



2021 Foreign Policy Report Card

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2021 REPORT CARD



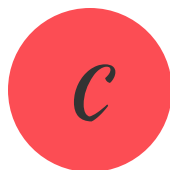
OVERALL GRADE



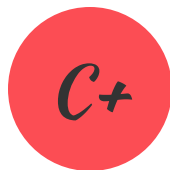
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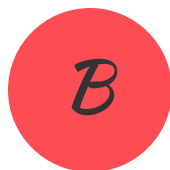
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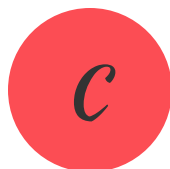
SECURITY



TRADE



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE



DEVELOPMENT



IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES

PAST REPORT CARDS

	2017	2018	2019
FINAL GRADES	<i>B-</i>	<i>B-</i>	<i>C+</i>
DIPLOMACY	<i>B-</i>	<i>B/B-</i>	<i>C-</i>
DEFENCE	<i>C</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C+</i>
SECURITY	<i>B+</i>	<i>B-</i>	<i>B</i>
TRADE	<i>B+</i>	<i>B-</i>	<i>C+</i>
ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE	<i>B-</i>	<i>B+</i>	<i>B-</i>
DEVELOPMENT	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>B-</i>
IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES	<i>B+</i>	<i>A-</i>	<i>B-</i>

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The grades assigned for the Report Card serve as an assessment of the Trudeau government's foreign policy performance. While the grade is largely based on the two years since the last Report Card, there will certainly be a degree of overlap with previous Report Cards.

We have provided letter grades for the following areas: Diplomacy, Defence, Security, Trade, Environment and Climate Change, Development, and Immigration and Refugees.

Each category is weighted equally to generate the final grade, which serves as an average of our seven categories. In assigning grades for each section, three factors were considered, with their respective weighting in brackets:

Rhetoric vs. Reality (30%): By identifying key promises made during the 2019 campaign, outlined in ministerial mandate letters, the grading process evaluates the degree to which the government has made progress on these commitments.

Overall Performance (60%): The grade reflects an evaluation from our policy experts on the effectiveness of the government's policies, actions and commitments in each area.

Openness, Transparency, and Accountability (10%): The Trudeau government campaigned heavily—both in 2015 and 2019—on distinguishing itself from the previous government in this regard. The grade assigned considers the degree to which the government's actions have reflected this rhetoric.

The objective of the Report Card is to engage the public in the discussion of Canadian foreign policy. This year's overall grade of 'C' is the lowest on record, driven in large part by the two 'D+' grades in Diplomacy and Defence. We will leave it to our readers to discuss whether or not this evaluation is justified.



INTRODUCTION

With an unsteady minority government in hand, the Liberals find themselves with the immense and important challenge of bringing Canada's economy back on track, while also striving to secure a functional international order. Liberal rhetoric alone has proved insufficient to reclaim Canada's position as a middle power with influence and pride of place. This year's Report Card has downgraded Diplomacy for the simple reason that this government has failed to provide any strategic guidance on foreign policy since 2015.

Defence has been equally disappointing: scandals of financial and personal excess abound, ineffective deployments dominate our agenda abroad, and we continue to delay the development of a strong, self-aware strategic vision. Transparency is lacking and defence procurement is a mess, underscoring just how fragile Canadian defence is internally *and* externally.

The pandemic introduced novel security challenges for the government, with countless Canadians moving their work, and lives, online. Despite some successes (dodging hacks and side-stepping election interference in 2019), old problems persisted. Foreign interference remains a problem and issues in our own agencies are numerous as well, not to mention the endless debate around Huawei, the near-obsolete North Warning System, and a lack of urgency in addressing the potential risks of new technologies like 6G and the Internet of Things.

With implementation underway for three major trade deals, trade was not set to dominate the Liberals' agenda; a polarized U.S. election, rising tensions with China and the economic devastation of COVID-19 presented major challenges for Ottawa. In the face of increasing protectionism and threatened global supply chains, the Trudeau government settled for a reactive trade strategy.

The Liberals' 2019 election platform promised to take sincere action to combat climate change, a promise that was backed by ambitious initiatives. While some initiatives, such as the ban on single-use plastics, are underway, many are impeded by a fixation on short-term interests. The Report Card demonstrates how reconciling a commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 and jump-starting Canada's economic growth has proven to be a difficult endeavour.

While making some important progress on development, the government does not differ much, in terms of "generosity," from the Harper Conservatives. Operational issues and domestic considerations also remain barriers to developing a truly impactful development policy. Vaccine nationalism, and "Canada First" thinking, are not problems *per se*; they are merely startling because they expose Trudeau as being liberal-internationalist only when it suits him.

The global spread of COVID-19 led to the reinforcement of borders around the world, and the Canada-U.S. border was no exception. This move, compounded by moral and legal questions surrounding the Safe Third Country Agreement, stood in contradiction to the Liberals' rhetoric positioning Canada as a country eager to welcome asylum seekers. Furthermore, the pandemic exposed the inequalities in Canada's immigration system, exacerbated backlogs at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), but also prompted the announcement of higher immigration targets.



DIPLMACY

D+

After six years of struggling with the question, Canada's international agenda under the Liberal government remains undefined. Growing tensions between China and the United States expose Canadian economic and security vulnerabilities, limiting opportunities for autonomous foreign policy decision-making. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge traditional approaches to foreign policy making.

The established liberal international order and its associated institutions remain in a state of flux despite President Donald Trump's departure from the Oval Office. The U.S. will continue to work to preserve America's slipping advantage by whatever means necessary.

Clearly, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau came to power on the basis of re-invigorating an institutional order that may no longer exist. It is unlikely that President Joe Biden's "alliance of values" will ever be a reasonable alternative. Nostalgia and domestic politics are no substitute for effective statecraft driven by a national agenda. The Liberals have not positioned Canada's place in the world through diplomatic means.

With an unsteady minority government in hand, the Liberals find themselves with the immense and important challenge of bringing Canada's economy back on track, while also striving to secure a functional international order. Liberal rhetoric alone has proved insufficient to reclaim Canada's position as a middle power with influence and pride of place. This year's Report Card has downgraded Diplomacy for the simple reason that this government has failed to provide any strategic guidance on foreign policy since 2015.

Initially the Liberals relied on branding to keep voters onside, but since winning only a minority in 2019, the government's silence has been deafening. What we are seeing is a government that has been reluctant to disclose a strategic course other than bold pronouncements that vilify China with respect to the country's treatment of Uyghurs or the arbitrary detentions of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.

Despite comprehensive defence and aid policy reviews, the Liberals have not seen the need to conduct a parallel foreign policy review to recalibrate Canada's national interests in an increasingly complex world. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland mostly played on the diplomatic fringes while in her role, devoting most of her energies to

finalizing the Canada-EU trade deal and renegotiating NAFTA. Freeland should have put more effort into lobbying for a seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), reengaging Africa, finding focus on the Middle East, and countering China's increasing influence in Asia (as documented in our past Report Cards). Unfortunately, her office failed to make any of those projects a legitimate priority, leaving them instead to her successor.

"Coercive—if not leveraged—diplomacy is a part of American statecraft that Canada seems to have forgotten."

That successor, François-Philippe Champagne, made only indirect remarks at the onset of the pandemic about reengaging Canada globally, and has been replaced by Marc Garneau.

While there may be more instances in which Canada will fall back on claims that it can and will reinvigorate international institutions, other nations are charting an independent course, looking to work constructively with both China and the U.S.

Canada's strategy appears to be rooted in building a "Fortress North America." Indeed, the Liberal government under Trudeau has brought Canada even closer to the U.S., even after an unpredictable Trump administration, a Biden administration committed to an "America First" agenda, and a thickened border that remains closed to all but commercial traffic.

Finance Minister Freeland has suggested as much, emphasizing the need for more localized and regional supply chains which would essentially delink Canada from China. The problem for Freeland, and Canadians more broadly, is that the country has very little tier one manufacturing, rendering it highly dependent on other countries' supply chains. Reducing the number of supply chains by itself cannot overcome a gutted domestic manufacturing sector, low productivity, and diminished economic competitiveness. If anything, regional supply chains will not only bring Canada closer to integration with the U.S., they will also increase our dependence on America – and all the riskiness that entails.

Coercive—if not leveraged—diplomacy is a part of American statecraft that Canada seems to have forgotten. As we discovered

under Trump, shared institutions have a propensity to be leveraged by the larger, more capable power. Nowhere was this more evident than in the initial shortage of PPE and now, vaccines. At one point, for example, despite a free trade agreement (FTA), Canada found itself denied access to crucial PPE when the Trump administration prevented exports of face masks across the border. These specific problems have still not been properly addressed as we enter the second year of the pandemic.

More worrisome was the inability of the Liberal government to project sufficiently ahead, failing to establish a manufacturing base for vaccines in Canada, and failing to ensure a majority of Canadians would be vaccinated by the middle of 2021. Just recently, Trudeau was told by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India that Canada was not among those prioritized for its vaccine shipments.

One diplomatic lesson for Canada's foreign policy makers is that they need to pay much more attention to what is happening in Asia. Unfortunately, if there is interest in working with India, Japan, or Taiwan, for example, it is because those countries are a means to confront China. The intrinsic worth of these partnerships is measured in terms

of their utility, a strategy that is far from sufficient to ensure Canada's economic prosperity.

CANADA ON THE MARGINS

Canada's foreign policy makers need to think hard about what it means to survive in a changed world order. That challenge begins with a sober assessment of what the world thinks of Canada. Consider the unfortunate demise of Canada's standing at the United Nations (UN) as a reasonable proxy: Foreign Minister Freeland rarely spoke at the UN and never visited Africa, whose countries carry enormous clout in UN voting.

True, Canada scores well on several indices that measure our quality of life and as a place to live, but there is a growing perception that Canada is more of a marginal player in the world than it is a provider. This is a perception that has hampered Trudeau since he came to power.

Indeed, there was a very active campaign to prevent Canada from securing a seat on the UNSC, driven partly by a large challenge that focused on Canada's Latin American and Middle Eastern policies. The main criticisms came from organizations and media that supported Palestinian statehood, and those that questioned Canada's shaky record on the environment.

Greta Thunberg was among those who called out the Liberals, specifically on their underwhelming environmental record. (It was Thunberg who endorsed Justin Trudeau in his 2015 election bid.)

Thus, if Canadians want to know how Canada's "brand" stands up globally, they are encouraged to read *Al Jazeera*, or consider that both India and China, as well as a host of ostensibly sympathetic developing and European countries, rallied against our campaign for a seat.

These challenges forced the Liberals to launch a last-minute effort to rescue the doomed bid. Canada's Permanent Representative to the UN had to convince member countries that efforts to weaken Canada's bid were based on a portrait of Canada that was inconsistent with what the Liberals claimed they were doing and what Canada stood for. That did not work.

Even those who do not put much stock in the UN, or consider a UNSC seat pointless, must consider this failure as an indicator of diminished standing, regardless of what branding (Liberal or Conservative) is in place. Look beyond the brand and what do Canadians see?

A POST-TRUMP WORLD

Such is the state of Canadian diplomacy that the Liberals pinned their hopes on the arrival of President Biden to solve Canada's problems. Undoubtedly, the departure of President Trump will usher in a revamped foreign policy perspective from Washington. But will that perspective be focused on positive re-engagement with global allies, an emphasis on reinvigorating international institutions, and strengthened support for a rules-based system? Or will it merely be more "America First"?

In an unsurprising move, the Biden administration has proposed "an alliance of values" under U.S. leadership to address global challenges. The Americans' success in Cold War leadership was rooted in compelling democratic values and support for human rights. But today, the ideologies of the Cold War—and the brief unipolar moment that followed it—are no longer top of mind for many of America's allies, let alone much of the world.

The problem for Canada is that its sovereignty is both strengthened and weakened by being closely tied to the U.S. Canada is hemmed in by the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement's (CUSMA) non-market trade clause and is also dependent on the U.S. to negotiate for the release of the Two Michaels.

Consider, for example, the arrest of Meng Wanzhou on charges related to fraud. These charges precede the renewal of sanctions on Iran, imposed by the Trump administration in 2018 and to which Canada was not a party.

Although limited in scope, the Europeans have implemented their own workaround to U.S. sanctions on Iran, labelled the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX). These alternatives should signal to President Biden, who claims he wants to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), that he will need to work with allies, not sanction and punish them for falling out of line.

For Canada, which seems less inclined to follow the European path, there is a second set of challenges. In February 2020, the U.S. announced more charges against Meng and Huawei, this time for allegedly stealing trade secrets and intellectual property. If proven guilty, Meng could face up to 10 years in prison.

On Meng, former Justice Minister Allan Rock recommends that Canada get creative, describing the government's insistence on the rule of law as "formulaic, robotic incantations." But what matters more are the implications of Canadian acquiescence in the face of a

growing tendency in American foreign policy to find “principle” in what, ultimately, can be construed as pure power politics. This is not a question of whether Meng should be freed of all charges; it is a question of why, in the first place, Canada’s security establishment accommodated America’s request when other countries declined that option.

America’s disturbing tendency towards defining coercive diplomacy and sanctions against other states as “national emergencies,” such as the sanctions on Iran which triggered Meng’s arrest, has significant implications for Canada. Notwithstanding the soft power intimations inherent in Biden’s agenda, the president and his team are still very much focused on an “America First” doctrine as reflected through these controversial policies, which many regard as weaponized forms of extraterritoriality.

The reality is that U.S. diplomacy cannot thrive in an environment where the threat to do harm to allies constantly looms in the background. While countries like Canada may be considered safely on the U.S. side because of its deep dependence on U.S. trade, arms sales, and defence, it is not clear if other countries are as secure. Many middle powers are increasingly self-confident and refuse to

tie themselves to any single great power. The U.S.’s self-interested reliance on the direct imposition of extraterritoriality could eventually backfire if Biden is not careful.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

The likelihood of Canada finding a similarly self-interested and constructive path hinges, to a large extent, on how the Biden presidency engages China. Arguably, little of China’s behaviour towards Canada can be explained without first understanding the relationship we have with the U.S.

If a multilateral, diplomatic approach is taken, Biden’s China agenda could fall into Canada’s self-professed “value-driven” expertise, such as human rights advocacy and democracy promotion. On the one hand, Canada may end up having more of a hardline—and very vocal—policy on China to satisfy both American and domestic interests. On the other hand, should the Liberals say ‘no’ to Huawei and support Meng’s deportation, Canada’s ability to engage China constructively will be diminished significantly. Not only will our influence with China take a hit, we will very likely depend almost entirely on the U.S. to resolve our sticky diplomatic relations with Beijing.

The Liberals must bear some of the blame for this current state of affairs. As a minority government, they are, of course, sensitive to the possibility that they could be forced from office at any time. It need not have unfolded this way had we a media and an opposition party who were more critical and less opportunistic in their unconcealed support for anti-China sentiments.

"Canada stands on the outside looking in."

For all its claims to being the party of and for the people, the Conservatives are more than content to rely on an agenda that is announced to Canadians on high from elite bureaucracies such as the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and Department of Defence (DND) without much substantiation or evidence.

More importantly, few of the elites (and those bureaucracies that they represent) are giving balanced advice on how to engage China, preferring delinking and containment instead. This is not only

narrowly constructed advice, it is often issued in the absence of proper public debate. When debate does occur in the House of Commons or in Special Committees, the ideology and the pandering plainly shine through. When Conservative leader Erin O'Toole's party is not focused on the plight of the Uyghurs—their favourite sharp stick with which to poke China—they demand that Canada withdraw from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), forgetting that each time they ratchet up the rhetoric to win points at home, they undermine Canada's ability to access growing markets that will improve our economic well-being.

In response, Liberal Foreign Ministers from Freeland to Champagne, and now Garneau, have spoken of a principled approach on China. That is certainly true. China's influence is growing along with its economy. In November 2020, 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Stalwart U.S. allies, such as South Korea, Japan and Australia, joined with China in pursuit of free trade, and when the agreement comes into force, it will be the largest trade agreement in history. The signing barely made front page news in Canada, even when it showed a path forward.

Japan is demonstrating that it not only has interests it will act on, it will also engage China in a negotiated trade agreement that recognizes the importance of norms and values, including regulation of investment, respect for intellectual property, and institution building. These are ideas and values that Canada has historically staked a claim to, and they are all apart of effective diplomacy.

Meanwhile, Canada stands on the outside looking in.

DEFENCE

D+

The Canadian defence establishment is in the throes of an identity crisis. Scandals of financial and personal excess abound, priorities are scattered, and new challenges from abroad do not fit neatly into the intentions and ambitions laid out in *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE). As one of our experts put it, it has been an exceedingly underwhelming performance, marked by “a lack of seriousness, a lack of geostrategic vision, and an unfortunate propensity to play political games with defence procurement,” made even worse by the disruptive fiscal effects of the pandemic on federal finances.

The ‘D+’ grade for Defence is one of the lowest grades on the Report Card. This is the case not only because we have weighed the botched, increasingly expensive Canadian Surface Combatant (CSC) procurement more heavily than other defence developments, but also due to the general lack of transparency within the Canadian defence establishment, in addition to ineffective deployments abroad.

The recent scandals implicating not one, but two, Chiefs of the Defence Staff is indicative of the larger identity crisis in Canadian defence. To do better, the government must follow through with its commitment to transparency, reform, and modernization of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

SEA CHANGE?

In February 2019, after years of drama and delay, the government chose to procure 15 BAE Type 26-styled warships, replacing the country's *Halifax*-class frigates, which are set to be rotated out of action between 2034 and 2048. At the time of the procurement announcement, it was billed as exciting news not only for Canada, but for our allies around the world, who expect us to help patrol the seas, enforce sanctions, and deter conflict away from our shores.

Construction on the 15 CSCs is slated to begin in the early-to-mid 2020s, with an optimistic initial delivery date planned for 2031. But that is if all goes according to plan, which looks less likely as time goes on. For one, no official contract has actually been inked for the ships. And according to one Canadian defence expert, there are “rumblings that the project is facing significant delays,” which could spell a minor disaster for taxpayers. If the project is delayed only two years, for example, it could add an additional \$5 billion in costs, according to Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) estimates.

What is more, PBO Yves Giroux reported in late February 2021 that the project will likely cost \$77 billion, substantially more than the DND's estimate of \$60 billion.

Lifetime costs of the project, which do not seem to be apart of the mainstream debate on the topic, will total hundreds of billions of dollars.

Confusion over cost is not the only issue dogging this process; transparency has also taken a hit. The last official “project update” was on February 8, 2019, more than two years ago, and the federal departments involved have been largely opaque. In 2019, for instance, PSPC forbade industry officials “interested in bidding on CSC from talking to journalists about the project,” requiring them instead to forward all inquiries to PSPC. As the *Ottawa Citizen* reported, “that was the fifth such gag order on military equipment projects issued by government over a year-long period.”

This issue is part of a much larger problem. Defence Procurement Canada, a Liberal campaign pledge and proposed agency that would “ensure that Canada's biggest and most complex defence procurement projects are delivered on time and with greater transparency to Parliament,” remains nowhere to be seen. And in keeping with this trend, the government has delayed the annual update to the related Defence Investment Plan, blaming its procrastination on the COVID-19 pandemic. For his part, Giroux, while

talking with media, said that he had no qualms with the DND or Minister Harjit Sajjan when it came to transparency, even praising the department for providing the PBO with “surprisingly detailed” information with regards to the costing of the CSCs. However, one of our experts told a different story, noting that the current government may have committed to transparency but, in reality, little has changed from the Harper years.

“The bottom line is that Canada needs these ships, or at least suitable alternatives.”

The DND said in SSE that the “ongoing need for transparency” remains a “critical aspect of how the department showcases its implementation efforts.” But transparency should not just be reserved for the PBO. Taxpayers are funding the project, after all, and the government should humour them, allowing media to ask—and have answered, or explained—whatever questions are posed. In this respect, the government would do well to publish its Annual Update every year and provide more consistent updates on this remarkably costly procurement.

The bottom line is that Canada needs these ships, or at least suitable alternatives. The PBO sketched out other possibilities for Canada, including a blended fleet of Type 26s and Type 31s (an older, less dynamic ship, but a tested and less costly one), or a fleet of 15 FREMMs, a ship serving the French and Italian navies. The DND has fought both options, declaring that “selecting a new design at this stage in the project would lead to significant economic loss for Canada's marine industry and those employed in it.”

Never has an election been lost on the back of a bungled defence procurement, but the Trudeau government—most of all, the departments responsible for this project—have clearly lost the trust of the cohort of voters who care about Canadian defence procurement or, more broadly, their tax dollars going to good use. It will take salvaging this project, though increased transparency, realistic timelines, or cost-cutting measures, to gain it back.

Ottawa is moving quickly on certain minor aspects of the project. In November 2020, Canada got the U.S. State Department’s ‘okay’ to procure 100 SM-2 Block IIIC missiles to outfit the CSCs from Raytheon—along with 100 corresponding vertical launch systems—

for a total cost of roughly \$650 million.

Thankfully, there is only muted drama over the government's decision to build two resupply vessels rather than converting and purchasing two older vessels. The PBO, in an unavoidably delayed analysis, concluded that the government could have saved nearly \$3 billion by simply purchasing MV *Asterix* and MV *Obelix*. But the DND said in response that the new joint support ships have "capabilities the modified civilian ships do not, such a mine avoidance system and defences against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents." The true usefulness of mine avoidance for a joint supply ship, that will rarely, if ever, see open conflict, remains unclear, but the purchase does emphasize the government's supposed commitment to the revitalization of the Navy-at-large.

Another important milestone was the delivery in July 2020 of HMCS *Harry DeWolf*, the first in a class of six Arctic and offshore patrol ships (AOPS). Three more AOPs are under construction, with HMCS *Margaret Brooke* in the final phase (set to be delivered in summer 2021) and the other two scheduled to begin construction over the next two years. If this project can stay on budget and deliver on time, it will be a success for the government (even if they inherited much

of the current plan from the Harper Conservatives). Past projects and even minor hiccups on this project offer only modest hope that this will be the case, but the delivery of *Harry DeWolf* is a reminder of Canada's shipbuilding potential and capability.

FIGHTER JET TIMELINE STILL UP IN THE AIR

The wheels of the RCAF are turning, but they are turning slowly. In July 2020, the government revealed the three companies bidding to build the new, much-anticipated fleet of Canadian fighter jets. Eighty-eight planes are set to be constructed with two American entrants, Lockheed Martin and Boeing, and one Swedish entrant, Saab, vying for the lucrative \$19 billion contract. Terms are expected to be finalized with the winner in 2022.

This is a monumental chapter in Canadian defence. Keeping (even upgraded) CF-18s in the sky is not a respectable course of action for a modern, middle power like Canada. The government is, rightly, modifying our CF-18s so that they can hang on a bit longer and assist allies in places like Romania. At a cost of \$1.5 billion, as estimated by Brig.-Gen. Todd Balfe, the project is justified.

The government also replaced a less sensitive, expensive part of our fleet, announcing in June 2020 the purchase of two Challenger Model 650 utility aircrafts, which will replace the old Model 601s. This \$105 million purchase, says the government, will allow the CAF to continue “mission critical roles,” among a host of other minor roles.

ALL QUIET ON THE EASTERN FRONT

Since entering Latvia, the 540 Canadian troops stationed in the country have been subject only to one-off disinformation campaigns—likely stemming from Moscow—rather than open combat, in addition to a handful of COVID-19 cases in the ranks. The mission remains a key part of Canada’s NATO involvement, however, and even drew praise from the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg. But it is not just allies urging us on in eastern Europe; a February 2020 poll by Pew Research Center found that 66% of Canadians had a favourable view of NATO, and 56% expressed support for honouring our Article 5 obligations should Russia invade one of its neighbours, one of the highest proportions reported among member states.

The likelihood of Russian expansion into Latvia, or another Baltic state, has never been the main reason for the mission in the Baltics. President Putin has little

incentive to invade another country—lest his country be bludgeoned by even more sanctions—and has enough issues at home to keep him occupied. Canada’s deployment to Latvia is more about solidarity with NATO than preventing an invasion, despite the government’s claims to the contrary. Demonizing Russia might play well with allies and voters, but Trudeau would do well to move away from this brand of unhelpful rhetoric and focus his statements regarding the deployment on Canada’s legitimate interest in bolstering NATO solidarity.

The CAF has also been active south of Riga. Our minimized presence in Ukraine through Operation UNIFIER, consisting of around 150 troops, will last until March 2022, pending any further renewals. Again, the presence of Canadian troops does not significantly improve Ukrainian security, but it does boost support for the Liberal Party among the vast Ukrainian-Canadian diaspora and play into the Canadian public’s widespread support for low-risk military intervention abroad. Of course, for Canada to have trained around 20,000 Ukrainian troops is useful, but any genuine resolution to the Ukraine-Russia conflict will come not from deterrence, but from diplomatic overtures and negotiation, a process unlikely to be brokered by Canada

thanks to its deliberately (and persistently) chilly dynamic with Russia.

One-hundred and thirty-five Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) personnel and six of our CF-18 Hornet fighter jets were in Romania until December 2020, helping to “secure the skies.” Conflict in this arena has been rare and Canada has been involved openly to a minimal extent, raising the question of the true usefulness of our presence there. On September 23, 2020, for example, the government cheered when two Canadian Hornets intercepted a Russian SU-27 Flanker flying in international airspace near Romania. At the time, according to Radio Canada International, Russia was in the middle of a major five-day military exercise, which extended into the Black Sea region and included around 80,000 military members, pilots among them. When such events are put into context, a clearer picture of Russia’s actions (planned and legal, not provocative and out-of-the-blue) can be formed, allowing for a more accurate understanding of the “tension,” or lack thereof, in the region.

MALI: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED – OR ABANDONED?

There has been significantly more controversy over Canada’s role in Mali. If Canada’s objective was to bring calm and stability to the country, we came up short. Roughly one year after we all but left Mali,

the country was plunged back into chaos thanks to a coup d’état, unravelling years of work and billions of dollars in foreign aid.

The optics for Canada are not ideal. Our ally France has called on us to re-enter Mali in a significant way, even floating the idea of Canadian military assistance. A former Canadian ambassador to Mali also urged Canada to become “more present” in Mali, possibly by sitting in on peace and reconciliation talks. One French official suggested in November 2020 that talks between Canada and France regarding further assistance may already be in progress, but it remains to be seen. Canada is not totally indifferent to, or insignificant in, Mali. The government is providing police trainers and \$1 million in funding to a peacekeeping school in Bamako. (We have also contributed more than \$1.6 billion in foreign aid to Mali since 2000.) But the government struggles to justify our limited, up-in-the-air presence there, shying away from major involvement despite requests from our allies and the clear need for stability in the region.

BUILDING LINKS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

HMCS *Winnipeg*, meanwhile, has played a minor role in enforcing UNSC sanctions against North Korea under

Operation NEON, the third time the CAF has deployed personnel to the mission since 2019. *Winnipeg* also had a cameo for Operation PROJECTION during the latter part of 2020.

PROJECTION saw *Winnipeg* join forces with allies U.S., Japan, and Australia, strengthening our ties in that realm. Doubtless, maintaining links with our partners in the Asia-Pacific, especially South Korea, is important, and “emerging” economies such as Indonesia and Vietnam will hopefully see our modest involvement in the region as a sign of good intentions. A genuine Asia-Pacific strategy, not simply a “China strategy” superimposed onto the rest of the region, would be useful in conveying to Canadians what our objectives are in this area, as it is oft-neglected by politicians who focus on the real or imagined threats emanating from Beijing.

OUR UNCERTAIN FUTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The curtain has closed on Canada’s lead in NATO Mission Iraq, and we are in the final stages of Operation IMPACT, Canada’s broader strategy of involvement in the Middle East. Canada’s role in Iraq was largely focused on training domestic security forces, in a bid to rid the country and the surrounding areas of Daesh. The year 2020 did not get off to a peaceful start, however, with Canadians stationed

at a military base in Erbil, Iraq coming under fire from Iranian missiles, thanks to the U.S.’s assassination of Iranian major general Qaesem Soleimani, among other high-ranking officials. Trudeau told media that he was not warned by the U.S. in advance of the assassination, implicitly shifting the blame for the ensuing missile strike, and the endangered Canadians, toward President Trump.

Despite the lack of notice, Trudeau condemned the Iranian missile attack, telling the Iranian president that he had “put the lives of Canadians at risk.” An undisclosed number of Canadians were relocated to Kuwait from Iraq after this spectacle, and the mission was put on hold for a short period while Canadian troops regrouped.

"In the grand scheme of things, Canada has made a difference, albeit a minor one."

The CAF were active in the area prior to the attack, teaching Iraqi security forces how to clear roads of IEDs and, separately, mentoring an all-female infantry platoon from Jordan. Some

CAF personnel on capacity-building operations have remained in Lebanon and Jordan, and according to the government, have “continued to perform activities that can safely be conducted while respecting both host nation and Canadian forces protection measures.” It is unclear if the Joint Task Force 2, a highly-specialized and highly-competent arm of the CAF, is present in the Middle East, or Mali, for that matter, as a request for such information by the researchers went unanswered by the DND.

Despite the secrecy shrouding that aspect of the CAF, the closing numbers for Op. IMPACT are impressive on the surface; as of October 2020, Canada has been responsible for 4,452 sorties, the movement of 14.6 million lbs of cargo, and the transportation of 8,488 passengers within the Joint Operation Area.

In the grand scheme of things, Canada has made a difference, albeit a minor one. The risks to Canadians—compared to missions in Latvia and Ukraine—were high and the work done, especially the training of locals, was important. But it remains to be seen if there is sufficient political will to deepen and extend our involvement in this arena, underlining the government’s broader superficiality on overseas deployments. Deciding on when, and how, to involve the CAF abroad

should not (in a perfect world) be based on whether it plays well domestically, but rather on how crucially we are needed in a specific area. The Middle East is one such region which would, with the blessing of host nations, benefit from continued, specialized support. If the government seeks to set an example for other middle powers, it would do well to consider this.

NUTS, BOLTS, AND COLT CANADA

Thanks to the flashy, big-ticket procurements promoted by the RCAF and RCN, the Army seems, at least a little, like the neglected third brother of the family. The Army has made strides to modernize, however; in January 2020, it was announced that they would receive around 3,600 new C6A1 FLEX General Purpose Machine Guns for roughly \$100 million. This is a welcome, if not subtle, upgrade, and shows the government cares about the smaller, nuts-and-bolts elements of the military. The government also spent \$8.5 million to provide Canadian sniper teams with 272 new semi-automatic C-20 rifles (along with spare parts), costing roughly \$25,000 per weapon. In a win for the government but not for taxpayers (who had to pay a premium for made-in-Canada snipers), the contract was

given to Colt Canada, who was expected to finish distributing the C-20s by early 2021.

'SLIGHTLY DELINQUENT' NO MORE?

Canada's real GDP declined 5.4% in 2020, a humbler decrease than was forecasted by, for example, NATO, which predicted a more alarming 8% decrease.

This is good news for the government: our military spending as a percentage of GDP was 1.29% in 2019, and it will end up being higher for 2020, at around 1.3% to 1.4%, depending on one's definition of military expenditures. (This small victory comes after significant underspending in the fiscal years 2017-'18 and 2018-'19, in which the DND left \$2.29 billion and \$2.11 billion unspent, respectively.)

The significance of this relative increase in defence spending will be diluted thanks to the departure of President Trump, who publicly criticized Canada for being "slightly delinquent" when it came to defence spending. Biden has not yet applied the same pressure on defence spending, opting instead to focus on, for example, climate change, trade, and defending against COVID-19.

SECURITY

C

There has been a healthy mix of success, scandal, and failure in the Security file. The pandemic forced countless Canadians online, introducing massive challenges for the government and the private sector more broadly. But run-of-the-mill challenges did not disappear. Foreign states continue to conduct interference on Canadian soil, the North Warning System (NWS) wallows in disregard, CSIS reels from a scandal, and the government continues to stall on Huawei.

There have been bright lights: Canada seems to have dodged the devastating SolarWinds hack and, according to government officials, there was no significant foreign interference in the 2019 federal election.

But there are key problems that remain unsolved, according to our experts. These problems include securing cyberspace in the broadest possible sense as well as threats from several emerging technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, quantum, 5G and 6G, and the Internet of Things). Some parts of government have examined the implications of such technologies—including the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), DND, the National Research Council (NRC), and Public Safety Canada (PSC)—but there remains a lack of urgency within the government-at-large.



Photo Credit: Private Jessica Blackburn - CAF

THE DRAGON IN THE ROOM

Despite being offered ample time and input from Five Eyes allies and its own security agencies, Canada continues to delay a meaningful decision on Huawei's role in the country's 5G rollout. The Liberals' procrastination—more than two years in the making—underscores not only their deference to the U.S. in developing national security policy, but a clear lack of boldness on one of the country's most pressing security files. But this is what happens when China is involved: a domestic security decision of limited interest morphs into one of the defining hot button issues of the day. What is clear now is that Canada cannot rely exclusively on Five Eyes allies, especially the U.S., and merely “borrow” an opinion on Huawei. The U.K., for example, initially ruled that telecom providers could use up to 35% of Huawei equipment in their networks (just so long as the network was not sensitive), but reversed course in July 2020 after pressure from the Trump administration.

Now, even after acknowledging the economic costs and resulting delay in its network rollout, the U.K. is seeking to rid itself of all Huawei 5G equipment by 2027. Australia, another Five Eyes ally, has also agreed to go along with the U.S. recommendations, while New Zealand, uncommitted at the time of writing, has

Been tilting toward a shut-out since 2018. The U.S., even under a supposedly “kinder” President Biden, will still be peering over our shoulder, waiting impatiently for us to fall into line. And that is just the problem. More trust must be placed in our security agencies, specifically the CSE, which reportedly concluded in 2019 that it could keep Huawei in check through “robust testing and monitoring,” according to one media report. (CSIS reportedly disagrees.)

What the Liberals seem to have done by dilly-dallying is spook the three main Canadian telecom providers—Bell, Rogers, and Telus—into submission, sending out signals here and there to suggest government directives, but avoiding a fatal final judgement. To circumvent risk and keep their networks afloat, all three companies have moved away from Huawei. In November 2020, it was reported that Telus was banking that the government would ban Huawei and was moving to sign contracts with Ericsson, Nokia, and Samsung. Bell and Rogers have also said that they will go with Sweden's Ericsson for any further 5G rollout, with the former pledging only to use Huawei if it is formally approved by the federal government. The unavoidable truth is that any federal directive on Huawei will be influenced

more by all-time low opinions of China among Canadian voters (only 14% of Canadians now hold a “favourable” view of China, according to Angus Reid, down from 48% in 2017) than any rational, forward-looking security assessment. Erin O’Toole’s daily barrage of rhetoric aimed at the “Chinese Communist regime” does not inspire constructive debate on the topic either, and only acts to demonize officials who promote a more level-headed approach to dealing with China and Huawei. Strategic ambiguity on Huawei has, so far, prevented any blowback from Beijing. But the time for a decision will come eventually and when making that decision, the government would do well to publicly lay out its rationale, incorporate security assessments, and draw on its own agencies for evidence, instead of bowing to opportunistic MPs or allied leaders with interests of their own.

CYBER SECURITY

In its most recent National Cyber Threat Assessment, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security explicitly labelled China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia as “posing the greatest strategic threats to Canada,” thanks to these states’ alleged willingness to harass and disrupt online. These states sponsor initiatives of varying efficacy and consequence, usually in a bid to bring down detractors.

Mobilizing Twitter trolls is the most notorious example, but other schemes, like the probing of domestic electricity networks or mining for COVID-19 vaccine data, feature in the report as well. It is no wonder that Minister Sajjan called cyber security “one of the most serious economic and national security challenges we face.” CSIS director David Vigneault echoed Sajjan in his agency’s annual report, saying that cyber-espionage, cyber-sabotage, cyber-foreign-influence, and cyberterrorism “pose significant threats to Canada’s national security, its interests, as well as its economic stability.”

"With greater incentive for hackers comes greater risk for Canadians."

However, it remains to be seen whether Canadian businesses are prepared for such cyber attacks, and whether the government can properly deter state-sponsored hacking. For example, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) recorded nearly 700 data breaches impacting 28 million Canadians from November 1, 2018 to November 1, 2019.

And as the report notes, the “global market for cyber products and services is projected to grow from approximately \$204 billion in 2018 to \$334 billion in 2023.” With greater incentive for hackers comes greater risk for Canadians. The passing of Bill C-59, *The National Security Act*, in June 2019, though overdue, is a step in the right direction. Allowing CSE to conduct active cyber operations—with the ‘okay’ from the appropriate minister—modernizes Canada’s defence and security operations, makes us more of an asset to allies, and will hopefully increase the safety of Canadian citizens and businesses. What is more, in addition to making inroads in defensive and offensive cybersecurity, CSE has continued to build better partnerships across government, public, and industry stakeholders in the past year.

Additionally, the lack of foreign interference in the 2019 federal election is an encouraging sign for Canadians, signalling that both the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force did its job, but also that the rhetoric leading up to the election—with CSE asserting that it was “very likely” that there would be some degree of interference—was an over-reaction. Minister Freeland herself said before the election that interference was “very likely,” but a five-person panel of high-ranking civil servants who were tasked

with keeping an eye on foreign interference “did not observe any activities that met the threshold for public announcement or affected Canada’s ability to have a free and fair election,” a Privy Council Office (PCO) spokesperson told media.

The invisibility of the latter narrative—the true lack of foreign interference—speaks volumes about how the federal government is operating, and underscores how off-base our intelligence analyses were on foreign interference. It is useful to be vigilant on foreign interference, of course, but preemptively insinuating Russian interference, for example, does nothing to mend ties with that country, and emphasizes Canada’s lack of self-awareness. Canada is a Five Eyes country, a NATO member, a middle power—but Canada is not the U.S., and our election anxiety, and rhetoric, more importantly, should not match that of the U.S.

One further blemish on CSE’s record comes in the form of a redacted National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA) report, released in February 2021, that detailed the agency’s privacy shortcomings. For instance, the report found that the mitigation, documentation, and reporting of privacy incidents involving CSE did not live up

to the transparency and accountability objectives enshrined in agency policy, and that workers were not adequately preventing “systemic” privacy breaches from occurring in the future. CSE needs to take these criticisms to heart and remedy them before any private error, or (more unlikely) a foreign attack, shines a larger light on the agency’s shortcomings.

CSIS: OUT OF THE SHADOWS AND INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

CSIS has had a rough year. During the summer of 2020, a Federal Court Justice publicly rebuked the agency and ruled that CSIS’s counter-terrorism payment strategy was “very likely unlawful.” (The Trudeau government has challenged this ruling in court.) The Court also bashed CSIS director David Vigneault, asserting that he approved at least 10 “potentially illegal activities” over a two-year period. A commissioned third-party review of CSIS’s duty of candour (written by Morris Rosenberg and obtained, in redacted form, by the researchers) uncovered a litany of inefficiencies within the agency. Rosenberg found “an uneven understanding” of the meaning of the duty of candour among CSIS employees and wrote that, within CSIS, warrants are seen as an “essential investigatory tool,” but that the work supporting the warrant acquisition process is regarded as “burdensome and has not been valued in the culture of the Service.”

Trust gaps are said to exist between CSIS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the role of the Federal Court is not appreciated or understood by CSIS employees, according to the report. CSIS responded to the Court’s concerns and the Rosenberg review by trying to increase awareness of employee obligations under the *National Security Act, 2017*, establishing a dedicated task force to implement key Rosenberg recommendations, and developed a joint framework with PSC to “increase transparency.”

"Debate on the introduction of a Canadian foreign intelligence service is welcome—though politically fraught—but CSIS needs to stay out of the headlines."

It is unsurprising that the Court found Vigneault to have approved “potentially illegal” activities; as Vigneault said himself, the way Canada interacts with

human sources is representative of routine “bread and butter” practices used in many intelligence services. What is more damning is the contempt for convention and candour that Rosenberg spells out in his review; as a former assistant director of CSIS wrote following the Federal Court ruling: “CSIS is experiencing an identity crisis. It is a security intelligence service that wants to be a foreign intelligence agency.” Debate on the introduction of a Canadian foreign intelligence service is welcome—though politically fraught—but CSIS needs to stay out of the headlines.

CSIS is not alone in its corner of controversy; the RCMP continues to writhe as the Cameron Ortis trial runs its course, casting doubt on the efficacy and secureness of that agency as well. It is important to note that none of the charges against Ortis have been proven in court. But if they are determined to be legitimate, it would be a major blow to Canada’s reputation on the world stage and possibly one of the worst cases of espionage in the country’s history. If Ortis did truly know “about every major national security investigation at home and abroad,” as one expert has surmised, the RCMP would not only jeopardize themselves—and the safety of Canadians—but our allies as well. What makes this scandal even more tormenting is that,

according to an unproven statement of claim filed by a group of people who worked with Ortis, senior RCMP officials allegedly ignored repeated warnings about him before his arrest.

REBUKING FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

The annual report from the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) identified China and Russia as the principal perpetrators of foreign interference in Canada and offered only modest hope that Canada could respond to the “threats” posed by each country. The report asserted that the extent of Russia’s foreign interference threat was “significant” and constituted only one element of the country’s broader strategy. It also alleged that some of Russia’s intelligence officers have engaged in “threat-related activities” under diplomatic cover.

This is troubling but unexpected. Russia is a suspicious regional power, one who has been grappling with creeping NATO and EU advancements since the end of the Cold War. Canada, under both Harper and Trudeau, has exacerbated that paranoia through its rigid approach to Russia, designed not to ensure peace or build links between the two countries, but to play to supportive,

vote-rich diasporas at home. Canada must continue to monitor Russian disinformation and intimidation campaigns as well as condemning the country for its human rights abuses. But the Liberals and Conservatives alike must also be careful not to use foreign policy merely as a way to gain votes at home.

The NSICOP report names and shames China and Russia repeatedly but offers up a sobering conclusion regarding Canada's ability to counteract these "threats," asserting that government responses in the past have been far from spectacular, acting only on specific instances of foreign interference and "leaving unaddressed the many other areas where Canadian institutions and fundamental rights and freedoms continue to be undermined by hostile states." Even grimmer, the government's engagement with the provinces and municipalities has been "inconsistent and uninformative."

A related issue is the safety and security of the Chinese diaspora in Canada. An Amnesty International report from March 2020 concluded that responses from Canadian authorities have been "piecemeal and largely ineffective" in counteracting the intimidation faced by some human rights defenders in Canada. In November 2020, then-Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne

said that the federal government was going to implement new measures to crack down on China's interference campaign. At the time, Champagne said that foreign interference was taken "very, very seriously," and that the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness would be introducing measures very soon. But nothing has come from the desk of Minister Bill Blair, giving the impression that the government is unwilling to confront China or, at the very least, caught off guard. The Liberals need to talk more with more vulnerable subnational governments and communicate better with the Canadian public and the media.

The government has done a much better job, however, of ensuring the security of Canadians in Hong Kong and strengthening bilateral ties in general. After Cong Peiwu, China's ambassador to Canada, commented on the conditional safety of 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong, not only did Champagne label his comments "inappropriate and disturbing," but Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendicino promptly unveiled a new immigration plan targeted at Canadian citizens in Hong Kong and young Hong Kong residents. Canadian citizens and permanent residents can return at any time to

Canada and any documents they require will be expedited, according to Mendicino. Canadians' family members in Hong Kong can also travel to Canada under current travel exemptions and application fees are being waived for Hong Kong residents in Canada who want to extend their stay. More incentives were also introduced for recent graduates wanting to come to—and stay in—Canada. The framework is an indispensable one, but more effort should be put into attracting international students from Hong Kong, and elsewhere in Asia, to come to Canadian universities, who are financially reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic (and rely heavily on international student tuition).

EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM PROSECUTIONS

The best estimates suggest that there are around 190 foreign fighters with connections to Canada scattered across North Africa and the Middle East. CSIS's Vigneault wrote in his agency's annual report that the threat posed by those "who have travelled for nefarious purposes and who then return to Canada continues to be a priority for CSIS." The latest data suggest at least 60 fighters have returned to Canada, but Vigneault maintains that CSIS and the government-at-large are "well-organized as a community to manage the threat posed by returning fighters." Merely monitoring

these liabilities is not enough. Canada needs to immediately establish a Director of Terrorism Prosecutions, as was outlined in the 2019 mandate letter to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. The country is "getting a failing grade" in terrorism prosecutions according to one University of Ottawa expert; trials take much too long to begin, sentences are lenient, and charges are thrown out worryingly often. This is not, exclusively, a fault of the current government—but they have owned it as such. As far back as 2010 (following the investigation of the 1985 Air India bombing), there were proposals for special guidelines for terrorism prosecutions.

A COLD SHOULDER TO THE ARCTIC

Years ago, SSE lamented the state of the NWS: "While the current NWS is approaching the end of its life expectancy from a technological and functional perspective, [...] the range of potential threats to the continent, such as that posed by adversarial cruise missiles and ballistic missiles, has become more complex and increasingly difficult to detect." The NWS has only deteriorated further since then, classified by one commentator as "hopelessly out of date."

Despite all of this, little meaningful work has been done to the NWS. Indeed, should the Biden administration pursue a modernization of the NWS, it is possible that the Canadian government would not be willing, or able, to pay for its share in the project.

"Investments in the NWS would show our Arctic neighbours that we are serious about security in the region."

A modernization of the system would have a significant price tag—estimated to cost Canada anywhere from \$2.4 billion to \$5.2 billion—and nothing around the NWS was costed in SSE. As Minister Sajjan's director of communications told one newspaper, "The Minister of National Defence is committed to working with our American partners to modernize NORAD. But as nothing has been agreed to, there are no publicly available cost estimates." The government's focus seems to be elsewhere.

In September 2019, the Liberals announced their long-awaited Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. After

extensive consultations, the government developed eight goals and 10 principles to underpin the policy, with some more relevant to foreign policy than others. The framework is a step in the right direction but, as two Canadian Arctic experts put it, the plan "fails to provide a clear road map for action."

For one, the government wants to ensure that "the Canadian Arctic and North and its people are safe, secure and well-defended," and that "the rules-based international order in the Arctic responds effectively to new challenges and opportunities." Investments in the NWS would accomplish both objectives, among others, and show our Arctic neighbours that we are serious about security in the region.



TRADE

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The Trudeau government has concluded the three major trade deals inherited from the Harper government: Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and CUSMA. The Liberals frequently speak of how Canada is the only G7 country to have free trade agreements with all other members of the G7. The major task in Trudeau's trade file last year was to smoothly implement these trade agreements. The Liberals acknowledge, however, that they must also ensure Canadian businesses take advantage of the opportunities of these trading relations, a task that became admittedly more difficult with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade was not set to dominate the government's foreign policy agenda with no major objectives outlined for 2020. Navigating a tumultuous international trade environment—in which global supply chains were threatened and protectionism flared up—has resulted in moments of innovation by the Trudeau government, but missteps and inaction as well.

NEW NAFTA, NEW PRESIDENT, SAME OLD PROBLEMS

Despite increasing trade with China and a decline in trade with the U.S., the latter remains Canada's largest trading partner. Reliance on the U.S. for trade renders the Canadian economy sensitive to relations between Ottawa and Washington. U.S.-Canada trade relations suffered under the Trump administration, with NAFTA renegotiations dominating the agenda in 2020, as well as the steel and aluminum tariffs imposed on Canadian exports to the U.S.

In negotiating CUSMA, Canada was not looking to make gains, but rather, to avoid any major losses. While the Trudeau government labelled the NAFTA renegotiations a success, the trade deal is not forecasted to deliver any boost to the Canadian economy. In fact, a study from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) found only a negligible impact on Canada's real GDP. Global Affairs Canada (GAC), for one, has emphasized the costs that would have been felt if a trade agreement with the U.S. and Mexico had been abandoned altogether. For GAC, it was NAFTA or bust.

The stakes seemed to be just as high during the American presidential election. For Canadian trade it was also "Biden or Bust," as one headline read. Having a president in office that views Canada as

an ally rather than a headache improves our trading relations with the U.S. With trade so dependent on the U.S., it is unsurprising that the behaviour in Washington is the major source of instability. Thankfully, Biden provides a degree of predictability for trade going into 2021 and beyond; the president recently provided, for example, a massive US\$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package that will jolt the U.S. economy and subsequently aid Canada's economic recovery.

But the change in presidency does not provide a solution to all of Canada's U.S. trade qualms. Firstly, a new president will not bring an end to old trade wars persisting under the new NAFTA. Secondly, American foreign policy will continue to be dominated by the strategic need to counter China's increasing power. Canada will need to decide if it will adhere to the U.S.-led approach to trade while remaining in the crossfire of U.S.-China tensions.

With the CUSMA deal successfully closed, the Canadian government could direct its attention to implementation. As implementation got underway, familiar trade disputes reemerged. In December 2020, the U.S. challenged Canada's regulation of dairy imports under CUSMA's state-to-state dispute

settlement provision. Canada's dairy industry has suffered losses in all of Canada's recent major trade deals; dairy farmers received compensation for the impacts of both CETA and CPTPP on their industry and are still waiting for the compensation that they were promised two years ago for CUSMA. After the conclusion of each deal, Canada's dairy industry has lobbied for import permits which grant control over deciding which foreign dairy products will enter the Canadian market. The government's provision of duty-free imports to Canadian dairy processors was deemed inequitable by the U.S. The Biden administration will not ease up on this issue and, as such, clashes surrounding dairy imports will persist into 2021. Tom Vilsack, the U.S. agriculture secretary, is the former president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council and, with that in mind, Canada should prepare for extensive legal battles around the issue.

Two days later, Canada escalated the dispute over softwood lumber by requesting a panel for review of revised duties. The Trudeau government denounced the duties as "unwarranted and unfair." Though Biden will ease trade tensions, he will not diminish the power of the U.S. Lumber Coalition that has successfully maintained the duties. It is likely that calls for free trade in forest products will continue to fall on deaf ears.

Canada could bring the case to the WTO again, but it would be nothing more than a moral victory as the appellate body remains effectively paralyzed.

"...it seems that China is writing the rules of trade after all."

The persistence of trade disputes under CUSMA has been accompanied by issues surrounding implementation. This has been acutely felt in Canada's auto industry, which already stood to lose more than \$1.8 billion in motor vehicle exports to the U.S. Tighter rules of origin are being enforced on the auto sector as well, complicating the sector's recovery amid COVID-19.

The U.S.'s impact on Canada's trade relations is not limited to CUSMA. The trade war between the U.S. and China places Canada in the crossfire, and while Biden will be more diplomatic in challenging China's power, the U.S. will still put most of its foreign policy focus on China. It is likely that Biden will seek to rejoin the CPTPP to counter China's dominance in trade because he views the American decision to withdraw from the agreement as allowing China to be in "the driver's seat." While President Xi

expressed an interest in joining the CPTPP, the Biden administration is likely to block entry of China. The CPTPP was originally an opportunity to ensure China was not writing the rules of international trade, as initially stated by Obama, but with the withdrawal of the U.S. from the agreement, and the emergence of the RCEP, it seems that China is writing the rules of trade after all.

CAUGHT IN THE U.S.-CHINA CROSSFIRE

Friction with Canada's second largest trading partner has hardly dwindled over the past year. Meng Wanzhou's extradition case, China's unwillingness to concede to Canadian clauses on gender, labour and environment, and the arbitrary detention of the Two Michaels led to the abandonment of FTA talks between the two countries. Minister Champagne denounced China's "assertive, coercive diplomacy" as Canada terminated efforts to form the FTA.

But despite worsening bilateral relations, Canadian exports to China rebounded from the blocks on beef and pork in 2019. Blocks on canola remain in place with the licenses of two major Canadian exporters, Richardson and Viterra, suspended since March 2019, while those whose canola seeds are still being purchased have seen

a 50% to 70% drop in exports. Despite these bans, however, demand soared for Canadian canola seed in summer 2020 as China ramped up oil imports from countries using Canadian canola.

Canada is witnessing increasing exports to China generally, with trade rebounding to pre-pandemic levels, a consequence of the markets rather than any government policy. The Canada-China Business Council Business Impact Survey, for example, revealed that Canadian businesses are keen to expand their operations in China and some feel that Ottawa needs to clearly communicate its strategy on China.

Caught between two global powers, Canada has largely settled for inaction. Outside of the Meng extradition, Canada has avoided antagonizing the Eastern power as the beef and pork bans highlighted the consequences of souring relations. The extent of bans on Australian exports levied by China in response to deteriorating bilateral relations underlined the consequences that Canada could face if it voiced similar concerns regarding Beijing's actions. Despite political tensions between Australia and China, both countries are members of the RCEP while Canada sits on the sideline.

The 15 countries included in the RCEP represent one-third of global GDP. As such, the agreement is largely regarded as a victory given its emergence during a time when trade liberalization is waning. While the RCEP represents an enormous potential economic bloc, Canada suffers more of a symbolic loss than an economic one. Yet Canada's exclusion from the agreement does entail adverse impacts for Canadian trade.

The Trudeau government has made little effort to diverge from the American-led approach to trade, and Canada's exclusion from the RCEP is representative of this. But would the Trudeau government have pursued membership in this agreement if the offer had been extended? The increasingly critical rhetoric toward China, as well as the abandonment of FTA talks, suggests not. However, even if the Canadian government was included in the RCEP, the 'Chinese clause' of CUSMA would have necessitated that Trudeau obtain permission from the U.S. to enter free trade negotiations with the "non-market economies" of Vietnam and China.

The RCEP also limits the room Canada has to pursue an FTA with the ASEAN countries. Exploratory discussions for a Canada-ASEAN FTA were concluded in September 2019, with no public progress announced since then.

However, GAC has been conducting consultations for a possible comprehensive economic partnership agreement with Indonesia. As Canada's largest export market among the ASEAN countries, a bilateral agreement with Indonesia would be a constructive move towards the Liberals' diversification agenda while advancing Canada's economic interests in the East despite tensions with China.

Despite the economic benefits Canada could reap by overlooking political differences with China, Canada has not been willing to resume discussion on further economic integration with the country. This may reflect growing apprehension among Canadians regarding relations with China; a survey conducted by Angus Reid revealed that 76% of Canadians think Canada should prioritize human rights over economic opportunity, and only 11% of Canadians felt that trade efforts with China should be a focus.

The rhetoric of Erin O'Toole reflects Canadians' growing anti-China sentiment. O'Toole has denounced the behaviour of China within the WTO, where he argued that China has not been made to "play by the global rules."

The Trudeau government's stance on China remains ambiguous as they attempt to promote liberal values and the rules-based international order, while avoiding tariffs, bans on exports, and generalized economic misery.

SCHEMING A POST-BREXIT STRATEGY

The Liberal government is also implementing CETA. As with CUSMA, Canada's dairy industry has suffered losses under this trade agreement; however, compensation was doled out to Canadian farmers. With Brexit looming these past years, it was clear that Canada would need to renegotiate a trade agreement with the U.K. after their departure from the EU. The U.K. was the largest recipient and provider of Canadian investment among the E.U. countries, which meant CETA's value was diminished by Brexit.

Coming hot off NAFTA renegotiations, Trudeau voiced concerns that negotiating a trade deal with the U.K. could be hindered by the out-of-practice negotiators in the British government. Regardless, Trudeau was confident that a deal could be reached before the start of the new year, a necessity to combat uncertainty for Canadian businesses. By the end of November, the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement

(Canada-U.K. TCA) was reached, which maintains the elimination of tariffs on 98% of products traded between the countries. (A more ambitious trade deal is to be negotiated in 2021.) It should be expected that the rhetoric around the environment and Canada's feminist foreign policy considerations will be reflected in this agreement in a way they were not in CUSMA.

While the Canada-U.K. TCA is an adequate stopgap measure to the uncertainty of trade relations with a post-Brexit U.K., concerns linger as to whether market access issues under CETA will be rectified. But before the deal can even come into effect, it must be ratified by Parliament.

A bill was tabled December 9, 2020, with the expectation of a December 31, 2020 deadline. While Trudeau assured that the deal would be cemented before January 1, 2021—when CETA expires—MPs on the House of Commons Trade Committee warned that this deadline could not be met and accused the government of allowing the negotiations to drag on. After CUSMA was rushed through Parliament, the government approved an NDP proposal to ensure a higher degree of parliamentary oversight for future trade deals. Yet a year later, Parliament finds itself being asked to rush a bill once again.

Canada and the U.K. signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on December 22, 2020 that ensures preferential tariff treatment until the Canada-U.K. TCA enters into force.

MANOEUVRING AS A MIDDLE POWER

While Canada's trade activity has been largely reactive this past year, a key source of Canadian leadership has been through the work of the Ottawa Group on WTO Reform. The issues raised regarding the WTO are not novel, namely the operation of the appellate body. The Ottawa Group is representative of an effective wielding of Canada's middle power position: working with like-minded states to bring an end to problems created by big power politics.

There have been important conversations on several pressing topics, including dispute settlement, e-commerce, and investment facilitation. Canada's ability to advance these types of discussions is even more advantageous in light of COVID-19. A joint statement released by the Ottawa Group on COVID-19 included key actions pertaining to the increased transparency of export restrictions, predictable agricultural trade, and streamlining procedures for trade facilitation. This works to protect the global supply of goods and services and maintain stability in international trade during the pandemic.

VACCINE PROCUREMENT

The pandemic hit Canada's economy hard. Between March 2020 and April 2020, Canada lost 3 million jobs. As lockdown measures eased, more Canadians returned to work. However, COVID-19 continued to run rampant, morphing into variants, and necessitating stricter public health measures.

"Trudeau has been blamed for procuring both too many, and not enough, vaccines."

December 2020 broke the streak of rising employment with job losses surging once again and in January, Canada was 4.5% below pre-pandemic employment levels. The Liberal government promised up to \$100 billion towards economic stimulus over the next three years; however, optimism for the Canadian economy is still pinned to vaccine rollout. Trudeau has been blamed for procuring both too many, and not enough, vaccines. By November 2020, the federal government had reportedly secured more than 400

million vaccine doses (enough to deliver 10 doses to each Canadian). At least \$1 billion has been spent on vaccine agreements so far, with the figure expected to climb even higher given the agreements reached with Pfizer and Moderna in late 2020.

An analysis by Duke University placed Canada as the country with the most confirmed COVID-19 vaccines per capita. This invited criticism and concerns regarding Canada's contribution to "vaccine apartheid," in which the mass purchase of vaccines by high-income countries leaves low-income countries with inadequate, or delayed, doses.

However, delivery delays and reduced shipments have resulted in an unexpectedly slow vaccine rollout. At the time of writing, early March 2020, more than 2.6 million Canadians have received one COVID-19 vaccine dose, with only 585,000 fully vaccinated against the virus. Canada was quick in reaching vaccine agreements as the first country to enter a deal with Moderna and the fourth to reach an agreement with Pfizer.

But with the incapacity to produce vaccines at home, Canada was vulnerable to delays abroad. If Canada wanted to be prepared to undertake domestic production of vaccines, measures would have needed to be taken years ago.

As a result, Canada is reliant on production elsewhere, undertaking too-little-too-late measures in a bid to save face.

Indeed, in early February 2021, more than a year after signs of COVID-19 began emerging in Canada, a deal was reached with an NRC-owned facility in Montreal. The first Canadian-made vaccine is not expected to be produced until the end of 2021—months after the government expects to have vaccinated "every Canadian who wants a shot."

TALK IS CHEAP

Adapting to a rapidly-changing global economy has resulted in blunders, but also opportunities for Canada to advance its leadership. In most cases, shortcomings in the Canadian trade file persisted. Liberal rhetoric of "openness and transparency," and the apparent primacy of a feminist foreign policy, fell to the wayside in Trudeau's trade agenda.

One does not need to look beyond the agreement with Saudi Arabia to see these shortcomings. Selling arms to a country known for its dismal human rights record, and its frequent detention of women's rights activists, stands in stark contrast to the feminist foreign policy rhetoric promoted by Trudeau.

The Liberal government did try to wash its hands of responsibility on the Saudi agreement, with Minister Champagne remarking, “what we are doing today is improving a situation we have inherited,” but the government clearly fell short on its promise for a more open agreement. Following the introduction of the new contract, Champagne acknowledged, “we really cannot talk about the specifics of the contract.” A far cry from transparency, indeed.

Despite free trade agreements with the majority of the world’s economy, Canada’s exclusion from the RCEP, ongoing disputes with the U.S., and an uneasy position squeezed between the U.S. and China impede a successful international trade policy. All the while, Canadians continue to wait to see what the Liberal values of feminism and environmental protection look like in trade agreements.



ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

B

The environment and climate change were focal points of the government's mandate letters following the 2019 election, with 17 members of the newly-formed cabinet assigned tasks related to environmental issues.

This intent was reaffirmed during the opening of the 43rd Parliament, when Trudeau made clear during his Speech from the Throne that climate change would be the focus of his government's priorities going forward.

Key promises made in the 2019 Liberal election platform were ambitious and included setting legally binding five-year milestones to reach net-zero by 2050; planting two billion trees over 10 years; strengthening existing rules on emissions in the oil and gas sectors; implementing a ban on single-use plastics; and investing every dollar earned from the Trans Mountain Expansion Project into Canada's clean energy transition.

LIFE IN PLASTIC

In early 2020, the Trudeau government announced two initiatives related to plastics reductions as the next steps of the country-wide Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste. In July 2020, phase two of the action plan was announced by the Canadian Council on Ministers of Environment, which will focus on the

reduction of plastic pollution in oceans, lakes and waterways, and, more broadly, the effects that plastic pollution has on the environment. Much of the action plan involves the collaboration of both federal and provincial governments, although the federal government will play the leading role in fisheries.

The second announcement, which took place in October 2020, concerned a ban on single-use plastics; the ban will include plastic checkout bags, straws, stir sticks, six-pack rings, cutlery and food containers made from hard-to-recycle plastics. By implementing such a ban, the Trudeau government becomes the first to regulate solid waste, an issue that was previously left up to provinces and municipalities.

The ban will likely take effect by the end of 2021. And although Canada is not the first to impose a country-wide ban on types of plastics, as the U.K. and Kenya, for example, have already done so, it does join a growing list of countries taking action against plastic pollution. The EU, for one, is set to outlaw single-use plastic items by 2021, while China recently announced a scheme to ban all non-degradable bags by 2022. Moreover, 170 nations signed the UN Resolution in 2019 aimed at significantly reducing plastic pollution by the year 2030.

The Trudeau government, however, is already receiving pushback for its proposed ban from various critics, including the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada and a coalition of U.S. industry associations representing chemicals, fossil fuels, food packaging and transportation. In a letter to Minister Mary Ng, the coalition invoked provisions of CUSMA and asserted that Canada's plan violates international trade obligations. Whether this may lead to delays in the rollout of the legislation is unknown.

CUSMA does include exceptions for "environmental measures necessary to protect human, animal, or plant life or health," and "measures relating to the conservation of living and non-living exhaustible natural resources," reflecting what is described as a "spirit of mutual cooperation" that encourages consulting one's partners before imposing new restrictions. By designating plastics as toxic, critics argue that the Liberals are "recklessly making policy that could have significant negative impacts on human health."

HITTING OUR EMISSIONS TARGETS

In its nationally determined contribution (NDC) outlined in the Paris Agreement, Canada pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30%

below 2005 levels by 2030. Trudeau went even further, though, promising that Canada would become carbon neutral by 2050. Doing this will require bold, immediate action.

New climate accountability legislation announced in late 2020, the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act or Bill C-12, will legally bind Canada to its goal of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The bill will establish mandatory five-year targets to cut emissions over the next 30 years, starting in 2025. Although it is legally binding, the legislation will not set out exactly how the federal government should go about reducing emissions, include any enforcement mechanisms to ensure the targets are met, or outline any legal consequences if the country fails to drive down emissions as intended. A future government could also simply repeal the law and do away with reporting obligations altogether. According to Trudeau, it will be up to voters to “punish governments that fail to hit their marks.”

The legislation additionally calls for the creation of a 15-member advisory board to provide advice to government and requires the tabling of a plan in Parliament that would outline how exactly Ottawa plans to meet its targets.

While the effectiveness of the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act is the subject of skepticism, the Healthy Environment Plan, released in December 2020, seems much more promising. It is the first time a Canadian government has released a credible plan detailing how greenhouse gas emissions are to be met, including calculations and necessary reductions within each sector of the economy. Critics, however, point out the lack of transparency surrounding the Healthy Environment Plan. Public consultations prior to the introduction of a plan of this kind have been the norm in the environmental policy field; however, no such consultations took place in this case. Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan, said his government was also not consulted.

It is also not clear how the Trudeau government will negotiate with the provinces nor how the provinces will tackle emission reductions, considering that it will cost oil-producing provinces more per capita to reduce emissions. Whether the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act and the Healthy Environment Plan will bring about real changes remains to be seen, considering that Canada has, for thirty years, set multiple reduction targets and has never met a single one. According to the United Nations Environment Programme’s most

recent Emissions Gap Report, it is expected that Canada's emissions will exceed its NDC target by 15% in 2030 given current policies and practice.

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE

Part of the 2019 mandate letters was the initiative to support the Minister of Natural Resources in planting two billion trees by 2030. This is a key component of the government's plan to reach net-zero emissions by the year 2050, as any emissions produced 30 years from now would need to be offset by actions such as tree planting or carbon capture and storage systems.

But for the government to accomplish its tree planting goals, more than 500,000 trees would need to be planted every single day—starting in 2020. As of November 2020, the initiative had not been funded and not a single tree had been planted which was, according to Natural Resources Minister Seamus O'Regan, due to a “complicated planning process and the COVID-19 pandemic.”

According to O'Regan's office, some federally funded trees were planted in 2020. However, the commitment to plant two billion trees referred to new ones, in addition to the approximately 600 million trees that are already planted in Canada each year.

During an announcement in December 2020, the federal government finally revealed a \$3.16 billion budget to plant the two billion trees over the next decade starting in the spring of 2021, which will also create 4,300 jobs.

PRICING CARBON

Mandatory carbon pricing has been in effect across the country since 2019 and is considered by most economists as the most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and incentivize investments in alternatives to greenhouse gas emissions.

"The future of the carbon pricing system suddenly seems uncertain."

The federal government claims that its constitutional right to legislate in the name of “peace, order and good government” allows it to impose a carbon tax and contends that legislation aimed at reducing carbon emissions is subject of national concern. As a result, it is beyond the scope of any one province. Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Alberta all presented separate appeals in front of the Supreme Court on the topic.

However, following two days of deliberations, the Supreme Court adjourned the hearings. It is unknown when rulings will be delivered on these appeals. The future of the carbon pricing system, as a result, suddenly seems uncertain. If the Supreme Court rules in favour of even one of the provinces, the federal government's authority for the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change will be compromised.

An announcement by the Trudeau government in December 2020 reported increases to the minimum federal carbon tax. While the tax will increase by \$10 annually, after 2022 it will increase by \$15 annually, landing at \$170 per tonne by 2030. An additional \$15 billion in federal spending was also included in the announcement and is meant to be directed towards initiatives such as subsidizing the transition of remote communities from diesel to clean electricity generation (\$300 million); upgrading Canada's electrical grid (\$1 billion); rebates for purchases of zero emissions vehicles (\$280 million); and upgrading the national network of charging stations (\$150 million).

THE CLEAN FUEL STANDARD

The Clean Fuel Standard, a federally binding regulation first announced in 2016 by the Trudeau government, aims at

reducing carbon content in fuels across Canada. In a recent announcement, the government specified that the regulation is intended to achieve up to 30 million tonnes of annual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. While the regulation was initially meant to cover solid and liquid fuels, the more recent announcement specified that it will in fact only apply to liquid fuels, such as those used in transportation and to heat homes.

According to the federal government's own analysis, the regulation will result in fuel price increases that will have the greatest impact on low- and middle-income households in Canada. Responding to the criticism, a spokesperson for the Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson stated that government initiatives, such as providing funding to make homes more energy efficient and incentivizing electric vehicle purchases, will help offset the price impact to households. If adopted, the regulation will go into effect in 2022. However, mounting push back regarding the increased costs to households could delay the process.

HEARD IT THROUGH THE PIPELINE

As noted in the last Trudeau Report Card, the effectiveness of the government's climate policy is

undermined by its approach to simultaneously expand Canadian oil and gas exports while attempting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Any effort to reconcile the two, including the government's plan to invest any money earned from the Trans Mountain Expansion Project in Canada's clean energy transition, has been met with ample criticism. This is because an uptick in oil and gas exports will, according to the Canada Energy Regulator (CER), lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. The expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which began in 2019, will contribute to the increase in exports.

Having purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline for \$4.5 billion in 2018, there are now questions about whether the government will be able to profit from it in the long term. According to the Canada Energy Regulator, after a peak of oil and gas exports in 2039 at 5.8 million barrels per day, the growth of Canada's oil export supplies will slowly decline and flatten through 2050 if the world continues to strengthen its action on climate change.

Critics question whether Canada's pipeline projects, which include the Trans Mountain pipeline between Alberta and British Columbia, Keystone XL from Alberta to Nebraska and potentially Texas, and the Enbridge Line 3 replacement from Alberta to Wisconsin, are truly

necessary. Although Alberta has invested \$1.5 billion in the Keystone XL construction and put forth a \$6 billion loan guarantee, Canadian taxpayers will likely be the ones to bear the brunt of this expansion project. According to a February 2020 estimate, the construction of the pipeline expansion is expected to cost \$12.6 billion.

Current and future U.S. policy on climate change also looms over the future of Canada's pipeline projects. Having promised to revoke the Keystone XL pipeline permit issued by President Trump, President Biden made good on his promise on his first day by rescinding the permit and shutting down construction of the expansion project. It remains unclear what actions the Biden administration will take with regards to other pipeline projects, such as Enbridge's Line 5 which funnels about 45% of Ontario's crude oil and has become a source of major uncertainty of late.

BIDEN OUR TIME

A Biden presidency signals a contrast to the Trump administration's handling of the environment and climate change after vowing to make climate change a national security priority and a major component of his foreign policy. Hours after his inauguration, President Biden

signed a number of executive orders, rejoining the Paris Climate Accord after the Trump administration left the treaty in 2020, cancelling the aforementioned Keystone XL pipeline, and directing various agencies to review and reverse more than 100 Trump administration actions on the environment. Having effective control over the House, Senate, and the presidency, Biden will face few hurdles in fighting climate change. Under Biden, the U.S. become yet another country to commit to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Canada sees a Biden administration as an opportunity to not only advance the fight against climate change in Canada but also increase the pressure on Trudeau's government to fulfill its own promises. According to Sarah Petreva, policy director at Clean Energy Canada, "having America (especially with its economic heft) 'back' in the global climate fight could help to increase the drive to increased ambition [and] climate solutions."

In December 2020, the Trudeau government asserted that it was exploring the possibility of border carbon adjustments—essentially, a fee on imports from jurisdictions that either do not have carbon pricing or whose carbon price is too low.

Border carbon adjustments would therefore help Canadian businesses and industries maintain their competitiveness while simultaneously encouraging international partners to take action against carbon emissions.

The U.S. attempted to implement such a fee in 1991, when the Senate considered a bill that would impose a tax on imports from countries whose pollution controls were less rigorous than those of the U.S. However, carbon adjustment fees were mentioned in Biden's environmental platform, which points towards a potential harmonization and North America-wide border adjustment.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Multiple challenges related to human rights continue to plague Canada's claim of leading in the defence of human rights. Some of these include Canada's past in committing injustices against Indigenous peoples.

One of the latest flashpoints in this discussion took place in early 2020, when protests over the Coastal GasLink pipeline in British Columbia erupted. The conflict centred on a road leading into Wet'suwet'en territory, which was the only access point for pipeline workers. The RCMP maintained a

near-constant presence in the area to uphold a B.C. Supreme Court injunction first granted in 2018. (The cost of policing between January 2019 and March 2020 exceeded \$13 million.)

A lack of access to clean and safe drinking water is also a major public health concern in many Indigenous communities in Canada. Such a state of affairs calls into question the supposed commitment of the government to human rights.

According to the Liberals' fiscal update in November 2020, the government plans to invest \$1.5 billion in 2020 and 2021 to lift all long-term drinking water advisories in Indigenous communities, with \$114 million pledged for each subsequent year. A new website was also unveiled to increase transparency on the issue. Even though 95 advisories have been lifted since the Liberal Party came to power in 2015, 58 advisories, across 38 communities, remained as of March 2021.

DEVELOPMENT

C

The Trudeau government's campaign promises on development were limited, and the objectives laid out in the relevant mandate letters following the election win were vaguely defined. Some of these promises included the continued increase of Canada's international development assistance every year until 2030, better management and delivery of international development assistance, and the maintenance of the gender equality focus of all international assistance investments. Due to the vagueness of these promises, evaluating their implementation has proven difficult compared to past initiatives.

While the pandemic certainly delayed parts of the government's agenda, the lack of political will and attention devoted to development efforts must be noted. The government gives the impression of continued progress, however, there does not appear to be a strategic approach to Canada's development portfolio. As a result of this vagueness and distraction, the country's development efforts are at risk of being designed with domestic interests—rather than global needs—in mind.

MORE OF THE SAME ON FOREIGN AID

Trudeau's 2019 election platform included a promise to increase Canada's international development assistance spending every year until 2030 in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



However, Trudeau has maintained a Harper-like silence on a possible Canadian commitment to the UN aid spending target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). The most recent figures show that the Trudeau government spends less on development assistance than the Conservatives did before them—a damning contradiction of the Liberals’ claim that Canada has become a “true global leader in helping the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world.”

Under Harper’s leadership from 2006 to 2015, Canada’s official development assistance (ODA) averaged 0.3% of GNI, the standard measure used to compare aid levels. In 2015, when the Trudeau government was first elected, ODA stood at 0.28% of GNI, a figure that the Trudeau government has never been able to exceed. In fact, in 2019, that figure fell to 0.27%, and when one excludes the cost of refugee settlement in Canada, it falls to 0.24%. This figure is well below the 0.3% average for the 29 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries.

Canadian aid increased by only 0.5% from 2018 to 2019 according to the OECD, an increase that is less than the rate of inflation. Notably, Canada’s competitors for a seat on the UN Security Council, Norway and Ireland, increased their aid by 9.7% and 4.5%, respectively in 2019.

(They are providing foreign aid equivalent to 1.02% and 0.31% of GNI.) The \$1.5 billion allocation for two new financing tools—an International Assistance Innovation Program (IAIP) and a Sovereign Loan Program (SLP)—earned the Trudeau government praise from aid agencies when it was announced in 2018. But since the inception of these tools, only \$120,000 of the \$1.5 billion has been spent. GAC has attributed the stalling of these programs to “operational constraints,” in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. GAC’s inability to implement these financing mechanisms suggests enduring obstacles to the deployment of this \$1.5 billion.

An additional \$485 million in development assistance was announced by Minister Karina Gould, with funds earmarked to promote the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in low-income countries. Gould also revealed that the government is redirecting \$520 million of previously budgeted funds towards combating malnutrition. During a video conference at the UN, Trudeau stated that the funds will go to “trusted partners on the ground fighting COVID-19.” What has not been made evident by the Liberal government is the extent to which these additional funds represent a true increase to the budget or whether the majority of these funds were

simply previously allocated elsewhere. Germany, for its part, has been comparably transparent regarding increases in aid allocation, and the U.K. has been explicit that its development assistance is being slashed.

FIAP: THE TRIALS, TRIUMPHS, AND TRIBULATIONS

It has been more than three years since the Trudeau government announced the launch of its Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), designed to achieve peace and sustainable development through gender equality by supporting the economic, political, and social empowerment of women and girls. The FIAP seeks to commit 95% of Canada's international assistance funds to gender equality and empowerment initiatives by 2022.

Since FIAP's unveiling, Canadian development assistance has garnered criticism for the discrepancy between the document's promises and its implementation. While Canada's FIAP made significant contributions to supporting women's groups and local organizations that support gender equality, critics argue that most of the funding continues to be directed at organizations lacking gender-mainstreamed perspectives on development. The organizations that are receiving grants under the FIAP program

are being called on to re-evaluate their development models to innovate programming in new areas.

FIAP has also faced criticism regarding its reductionist version of "feminist policy," which concerns only "women and girls" rather than promoting true gender equality. While intersectionality is recognized in the FIAP summary as being essential to Canada's feminist approach, this principle is not embedded throughout the document other than vague references to marginalized groups.

While FIAP itself does not provide clear commitments addressing LBTQ2I+ issues, GAC has gone beyond what is outlined in FIAP to dedicate resources to these issues. The 2019 announcement of \$30 million to LBTQ2 and intersex rights and socio-economic outcomes is a clear example of this. However, LBTQ2I+ considerations are not mainstreamed into development programming. While the cursory mention in the last mandate letter indicates an acknowledgement of LBTQ2I+ issues, it has yet to translate into any meaningful action. According to experts, it does appear that GAC is, indeed, responding to criticisms of FIAP by working towards the implementation of a more intersectional framework. FIAP is an excellent opportunity for Canada to lead on advancing issues related to gender globally; however

it is susceptible to being reduced to a branding exercise.

The pandemic has introduced gender-specific consequences, which are felt even more acutely in low-income countries. These include increased gender-based violence, disruptions to key sexual and reproductive health services, and reliance on women to provide informal, unpaid care services. As Trudeau acknowledged in his 2021 International Women's Day statement, post-pandemic development will need to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected. As such, Canada's international development policy is an opportunity for FIAP to engender concrete policy action that will protect the women, girls, and marginalized communities who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. If such action is not witnessed throughout 2021, it will affirm the many criticisms levelled at FIAP, denouncing the policy as a symbolic gesture to win votes at home rather than a sincere effort to promote gender equality abroad.

ON VACCINES, "CANADA FIRST"

The initial purchase of a massive number of vaccines by the Trudeau government, along with its opposition to an intellectual property waiver designed to make vaccines more available and less costly for developing countries, suggested that the government was, contrary to its globalist

rhetoric, engaging in vaccine apartheid. Trudeau remarked initially that waiting for other countries to help out was "not in our self-interest, and it's just not who we are." To follow thorough on this rhetoric, the government supported vaccination efforts in the global south by contributing to COVAX, and by deciding not to reroute ODA funds back to Canada. The support of the COVAX facility harkened back to Canadian efforts a decade earlier, when 5 million doses of the swine flu vaccine were donated to the WHO.

"When the government's policy is compared to its rhetoric, there is an undeniable chasm."

In December 2020, GAC continued to stress that Canada would do its part to ensure that "everyone, everywhere, has access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines." But two months later, the federal government admitted that it would tap into COVAX to vaccinate Canadians. Canada is the only G7 country to take from COVAX. Despite promoting the rhetoric that protecting

vulnerable populations in low-income countries was in the best interest of Canadians, the government succumbed to a “Canada First” approach. As such, Canada has the unfortunate role as a leader in vaccine nationalism while countries such as India and China take the lead in vaccine diplomacy.

Minister Anand was elected to be one of the bearers of this bad news, telling CBC that “we are going to make sure that all Canadians have access to vaccines. That's our priority, that's the role of the federal government.” Minister Freeland asserted even earlier that “our government will never apologise for doing everything in our power to get Canadians vaccinated as quickly as possible.”

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with this position: the federal government is responsible for ensuring the health of its citizens. What has prompted the outrage, in addition to the original sin of taking from low- and middle-income countries, is that the move flies in the face of the Liberals’ internationalist sheen. An excerpt from the 2019 Liberal platform reads: “Canadians remain open [...] and generous – and the world is better for it.” There is more about how Canada will “lead by example” and make the world a safer place. Attempts have certainly been made to accomplish these goals—and roughly half of the \$515 million pledged by

Canada to COVAX will eventually help to vaccinate people in more than 90 countries—but when the government’s policy is compared to its rhetoric, there is an undeniable chasm.



IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES

B-

In response to the spread of COVID-19, Canada, along with many other countries, restricted movement across its borders. Preventing the movement of people became synonymous with protecting the health of Canadians. As a result, the pandemic had profound impacts on Canadian immigration and refugee policy, including ambitious immigration targets, an unprecedented politicization of the U.S.-Canada border and the exposure of inequalities in Canada's immigration system.

BIG BACKLOGS, BIGGER TARGETS

Few objectives outlined in Minister Mendicino's initial mandate letter were fulfilled. Some, like the modification to the Canadian Oath of Citizenship to reflect the rights of Indigenous peoples, were carried out in early 2020, but most were pushed aside when COVID-19 arrived at Canada's border. In 2019, more than 1 million immigrants, as well as study and work permit holders, came to Canada and 60% of the 341,000 new permanent residents were part of the economic class.

The year 2020 did not see such impressive numbers: between January and August, Canada admitted 128,430 permanent residents, well below the government's target of 341,000.

During the first wave of COVID-19, approval rates for immigrants were cut in half. Simultaneously, extensions given to people with existing permits, work permits, and temporary visas surged. Given the impacts of the pandemic on immigration, the Trudeau government released new targets. Shockingly, these targets were even higher: 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021, 411,000 in 2022, and 421,000 in 2023. Minister Mendicino provided the government's rationale: "Put simply, we need more workers and immigration is the way to get there." The government aims to advance 2019 trends by having 60% of all new admissions in the economic class to aid economic recovery.

Realizing such lofty goals will require increased attention and resources. Even before the pandemic, the family class of immigration was the source of a relentless backlog at IRCC. At the end of 2015, the "spouses, partners and children" category had a processing time of 21 months. While this was reduced to 13 months by the end of 2019, it has since risen due to the pandemic. In September, IRCC stated it would increase the number of staff devoted to spousal sponsorship applications by 66% to expedite the processing. They will need the help; nearly 6,000 applications, on average, will

need to be processed each month until the end of 2020. However, during the first wave of the pandemic, only 163 family sponsorships were submitted. It is possible that this is not the full extent of the backlog. Since family applications cannot be completed online, it is likely, says NDP immigration critic Jenny Kwan, that they are piling up in empty mail rooms.

Border closures resulting from the pandemic have introduced additional stresses, with immigrants who had not arrived in Canada before COVID-19 caught in a limbo. After quitting their jobs, taking their children out of school, and liquidating their assets, thousands are now waiting to enter Canada. As they wait, their authorizations expire. As a result, the IRCC is dealing with approximately 10,000 cases of expired confirmation of permanent residency. Border closures have also impacted family reunification and international student numbers.

In 2019, the Trudeau government replaced the controversial lottery family reunification process with a first-come-first-served system which was, in turn, widely criticized. Thus, the government has reinstated the lottery system but with a limited number of available spots, dropping from 20,000 to 10,000, but expected to increase to 30,000 in 2021.

When it comes to academia, the situation is grim. The population of international students in Canada has tripled in the last decade, growing by 13% in 2019 alone. International students account for almost 40% of all tuition fees and brought \$4 billion in revenue to Canadian universities in 2017–‘18. However, international enrollment fell by 2.1% in 2020 as a result of border closures. The turbulent political environment in the U.S. helped to drive more international students to Canada; now, with Trump out of office and Biden presenting a warmer face to the world, Canadian universities will have more trouble attracting students—and miss out on the revenue, expertise, and cultural knowledge these students provide.

Canada’s commitment to increasing immigration targets is praiseworthy. Remaining to be determined, however, is the government’s willingness to do the legwork to ensure that 401,000 new permanent residents have the necessary support once they arrive. For all the criticisms of the resettlement and integration programs under Harper, the Liberals have largely left them unchanged. Further, racist and anti-immigration sentiments across Canada remain unaddressed. Without tackling these domestic policy questions, higher target rates reflect a superficial commitment to progressive immigration.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE?

Canada continues to assert itself as a leader in immigration and refugee issues. At the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, Canada committed \$50.4 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugee protection and announced that “Canada will continue to lead by example.”

Leading by example takes the form of active participation in international initiatives and responding to evolving political contexts. For example, in June 2020, Canada chaired the virtual Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in partnership with UNHCR and the Canadian Council for Refugees and presented three new “innovative solutions”: admitting up to 500 refugees as part of Canada’s Economic Mobility Pathways Project, establishing an advisory role for a former refugee to attend international refugee protection meetings and supporting the creation of a new Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility.

These actions, while not particularly impactful, are indicative of the reputation the Trudeau government is cultivating for itself on the world stage. In July 2020, this was reaffirmed as Canada worked with Nigeria and Switzerland to support the Nigerian

government's efforts to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling. A month after that, Canada announced it was waiving immigration fees for Lebanese-Canadians and their relatives in response to the Beirut explosion.

In these instances, the Trudeau government endeavours to cement its image as a leader on immigration policy and refugee initiatives. While this leadership status is largely deserved, Canada's record is far from flawless. In June, for example, as protests escalated in Hong Kong, many of Canada's allies were quick to introduce immigration measures. Despite Canada's close connection to Hong Kong—with 300,000 Canadian citizens residing in Hong Kong—clear immigration measures were not enacted until November 12, 2020.

These measures lacked lustre, with eligibility for new work permits requiring youth to have attended post-secondary school in Canada or abroad within the last five years. Inconsistency between Canada's rhetoric around immigration and its actual policies is typical in inward-looking policy, as evidenced in responses to COVID-19.

THE BORDER AND BEYOND

On March 20, 2020, the Canadian government announced that its border would be closed. Amnesty International

criticized this as a “unnecessary, inhumane and harmful decision.” This decision violated the suggestion of the UNHCR, which urged countries to manage borders effectively while allowing access to those seeking asylum. Yet Canada's response was to return all refugee claimants arriving from the U.S. through irregular crossings. This prompted criticism from refugee rights advocates, providing a needed reality check for Canada, whose veneer of compassionate refugee policy often goes unquestioned.

Yet controversy surrounding the U.S.–Canada border was not unique to the pandemic. Irregular border crossings and the legality of the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) have been prominent in immigration discourse in recent years, particularly thanks to the Trump administration's hostile stance on immigration.

In 2019, more than 16,000 people were caught by the RCMP attempting to cross into Canada between official Points of Entry (POE). The primary response by the government has been the creation of the Asylum Seeker Influx National Strategic Response Plan, which provides strategic direction in coordinating a national response to the increase in asylum seekers. In March 2019, the

federal budget outlined a \$1.18 billion investment over five years, starting in 2019–‘20 to “enhance the integrity of Canada’s borders.”

The STCA is a bilateral agreement between Canada and the U.S. under which refugee claimants are required to make their refugee claim in the first safe country they arrive in. Canada and the US recognize the other as “safe”, and as such Canada, returns refugee claimants at land POEs, subject to a variety of exemptions including, claimants with family in Canada and unaccompanied minors. Following the Liberals’ minority government win in 2019, Marco Mendicino’s mandate letter included a task to “modernize the Safe Third Country Agreement.”

Less than a month later, Federal Court hearings regarding the constitutionality of the agreement began. In July, it was ruled that the STCA violated s. 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, liberty and security, with Federal Court Justice Ann Marie McDonald making reference to the evidence that claimants returned to the U.S. were being imprisoned as a penalty. The federal government is now looking to have this ruling appealed. The Federal Court has ruled before that the agreement is a violation of constitutional rights after determining, in 2007, that the U.S. is not

safe for refugees. This ruling was overturned by the Federal Court of Appeal shortly thereafter. The question has been brought to the courts again due to policies and practices implemented by Trump. Many critics point to the large-scale detainment and family separation at the U.S.–Mexico border as evidence that the country is unsafe for refugees, but America’s “one year ban,” “expedited removal process” and lack of inclusion of women fleeing gender-based persecution under the definition of refugees, are also referenced by critics and the courts.

While this has prompted increased opposition to Canada’s compliance with the STCA, the Trudeau government maintains that the U.S. is a safe country for refugees. Biden plans to fully restore programs that protect “Dreamers,” remove Trump’s “Muslim ban,” and implement a 100-day freeze on deportations until new guidelines for ICE are established. Given the likely eradication of Trump’s more offensive immigration practices, it is possible the Trudeau government will be successful in its appeal process. It is unclear whether Canadian opposition to the STCA will be sustained even as the U.S. enters a new era, given the prevalence of anti-immigration sentiment in the country.

Despite the legal ambiguity surrounding the STCA, the Trudeau government extended the agreement as a way to limit the spread of COVID-19. Now, the STCA applies to the entirety of the U.S.-Canada border, rather than simply the POEs. An order-in-council on March 20 prohibited most foreign nationals entering Canada from the U.S. “for the purpose of making a claim for refugee protection.”

A month later, this order-in-council was replaced by one that prohibited asylum seekers from making refugee claims unless they were at an official POE. Refugee advocates have deemed this decision “wrong” and “unnecessary,” while others have identified how this policy is inconsistent with international refugee law. These orders-in-council were enacted pursuant to the Quarantine Act 2005 which states under 58(1) that the “Governor in Council may make an order prohibiting or subjecting to any condition the entry into Canada of any class of persons” to prevent the spread of disease when “no reasonable alternatives” are available.

It is unconvincing that the de facto extension of the already controversial STCA balances public health and safety and human rights. While this decision is not in line with what has been recommended by the UNHCR, it also delivers harsh consequences to those

seeking asylum in Canada. For claimants entering between POEs, they can be subjected to fines outlined in the *Quarantine Act's* prohibition on non-essential travel. The commitment to the STCA and its application to claimants crossing the border irregularly stands in stark contrast to Canada’s international claim as a leader in immigration and refugee policy.

President Biden introduces new challenges and opportunities for the Canadian government in terms of immigration and refugees. While Biden will retract the callous immigration policies pursued by Trump, a new president alone will not soothe the anti-immigration views held by most Trump supporters.

In that way, Biden does not signal the end of legal and moral questions surrounding the STCA. It will remain important for the Trudeau government to pursue a “modernization” of this agreement, and to communicate what that means.

Biden also threatens Canada’s comparative advantage. While Canada’s status as a leader in immigration and refugee issues is upheld through engagement with international organizations and partners and the promotion of progressive rhetoric, it is

further bolstered by looking particularly impressive in comparison to the U.S.

This perception of Canadian progressiveness may come under scrutiny now that the U.S. has rid the White House of Trump. For example, in his first day in office, Biden fulfilled his promise to suspend deportations for 100 days. While during Canada's suspension of deportations in response to the pandemic, over 1,000 people ended up being deported.

PANDEMIC PROBLEMS

The STCA is not the only aspect of Canada's immigration system that has been strained as a result of COVID-19. The immigrants and refugees within Canada's borders have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and their experiences have exposed systemic inequalities and brought about new policy measures.

Factors such as low pay and precarious employment placed an increased pressure on immigrants and refugees to go to work even as health risks loomed, according to a report prepared by the non-profit research institute ICES. This helps to explain why immigrants, refugees and other newcomers made up roughly 44% of Ontario's COVID-19 cases, despite comprising less than 25% of the province's population.

Long-standing problems with Canada's migrant worker programs have also been exposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Migrant Rights Network estimates that there are around 1.6 million people in Canada that qualify as temporary or undocumented migrants. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) is an annual migration bilateral agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Under this agreement, migrants work in Canada for up to eight months on farms producing \$5 billion worth of fruits and vegetables. In 2019, there were over 50,000 workers that came to Canada under the SAWP.

The pandemic has rendered migrant farm workers essential, yet tales of mistreatment abound. Conditions on migrant farms are alarming, but the numbers say enough: in Ontario, farm workers are at least 10 times more likely to get COVID-19 than the general population. Consider that nearly 1,400 workers had tested positive by October 2020, representing around 5% of the total farm worker population.

Outbreaks have been declared at migrant farms in Kelowna, B.C. as well as in Ontario, where 200 workers tested positive. With 10 to 12 workers living in a single bunkhouse, it is unsurprising that

COVID-19 outbreaks are occurring at these farms. Over the summer, there were reports that workers were being denied freedom of movement, with instructions to not leave the farm or have visitors. However, many were afraid to speak out for fear of not being permitted to participate in the SAWP next season. The federal director-general of the Temporary Foreign Worker program said in late August that farmers they were not permitted to limit the freedom of movement of workers, yet there is no evidence of any further action. The farmers themselves were placed in a precarious situation with little instruction from the federal government. As one farmer told CBC, “You're the bad guy if you send them to town, you're the bad guy if you keep them [on the farm].”

“The rhetoric Trudeau espouses abroad, one that positions Canada as a righteous leader, has long been challenged by the realities of domestic politics.”

While the Throne Speech commended the work of migrant workers, saying that they “have done an outstanding job of getting good food on people’s plates,” and announced that they are deserving of governmental protection, genuine change to the SAWP has yet to occur.

The government has enacted change in regard to other areas of migrant worker policy. For example, Minister Mendicino announced a temporary measure to allow permanent residence for asylum claimants who worked in the health care sector during the pandemic.

Migrants working on the COVID-19 front lines have also been referred to as “guardian angels,” and this pathway to permanent residency is designed as a way to thank them. This measure will affect at least 1,000 claimants across Canada. The policy’s potential has been hindered by the Quebec government, who has ensured the program will only benefit certain categories of health care workers. This province is central to discussions regarding this policy, given the number of migrants who reside in Quebec after crossing into Canada from New York.

Given the centrality of borders to the spread of COVID-19, immigration and refugee policy this past year has been

largely inseparable from rhetoric surrounding the pandemic.

Navigating a contentious domestic political climate, a global pandemic, and fraught international relations, the Trudeau government was presented with a difficult task. The rhetoric Trudeau espouses on the international stage, one that positions Canada as a righteous leader, has long been challenged by the realities of domestic politics. The onset of COVID-19 has only served to bring greater scrutiny to this disconnect.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alex Wilner
David Black
Dane Rowlands
Douglas Macdonald
Geoffrey Hale
Hunter McGill
Inger Weibust
Kim Richard Nossal
Lloyd Axworthy
Megan Gaucher
Stephen Brown
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Canadian Foreign Policy Journal
Canadian International Development Platform
Centre for Trade Policy and Law
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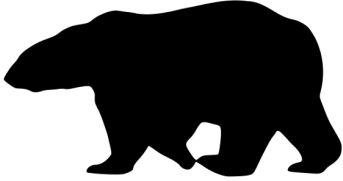
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MARCH 2021