U.S. has only a skeleton staff in Moscow. Reportedly, the Kremlin and Washington have quietly agreed on a plan for getting U.S. diplomats back to Russia, but they will need to do more to restart normal diplomatic relations and consular services, including visas. Not only would this step remove a major irritant in relations, it would facilitate discussions going forward, on this and other topics.

Thirdly, all involved should commit to restarting Ukraine peace talks, maybe with new incentives on the table. The U.S. should play a bigger role, for example by appointing a new special envoy. Moscow, which believes that only Washington can persuade Kyiv to move on difficult matters,

would value this step. Moreover, Western powers should – as Crisis Group has argued before – prepare to trade sanctions relief for de-escalatory measures by Russia and its proxies. They might offer measure-for-measure relief once the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gets full access to the Ukraine-Russia border and other non-government-controlled areas; upon disengagement of forces along the Donbas front lines; after local elections in Donbas have been scheduled; or following the disarming of separatist forces. The gradual lifting of sanctions in return might begin with those on borrowing conditions for Russian banks and companies and on individuals not involved in Crimea’s annexation and end with the total removal of sectoral and personal sanctions after Ukraine regains control of its border.

The risks to using sanctions relief as an incentive along these lines are real but still worth taking. Critics of putting sanctions on the table before the Ukraine talks have progressed much further tend to highlight the danger that Russia will backslide and the West will struggle to rebuild the consensus that got sanctions imposed in the first place. But that risk has to be weighed against the perils of the moment. There seems to be increasing recognition in European capitals and Washington that the sanctions policy needs an overhaul. Russia itself appears ready to have such a conversation if the U.S. takes the lead. As a Russian expert on sanctions told Crisis Group, “Russia will not discuss sanctions in the abstract because that would be tantamount to recognising itself as a party to the conflict in Ukraine, but if the U.S. presents a specific plan to lift sanctions, Russia will of course consider it carefully”.

Fourthly, at the reformatted peace talks, the parties would need to take a somewhat different approach to Minsk. For all their flaws, the 2014 and 2015 agreements are, at least formally, something all parties have agreed to, and they were endorsed by the UN Security Council. They are also at the core of Western governments’ stated policies regarding Ukraine and Russia.

Rather than creating additional uncertainty about whether Ukraine ever intends to fulfil the agreements, Washington, Kyiv and their European partners should show a new seriousness about implementing them – including the difficult steps of affording some autonomy for separatist-controlled Donbas, holding local elections there and granting a broad amnesty for separatists who lay down their arms. In so doing, the parties could explore creative options for addressing Ukraine’s concerns about holding elections before it assumes control over its border. Possible solutions include involving a third party – likely the OSCE or the UN – to monitor the border and the region as a whole, while elections are held.

Fifthly, the European Union could begin discussing a special format for negotiations with Russia to address the Kremlin’s concerns regarding EU relations with third countries. This format can be based on the declaration by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany in 2015, at the time of the second Minsk agreements, which affirmed the leaders’ “support [for] trilateral talks between the EU, Ukraine and Russia in order to achieve practical solutions to concerns raised by Russia with regards to the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU”. Thus far, the parties have used this format only to discuss Russian gas transit through Ukraine.

Finally, because immediate de-escalatory steps will be insufficient to assuage Russia’s long-term concerns about European security – and even the approach to Ukraine peace talks and Minsk will fall far short of what Russia wants – it will be necessary to begin laying the groundwork for additional steps that will put relations between Russia and its Western neighbours on a steadier

footing. The measures cited above are a starting point, but they will need to be solidified and in certain cases expanded, some quietly and some more formally. For example, NATO members are unlikely to walk away from their open-door policy, and the declaration from their 2008 Bucharest summit, which promised eventual Ukrainian and Georgian membership, but they can reach an understanding with Moscow that they will tone down their rhetoric. A quieter approach would not imply the alliance's willingness to cede a sphere of influence to the Kremlin. Rather, it would be consistent with the reality that NATO's membership is not likely to include additional countries on Russia's Western flank any time soon.

As regards more concrete commitments, Moscow and Brussels should look to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, by which NATO affirmed to Russia that it had "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new member states" and no plan to "permanently station substantial combat forces" there. Today's threat of escalation risks upending what is left of the second promise. The two sides could agree to deepen these commitments (for instance, by defining "substantial"). The alliance could also commit not to station permanent combat forces in non-NATO members of the OSCE, including Ukraine. They could discuss limiting temporary visits of NATO member state and Russian troops and instructors to these countries. Such steps would be explicitly contingent on reciprocal commitments by Moscow not to use force or support its use against OSCE states – and also to refrain from stationing forces on the territory of non-allies. Because such a mutual commitment implies resolution of the Ukraine war, it would be possible only after Russian-backed forces in Ukraine disarm and Kyiv regains sovereignty over breakaway areas.

In addition, Russia, Ukraine and Western states would be well-served by beginning negotiations to define express limits and transparency commitments regarding conventional force deployments, exercises and other activities in potential flashpoint areas, especially in and around the Black and Baltic Seas. These discussions will surely take time, but they are crucial to prevent future crises and manage what will likely be a conflictual relationship for some time to come, given the disparity between Moscow's security goals and those of Western states.

VII. Conclusion

The worry is that, before they get to have these conversations, the parties could take the region in a much darker and more dangerous direction. Russia, the potential aggressor, should turn back while there is still time, if nothing else to avoid the costs that it will incur to itself and create for others, all in the service of goals that military force cannot attain. But as Moscow shows no sign of doing so at present, it behooves the U.S. and NATO allies to make clear the costs – both those they are determined to impose and those that may be hard to stop – by defining them and communicating them clearly to Moscow.

At the same time, it would be a mistake for Washington to rely on sticks alone. The U.S. and its allies need to be prepared to show movement of their own if they want to achieve the choreographed de-escalation that would serve both sides' interests. As an immediate matter, they could pursue a quiet mutual deal to throttle back provocative military exercises and to allow diplomatic missions to be re-staffed. Such a deal should also be joined to new commitments that the U.S. will play an enhanced role in peace talks if Russia returns to the table; that Kyiv and the West will take a new approach to Minsk implementation; and that measure-for-measure sanctions relief will be up for discussion.

Concrete steps to shore up the broader European security order need to run parallel to peacemaking in Ukraine. The present crisis points to how shaky that order has become, as well as to the harrowing repercussions of further deterioration. Even as the U.S. and its partners prepare to show the Kremlin the depth of their resolve, they should also be laying the groundwork for a new approach that can help ward off future crises and bring greater stability to the region.

Kyiv/Moscow/Brussels, 8 December 2021

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine>

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Nicole Covey, Ph.D. In the Canadian Army Journal Vol 19 – Number 2: 2021

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The North Warning System (NWS) has played a vital role in Canada’s defence plan since it came into service near the end of the Cold War, and it continues to play a key role in a close Canada/United States defence partnership. This paper aims to demonstrate the continued relevance and importance of the NWS renewal project through the lens of Canada’s domestic, continental, and international security spheres. While not intuitively linked to the land power domain, it is a support consideration for widely dispersed land forces in austere environments,¹ in particular, the Arctic. It is argued that the prioritization of NWS and other North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) modernization projects will be beneficial to the Canadian government through strengthening the Canada/US defence relationship and filling a gap in North America’s (and, by extension, Canada’s) defence system during an era of increasing global tensions.



The North Warning System

The NWS was created in the late 1980s as an upgrade to the distant early warning (DEW) line and was designed to protect North America from the Soviet threat during the Cold War. The NWS is a series of short and long-range, ground-based, unmanned radar stations that extend across Canada to the North Slope in Alaska, with additional radars on the west coast of Greenland.² The NWS is essential to NORAD’s aerospace warning and control mandate. The NWS struggles, however, to “see” certain threats to North America—especially slower and lower moving drones or high speed and higher altitude weapons. Nevertheless, it remains NORAD’s primary air

detection system.³ This stationary and passive defence relic is reaching, and some argue has already reached, the end of its serviceability and needs to be replaced. While the NWS renewal project is still in initial stages, Canada and the United States are working together, via NORAD and with industry partners, to find the most effective way to modernize the NWS as part of the overall NORAD modernization project.⁴

During the early years of the Cold War, NORAD maintained three radar lines (the DEW, mid-Canada, and Pinetree lines) that were intended to be used as an air threat tripwire for the protection of the North American continent. The DEW line was located farther north than the other two and was designed with the Soviet bombers of the day in mind. The mid-Canada line was meant to confirm information presented by the DEW line and demonstrate that the threat was moving farther south. The southernmost radar line was the Pinetree radar line. Once the Soviet bomber reached the Pinetree line, the invader would be attacked via surface-to-air missiles and interceptors.⁵ The NWS replaced the obsolete DEW line and was created to deal specifically with the advances in missile technology in the form of air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) but was not located any farther north.⁶ The current radars are remotely monitored from a control centre at 22 Wing North Bay, in Ontario, but private contractors maintain the radars.

The DEW line “decommissioning” ended up resulting in the largest ever environmental clean-up project by the Canadian government and cost over five hundred million dollars. The 63 DEW sites, 42 of which were located in Canada, were simply abandoned and left to contaminate the land with toxic chemicals.⁷ It is readily acknowledged that that cannot be repeated, and attention must be paid to the Canadian government’s environmental responsibilities with regard to both old and new radar sites.

The NWS’s renewal and concomitant northern infrastructure investment that is part of wider NORAD modernization efforts (such as extending and repairing Arctic runways) has the opportunity to benefit the local populations. The key term to keep in mind is “dual use.” It is too expensive to build purpose-built infrastructure in the Arctic and, as safety and security threats can easily become defence threats, being able to monitor a variety of threats in multiple domains is the goal. It is vital that local populations be consulted and be part of the modernization projects. There is a significant infrastructure deficit in the Canadian north, and all NORAD modernization projects must bear that in mind.

The NWS is unable to properly detect a host of current weapons’ technology, which is not surprising given that it is based on 1970s thinking. Not only is it optimized for air threats of a certain speed, altitude and direction; the system is “vulnerable to new data exploitation methods and too old for parts to be easily accessible.”⁸ In an age of increased cyber warfare, it is vital that the state be able to secure its defence systems from data exploitation, including the information feeds both into 22 Wing and outward to other operating centres. Another problem with the NWS is that the current range of the radar system does not cover the entire Canadian Arctic

Archipelago and does not match the Canadian air defence identification zone (CADIZ)⁹ (Figure 1 shows the extended CADIZ range and Figure 2 demonstrates NORAD's current radar coverage).

That creates the conditions for blind spots. Ideally, Canada and the United States want to track potential threats as far out in time and space as possible and not wait until they are deep into Canadian territory to detect them.¹⁰ Given new geopolitical tensions, threats in new domains and the ability of both state and non-state actors to launch from anywhere in the world and potentially hit North American targets, an ecosystem of sensors is required.¹¹

The NWS renewal and other NORAD modernization investments were key defence priorities in Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE), the 2019 mandate letter for the Minister of National Defence, as well as in the 2021 supplemental mandate letter for the Minister of National Defence. The problem is that no specific funding has been earmarked for these projects. In Strong, Secure, Engaged, it says "collaborate with the United States on the development of new technologies to improve Arctic surveillance and control, including the renewal of the North Warning System."¹² In the 2019 mandate letter, one of the top priorities laid out for Minister Sajjan is to "work with the United States to ensure that the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is modernized to meet existing and future challenges, as outlined in Strong, Secure, Engaged."¹³ The 2021 supplemental mandate letter noted that, in addition to COVID-19, a priority is still to "ensure the Canadian Armed Forces have the capabilities and equipment required to uphold their responsibilities through continued implementation of Strong, Secure, Engaged, including new procurement, continued investment in infrastructure improvement and planned funding increases."¹⁴ And of course, in President Biden's first foreign leaders' telephone call on Friday, 22 January 2021, he and Prime Minister Trudeau discussed the importance of continental defence. Specifically, the two "agreed to expand cooperation on continental defence and in the Arctic, including the need to modernize NORAD."¹⁵ Considering that the modernization effort was discussed so early in Biden's presidency, it demonstrates the importance that both governments want to place on upgrading the NWS, modernizing NORAD and continental defence more broadly.

Given that the air domains of Canada and the United States are indivisible, and that successive NORAD commanders have called on the need for more information about possible threats earlier, the NWS, NORAD's "eyes" in the Arctic, is a natural starting point. "The need to be able to warn of aggressive action as far away as possible in terms of time and geometry has never been greater, but the NWS is simply not designed for such a task."¹⁶ Because of budgetary constraints, especially in light of federal COVID-19 spending, the United States' military, industry and Canada have been investigating how to extend the utility of the NWS. One such initiative is called Pathfinder. Pathfinder uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to help analysts see what the NWS is detecting but could not interpret before.¹⁷ The NWS renewal, therefore, will be a long and multilayered project. Rather than instant replacement, the NWS will be improved in stages. Pathfinder is already proven to increase the ability of the NWS to detect patterns and increase the information outputs from radar technology. The NWS, like the DEW line before it,

served Canadian defence interests admirably in the past, and it is time to continue Canada's northern radar legacy by modernizing the system so that it can continue to remain relevant in the current and future age.

Domestic

In the 2018–2023 Defence Plan, which operationalizes SSE, the first two core missions are to “Detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on Canada” and “Detect, deter and defend against threats to or attacks on North America in partnership with the United States, including through NORAD.”¹⁸ Those two core missions are directly related to the ability of the NWS to carry out its designed function and alert NORAD regions to aerospace threats targeting North America. The system also contributes to the land power dependencies arrangement as articulated in the 2019 publication, “Close Engagement: Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty,” which explains the need for a collaborative approach across different aspects of the Canadian military in order to fully respond to the evolving threat environment.¹⁹ The NWS is also a vital source of information for NAV Canada and other agencies confirming flight patterns of civil aviation. In terms of domestic-security-related considerations in regard to the NWS renewal effort, the civilian information that the NWS provides is of vital importance.

In the short term, the “gap” between the sight line of the NWS and CADIZ can be decreased with the airborne warning and control system and drones, but a future NWS should be more optimally located and be able to detect a myriad of threats in all domains.²⁰ It is likely that space, land and maritime sensors will combine to create a “system of systems” to maximize the information collected coupled with increased use of AI and machine learning to detect patterns of behaviour.

While the cost of the NWS modernization project is expected to be high, as is the case with any Arctic infrastructure project, it is a cost that must be borne by the Canadian government with assistance from the United States. At this time, no one is sure if the cost-sharing arrangement between Canada and the United States to build the NWS, in which Canada contributed 40% of the costs and the United States paid 60%, will be used for future arrangements.²¹ It is highly unlikely that Canada would be able to renegotiate a better cost-sharing agreement with its southern neighbour, especially if the United States viewed Canada's refusal to modernize as a snub against the two countries, longstanding partnership. The cost of the Canada/US defence relationship deeply fracturing or even breaking down would have serious repercussions in both the political and economic spheres. Therefore, while the costs of future renewal projects are expected to be very high, the NWS benefits all armed services and multiple Canadian agencies as well as companies. Continuing with NWS renewal is still a financially wise decision despite the high deficit Canada will carry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NWS remains vital to the defence of Canada. And Canada does not have another system that could serve in place of the NWS.²² In order to properly defend the state, Canada requires the ability to detect threats through its North.²³ Climate change and the growing accessibility to the North American Arctic is increasing the urgency for Canada, and NORAD, to modernize northern

defence infrastructure.²⁴ The NWS renewal was placed in the mandate letter for Canada's Minister of National Defence, and the project was indicated to be a way for the state to ensure its north is both strong and secure, key elements of Canada's current defence policy Strong, Secure, Engaged.²⁵ Continental The NWS and NORAD modernization are essential for continental defences. The NWS plays a key role in the protection of North America and is a key asset for the binational NORAD command.

The Canada/US defence relationship is unique because of its interconnectedness on many fronts related to economic matters, security, safety and, of course, defence. Canada and the US have several binational agreements. Binational means that both sides are obligated to think of and contribute to North American defence, as opposed to the United States and Canada operating separately. Be it the Permanent Joint Board on Defense, the International Joint Commission or the NORAD Agreement, these binational arrangements are unique to North America. The especially close defence relationship does not hinder the two states, respective sovereignties. The NWS is one of NORAD's few assets and is as important to the United States as it is to Canada, even if Canada hosts more radar sites.²⁶ What is more, NORAD and the continental defence relationship that sees exceptionally close connections between the navies, coast guards, armies, police and intelligence agencies brings more to Canada than just those issues surrounding defence; it also contributes to building closer ties between the countries and allows Canada to accumulate political capital with the United States.²⁷ Regardless, NORAD, with its bi-national command structure, is a symbol of this unique Canada/U.S. defence relationship²⁸ and, therefore, it stands to reason Canada needs to prioritize NORAD as long as it values the defence relationship.

Despite the strong defence relationship between Canada and the United States, there still exists a gap of expectations between the two countries in terms of defence contributions, at least historically speaking.²⁹ There is the concern that, if Canada does not contribute enough to the relationship and is seen to be a strategic liability to its southern partner, the US would defend itself despite Canada, and Canada would simply lose its ability to make decisions related to the defence of North America.³⁰ This is referred to as the "defence-against-help" thesis developed by Nils Orvik. According to the theory, Canada views its defence relationship with the United States through the defence-against-help lens, in which a smaller state works to maintain and invest in a level of defence so that a larger state does not step in to "help" secure the smaller state.³¹ According to Donald Barry and Duane Bratt, the defence-against-help theory is especially important in regard to the Canada/US defence relationship because of North American geography; and so, since the 1930s, defence-against-help has played a key role in relation to Canada defence and security policies.³²

Andrea Charron and Jim Fergusson, however, argue that the defence against-help thesis never applied to Canada and the United States; after all, Orvik was explaining what defence decisions Finland, Sweden and Norway needed to make against an aggressive Soviet Union.³³ The analogy, according to Charron and Fergusson, has been co-opted as a convenient shorthand to compel certain Canadian defence decisions in the face of lukewarm political will on the part of the

Canadian government rather than bona fide fears of retaliation by the United States against Canada. If defence-against-help was truly in play, the US would never have been satisfied with Canada's refusal to participate in the US' ground-based midcourse ballistic missile defence program, with the country refusing not once but twice—with no consequences—to contribute to a system that is considered vital to the United States' national security.

The very nature of having a strong defence relationship with the United States does not infringe on Canadian sovereignty, as the security for both states under this relationship is interdependent.³⁴ Instead, this close defence relationship and NORAD allows Canada to demonstrate its ability to fulfill its role in the defence of North America, and it allows Canada to have a larger voice in continental security measures that it would not normally have, considering its relative defence capabilities and budget.³⁵ If Canada wants to maintain its voice in matters related to continental security, and not just simply be a passive actor in the decisions made by the United States, Canada needs to demonstrate that it takes continental defence seriously, and the state can do this by prioritizing the NWS renewal effort.

International.

While there are many possible international implications to consider, this paper will briefly address two points: the breakdown of the 1987 intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) Treaty, and the increase in global tensions. The INF Treaty was signed in 1987 by the Soviet Union and the United States and entered into force in 1988. Both signatories were required under the treaty to eliminate all of their respective ground-based cruise and ballistic missiles that reached between 500 and 5,500 kilometers by June 1991.³⁶ NATO ministers decided in 2018 to support the American position that Russia was violating the terms of the treaty, but Russia refuted the allegations put forth in January 2019 and, in August that same year, the US, under the Trump administration, decided to officially withdraw from the INF Treaty, citing Russian violations.³⁷ Because of the breakdown of the INF Treaty, the importance of modernizing the NWS becomes even more important and time-sensitive. The NWS is unable to track Russia's newest generation of ALCMs and ground launched cruise missiles (GLCM).³⁸ Without the INF Treaty in place to moderate the threat of Russian missiles entering North American airspace, the NWS needs to be modernized quickly because of the vulnerability of the system (which is therefore a major vulnerability in regard to continental defence), as "we cannot deter what we cannot defeat, and we cannot defeat what we cannot detect."³⁹ The breakdown of the INF Treaty demonstrates the rise of missile-based threats, and the current iteration of North America's radar system is unable to properly fulfill its role in alerting NORAD to incoming threats.

As global tensions continue to rise around the world, the defence of North America cannot be put on the backburner, in a place where the high north is out of sight and out of mind. "NORAD is at a point where changes in the threat environment have created a need for NORAD to modernize its capabilities to defend North America."⁴⁰ North America's northern flank is no longer protected by the harsh northern environment, as global climate change and technological

advances make the region more accessible. In 2007, Russian bombers resumed training exercises outside of the CADIZ, and while those bombers have remained in international airspace to date, this demonstrates that NORAD needs to continue to improve the nature of North American defence, and modernizing NORAD includes Canada. The NWS is nearing its end of life, but initiatives like Pathfinder are demonstrating what the asset should be. The NWS struggles to keep pace with new technology, such as hypersonic glide vehicles and drones, as it was never designed to detect that technology.⁴¹ In order to respond to the growing great power competition that is occurring, Canada must prioritize the renewal of the NWS in order to ensure that North America remains secure.

Conclusion

The NWS plays a key role in North America's continental defence but, because of its location and existing technological advances, it struggles to properly fulfill the role it was designed to play. The NWS is a key part of NORAD's defence strategy and, if Canada does not prioritize this renewal, there is the concern that it will badly damage the close defence relationship that Canada shares with the United States and lose privileged access to intelligence, training, and leadership positions within the US military. Budgetary constraints will not allow for a complete replacement of the NWS by the end of its service life in 2025. However, over time and with the help of new technology, it can be upgraded to extend its life until a new system of systems that joins all the domains can be created. There is no other system that can do what the NWS is currently doing over such an enormous expanse of territory. The information that the NWS provides is vital not only to Canada (and, by extension, the Army) and the United States, but to allies as well. With the breakdown of the INF Treaty, the Arctic becoming more accessible, and increased global tensions, the role for the NWS is far from over. Canada needs to prioritize NWS renewal to ensure that the North American continent is safe.

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Footnotes available in the article at this Website

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2021/mdn-dnd/D12-11-19-2-eng.pdf

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