

MARCH 12, 2025

Defending the North American Homeland: Reassuring Messaging from the NORAD- USNORTHCOM Perspective

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General Gregory M. Guillot, Commander United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), testified before the US Senate Armed Services Committee on 13 February 2025, offering clarity on the US military and binational NORAD assessments of the North American threat environment and our shared commitment to defending the continent. While “USNORTHCOM and NORAD are distinct commands,” Gen. Guillot explained, with Canadians serving in the former and collaborating with the latter, the commands are “linked by history, collaboration, and a shared commitment to defending North America.”¹ He updated the congressional committee on the increasing threats facing both of his commands and the actions that they are taking to meet the challenge. This is important for Canadians to track, Gen. Guillot argued, as “both commands continue to defend North America through what is arguably the most complicated and rapidly evolving operational environment we have seen.”²

Gen. Guillot emphasized three major threats to the defence and security of Canada and the US. First, he highlighted that “the likelihood of a direct conflict between the United States and one of its four principal adversaries [PRC, Russia, North Korea, and Iran] is increasing.”³ Second, “strategic cooperation between and among our four principal adversaries” is growing, “increasing the risk that war with one adversary could quickly expand into war with an enemy coalition.”⁴ Third, these adversaries are building their capability “and, in some cases, rehearsing [their] plans” to directly strike Canada across “multiple domains and from multiple vectors” in

¹ Senate Armed Services Committee, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot, United States Air Force Commander United States Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command,” 13 February 2025, 2, at https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/guillot_statement1.pdf

² SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 2.

³ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 5.

⁴ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 6.

the event of armed conflict elsewhere.⁵ When taken together, a major interstate war is increasingly likely that could see adversaries directly attack Canada.

Capability + Intention = Threat

Gen. Guillot built on strategic assessments of his predecessors⁶ in arguing that, after “years of steady investment, our strategic competitors have the means to overcome... favorable geography and advanced technology”⁷ to attack North America. This in no way should be taken to mean that geography no longer matters. It certainly does. For example, Canada is effectively immune from a land invasion from a non-US entity whether or not the US decided to intervene.⁸ Nonetheless, both Canada and the US face “a range of advanced nuclear, conventional, and non-kinetic systems while employing disruptive grey-zone, cyber, and information operations” completely across either country.⁹ This continues a trend away from the mutually assured destruction (MAD) of nuclear annihilation during the early Cold War towards increasingly flexible responses “below the threshold” that makes deterrence more credible but at the risk of great power war becoming more permissible.¹⁰

For example, Gen. Guillot noted a new generation of PRC and Russian capabilities designed to circumvent existing defences with which to threaten North America. Russia is enhancing “its already formidable capability” of air- and sea-launched cruise missiles and supplementing these with new delivery systems such as fielding “the world’s first [hypersonic glide vehicle] HGV-equipped [intercontinental ballistic missile] ICBM over five years ago,” fractional orbital bombardment systems (FOBS) to try to sneak under radars oriented towards space, the Poseidon transoceanic torpedo designed to destroy ports with a nuclear tsunami, and the Burevestnik, a nuclear-propelled cruise missile of extreme range. Guillot argued that the PRC was also developing similar weapons, such as FOBS with a “trajectory that approaches North America from the south rather than the

⁵ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 7.

⁶ See, for example, Terrance J. O’Shaughnessy and Peter M. Fesler, “Hardening the Shield: A credible deterrent & capable defense for North America,” *Wilson Center: The Canada Institute* 20, no. 26 (2020); Nancy Teeple and Ryan Dean, eds., *Shielding North America? Canada’s Role in NORAD Modernization* (Peterborough: NAADSN, 2021), <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAADSN-engage4-NORAD-NT-RD-upload.pdf>; P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Troy Bouffard, “The Arctic and North American Defence: Reflections on 2021,” *NAADSN Policy Brief*, December 2021, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/21-dec-PWL-TJB-The-Arctic-and-North-American-Defence-2021-final.pdf>; Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, *NORAD: In perpetuity and beyond* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, “‘Cooperation in the Age of Competition’: The Arctic and North American Defence in 2022,” *NAADSN Policy Brief*, December 2022, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22-dec-PWL-RD-Arctic-and-NA-Defence-2022-NAADSN-policy-brief.pdf>.

⁷ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 3.

⁸ See Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Geostrategy and Canadian Defence: From C.P. Stacey to a Twenty-First Century Arctic Threat Assessment,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 20:1 (2019): 33-96 at <https://jmss.org/article/view/69488/53633>. The only country that could invade Canada is the US.

⁹ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 3.

¹⁰ For more on the evolution of theories regarding nuclear warfare, begin with classics such as Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: The RAND Corporation, 1959); and Herman Kahn and Evan Jones, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

traditional northerly vector for which our legacy early warning radars were designed.” He concluded these adversarial capabilities “will severely challenge our ability to detect and characterize an inbound attack and determine an appropriate response during a conflict,”¹¹ ultimately “erod[ing] strategic stability.”¹²

Authoritarian adversaries share the intention to undermine “international norms or the sovereignty of nations” as they “challenge their expansionist ambitions.”¹³ Gen. Guillot argues these intentions are amplified by the “misperception of a Western decline,” which “fosters a growing willingness to challenge the United States on the global stage and increases the risk of miscalculation in a crisis.”¹⁴ He cites “Russia’s brutal and misguided invasion of Ukraine”¹⁵ as an example of this, which “could escalate into a direct military conflict with the United States.”¹⁶ So far cooperation between authoritarian regimes to overturn the rules based international order (RBI) have “remained mostly transactional,”¹⁷ citing examples such as Chinese bomber aircraft deployed to a Russian Arctic airbase and both PRC and Russian ships and aircraft operating together off the southern coast of Alaska.¹⁸ While the threat posed by a potential Sino-Russo alliance is previewed in these rehearsals of coordinated attacks on Canada and the US, Gen Guillot testified that this cooperation “has not advanced to the level of a formal military alliance.”¹⁹

The North American Advantage

Gen. Guillot pointed out that that both Canada and the US have a major advantage the PRC and Russia currently lack: NORAD. Rather than transactional cooperation built on a mutual rejection of democracy and individual freedom and a desire to attack it, he explained how NORAD:

is the bi-national U.S. and Canadian command responsible for aerospace warning, aerospace control, and maritime warning for North America. For nearly 67 years, the U.S. and Canadian personnel assigned to NORAD have worked side-by-side in a shared commitment to continental defense. Forged through operational experience and a common vision, NORAD consistently demonstrates world-class professional standards while executing its critical defense mission 24 hours a day. Today, NORAD remains the world’s only bi-national command, safeguarding the U.S. and Canada while routinely demonstrating seamless interoperability and operational excellence that our competitors can only hope to match.”²⁰

¹¹ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 8.

¹² SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 7-8.

¹³ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 3.

¹⁴ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 5.

¹⁵ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 5.

¹⁶ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 5.

¹⁷ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 6.

¹⁸ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 6.

¹⁹ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 6.

²⁰ SASC, “Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot,” 3.

Similarly, while USNORTHCOM is a separate command, it and NORAD share the same goal of defence of Canada and the US. Guillot elaborated how:

USNORTHCOM and NORAD are fortunate to draw upon decades of shared history and lessons learned to shape the commands' plans and operations, and defending the homelands in the coming years will require forward thinking, advanced capabilities, and a professional workforce with the experience and technical knowledge necessary to plan, resource, and execute the commands' crucial missions in tremendously demanding conditions.²¹

Growing this continental alliance is a critical element in overcoming adversarial threats to North America and a foundation on which to build future defence efforts.

Gen. Guillot observed that both commands are "ideally situated to serve as the synchronizer and integrator for that crucial whole-of-government enterprise" against below-threshold threats.²² Much of this is based around continuously updating policies, planning and investing to ensure both USNORTHCOM's and NORAD's "ability to detect, track, and defeat potential threats in all domains."²³ He notes that this capability is partially built across the Arctic, and pointed out that "the Canadian Armed Forces' expertise in Arctic operations and the Government of Canada's longstanding commitment to Arctic security are of enormous value to continental defense."²⁴

Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy (CAFP), announced in December 2024,²⁵ also acknowledges the vital importance of the North American Arctic to both the United States and Canada, as well as the growing threat posed by Russia-PRC collaboration in the Bering Sea and the broader Arctic.²⁶ This updated foreign policy direction will bolster NORAD through diplomatic engagement and by reinforcing Canadian defence investments designed to strengthen continental defence. The extraordinary value of the bilateral and binational "defense relationship has proven itself time and again over the course of six decades," Guillot emphasized, "and I have every confidence that the strategic vision and commitment to North American defense articulated in the CAFP, when resourced, will pay dividends for the defense of North America for many years to come."²⁷

²¹ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 4.

²² SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 10-11.

²³ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 4.

²⁴ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 18-9.

²⁵ Global Affairs Canada (GAC), *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* (December 2024), <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/transparency-transparence/arctic-arctique/arctic-policy-politique-arctique.aspx?lang=eng>.

²⁶ P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Key Takeaways for Arctic Security Practitioners and Scholars," NAADSN *Policy Primer*, 16 December 2024, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/24dec-CAFP-Lackenbauer-NAADSN-Policy-Primer.pdf>.

²⁷ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot."

The commander's message also reiterated the mutual commitments that the countries have made to bolster domain awareness and deterrence by denial.²⁸ Gen. Guillot expressed his explicit gratitude to "our Canadian partners, as the Government of Canada has committed to fielding long-range sensors and weapons system to deter and defeat potential air, sea, and missile threats in the approaches to North America."²⁹ He noted how "integration and collaboration with Canada – through NORAD and in broader continental defense initiatives – will grow even more necessary as our competitor field greater numbers of increasingly advanced long-range cruise missiles."³⁰ This positive sentiment, which highlights the North American allies as partners with shared vested interests and dependencies, is a refreshing contrast to the critical characterizations of Canada and of the countries' relationship coming out of the current Trump Administration.³¹ "I thank our service members and civilian employees for their efforts while executing our noble mission of defending the United States and Canada," he offered, "as both commands continue to expand our bi-national, whole-of-government, continental approach to homeland defense."³² This message astutely acknowledges that homeland security includes but also transcends nuclear or conventional military threats, thus necessitating broader interagency cooperation – within and across our national borders in North America. This requires trust and mutual respect, akin to that displayed in Guillot's statement.

Conclusion

In 1972 then Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp wrote his influential "third option" piece about how Canada could develop its future economy. His message still resonates today: regardless of how Canada decides to develop its economy, it has options.³³ The same cannot be said of continental defence. In 1962, defence scientist Robert Sutherland wrote that Canada and the US represent a single target entity to adversaries. This means that both countries must be attacked in the event of war, and he was writing during a period when Canada and the US were much less interdependent on trade and defence cooperation. Regardless of strained political and economic relations, our countries must defend one another to defend ourselves.³⁴

The Trump Administration's threats to impose heavy tariffs on bilateral trade and destroy the Canadian economy (presumably as part of his more general desire to annex Canada) will harm Canadian defence efforts

²⁸ P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, "We Cannot Deter What We Cannot Detect," NAADSN *Quick Impact*, 25 May 2020, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20-may-25-PWL-RD-We-Cannot-Deter-What-We-Cannot-Detect-final.pdf>.

²⁹ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 14-15.

³⁰ SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 14-15.

³¹ See, for example, P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Marc Lanteigne, "Uncertainty, Bombast, and Disruption: Anticipating the Impacts of Trump 2.0 in the Arctic," NAADSN *Strategic Perspectives*, 9 January 2025, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/25jan-Strategic-Perspectives-Trump-North-American-Allies-PWL-ML.pdf>; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Turning the World on its Head: Trump Returns," NAADSN *Quick Impact*, 24 January 2025, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/25jan24-Trump-QI-PWL.pdf>.

³² SASC, "Statement of General Gregory M. Guillot," 23.

³³ Mitchell Sharp, "Canada-U.S. Relations: Options for the Future," *International Perspectives* (Autumn1972).

³⁴ Robert J. Sutherland, "Canada's long term strategic situation," *International Journal* 17, no. 3 (1962): 199-223.

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to the detriment of both countries. Applying a sales tax on US consumers of Canadian goods and resources reflecting a “beggar-thy-ally” policy will reduce capabilities to provide for continental defence. Markets will become smaller and less efficient, North Americans poorer, and less funding available for defence. Similarly, the continued threat of tariffs undermines the positive intentions driving defence and security cooperation between the northern North American allies. Undermining or hindering enhanced binational and bilateral cooperation undermines the major advantage that, as Gen. Guillot pointed out, our countries have over the adversaries that threaten us.

Canadians are not succumbing to Trump’s coercive tactics when we invest in improving our contributions to the defence of our North American homeland. We have committed to increase our ability to detect and track threats and defend against them, which is something best done in partnership with the Americans. Doing so will more credibly deter threats, both below and above the threshold of armed conflict, that exacerbate the risk of a great power war – and all that comes with it. Continuing to work through NORAD and with USNORTHCOM is the best way to do this, and General Guillot’s February statement shows that the senior US military commander responsible for the defence of North America gets it.