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A DIFFERENT KIND OF LINCHPIN? CANADA, GERMANY, AND THE FUTURE OF TRANSATLANTICISM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the "special relationship" between Canada and Germany from a perspective known as "strategic culture" using the symbols (or concepts) of *middle power* and *linchpin* as the analytic categories shaping Ottawa's and Berlin's stance on transatlantic relations in general and relations with the United States in particular since the end of the Second World War. We argue that the coverage of Mark Carney's World Economic Forum speech in Davos in January 2026 and Friedrich Merz's address at the Munich Security Conference the following month has overlooked crucial differences in the two countries' approaches to dealing with the US – with Carney's "rupture" suggesting a radical shift as opposed to Merz's plea to "repair and revive transatlantic trust together."

We make two claims with respect to upcoming procurement decisions in Canada – especially the question of South Korean vs. German/Norwegian submarines (though we also add a passing reference to a related query of whether Ottawa should buy the Swedish Gripen and/or join the sixth-generation fighter project development as a part of the Italian-British-Japanese Global Combat Air Program). The first claim is that one should not simply interpret these pending procurement decisions to be a rekindled version of Pierre Trudeau's (or rather Mitchell Sharp's) "Third Option." Our second claim focuses upon the *security* implications of the bidding process. We argue that a decision for the South Korean submarines would send a highly problematic message to Canada's NATO partners – especially the ones that Ottawa needs to help protect the Arctic and its sovereignty in the North, as well as the other framework nations in eFP ("enhanced forward presence") in the Baltic states. In doing so, it would complicate the aim of buttressing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the central pillar of Canada's grand strategy.

Introduction: Strategic Culture and the Symbolism of Canadian-German Relations

In this paper, we explore the "special relationship" between Canada and Germany from a perspective known as "strategic culture." Although the label sounds a bit fanciful, if not downright ethereal, what strategic culture connotes is something that falls clearly within the realm of "real world" developments in transatlantic relations – developments that are of central concern to the Atlantik-Brücke. For strategic culture, as we understand the rubric, is primarily concerned with the way in which *symbols* can help us grasp larger truths appertaining to international relationships in general, and the Canadian-German one in particular. As Michael Walzer once put it so eloquently, symbols tell us "more than we can easily repeat."[1]

When it comes to relations between Canada and Germany, two symbols, above all, tell us more than we can easily repeat: the middle power, and the linchpin. Both have a lengthy pedigree in the writing on Canadian foreign policy – indeed they are each "clearly Canadian" in inspiration.[2] Yet they are also applicable to German foreign policy; for ever since the post-Second World War period, what the two symbols represent has been central to discussions of the foreign policy of the Federal Republic. There are some differences, however, in the way each symbol gets interpreted in our respective countries. In what follows, we are going to begin by analyzing the two symbols and explaining how, for each country, they have helped identify policy preferences. After the two sections in which we explore our respective symbols, we turn to the current policy dilemmas facing Ottawa and Berlin as they individually and together seek to respond to the current challenges to transatlantic security occasioned by the Trump administration's unusual (to say the least) manner of dealing with America's traditional allies.

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[1] Michael Walzer, "On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought," *Political Science Quarterly* 82 (June 1967): 191-204, quote at p. 196.

[2] A punning allusion to the manufacturer of sparkling water bearing that name, based in British Columbia.

Our central claim is that Germany, possibly even more than either of Canada's two "mother countries" – the UK and France – will be an important component of any Canadian effort (should one be desired) to embed the strengthening of the transatlantic "bridge" into its grand strategy. And in this respect, one issue-area calls out for attention – an issue-area pregnant with both economic and security significance. That issue-area is defence procurement. Specifically, we argue that the forthcoming decision in Ottawa regarding which submarine to procure for the Royal Canadian Navy – the German/Norwegian boat or the South Korean one[3] – will tell us a great deal about whether the current advocacy for a European-inflected diversification of Canada's trade and, especially, security prospects is likely to meet with any more success than had the earlier, and much-ballyhooed, quest for a "Third Option" that was mounted in the early 1970s, prior to becoming deemed to have been a colossal failure by the 1980s. We contextualize this claim in section four, before turning to the submarine issue in section five. But first we analyze our two core metaphors, in a bid to show their relevance to contemporary challenges facing the two countries; this is the task of the next two sections, commencing with our assessment of the German chancellor's address to the most recent Munich Security Conference.

[3] Since the decision is tightly linked to non-traditional offsets in the automotive and aerospace sector, it may be interpreted as a wider signal as to whether Canada pivots towards Asia or Europe.

The 3Ms: Merz, Munich, and Middle Power

This past winter saw each of our two countries' leaders make important policy statements at leading policy forums. In late January Prime Minister Mark Carney ramped up the crowd at the World Economic Forum in Davos by a stirring (some say stunning) claim that the familiar and comforting postwar order was no longer, that it had "ruptured." Henceforth, he continued, countries not ranking among the world's "great powers" would need to coordinate their efforts to assure their security. In the punchiest line of his speech, Carney reminded those less-than-great (i.e., "middle") powers, that they "must act together because if you are not at the table, you are on the menu."[4]

The following month, Chancellor Friedrich Merz addressed the Munich Security Conference, the long-running annual gathering some wags have taken to calling, "Davos with Guns," in a nod to its greater focus on security and defence issues. And while an inattentive listener might have drawn the conclusion that the chancellor was merely seconding earlier remarks made by the prime minister, or even simply repeating his own Davos speech,[5] we advance in this paper an alternative perspective. We will be arguing that there are important differences in the way the two leaders assess the current state and future prospects of the transatlantic relationship – differences that show up most clearly when we examine them through a "strategic-cultural" lens that puts emphasis upon the symbolism of political communication.

At first blush, it might seem as if the Canadian and German leaders are the modern-day geopolitical equivalents of those Boris-Johnson-lookalike twins encountered in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

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[4] For the complete text of the prime minister's remarks, see *"Principled and Pragmatic: Canada's Path," Prime Minister Carney addresses the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting*, Davos, Switzerland, 20 January 2026, https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minister-carney-addresses.

[5] The complete version of the chancellor's Davos speech can be found at https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzler-merz-beim-world-economic-forum-am-22-januar-2026-in-davos-2403600.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee.[6] But peer closer, and one discovers not-so-subtle differences between the manner in which Mark Carney and Friedrich Merz assess the contemporary state of global politics and, by extension, transatlantic relations. The prime minister might have gone to Davos to pronounce the old order truly dead and buried, but the chancellor hardly intended to travel to Munich simply to murmur, "Ich stimme zu."

The pair *do* agree on the gravity of the current challenge, although it would be surprising if they shared the same exact assessment of what has gone wrong. While the chancellor implored his listeners to consider what was at stake, urging them, in Carneyesque style, to "be realistic," he also stressed that the "major goals of Germany's foreign and security policy are derived from our Basic Law, our history and our geography. Our freedom is paramount here."[7] To put it mildly, Germany's history and geography are not Canada's. In short, if there is an *existential* threat to Europe, it has to be seen as coming from the great power lying closest to hand, and for Germany (and most other European states), history and geography can only point to Putin's Russia not Trump's America as the real source of upset.[8] Whereas in Canada many seem, logically or otherwise, convinced that America aspires to take over the country,[9] in Germany the worry is that America might no longer be willing to prevent *Russia's* taking over the country.

As did the prime minister, so too did the chancellor subscribe to the conviction that what was needed was more good-old-fashioned "hard

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[6] Lewis Carroll [Charles Lutwidge Dodgson], "Through the Looking-Glass," in *Alice: A Special Centenary Edition* (London: Macmillan, 1998; orig. pub. 1871).

[7] For the English version of Merz's Munich address, see "Speech by the Federal Chancellor at the Munich Security Conference on 13 February 2026 in Munich," https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/federal-government/speech-munich-security-conference-2407298. In slightly different form, the address has been published online under the title, "How to Avert the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics: Germany Knows the Costs of a World Governed by Power Alone," *Foreign Affairs*, 13 February 2026, How to Avert the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics | Foreign Affairs.

[8] It is one of the historic and geographic ironies of Germany's foreign policy that its role as a "middle power" (*Mittelmacht*) has often been interpreted in a strictly spatial sense as the power in the middle of Europe or the power "in-between" (*Zwischenmacht*); see Carsten Holbraad, "The Role of Middle Powers," *Cooperation and Conflict* 6, 1 (1971): 77-90, citing from pp. 79-80.

[9] See Erin Andersen, "A U.S. Invasion of Canada Is Still Far-Fetched. Canadians Are Preparing Anyway," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 18 March 2026, pp. A10-11.

power," expressed not just in terms of military but also of economic clout.[10] But again, the reason for becoming stronger was specified in a manner deliberately left indeterminate in Carney's depiction, which despite its generic nature everyone took to be aimed mostly at Trump. For Merz, the bogey bore a Russian name: Vladimir Putin. "Let's therefore," said the chancellor, "be accountable for our own capabilities." In case anyone missed his point, he turned on a "brief spotlight: Russia's gross domestic product currently stands at around two trillion euro. The European Union's GDP is almost ten times higher than that. And yet Europe today is not ten times stronger than Russia. Our military, political, economic and technological potential is enormous. But we are still far from exploiting it to the necessary extent."

So, to those who, like the prime minister, would proclaim the definitive "rupture" of an old order that had in any case been all along a fantasy of naïve imaginations, the chancellor injected a strong note of caution, worth quoting here at some length:

> The reorganisation of the world by major powers is happening faster and more profoundly than we are able to strengthen ourselves. For this reason alone, I am not convinced by the sometimes overly knee-jerk calls for Europe to write off the US as a partner. Ladies and gentlemen, I understand the unease and doubts expressed by such demands. I even share a number of them. And yet these calls have not been fully thought through. They simply ignore the harsh geopolitical realities in Europe and underestimate the potential that our partnership with the US continues to offer, in spite of all the difficulties…. We Europeans know the enormous value of the trust on which NATO is based. In an era of great powers, the US will also need this trust. Even the US reaches the limits of its own power when it goes it alone. At any rate, this seems to be clear to the strategists in the Pentagon. NATO is not only our competitive advantage, my dear American friends, it is also your competitive advantage…. For three generations, trust amongst Allies, partners and friends has

[10] European analysts sometimes give the impression of thinking that while military capability is synonymous with "hard power," economic capability is an attribute of "soft power." Of course, this is not true, at least according to the scholar who coined the latter term. See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990,) pp. 31-32.

> made NATO the strongest alliance of all times. Europe knows deeply how precious this is. In an era of great power rivalry, even the United States will not be powerful enough to go it alone…. So let's repair and revive transatlantic trust together.

Despite so many similarities in the leaders' respective speeches, the above passage highlights the key difference between Carney and Merz. One calls on the middle powers of the world – irrespective, it would seem, of their political values or their location on the map – to unite, in a new twist on the old theme of "variable geometry"[11] that first gained traction in the early 1990s; the other makes appeal to a values-based political community rooted not in any variegated geometry but in one specific geographic setting, the transatlantic West. One would seek "counterweights" to all the great powers, including and especially the United States; the other wants to repair what has been so damaged by Donald Trump. What the prime minister disparages as a romanticized fiction – the idea of a transatlantic "West" committed to an order in which the strong do *not* always lord it over the weak – the chancellor holds up as a model worth restoring, if only to buy time for Europe to adapt to the new era of "power politics."[12] To understand this difference more completely, we turn to the analysis of two metaphors we hold to be indispensable for "fully thinking through" the current challenge to transatlantic relations. We begin with the metaphor that most featured in the Carney *tour d'horizon* at Davos: middle power.

It is hardly a surprise that this metaphor was accorded top prime ministerial billing, for in Canada's diplomatic lore, symbolism has long been

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[11] New twist because as originally applied, the theme was regionally focused on Europe, and in particular on Franco-German security and defence relations; see David G. Haglund, *Alliance Within the Alliance? Franco-German Military Cooperation and the European Pillar of Defense* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,1991), chap. 7: "After the Wall: France, Germany, and the Variable Geometry of European Security."

[12] "Two days ago, Mark Carney said in this hall from this place: 'We must no longer rely only on the power of our values. We must also recognize the value of our power.' I share that view. And when I look into this room, into this hall, I want to say: Most of us share it. And that is a good starting point. European Friends, if I may say so: Our power today rests on three pillars: our security, our competitiveness, and our unity. First, we must invest massively in our ability to defend ourselves. And we are doing this. Second, we must rapidly make our economies competitive. And we are doing this. Third, we must stand closer together, among Europeans and among like-minded partners. We are doing this." Rede von Bundeskanzler Merz beim World Economic Forum am 22. Januar 2026 in Davos, https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzler-merz-beim-world-economic-forum-am-22-januar-2026-in-davos-2403600.

employed to provide analytical guidance to those engaged in the study and even the making of the country's foreign, and by extension, its security and defence policy. And no diplomatic metaphor has been more frequently employed over the past eight decades than that of the "middle power."[13] It has constituted a highly useful shorthand means of expressing not only where Canada "stands" in the international pecking order but also how it is supposed to comport itself based on this standing. Nor is middle power merely a Canadian role-aspiration, even if it is true that in its first invocation in the diplomatic context, during the latter phase of the Second World War when thoughts were beginning to dwell upon the construction of an international organization (the United Nations) that might prevent a Third World War, there was obviously something about the metaphor that made it irresistible to policymakers in Ottawa.

But if Canadians originated the concept, they could not monopolize it. Today, a growing number of countries are content to subscribe to the middle-power category, not even excluding (at times) the UK and France, a pair of nuclear-armed states possessed of permanent vetoes on the UN Security Council! Perhaps more to the point is the case of Germany, such a dominant international actor as to have earned for itself the dubious distinction of being regarded as *the* paramount "problem" (or "question") in all of global security from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth,[14] and now evidently well-pleased to have others look upon it as a middle power, even if there are beginning to be heard some not so *sotto voce* grumblings about it once again becoming *too* strong for its own good and that of its neighbours.[15]

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[13] See Nik Hynek and David Bosold, eds., *Canada's Foreign and Security Policy: Soft and Hard Strategies of a Middle Power* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[14] For the locus classicus of this genre of attributing blame to Germany not just for Hitler and the Second World War but for *everything* that had gone wrong in Europe and the world since (and because of) Martin Luther, see A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945). For valuable correctives, see David Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Dirk Verheyen, *The German Question: A Cultural, Historical, and Geopolitical Exploration* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

[15] For one peculiarly apprehensive assessment of the "meaning" of German rearmament, see Liana Fix, "Europe's Next Hegemon: The Perils of German Power," *Foreign Affairs* 105 (March/April 2026): 120-31. Also see Steven Erlanger, "Germany Is Pumping Up Its Military Spending. That Worries Its Neighbors," *New York Times*, 3 March 2026, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/03/world/europe/germany-military-defense-

Middle power is not simply a category for gauging a state's ranking. It is also routinely employed to suggest a state's virtue – or at least its *potential* to be virtuous – in an otherwise depraved world, on the basis that there must necessarily be an inverse relationship between virtue and power: the less one has of the latter, the more one can claim of the former. This association is sometimes lampooned as "middlepowermanship."[16] In the words of one of Canada's all-time great foreign policy analysts, Denis Stairs, it is simply wrong-headed to try to "secure by empirical means ... an independent foundation for a normative dedication to the pursuit abroad of the collective international good."[17] In short, if it is virtue you are seeking, do not start from an assessment of relative capability.

In reality, if one looks a bit more closely at the middle-power notion, it emerges that a category so commonly associated by its critics with moral posturing and international virtue-signalling is actually saturated with a great deal more self-interested motivation and a great deal less "altruistic" inspiration than imagined; this is why there was absolutely nothing inconsistent in Carney's extolling of both realism and middlepower *solidarność* at Davos. For when it was initially invented by Canadian diplomats at the time the United Nations was being conceived, the novel concept was not noticeably idealistic, being intended to confer advantage upon Canada in a world in which the middle power was argued *not* to reside in the midst of the pack – i.e., the "middle power" was not really in the middle – but rather was situated just a notch below the great power(s), and therefore to be entitled, on the basis of something known as the

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[16] John W. Holmes, "Most Safely in the Middle," in *Towards a New World: Readings in the History of Canadian Foreign Policy*, ed. J. L. Granatstein (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992), pp. 90-105.

[17] Denis Stairs, "Will and Circumstance and the Postwar Study of Canada's Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 50, 1 (Winter 1994-1995): 9-39, quote at p. 17.

"functional principle,"[18] to privileges and responsibilities not enjoyed by the vast majority of states.

At the outset, middle power, far from bestowing that aura of selflessness with which the metaphor would later get adorned, was originally intended to support a claim to preference based upon a proud assertion of "relative capability."[19] Canada, its diplomats wanted to make clear, had more than paid its dues during the Second World War and as such it had no intention of being relegated to any *Katzentisch* in the new institutional world order; instead, it would seat itself as close to the great powers and as far from the small ones as could be arranged. This intention lives on in Prime Minister Carney's call for action at Davos. There is strength in numbers, was his message, and combined, the middle powers can make their weight fully felt in the global balance of power, because it does not take too many middle powers combined to constitute another great power (assuming, of course, that they can resolve the dilemmas associated with collective action internationally).[20] That was the prime minister's core message at Davos, and it was a tribute to time-worn realist principles of international order being constituted through the mechanisms of the "balance of power."

When we shift our attention to traditional German conceptualizations of middle power, a decidedly different assessment of the metaphor guides analysis. For reasons related, as the chancellor put it, to its history and geography, the "middle power" means neither a country just below the great powers nor a singularly virtuous one, but rather a country that has been dealt a tricky hand by either geography or history, or both. Although the Federal Republic of Germany has sometimes been compared to Canada as an exponent of a certain kind of policy that, inter alia, features a

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[18] A. J. Miller, "The Functional Principle in Canada's External Relations," *International Journal* 35, 2 (Spring 1980): 309-28.

[19] R. A. MacKay, "The Canadian Doctrine of the Middle Powers," in *Towards a New World*, pp. 65-75.

[20] On those dilemmas in the specific instance of European defence "autonomy," see Steven Erlanger and Jeanna Smialek, see "Europe Mulls What Mutual Defense Looks Like Outside NATO," *New York Times*, 24 April 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/24/world/europe/europe-defense-nato-trump-eu.html?campaign_id=2&emc=edit_th_20260424&instance_id=174581&nl=today%27s-headlines&regi_id=62171838&segment_id=218780&user_id=23a0e0df85dc5b50fc649eea833dabd0.

preference for multilateralism and a desire to minimize if not eliminate altogether the role of military force,[21] the historical sense in which Germany has been regarded as a middle power is usually thought to be radically different from the Canadian understanding of the concept, with reason.

In the German case, middle power has conveyed nothing if not the insecurity and vulnerability that comes from being a country situated in the *middle* of Europe – hence a *Mittelmacht* in a decidedly geographic sense, surrounded by states few of whom could be assumed (at least until fairly recently) to be well-disposed toward it. To Germany, for far too long, the middle was anything but an irenic geopolitical locale; it was a territorial reality that shaped what one German analyst has called its "eternal predicament: too weak to hold its own, too strong to be left alone."[22] This, in turn, goes a long way toward explaining the preference of many German specialists in international relations to refer to the Federal Republic as a civilian power (*Zivilmacht*) rather than a middle power, notwithstanding that the Canadian conception of middle power as construed in this section does share so many of the attributes of the German conception of civilian power.[23]

You Say Linchpin, I Say Brücke

Josef Joffe's quote in the paragraph above gets us to our invocation of that second metaphor, the linchpin, and helps us understand why the prime minister and chancellor are not, despite appearances, Tweedledum and Tweedledee. As with middle power, there is similarly a clearly Canadian pedigree to the symbol of the linchpin. When it initially began to make the conceptual rounds toward the end of the nineteenth century and once more following the First World War, the linchpin was invested with a significant degree of interlinked *ethnic* and idealistic content. Regarding the latter, it

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[21] For a comparison between the two countries on this matter, see Jens Fey, *Multilateralismus als Strategie: Die Sicherheitspolitik Kanadas nach dem Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts* (Köln: SH Verlag, 2000).

[22] Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity," *International Security* 19 (Spring 1995): 94-117, quote at p. 108.

[23] Hanns W. Maull, "Deutschland als Zivilmacht," in *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), pp. 73-84.

was by its enthusiasts caught up in the vogue for a "universal peace"[24] said to be possible – and *only* possible – through a stitching together of the First British Empire. In short, the universal peace would be an "Anglo-Saxon" peace, or it would not be at all.[25]

Regarding the former, ethnicity, it never was all that easy, even in the heyday of Anglo-Saxonism, to figure out what exactly an Anglo-Saxon *was*. Given the central "prompts" conveyed through the very name (Anglo-Saxon) upon which German geography and demography bore such a clear impress, there was much to be commended in Mr. Dooley's own definitional contribution: "An Anglo-Saxon, Hinnissy, is a German that's forgot who was his parents."[26] But if the ethnic content of the linchpin metaphor soon encountered some logical drawbacks and began to be de-emphasized (though never totally eliminated), the same could not be said of its idealistic aspect. After the First World the linchpin emerged as a core idea of the new Canadian (at least, *English* Canadian) nationalism born of the wartime experience. Canada, many were arguing, could make a unique contribution to world peace by its ability to foment solidarity between the transatlantic's two greatest powers: the United States and the United Kingdom. Moreover, *only* Canada could play this role; to borrow a phrase made familiar by the Clinton administration in the closing years of the twentieth century, Canada had become in that century's opening years the world's "indispensable nation."[27]

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[24] See especially Duncan Bell, "Before the Democratic Peace: Racial Unionism, Empire, and the Abolition of War," *European Journal of International Relations* 20 (September 2014): 647-70.

[25] One particularly prominent enthusiast was the mining magnate, Cecil Rhodes, who lamented, "What an awful thought it is that if we had not lost America, or if even now we could arrange with the present members of the United States Assembly and our House of Commons, the peace of the world is secured for all eternity!" Quoted in *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes*, ed. W. T. Stead (London: Review of Reviews, 1902), p. 73. Expressive of the same sentiment, and longing for the day when the two countries could be reunited, was James Bryce, "The Essential Unity of Britain and America," *Atlantic Monthly* 82 (July 1898): 22-29.

[26] Finley Peter Dunne, *Mr. Dooley in Peace and War* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1898), p. 53.

[27] As explained by one prominent historian, the linchpin metaphor held out the promise of a powerful distinctiveness, one that "made Canadians proud, for it was the essence of their nationalism: it gave Canada a uniqueness that, at the same time, could serve all

The linchpin, to those who took it seriously, depended upon a cognate thought that in today's context of deep animosity toward the United States seems quaint, and nearly impossible to imagine could ever have been taken seriously: that there was a "North American Idea" pregnant with the potential to heal Europe if not the entire world.[28] This aspiration had been voiced during the war itself by James A. Macdonald, who in a series of lectures delivered to American audiences rang all the changes on the sources of North America's wonder-working properties. North America represented far more than a geographical construct: it was a "World Idea," expressing the self-determination of peoples everywhere. It was also a European idea in origin, such that Canada and the US had to be understood as representing "Europe's second chance," not so much for reasons of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity, but because "these two self-governing nations of North America are bound together [through a] community of dominant ideas," especially democracy and freedom. Happily, April 1917, when America finally joined the fighting, witnessed the assimilation of its vast power to Canadian purposes, a development Macdonald heralded (prematurely, it would turn out) as nothing less than the "world-enfranchisement" of the United States, by which he meant its liberation from the confines of isolationism.[29]

But it would not be until the interwar years that "linchpin mania"[30] hit its peak in English Canada. Its leading intellectual champion was the

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mankind." Ramsay Cook, *Canada, Quebec, and the Uses of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), pp. 187-88.

[28] On the rise and fall of this aspirational idea, see Norman Hillmer, "O. D. Skelton and the North American Mind," *International Journal* 60 (Winter 2004-2005): 93-110; Donald M. Page, "Canada as the Exponent of North American Idealism," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 3 (Autumn 1973): 30-46; Donald Barry, "The Politics of 'Exceptionalism': Canada and the United States as a Distinctive International Relationship," *Dalhousie Review* 60 (Spring 1980): 114-37; Robert Pastor, *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Greg Anderson, "What Was Once So Near, Is Now Very Far: The 'North American Idea' after 9/11," in *The Legacy of 9/11: Views from North America*, ed. Andrea Charron, Alexander Moens, and Stéphane Roussel (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), pp. 35-50.

[29] James A. Macdonald, *The North American Idea* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1917), pp. 60, 69-74.

[30] The term is Robert Bothwell's. See his "Has Canada Made a Difference? The Case of Canada and the United States," in *Making a Difference? Canadian Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, ed. John English and Norman Hillmer (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), pp. 8-9.

president of the University of Toronto, Sir Robert Falconer, who was convinced that Canada alone, among the world's states, possessed the singular ability to interpret Britons to Americans and vice versa. This role did not merely enhance its diplomatic prestige and influence (though it did do this); something far more important was at stake in the interpreter's mission. As he explained in 1926:

> Those interested in seeing an approximation of the English-speaking peoples profess with good reason that their purpose is to promote the well-being of the whole world.... We also who speak the English tongue and feed our spirits on its literature, faint though we were after the late War from deferred hope, pluck up our courage as we contemplate the steady improvement in the relations between the British and the American peoples. If ever a new order is to be ushered in, the day will surely begin with the creation of sympathy between them. For the hastening of such a day Canada in her history, her character and her position holds a unique privilege, and, if she takes advantage of it, the world of the future will judge that she will have played a part given to few nations in the progress of humanity.[31]

Given this brief historical survey, it can hardly be surprising that for Germans, the linchpin metaphor never really got off the ground, at least not under that name and certainly not during the phase of its existence when Anglo-Saxonism rather than democracy was heralded as its strongest bonding element. But a second's thought reveals that if what was being connoted by the linchpin was the ability to serve as an instrument for connecting important political entities, then the linchpin, albeit by other names, has been *the* core metaphor of German foreign and security ever since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949. Call it integration, call it *Westbindung*, or call it the *Atlantik Brücke*, it is all the same: the logic of the linchpin represented and still represents the summum bonum of the country's foreign and security policy. With their country's far less salubrious history than Canada's, Germans cannot afford to be as glib as Mark Carney was in his Davos address, when he not only pronounced the old rules-based

[31] Sir Robert Falconer, *The United States as a Neighbour, from a Canadian Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), pp. 250-51.

transatlantic order to be ruptured, but went further in dismissing it as having been a fairy tale in the first place.

In our penultimate section 5, we address how the linchpin role might come to facilitate (or complicate) the aims that Mark Carney identified at Davos, focusing our attention upon defence procurement. But before getting to this, we contextualize Canada's current European (and therefore German) policy by looking back at what happened the last time Ottawa turned its gaze eastward across the Atlantic in hopes of invoking the Old Continent in a bid to resolving problems with the United States.

Ottawa's Renewed Search for a "Third Option"

The "Third Option" in this section's subheading is a reference to an earlier attempt made by a Canadian government to invoke Germany/Europe as a "counterweight" in a bid to help it resolve problems with the United States. That attempt was made by the Liberal government headed by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, which in reaction to what was called the "Nixon Shock" of 15 August 1971, imposing a 10-percent surtax on nearly all imports into the US and allowing the dollar to float in response to a severe balance-of-payments crisis, fashioned a policy that sought to diversify Canadian trade, with a primary focus on doing more business with the European allies. Although the surtax would be lifted after four months, its psychological impact hit Canada – which had grown used to being exempted from recent American protectionist measures[32] – harder than other US commercial partners. Much like today, Canada back then sought to reduce the vulnerability associated with dependence upon an uncertain US market by diversifying away from it to an extent, through a policy that would come to be dubbed the "Third Option" (because there were two other options on offer, the first being the status quo and the second a deepening of trade and other economic links with the US).[33]

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[32] On the rise and demise of "exemptionalism," see Greg Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963-1968* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Stephen Clarkson, *Canada and the Reagan Challenge: Crisis and Adjustment, 1981-85* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1985).

[33] Stephen Azzi, *Reconcilable Differences: A History of Canada-US Relations* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 196-97; Mitchell Sharp, "Canada-U.S. Relations: Options for the Future," *International Perspectives*, special issue (Autumn 1972): 1-24; Pierre-Gerlier Forest, "À Propos de la 'troisième option' et de la politique américaine de

Prior to 1972, of course, there had been other Canadian attempts to tug at policy levers in a bid to enhance the country's commercial prospects, but those earlier ones had always centered upon a very small set of countries – namely the two other members of what John Bartlet Brebner so famously called the "North Atlantic Triangle," the United States and the United Kingdom.[34] But if this Brebnerian imagery of a triangle whose three points were Canada and its two large English-speaking partners might have sufficed, in the long period from Confederation in 1867 until the ending of the Second World War, to delimit the geographic bounds of Canadian foreign policymaking, things would change radically during the postwar period.

Starting in the late 1940s, the easternmost point of the North Atlantic triangle would shift from Great Britain to continental Europe, where it would become anchored upon one country: the Federal Republic of Germany. There was a clear geostrategic reason for this growing "Germano-centric" focus of Canada during the years of ideological struggle with the Soviet Union, for Germany was at one and the same time both the "stakes" of the East-West conflict and the theatre – the "Central Front" – on which it would be waged. Canada became one of the six NATO allies to station forces in the FRG during the Cold War, and by dint of that stationing presence Germany became ipso facto a "vital" national interest of Canada's.[35]

In later years, starting at the end of 1960s when it appeared to some as if regional détente with the Soviet Union might reduce if not eliminate altogether the need for Canadian military units to remain deployed in

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l'État canadien," *Études internationales* 13, 2 (1982): 305-21; Bruce Muirhead, "From Special Relationship to Third Option: Canada, the U.S., and the Nixon Shock," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 34, 3 (2004): 439-62; Garth Stevenson, "The Third Option," *International Journal* 33, 2 (Spring 1978): 424-31; and Harald Von Riekhoff, "The Third Option in Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Canada's Foreign Policy: Analysis and Trends*, ed. Brian W. Tomlin (Toronto: Methuen, 1978), pp. 87-109.

[34] John Bartlet Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966; orig. pub. Toronto and New Haven: Ryerson and Yale University Press, 1945).

[35] The other five were the US, the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. See Roy Rempel, "Canada's Troop Deployments in Germany: Twilight of a Forty-Year Presence?" in *Homeward Bound? Allied Forces in the New Germany*, ed. David G. Haglund and Olaf Mager (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 213-47.

Germany, it became fashionable for many in Canada to argue that as its presence there was "merely" symbolic from the military point of view, it might make more sense for Ottawa to consider de-deploying entirely from Germany, closing its pair of bases in Baden-Württemberg (Lahr and Baden-Söllingen [the latter now part of Rheinmünster]). Symbolic or not, the Canadian presence in Germany was something the latter country's government valued – usually much more highly than Canadians themselves valued it. And to the extent there is, today, a "special relationship" between the two countries (as we think there is), it owes its existence in no small measure to that four-decades' long military presence.

But in the early days of the Canadian commitment to Germany, "symbolic" could hardly have been the adjective of choice to apply to its military effort. That is because Canada did, with its 1950s' defence buildup that followed upon the formation of NATO, make a genuine difference providing military assets for the defence of Germany. Although in later years the image of Canada as the alliance's "odd man out" became a staple of discourse,[36] in the earliest stage of the Cold War Canada was extremely engaged in the defence of Western Europe. It is well known (at least in Canada) that Canadian diplomats were very much present at the creation of NATO. Less well remembered is the fact that Canadian military involvement was also considerable. As one of the very few countries to have emerged from the Second World War strengthened economically, and as for a time one of the world's ranking military powers,[37] Canada was seen to have an obligation to the defence of Western Europe that initially surpassed even that of the Europeans, for whom defending themselves and their immediate neighbourhood was about all one could ask in the alliance's first decade.

In the jargon of the interwar years, Canadians and, a fortiori, Americans were "producers" of security while Europeans were "consumers." Only this time, unlike during the interwar years, the North Americans knew

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[36] Joseph T. Jockel and Joel J. Sokolsky, *Canada and Collective Security: Odd Man Out* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

[37] According to R.J. Sutherland, Canada in 1945 was "very probably the fourth most powerful nation in the world." Sutherland, "Canada's Long Term Strategic Situation," *International Journal* 17 (Summer 1962): 199-233, quote at p. 203.

their duty. For Canada this meant, by the time the Cold War buildup set in motion by the Korean war had peaked, unprecedented peacetime defence budgets and a sustained military presence in Europe that had vast political and operational significance. By 1953 Canada was allocating more than 8 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to defence spending, a massive increase from 1.4 per cent in 1947. During the final year of the Korean war, Canada's defence/GDP ratio was fourth highest in NATO, and its defence budget of nearly $2 billion accounted for 45 per cent of all federal spending – far greater proportionately than today's defence outlays, which at $63 billion annually finally, in late March 2026, managed to hit the 2014 NATO "target" of 2 percent of GDP.[38]

All of this was a far cry from the closing years of the Cold War, when Canada typically was cited not for its military contribution to European defence but for its virtual absence from the "central front." What happened? At least three factors account for the change. The first and perhaps most important one was that it simply became too expensive for Canada to sustain a robust military contribution to European defence, especially when it also had to assume some responsibilities for the air defence of the North American continent in close partnership with the United States. Canada's location on the flight path of any Soviet bombers intent on attacking the American heartland for a time gave the country a special geostrategic significance and imposed unavoidable responsibilities, especially those associated with the maintenance of the deterrent credibility of the United States Strategic Air Command in an era before intercontinental ballistic missiles had rendered that challenge of declining relevance.[39] It was sometimes lost on Canada's European allies that within NATO only the United States had assumed security commitments whose geographic extent surpassed those of Canada.[40]

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[38] Steven Chase, "Canada Meets NATO's 2% Spending Goal after Lagging for Years," *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 2026, pp. A1, A6.

[39] Joseph Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs: Canada, the United States and the Origins of North American Air Defence, 1945-1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987); Melvin Conant, "Canada's Role in Western Defense," *Foreign Affairs* 40 (April 1962): 431-42.

[40] R.B. Byers, "Canadian Security and Defence: The Legacy and the Challenges," *Adelphi Paper* 214 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1986), p. 9; William T.R. Fox*, A Continent Apart: The United States and Canada in World Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985), pp. 122-23.

The second source of Canada's diminishing contribution to Western European security had more to do with policy perspectives than with budgetary outlays. Canadian visions of NATO at the time it was being formed demonstrated a conviction that the alliance had to be about much more than defence – a conviction borne out by Ottawa's dogged insistence on including in the Washington Treaty of 1949 an article calling upon the allies to constitute themselves into a community whose goals involved political and economic, and not just military, cooperation. As it turned out, Article 2 (the "Canadian article") remained very much a dead letter during the Cold War, and even the Canadian contribution to the alliance took nearly exclusive military form highly concentrated upon Germany.[41]

The third source of Canada's lessened commitment to the defence of Western Europe arose from the belief that the Europeans, as they recovered from the war, would be able to do more for their own defence, and therefore should do more. This conviction mingled with a related belief on the part of some Canadians (usually policy intellectuals on the left) that attention to Europe and its "needs" was depriving Canada of the ability to focus its limited resources on parts of the world where the case for assistance was even greater – and the entitlement apparently more justified. This perception of a "jaded" and "selfish" Western Europe arose at a time when, because of the Vietnam war, some Canadians were prepared to conclude that NATO was itself complicit in misplaced interventionism if not aggression.

This led to some demands – again, usually from the left – for Canada to withdraw from the alliance altogether.[42] Pro-neutrality sentiment never did make much of an inroad among the Canadian public. Nor could the one federal party that as a matter of principle advocated that Canada should leave NATO, the New Democrats, hardly be said to have benefited from the advocacy.[43] But if Canada did not "go neutral," with the advent of the

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[41] John English and Norman Hillmer, "Canada's Alliance," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire* 54 (1982): 31-52.

[42] Peter C. Dobell, "Europe: Canada's Last Chance?" *International Journal* 27 (Winter 1971-1972): 113-33, citing from pp. 114-15.

[43] For analyses of the pro-neutrality tendency in Canada during the latter Cold War years, see John D. Young, "The Contemporary Defense Debate in Canada," in *The U.S.-Canada*

Trudeau government in 1968 it certainly looked as if NATO would be receiving far less emphasis in the country's grand strategy. Trudeau promised as much in an important speech in Calgary in April 1969 when he asked whether it made any sense for NATO to continue to determine the country's defence policy and for defence policy to determine the country's foreign policy.[44] He kept that promise – or at least he did so until he was given a very useful "German lesson" – not a lesson in trying to comprehend the obvious complexities of the German language, but rather in understanding how defence and security obligations might contribute to the coherence of a Canadian grand strategy.

For one of the singularly puzzling aspects of the years in which "Third Optionism" was mooted as some sort of solution to Canada's "America problem," was the failure of Canadian policymakers to link one of the country's prime assets – its military presence in Germany – with its chief foreign policy desideratum, namely the lessening of its economic dependence upon the US. This latter was thought best accomplished through diversification of economic ties, especially by increasing trade with a European Community (as the EU was then known) whose leading member was Germany. As the latter, most assuredly, did *not* want to see any détente-engendered dreaming on Ottawa's part resulting in a reduction if not total elimination in the Canadian stationed presence, there emerged the clear outlines of a new strategic tutorial.

The chief lesson of the tutorial was delivered by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in the mid-1970s, when he and his Canadian counterpart, Prime Minister Trudeau, struck a deal that brought home the intimate relationship between defence policy, defence procurement, and commercial diversification. Although the two leaders had been well-aware of each other's existence for some years – Schmidt having been dismayed, when he was defence minister, by Trudeau's 1969 defence policy review with its distressing (to Germany) overtones of a deemphasis upon the Canadian commitment to NATO – the two leaders did not meet until Trudeau's state

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Security Relationship: The Politics, Strategy, and Technology of Defense, ed. David G. Haglund and Joel J. Sokolsky (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 65-91; and Douglas L. Bland, "Canadian Neutrality: Its Military Consequences," in ibid., pp. 93-111.

[44] "Address by Prime Minister Trudeau to the Alberta Liberal Association," Calgary, *Statements and Speeches 69/80* (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 12 April 1969).

visit to Germany in March 1975. The pair hit it off well, such that over the course of the following years a restoration of good bilateral relations managed to erase the bad taste left in German mouths by the 1969 defence policy review. One author has drawn an explicit linkage between defence commitments and trade diversification desires, in relating how the "purchase of the German Leopard I tank in May 1976 was evidence of Canada's decision to re-emphasize the importance of NATO within its defence priorities, while the achievement of a contractual trade link with the EC symbolized Germany's support for Canada's trade strategy towards Europe."[45]

The Chancellor had been a good teacher, and the prime minister an apt student. But the lesson could not last too long, due less to any flaws in its intrinsic rationale and more to sweeping changes in both world politics and Canada-US relations. By the end of the 1980s it was apparent that the Cold War was ending and that so too would the allied stationing regime in Germany be drawing to a close. In North America as well, change was afoot, as Canada jettisoned the Third Option in favour of a Second Option that presupposed closer commercial integration with the United States to be in the country's national interest. Still, it is undeniable that while it lasted, the Third Option could only be made to work if what Canada wanted, more trade with Germany and thus the EC, could correspond with what Germany wanted, an ongoing Canadian commitment to its defence fortified by a willingness to make a similar commitment to procuring German military equipment.

Can we imagine that Canada's current diversification initiatives, assuming they continue during the post-Trump era (and yes, Donald Trump will *not* be president forever), can be pursued without any comparable "strategic" connection between those initiatives and Canadian defence procurement decisions? This question we address in the section 5, below, as well as in our conclusion.

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[45] Roy Rempel, *Counterweights: The Failure of Canada's German and European Policy, 1955-1995* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp 86-87.

Will the Subs Sink the "Third Option 2.0"?

History may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes, as Mark Twain so memorably suggested. One may therefore be tempted to consider the upcoming Canadian procurement decisions on the twelve submarines for the Royal Canadian Navy[46] and new fighter jets for the Royal Canadian Air Force[47] as a rekindled version of Canada's foreign policy under Pierre Trudeau – in short, a Third Option 2.0. So to consider would be problematical, for three reasons.

First, it would echo the strategic mistake of Trudeau's policy, which presupposed that reducing Canada's *trade* dependence on – and thus vulnerability to – the US market was simply a question of pivoting to one other region, in this case to Europe. Second, strategic culture, as Éric Tremblay and Bill Bentley have reminded us, is shaped by geography, history, and governance.[48] And, as we have been arguing in these pages, Canada's defence identity as a transatlantic country matters.[49] Third, defence procurement is first and foremost a question of *national security*, therefore it can and does carry the risk of unintended consequences if it is coupled to a narrower logic of *economic* benefits.

The trade relationship with the United States is currently so lopsided that Ottawa would have to rebalance its economic posture by trading with as many countries as possible in order to reduce meaningfully its

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[46] Hanwha Ocean of South Korea and ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) of Germany (and Norway) are the two bidders.

[47] The aircraft decision is two-fold since it includes procurement of current military aircraft (the American F-35 vs. the Swedish SAAB Gripen) and the development of a sixth-generation manned fighter, the American F-47 (Next Generation Air Dominance [NGAD]) vs. the Italian-British-Japanese Global Combat Air Program (GCAP).

[48] Éric Tremblay and Bill Bentley, "Canada's Strategic Culture: Grand Strategy and the Utility of Force," *Canadian Military Journal* 15 (Summer 2015): 5-17, citing from p. 6.

[49] Following the Obama administration's 'pivot to Asia' (what is nowadays often referred to as the Indo-Pacific), there were debates about a stronger Canadian military presence in the region. With the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) adopted in 2022, there has been a modest but regular Canadian Navy presence, but there is no question that the main focus of Canada's security policy remains Europe and the North Atlantic/Arctic; see David Dewitt, Mary Young, Alex Brouse, and Jinelle Piereder, "AWOL: Canada's Defence Policy and Presence in the Asia Pacific," *International Journal* 73 (2018), 5-32; and Vina Nadjibulla, "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy at Three: Presence, Partnerships, and the Next Turn," Asia-Pacific Foundation, 29 September 2025.

dependence on its southern neighbour; focusing on Europe alone can hardly be enough to do the trick. The signing of numerous trade deals – most notably the one with China in January 2026 that will increase Canadian agricultural exports and allow for the import of 49,000 Chinese EVs at the most-favoured-nation tariff rate of 6.1 percent – has underlined the importance the Carney government attributes to trade diversification. And with regard to Canada's recalibrating trade and reducing its dependence on the US market, Germany could, to a certain extent, even be seen as a model for it. Over the last ten years, China and the US have both ranked number one in terms of Germany's most important trading partners (assuming one does not treat the EU as a single bloc).[50] Compared with Canada's, Germany's trade is significantly more diversified – with each of its two-largest trading partners accounting for less than 15 percent of its overall trade (albeit reflecting decades-long patterns such as a consistent trade surplus with the US and a trade deficit with China, to say nothing of the need for significant energy imports to sustain the German economic model). As Table 1 illustrates, such a balancing, if it is not downright unrealistic in Canada's case, would certainly need a lot of time to be effected. What is at least clear is that increased trade with one region will not suffice to produce meaningful change for Canada, if what it seeks to do is reduce the vulnerability associated with its high dependence on the US market.

[50] See the press releases of the German Statistical Agency (*Statistisches Bundesamt*). In 2024, the US was Germany's most important trading partner but lost that position to China the following year.

Table 1: Top Five Trading Partners of Canada[51] and Germany[52] 2025 (excluding services):

Canada (2025)	**#1**	**#2**	**#3**	**#4**	**#5**
Imports (share in %)	USA 58,8%	China 8.1%	Mexico 4.3%	Germany 2.5%	Japan 2.0%
Exports (share in %)	USA 71.7%	UK 6.4%	China 4.5%	Japan 1.9%	Netherlands 1.2%

Germany (2025)	**#1**	**#2**	**#3**	**#4**	**#5**
Imports (share in %)	PRC 12.5%	Netherlands 7.1%	USA 6.9%	Poland 5.9%	Italy 5.3%
Exports (share in %)	USA 9.4%	France 7.5%	Netherlands 7.2%	Poland 6.4%	Italy 5.3%

In the context of the pending submarine-procurement decision, it has to be noted that Germany and South Korea rank sixth and seventh, respectively, as a destination for Canadian goods; this means that irrespective of which company will soon emerge as the successful bidder, the submarines cannot on their own be expected to make much of a dent on the country's vulnerability problem in respect of the US market, if the latter is taken to reflect both imports and exports. The procurement decision should therefore be dissociated from Mark Carney's stated goal of seeking to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) from non-American sources. Instead, it must be the assessment of *operational* requirements within the broader military-strategic context that guides procurement decision making, even if not exclusively so.

[51] Figures are from Statistics Canada (2026) available at https://international.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/corporate/reports/chief-economist/quarterly/spring-2026 and https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2020001-eng.htm.

[52] Figures are from Statistisches Bundesamt (2026) available at https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/Tables/order-rank-germany-trading-partners.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=74.

This is where strategic culture enters the equation. Justin Massie has identified continental soft-band wagoning, defensive internationalism, and soft-balancing Atlanticism as the three chief components of Canada's strategic culture. Massie defines them as follows:

> Canada's continentalist strategic culture has traditionally consisted of a minimal contribution to continental defence and security, supplying greater efforts when pressured by Washington to do more. This allows Canada to play a marginal, yet not insignificant, role in continental defence and ensures the recognition of Canadian sovereignty. … There are two contending perspectives on Canadian (liberal) internationalism. The first emphasizes the country's self-ascribed (and self-elevated) middle-power status; the second places importance on its postmodern national character. These two self-understandings can be subsumed into a single strategic culture, for they rest on distinct, yet compatible, state identities…. [Soft-balancing Atlanticism] is characterized by values that seek to maintain transatlantic solidarity (hence avoiding Anglo-American unilateralism), reinforce NATO structures, and posture Canada as a relevant and distinct ally (to avoid political marginalization) within the alliance. [53]

If Canada seeks to preserve its linchpin role in the coming decades, something we take for granted as any calls for a rupture in this domain would verge on the suicidal, it will seem to follow that its strategic-cultural focus upon on the Euro-Atlantic region must continue to guide its strategic thinking. On one hand, Ottawa will have to walk a fine line of not alienating Washington by continuing to engage in close cooperation within NORAD for the enhancement of North American continental security. On the other hand, it will presumably want to strengthen ties with its European NATO allies to exercise control over its high North and the Arctic region. In short, it will want to remain faithful to the "soft-balancing Atlanticism" element of

[53] Justin Massie, "Making Sense of Canada's 'Irrational' International Security Policy: A Tale of Three Strategic Cultures," *International Journal* 64, 3 (2009): 625-45, citing from pp. 627, 633, 636, and 641.

its strategic culture that has served to inform strategy.[54]

This form of Atlanticism in Canadian grand strategy, should it be maintained, dovetails nicely with Germany's own strategic posture, which will have it re-calibrating its own linchpin role by finally heeding the call for shouldering more responsibilities within the Alliance. This endeavour will be particularly delicate for Berlin as Germany remains, for the time being, Washington's de facto bridgehead in Europe with approximately 50,000 service members based in places such as Ramstein Air Base or Grafenwöhr, as well as being the home to America's EUCOM and AFRICOM.[55] Irrespective of whether a reduced American presence in Germany and Europe will emerge in coming years, the strategic calculus for Germany and Canada should remain unchanged: preservation of strong ties between North America and Europe remains a sine qua non of rational policymaking.

With a size of approximately 67,000 regular forces and a reserve of some 23,000, the Canadian Forces contribute a significant share of their troops to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States. In comparison, the Bundeswehr comprises 185,000 personnel and a reserve of 70,000 (the legal, and nominal, reserve of 800,000 consists of former conscripts and is a somewhat theoretical force). As the framework nation of NATO Multinational Brigade Latvia (MNB-LVA), Canada will have more than 2,200 military personnel permanently deployed in Europe starting this year (if one includes the Navy contingent of Operation Reassurance the figure swells to 3,000). As of February 2026, NATO's Multinational Battlegroup in Lithuania has been fully incorporated into the command structure of the German 45th Armored Brigade *Litauen* comprising approximately 5,000 personnel. The renewed Canadian commitment to Europe's continental defence – after Canada's withdrawal from Germany in the early 1990s – is a powerful reminder of how deeply entrenched the linchpin role remains in Ottawa's strategic culture.

Besides the considerable (army) footprint in the Baltic states, recent developments in the Arctic and North Atlantic demonstrate that Canada's

[54] The row over Greenland in early 2026 demonstrated that Canada, Germany, and their *European* NATO allies will have to cooperate and invest heavily to counter Russian and Chinese presence in the Arctic. At the same time, they must increase the political costs of potential unilateral action by Washington.

[55] Respectively its European Command and Africa Command.

soft-balancing role in NATO (which in an earlier era used to be stylized as its "counterweight" role) continues to be shaped by genuine security interests. While defending the sovereignty of the Baltic states against any incursions from the Russian side might not be considered in Ottawa's more narrow definition of the national interest, the protection of its own sovereignty in the high North and the North Atlantic certainly is.
This has recently been reflected in the 2025 maritime security partnership for the North Atlantic between Canada, Germany, Norway, and Denmark to protect freedom of navigation and critical infrastructure (primarily communication cables and pipelines).[56] In addition, in response to tensions over Greenland and continuous demands by Washington to counter the Russian and Chinese presence in Arctic waters, the four countries have become key contributors to NATO's *Arctic Sentry* mission, including air policing and military exercises such as "Cold Response."

The submarine question, therefore, quite clearly raises the question of whether and how to link procurement decisions – driven as these so often are by cross-cutting pressures of an economic and regional nature – with broader security policy aims, of the sort that we have in this paper been referring to as "grand strategy." To put the matter bluntly: if you collaborate with your closest and most trusted partners to protect your country, why would your decision to buy the necessary equipment be determined by considerations (e.g., regional and industrial benefits) that are related to other goals? This is the situation in which Ottawa now finds itself. Germany and Norway have both placed orders for the 212CD which – not least because of demands from Oslo – will enable its use in Arctic waters. Since the three countries will operate their fleet under NATO command, questions of interoperability will hence be relevant from a military point of view. Using identical equipment sends a powerful signal of alliance cohesion, as well as facilitating joint training and enhancing deterrence credibility.

Such important defence-related procurement decisions as the new submarines (or fighter jets) must be evaluated within a wider military and strategic context. They should not be linked to the (otherwise laudable) attempt of diversifying the economic structure of Canada. Recent changes

[56] See the latest press release by the German MoD at 2026-04-14 Different Kind of Linchpin.docx.

in procurement such as the establishment of the Defence Investment Agency (DIA) and attempts to tie the offsets of the upcoming procurement decisions to wider economic considerations such as Korean or German investments in EV battery technology and the automotive sector cannot easily be reconciled with the aim of diversification in a strategic sense – at least not in the way in which we have been arguing, as one presupposing transatlantic soft-balancing to remain as the most coherent policy objective.

General William Tecumseh Sherman, of American Civil War renown, once famously remarked that "war is hell." So, too, is the competition for defence contracts a very diabolical business, one in which military/operational objectives can and do clash with economic and regional considerations, sometimes to the point of being made secondary to the pursuit of those economic and regional aims. This is nothing new, in Canada as elsewhere.[57] Recent Canadian press coverage suggests that in the battle for defence contracts, the old "Shermanesque" pattern will recur, with strategic considerations being relegated to a subordinate position in decision making.[58] This, as we argue immediately below, would be unfortunate.

[57] For the long-standing nature of the problem in the Canadian context, see David G. Haglund and S. Neil MacFarlane, eds., *Security, Strategy and the Global Economics of Defence Production* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press/Queen's University School of Policy Studies, 1999).

[58] Daniel Leblanc and Daniel Thibeault, "Industry Minister Pushing F-35 Maker for Economic Benefits in Canada," CBC, 15 October 2025, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/joly-f-35-program-economy-9.6938213; Murray Brewster "Deadline day: $20B Submarine Showdown Puts Korean and German Bids in Spotlight", CBC, 2 March 2026, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/submarines-canada-korea-germany-jobs-9.7108627; Steven Chase, "Canada Wants Submarine Bidders to Sweeten their Offer", *Globe and Mail*, 17 April 2026, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-wants-submarine-bidders-to-sweeten-their-offers/?login=true.

CONCLUSION

We began this paper by claiming that, despite obvious differences in geographic location – geography, after all, *is* in some way destiny – Canada's and Germany's strategic cultures do share important commonalities. More than this: we have also remarked that there has been a very "special relationship" between the two countries for several decades. Underpinning this relationship has been the similarity in the two countries' role-ascriptions, manifested in the dual symbolism of the "middle power" and the "linchpin."

The linchpin underscores a German and Canadian self-understanding of foreign policy that, by default, has been geared towards band wagoning with the United States while carving out niches (as middle powers) allowing them to play a more independent role and forge multilateral partnerships. This latter aspect has become more pressing with an American administration that is increasingly acting unilaterally and, frankly, erratically. As we indicated earlier in these pages, the reaction to this new reality has been more lugubriously voiced by the Canadian prime minister than by the German chancellor, with Mark Carney dramatically branding the new "reality" (if that is what it is) as one of definite rupture. We think that such a characterization is problematical, for reasons relating both to its timing and its tone. While Canada and Germany have begun to overhaul their foreign and defence policies, both will have to continue working with their American counterparts. This means a sober evaluation of the areas in which Berlin and Ottawa are dependent on the United States as well as the adoption, for both countries, of a strategy seeking to decrease the vulnerability that inevitably accompanies excessive dependence. As well, it warns against the danger of assuming that current transatlantic perturbations must be future ones, as well.

After all, we are short months away from a midterm election in the United States that, if current opinion polling is to be credited, will strip the Trump administration of the "unified" government that it has enjoyed since 20 January 2025, when the president was inaugurated for the second time. Much can change, of course, in respect of those polls showing President Trump, and thus his party, to be decidedly out of favour with the American

public. No one – and certainly not a pair of academics – should be allowed to get away with claiming to be in possession of definite knowledge about the great unknown, which of course is what the future happens to be, notwithstanding the strange preference of so many to speak of the "foreseeable future." But the stricture applies not just to academics; it also embraces others, not excluding prime ministers, tempted to engage in the always aleatory business of punditry.

But we *can* say that Germany has a greater stake – you might even call it an "existential" one – in the future of transatlantic relations than does Canada. This is simply a matter of geography. For Canada, focusing upon the transatlantic as its region of paramount national interest can always be presented as but one option among several. In the recent past, following the ending of the Cold War, there did in fact take place in Canada a lively geopolitical jamboree in which contestants vied among themselves to develop and shill for rationales elevating their own preferred region to the status of "lodestar" for the country's foreign and security policy – its grand strategy, if you will. The three leading contenders for lodestar status at that time were: 1) the Asia-Pacific, 2) the North American continent, and 3) the transatlantic arena.[59] For the moment, at least, the impact of Donald Trump on Canadian grand strategy has been to re-emphasize the centrality of that third contender, such that while this president may not have made America great again, he certainly seems to have made Canada "European" once more.

Whether Canada can remain so focused upon the Old Continent will depend, inter alia, upon Germany's playing the kind of linchpin role that Canada once imagined *it* enjoyed at the height of "linchpin mania," when as we saw above many in the country imagined only Canada had the potential to effect a lasting bond between the US and the UK. But it will also entail a Canadian commitment to linking its defence-procurement decision making more closely with its stated grand-strategic preferences.

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[59] For this post-Cold War round of contestation, see David G. Haglund, "Grand Strategy – or Merely a Geopolitical Free-for-All? Regionalism, Internationalism, and Defence Policy at the End of 'Canada's Century'," in *A Big League Player? Canada Among Nations 1999*, ed. Fen Osler Hampson, Michael Hart, and Martin Rudner (Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada, 1999), pp. 175-96.

And here we return to the critical difference, as outlined in this paper, between the Carney and Merz scripts, respectively delivered at Davos and Munich. If the prime minister's regionally non-specific but functionally *über*-specific call for middle-power solidarity is to guide Canadian strategic choice, then there should be no a priori reason for choosing a German/Norwegian submarine over a South Korean one. After all, a middle power is a middle power no matter where it lives, irrespective of its political orientation or even whether it happens to be an ally. And since the middle power category is an expansible one, it can be made to seem eminently sensible for Canada to do as it has done on many occasions in the past, and lard defence-procurement decisions with a basket of desiderata apart from those related to operational capability and compatibility with an overall strategic framework. What counts in this formulation, reflective as it seems to be of the prime minister's Davos address, is the cooperating country's *relative capability*, not its mailing address or alliance membership.

We, however, happen to think the mailing address and the membership are important. Thus, if Canada is to continue to elevate trans Atlanticism and its value structure over the simple concentration on relative capability hinted at in the prime minister's Davos address, it will matter a great deal that the Atlantik Brücke be buttressed. One way to assure this solidity, at a moment when for both Canada and Germany diversification as a vulnerability-reducing strategy has rarely made so much sense, is to coordinate more closely on defence procurement.

Joint procurement and a reduction not only in the use of US military equipment but also kit coming from elsewhere than NATO countries would seem to be a logical first step to take. We will soon know, perhaps by this summer at the latest, whether the step has been taken.

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