

From Counterterrorism to Deterrence: The Evolution of Canada's and Italy's Defense Postures

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Abstract

How do US democratic allies perceive and adapt to the multiple challenges associated with the rise of multipolarity and the return of major war in Europe? This article examines how two US allies—Canada and Italy—have adapted their defense postures from the professed beginning of the shift in the balance of power in 2008 to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. More specifically, it provides a comparison of three major dimensions of defense postures: threat perceptions, patterns of foreign military deployments, and military expenditures. This article argues that both allies have undertaken a shift from liberal interventionism towards a defense posture increasingly geared towards deterrence vis-à-vis Russia. However, the shift did not occur analogously and simultaneously, as the two allies' adjustment was shaped by differing levels of domestic inter-party contestation. This article highlights the extent to which US allies' international security adaptation follows political-party threat perceptions more than the traditional left-right dichotomy. Shared inter-party threat perceptions of great power revisionism are found to shape the degree of defense policy adaptation toward great power competition.

Keywords

Canada; defense posture; deterrence; foreign military deployments; Italy; liberal order; threat perception

1. Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is yet another important indicator of the contestation of the liberal international order. It has amplified the debates over the emergence of a “new Cold War” and the rise of a multi-order or multipolar system (Abrams, 2022; Flockhart & Korosteleva, 2022). The debate has been ongoing for some years now, with scholars deciphering Chinese and Russian willingness and capacity to

reverse the international status quo (Chebankova, 2017; Turner, 2009) whereas others attempt to demonstrate the ability of the international order to cope with the shocks (Bollfrass & Herzog, 2022). Neglected from current discussions on the fate of liberal international order is the response to this challenge by US allies. Having striven to help build the current order, which brought stability and growth for over 70 years, how do US democratic allies perceive and adapt to the multiple challenges associated with the rise of multipolarity and the return of major war in Europe? While the last great power transition occurred within the English-speaking world, when the US peacefully replaced Great Britain as the leader of the liberal hegemonic order (Vucetic, 2011), the current transition is likely to generate a profound shift that could lead US democratic allies to redefine their interests, objectives, and strategies.

This article examines how two US allies—Canada and Italy—have adapted their defense postures from the professed beginning of the shift in the balance of power in 2008 to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. More specifically, it provides a systematic comparison of three major dimensions of defense postures: threat perceptions, patterns of foreign military deployments, and military expenditures. Italy and Canada represent most similar cases as they are both middle powers, liberal democratic NATO allies with parliamentary political systems, and they value their relationship with the US. Both countries are indeed committed to their role as faithful allies of the US (Massie, 2009; Nuti, 2003) and share an attachment to the US-led international liberal order, despite the rise of populist parties in Italy. Yet structured and focused comparisons of Canadian and Italian defense postures are rare in the literature. This study examines two democratic US allies facing an increasingly fractured international order, whose willingness and capacity to support US hegemony is crucial to its endurance in the context of US relative power decline (Massie & Paquin, 2020).

What shapes US allies’ varying levels of commitment to US international leadership? Scholarship finds that hard power, geography, government ideology, and domestic constraints explain variance in US democratic allies’ degree of burden-sharing in US-led military operations (e.g., Davidson, 2011; Mello, 2014; von Hlatky, 2013; Wagner, 2020). Against this backdrop, this article finds that the two most similar US allies have differed significantly in terms of threat perceptions, force employment, and defense expenditures. It argues that the varying level of inter-party agreement explains the differing speed to which they have adapted to great power competition. We contend that both Canada and Italy have undertaken a shift from liberal interventionism, typical during the so-called “unipolar moment,” towards a defense posture increasingly geared towards deterrence vis-à-vis Russia, but that the shift has not occurred analogously and simultaneously, as the two allies’ adjustment was shaped by differing levels of domestic inter-party contestation. This article highlights the extent to which US allies’ international security adaptation follows political-party threat perceptions more than the traditional left-right dichotomy. Shared inter-party threat perceptions of great power revisionism are found to shape the degree of defense policy adaptation toward great power competition.

2. Canadian Threat Perceptions

Canada’s first white paper (Government of Canada, 2008) adopted during the period under investigation mostly emphasized low-intensity sources of threat. The “Canada first” white paper (Government of Canada, 2008) noted that Canada faced an unstable and unpredictable environment characterized by 15 different types of threats, including international terrorism, failed states, and civil wars. Neither Russia nor China were

mentioned by name. The former was entirely ignored, while the closest reference to the latter stated that the “ongoing buildup of conventional forces in Asia-Pacific countries is another trend that may have a significant impact on international stability in coming years” (Government of Canada, 2008, pp. 4, 6). Tellingly, the major military investments in new fleets of combat aircraft and ships were justified not by the threats posed by great powers, but by the need to take part in international operations (Government of Canada, 2008, p. 17).

Terrorism remained the most significant threat even after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support for secessionist rebels in the Donbas. For instance, during the 2015 election, Prime Minister Harper’s right-oriented conservative government highlighted “radical jihadism” as the main threat against Canada. It did emphasize the “risks to Canadian interests and security” caused by Russia’s aggression, but these were of second order compared to combating jihadi terrorism (Conservative Party of Canada, 2015). On China, the Harper government publicly accused Beijing of conducting digital espionage and cyberattacks against Canada (Mackinnon, 2013). Yet it emphasized Canada’s “traditional role of being an honest broker” in the Asia-Pacific region (Clark, 2013), and signed a cooperation agreement with Beijing to strengthen bilateral engagements at various levels, from academic exchanges, maritime security cooperation, reciprocal visits of government and military officials, and annual defense cooperation dialogues.

The election of a left-oriented liberal government in 2015 led to the crafting of a new defense policy. The 2017 defense strategy marked a shift by emphasizing state-based threats above terrorist groups. It stated that the global security environment was henceforth “marked by the shifting balance of power, the changing nature of conflict, and the rapid evolution of technology” (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 14). More specifically, the defense policy noted that:

Military threats across a range of systems such as advanced fighters and anti-access area denial (A2AD) surface-to-air missile systems, in addition to evolving cyber threats, are making the environment within which the Canadian Armed Forces operates more lethal and complex. (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 38)

There was no doubt as to which states represented the greatest threat to Canada: both China and Russia were explicitly identified as the main challengers of the rules-based international order upon which Canada’s security and prosperity rest. Despite recognizing that “the United States is still unquestionably the only superpower,” the 2017 defense strategy nevertheless stressed that the “re-emergence of major power competition has reminded Canada and its allies of the importance of deterrence” and the need to develop “advanced conventional military capabilities that could be used in the event of a conflict with a “near-peer” (Government of Canada, 2017, pp. 14, 38, 50).

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 entrenched this perception shift towards deterrence of great power revisionism. Defense Minister Anita Anand declared that “Canada’s geographic position no longer provides the same protection that it once did” (Anand, 2022a). She underscored the emergence of new threats, such as advanced cruise and hypersonic missiles, that require a re-examination of the threat assessments that underpinned the 2017 defense policy (Anand, 2022b). In the upcoming defense policy update, it is safe to expect that Russia will be deemed a major threat to Canada, as the deputy prime minister stated that “democracies around the world, including our own, can be safe only when the Russian tyrant and his armies are defeated” (Freeland, 2022).

Most importantly, all Canadian parties backed the Liberal government's decision to increase military spending, provide weapons to Ukraine, and boost its presence in Eastern Europe following the invasion of Ukraine. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre described Russia's aggression as "the result of a failed Western policy" and called for military and humanitarian support, comprehensive sanctions, expelling Russia's ambassador to Canada, and military build-up (Poilievre, 2022). In that vein, Conservative Shadow Minister for National Defence James Bezan declared: "No matter the cost, no matter what roadblocks Russia tries to put up, there can be no excuses. Canada and the West must do whatever it takes to support Ukraine. Nothing should be off the table" (Bezan, 2022, p. 2914). This position is in line with the Conservative Party's insistence to provide weapons to Ukraine following the annexation of Crimea, ahead of the Trudeau government's decision to do so in August 2018.

In short, despite the country remaining at a relatively safe distance, Canadian threat perceptions shifted from low-intensity menaces to high-intensity state-based threats following Russia's annexation of Crimea, a shift accelerated by Russia's full-blown invasion. The differential threat perceptions between the right-oriented Harper government (2006–2015) and left-oriented Trudeau government (2015 to date) owed less to partisanship than to the evolution of the strategic environment. The two governing parties have expressed similar threat perceptions before and after the shift towards great power competition. This bipartisan consensus, at odds with the traditional emphasis on political party divergences, is driven by a common perception of the threat posed by Russia.

3. Italian Threat Perceptions

Like Canada, Italy's defense policy was oriented toward counterinsurgency in the first decade of the 2000s and began shifting towards deterrence in 2015, albeit slowly. The 2015 white paper on international security and defense, the first real strategic policy document since 1985 (Sabatino, 2017, p. 3), acknowledges that the transition to a polycentric or a-centric world may result in political, economic, and military challenges (Italy, 2015, pp. 22–23). Yet, despite this recognition, the main threat perceived by Italy remained international terrorism, especially in the Mediterranean region, where the country decided to devote most of its future efforts (Renzi, 2015, pp. 3–5).

A shift has been perceptible more recently, with the explicit recognition of the threat posed by interstate wars. The Italian military anticipates all-domains conflicts, with limitations in maneuverability with anti-area technologies and dependence on technology (Esercito Italiano, 2019a, pp. 9–10, 2019b, p. 8). Nevertheless, the perception of Russia has remained, until very recently, relatively positive. Analyzing Italian prime ministers' and foreign minister's speeches, Siddi (2019, p. 126) shows that the belief that Italy should play a mediating role between Russia and the West has been constant since the early 2000s. Following the Crimean annexation, Italian Prime Minister Renzi preferred to continue his predecessors' policy of special relations with Russia rather than stand with the US, which was pushing for more sanctions (Brighi & Giugni, 2016, p. 22). Italy eventually sided with its allies and approved sanctions against Russia, while calling for the sanctions to be limited, non-punitive, and temporary (Coticchia & Davidson, 2019, p. 74; Natalizia & Morini, 2020, p. 53). In contrast with Canada, Italy opposed Ukraine's entry into NATO and the strengthening of sanctions against Russia. This was followed by several visits of Renzi to Moscow and Putin to Italy in which the Italian prime minister refrained from criticizing Russian policy in Ukraine (Coticchia & Davidson, 2019, pp. 74–75).

The positive representation of Russia began to dissipate following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi told the Italian parliament in March that Russia's aggression meant "the end of the illusion" of sustainable peace on the European continent (Camera dei Deputati, 2022, p. 17). The prime minister added that the unjustified aggression was an attack on democracy, the values of liberty, and the international order. "Tolerating a war of aggression against a sovereign European state would mean jeopardizing, perhaps irreversibly, peace and security in Europe" (Camera dei Deputati, 2022, p. 18). With this statement, Draghi recognized Russia as a threat to the European Union and the international liberal order.

Yet there remained some inconsistencies between this new threat perception and the actions taken in response to this threat. After former Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio declared that the allies needed to heavily weaken Moscow (Guerzoni, 2022a), Italy announced, in May 2022, a peace plan for Ukraine that included neutrality for Ukraine, autonomy agreements for the Donbas and Crimea, the end of sanctions, and the normalization of relations with Russia (Sylvers, 2022). This approach, which favors Russia, is partly explained by the perception of Italy's international role as a mediator between the West and Russia and by the perception that Russia is an indispensable strategic partner for Italy (Caffarena & Gabusi, 2017). Another explanation would be that this plan was proposed to please Italian public opinion and the main parties in the ruling coalition, notably the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega Nord. Italian public opinion would be ready to make this kind of concession if it meant an end to hostilities with Russia, especially among voters from the two parties mentioned (Alcaro & Mikhelidze, 2022). In contrast with the bipartisan consensus on Russia's threat in Canada, these inconsistencies reflected political divergences within the Italian government. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, pro-Russian positions have continued to be advocated by elected officials, including former Interior Minister Salvini (right-oriented Lega Nord party) and former Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio (neither left nor right-oriented populist Movimento 5 Stelle party; see Corbetta & Colloca, 2014). While the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega Nord insisted on the importance of maintaining relations with Moscow, Italy ended up siding with its allies. While there are no details on why Italy ended up voting with the rest of the EU countries, it may be explained by Italy's unshakeable loyalty to the European Union, which has been consistent in its foreign policy for many decades (Caffarena & Gabusi, 2017, p. 132).

The election of a center-right coalition government at the end of 2022, formed mainly from traditionally pro-Russian and Eurosceptic parties, may have surprised many. Instead of reconsidering the pro-Ukrainian position of the former prime minister and questioning Italy's support for Ukraine, the new government has pursued and even accentuated its support to Kyiv. While it may seem surprising that a traditionally pro-Russian populist coalition decided to increase aid to Ukraine after its election, at least two explanations can be advanced. Firstly, a change in threat perception following the Russian invasion that brought the war back to Europe led these parties to renew their commitments to European and transatlantic allies (Bordignon et al., 2022, p. 383). The second factor is the reputational cost within the West of maintaining such a pro-Russian stance (Coticchia & Verbeek, 2023, p. 141). The agreement between the parties forming the government coalition reaffirms the importance of belonging to Europe and NATO and support for Ukraine as the priority ("Per l'Italia," 2022). Italian Prime Minister Meloni has repeatedly reaffirmed Italy's unwavering support for Ukraine, despite criticism from the opposition Movimento 5 Stelle party (Amante, 2023; Italian Government, 2022). She notably stated that:

It is Italy's duty to fully contribute, because, whether we like it or not, freedom has a cost and that cost, for a nation, is its ability to defend itself and prove it is a reliable partner within the framework of alliances to which it belongs." (Italian Government, 2022)

Those in favor of maintaining Italy's role as a reliable Western ally have thus won, for now, the political competition against those pushing for a mediator role (Brighi & Giusti, 2023; Caffarena & Gabusi, 2017; Rosa, 2014).

In sum, Italy has been slower than Canada in recognizing Russia as a threat because of party-political divergences and, more specifically, pro-Russian radical parties contesting Italy's longstanding role as a faithful NATO ally. While Prime Ministers Draghi and Meloni sided with the Atlanticist positions expressed by the US, NATO, and the EU, the stability of this alignment is undermined by the importance of inter-party disagreements. As a result, we should expect greater ambivalence in Italy's defense policy adaptation to great-power competition than Canada.

4. Canadian Military Deployments

As Figure 1 shows, Canadian military deployments have decreased significantly since 2011, following the decision by the right-oriented Conservative government to put an end to Canada's combat mission in Kandahar before the termination of NATO's mission in Afghanistan (Massie, 2016). The same government committed Canada a few years later to the US-led coalition against the Islamic State from 2014 to 2016. Following the election of a left-oriented Liberal government in 2015, Ottawa put an end to its airstrike operations against the Islamic State. The Liberal leader, Justin Trudeau, believed that "Canada can make a more helpful contribution to the international effort to combat ISIL than a few aging warplanes" (Trudeau, 2014, p. 8230). Upon becoming prime minister, he put an end to Canada's combat mission and compensated by increasing troops dedicated to training and advising Iraqi security forces (Panetta, 2015).

Furthermore, Canada's greatest military commitment abroad since 2016 has been its contribution to NATO operations, most prominently its command of a battlegroup as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia to deter and defend against potential Russian aggression. Ottawa has deployed an average of 865 troops in NATO operations since 2016, in contrast to 226 in US-led operations and 106 troops in UN-led missions. Canada's contribution to NATO's deterrence posture has thus clearly supplanted its commitments to fighting international terrorism and peace operations. This contrasts with the pre-2016 period, where counterterrorism in Iraq and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan dominated Canadian military deployments overseas. Thus, the 2015 threat perception shift towards deterrence has indeed materialized in military operations.

Following the invasion of Ukraine, Canada increased its military contribution to NATO's deterrence posture. It further deployed an M777 artillery battery and an electronic warfare unit, consisting of approximately 165 soldiers, bringing the Canadian military contingent in the battlegroup to 695. In addition, a second frigate was deployed to Europe and a CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft has been repurposed to augment NATO forces in the Euro-Atlantic region. In March 2023, Canada announced it would be accelerating the acquisition of defense equipment for the NATO battlegroup it leads in Latvia. This includes portable anti-tank missiles, counter uncrewed aircraft systems, and air defense systems, deemed necessary

to meet the threats in “the changed global security environment” (Shakil, 2023). Three months later, Ottawa further announced it would deploy 15 Leopard battle tanks with an additional 131 personnel to Latvia, as part of NATO’s plan to boost the enhanced forward presence battlegroup to brigade-size level.

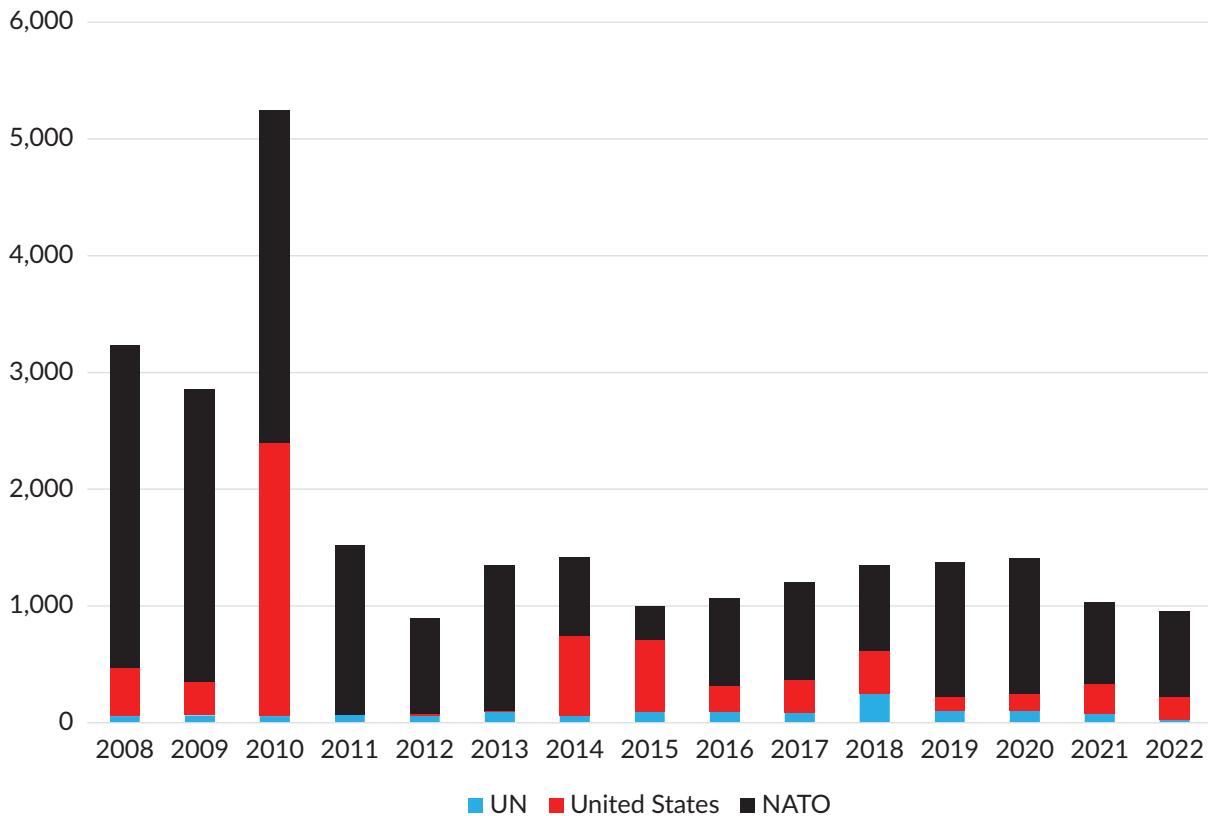


Figure 1. Canadian military deployments by leadership. Source: IISS (2008–2022).

Canada was one of the few allies to deploy troops to Ukraine to help train them before the 2022 invasion. Although it limited its material assistance to non-lethal military equipment, on February 14, 2022, Ottawa agreed to provide light weapons to Kyiv. It was not until after the invasion that Ottawa approved supplying Ukraine with heavy weapons. The left-oriented Trudeau government first offered 100 Carl Gustav anti-tank weapons systems and 2,000 rockets. Three days later, Ottawa added 4,500 M72 rocket launchers and 7,500 grenades (Massie, 2022). These weapons were welcomed by Kyiv but judged insufficient. The Ukrainian president asked for heavy artillery, tanks, air defense systems, armored vehicles, helicopters, fighter planes, and missiles (Trevithick, 2022). However, Canada’s defense minister declared it had “exhausted” its weapons inventory and that the Canadian forces were facing “capability problems” (Maurya, 2022). After weeks of international and political pressure, the Trudeau government announced the delivery of four M777 howitzers from the 37 batteries it acquired from the US in 2005, as well as eight main battle tanks. In addition, armored personnel carriers, cameras for drones, and satellite imagery have been delivered. During his visit to Kyiv, Prime Minister Trudeau stated that Canada would continue to do “whatever is necessary” to support Ukraine, which pleased President Zelensky, who in turn stated that he could not ask for more since Trudeau had already provided him with “everything he had.” While Canada is the 8th largest contributor of military aid to Ukraine, it is only the 20th most important relative to GDP (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023).

Thus, while Canada is offering notable support to Kyiv, its assistance remains limited and below what is necessary to achieve Canada’s political objective in Ukraine, namely the total repelling of the Russian invasion. The left-oriented Liberal government was indeed criticized by the right-oriented Conservative leader for having failed to provide Kyiv with weapons before the invasion (Poillievre, 2022). Since 2015, the Conservatives have continuously supported Canada’s NATO military deployment in Latvia. However, the new Conservative leader’s main critique of the Canadian government’s response to the Russian invasion has not focused on the timid military assistance, but on his desire for Ottawa to sell more liquefied natural gas to Europe (Tasker, 2022). This muffled criticism can be explained by the shrinking support amongst Conservative voters towards providing military aid to Ukraine. Between May 2022 and February 2023, Conservatives thinking that Canada is providing too much support to Ukraine rose from 19% to 26%, while those in the opinion that Canada is not lending enough decreased from 43% to 23% (“Russian invasion: 55%,” 2023). While defense policy is rarely an electoral issue, in Canada, due to significant inter-party consensus on threat perceptions, if public support for Ukraine continues to dwindle among Conservative voters, it may become a divisive issue.

5. Italian Military Deployments

Italian military deployments demonstrate both elements of change and continuity. According to Coticchia and Moro (2020), Italy has gone from a period of enthusiastic interventionism following the end of the Cold War to a period of relative retreat since 2014. Indeed, as Figure 2 shows, Italy deployed over 8,800 troops abroad from 2008 to 2014, in contrast with 6,250 since 2015, a 30% decrease. The Libyan experience, which still haunts Italian political elites, partly explains this trend. But, more than a retreat, it is above all a repositioning of Italian military posture to focus on Italy’s strategic neighborhood, the enlarged Mediterranean. The prime minister stated in 2015 that “the Mediterranean is the heart of the next decades of development of Italy and Europe. The Mediterranean is the center” (Renzi, 2015, pp. 3–5).

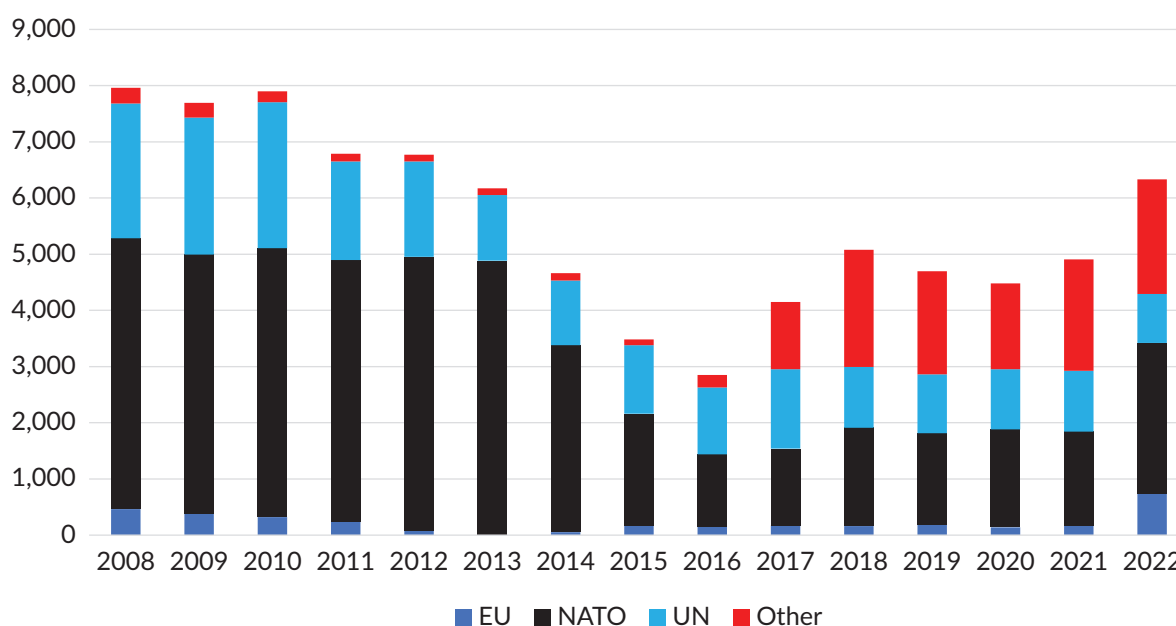


Figure 2. Italian military deployments. Source: IISS (2008–2023).

Although Italy took part in the US-led coalition against ISIS, it refused to conduct airstrikes despite requests and pressure from the US and France (Coticchia & Davidson, 2019). Here again, the Libyan experience seems to have played a role. As the prime minister stated in 2015: “if someone imagines solving the problem of Syria by saying ‘this morning I get up and decide that we do the bombing there,’ good luck! But it will not solve the problem. Libya is there to prove it” (Renzi, 2015, pp. 3–5). Opposition to Italy’s combat participation in Iraq and Syria was trans-partisan, but especially salient in the Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega Nord. These positions are consistent with Italian strategic culture, which favors a defensive and restrictive use of military force while framing military operations abroad as humanitarian or peacekeeping operations (D’Amato, 2019; Ignazi et al., 2012; Rosa, 2014).

On the other hand, there is also some continuity in Italian military deployments. Most current deployments follow past deployments focused on counterterrorism and stabilization. In May 2022, Italy assumed the command of NATO’s mission in Iraq, with an expansion of the allied contingent. Africa and the Middle East still figure as the regions with the highest number of Italian missions (Gozzini & Ezzamouri, 2022; Ministero della Difesa, n.d.).

However, the invasion of Ukraine has brought a slow evolution towards a greater deterrence posture against Russia. First, the Italian army was already planning in 2019 to strengthen deterrence capabilities by 2025, as well as to prepare for “high-intensity conflict, against conventional and hybrid threats, also with the purpose to safeguard the integrity of the Alliance in every possible domain” (Esercito Italiano, 2019b, p. 10). The war in Ukraine has accelerated this trend. In addition to continuing to contribute to NATO’s deterrence posture in Eastern Europe, Italy participates in the new NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (for rapid deployment of troops) and is preparing to substantially contribute to the newly established enhanced vigilance activity battlegroups in the four NATO allies on the Southeast flank, mostly in Bulgaria and Hungary (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, n.d.). In this context, at the end of February 2022, Italy confirmed the deployment of about 1,350 military personnel to Hungary and Latvia within the NATO framework, the dispatch of 130 military personnel and 12 fighter aircraft to Romania, as well as 235 personnel, two ships, and one fighter aircraft to the Black Sea. Italy also maintains about 2,000 troops available for deployment to the Eastern front if needed (Fubini & Sarzanini, 2022; Sarzanini, 2022).

Italy also decided to provide weapons and ammunition, such as Stinger anti-aircraft and Spike anti-tank missiles, to Ukraine after February 24, 2022. While approved by most political parties, this decision faced numerous criticisms from the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega Nord. Both parties voiced skepticism about weapons deliveries to Ukraine, calling instead for renewed peace talks with Putin. Since taking office, Prime Minister Mario Draghi has gradually dismantled the pro-Russian attitudes and policies of previous governments, preferring to side with European allies, despite facing mounting opposition by the Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega Nord (Albanese & Speciale, 2022). However, once in government, the Lega Nord fully endorsed supplying arms to Ukraine. Even the main opposition parties, such as the Partito Democratico and the Movimento 5 Stelle, voted in favor of sending weapons (“Armi Ucraina, ok,” 2022; see also Coticchia & Moro, 2023). The Movimento 5 Stelle is more critical of this type of contribution and frequently changes its position (Guerzoni, 2022b). Since October 2022, Italy has sent two M270 multiple rocket launchers, six 155mm PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers, 20 to 30 units of 155mm modernized M109L self-propelled howitzers, dozens of M113 armored personnel carriers, and several FH-70 Howitzers to Ukraine (“Cannoni e mezzi hi tech,” 2022; “New FH-70 Howitzers,” 2022). Overall, Italy is the 14th largest provider of military aid

to Ukraine and 22nd relative to GDP, ranking slightly less than Canada (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023).

This suggests that the degree of pro-Russianness influences Italian political parties' threat perceptions and force posture preferences. When there was strong pro-Russian sentiment across the political spectrum and among the electorate, Italy was reluctant to see Russia as an enemy and attempted mediation. When this pro-Russian sentiment gradually dissipated after the 2022 invasion, Italy's position changed towards a more deterrence-focused posture. This contrasts with Canada, where no such pro-Russia sentiments exist amongst elected representatives, and where, consequently, there has been a trans-partisan consensus since 2015 on the threat posed by Russia and the need to shift towards a deterrence-oriented defense posture.

Furthermore, while acknowledging the threat and challenges posed by Russia and the need to help Ukraine, the country's defense strategy is still articulated around the concept of the enlarged Mediterranean. It is not clear at this time how Italy can reconcile the two strategic priorities. Besides, the Italian prime minister, a strong supporter of Ukraine and of sending arms, is in a fragile political position. If support increased toward NATO after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with now 68% of Italians in favor of protecting NATO allies if attacked, 45% of Italians and 47% of Meloni's party supporters are against supplying Ukraine with arms, and only 34% in favor (Amante, 2023; Djinis, 2023; Marrone, 2022). It is not certain how long the prime minister's position can hold, especially if the political costs of such support become too high when the traditionally pro-Russian political parties in the governing coalition begin to challenge this posture (see De Maio, 2023).

6. Canadian Military Expenditures and Acquisitions

Canada's defense expenditures declined from 2009 to 2014 but have been on an upward trend since Russia's annexation of Crimea. Under the 2017 defense policy, considerable new investments have been made towards maintaining and enhancing Canadian military capabilities, for a total worth \$553 billion from 2016–2017 to 2036–2037. However, the largest increases are also the furthest away. Military expenditures decreased from 2017–18 (\$30.8 billion) to 2019–2020 (\$29.9 billion) but are projected to reach \$36.3 billion in 2022–2023 and \$51 billion in 2026–2027 (Parliament Budget Officer, 2022a). Given the rampant inflation and the inability of the Department of National Defence to fully spend its annual budget (almost \$10 billion was not spent between 2017 and 2021), the increase in Canada's military budget may be much smaller than projections suggest (Parliament Budget Officer, 2022b, p. 3).

Planned budget increases will not allow Canada to reach the NATO target of 2% of GDP, as Figure 3 shows, although the gap between defense spending and NATO's target is expected to decrease over the next five years if the planned budget increases are implemented. While military expenditures as a share of GDP rose by about 40% from 2014 to 2021, it is not projected to exceed 1.59% in the coming years. Canada would have had to invest an additional \$18.2 billion in 2022–2023—and \$75.3 billion more from 2022 to 2026—to reach NATO's 2% target (Parliament Budget Officer, 2022a). This is almost 10 times more than the planned reinvestments. On the contrary, the Trudeau government has asked the Department of National Defence to cut close to \$1 billion of its annual budget for 2023–2024 (Brewster, 2023). Canada's chronic under-investment in defense has long irritated the US, which has criticized Canada for not paying its fair share of the defense burden (Panetta, 2022). Canada ranks 25th among NATO allies in terms of military spending relative to its gross domestic product (NATO, 2023).

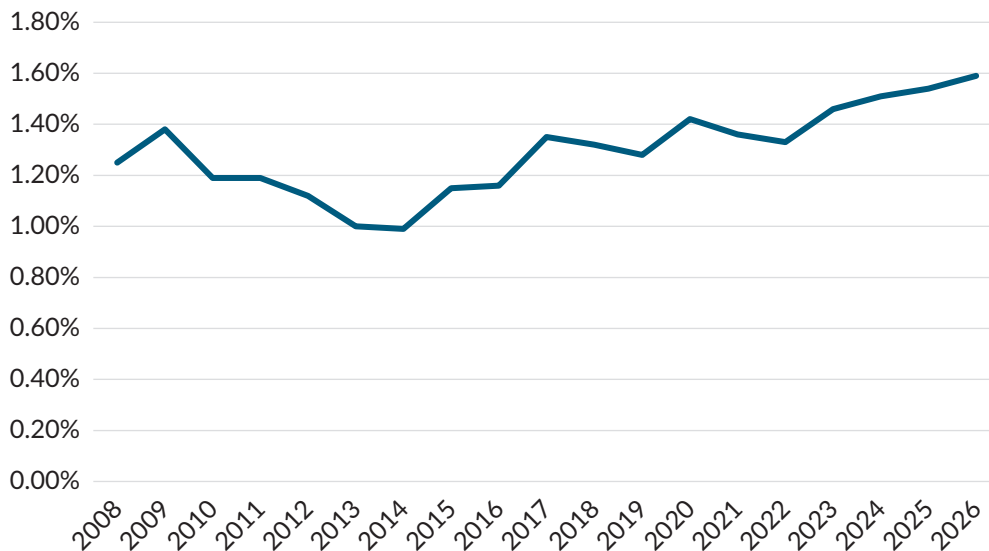


Figure 3. Canadian defense expenditures (% of GDP).

Additionally, a significant portion of Canada’s defense reinvestments are aimed towards North American continental defense. Among the \$8 billion new funds announced in the 2022 budget, over five years, over 61% of this amount will be used to modernize the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD; Brewster, 2022a). Indeed, the 2017 defense policy did not include a budget for the modernization of the North Warning System, a chain of radars along the Arctic Ocean to monitor airspace, which the former NORAD commander said was becoming obsolete (Berthiaume, 2021). Canada now appears ready to invest in the modernization of NORAD, for an estimated \$40 billion in additional spending over the next 20 years.

The modernization of NORAD highlights the priority towards enhanced deterrence in response to the changing world order. In Defense Minister Anand’s (2022b) words: “as autocratic regimes threaten the rules-based international order that has protected us for decades, and as our competitors develop new technologies like hypersonic weapons and advanced cruise missiles, there is a pressing need to modernize Canada’s NORAD capabilities.” The modernization of NORAD will include radar systems and a network of sensors to enhance early warning coverage, advanced air-to-air missiles for the planned acquisition of 88 new F-35 fighter jets, additional air-to-air refueling aircraft, the development of ground-based air defense capabilities, as well as infrastructure upgrades for military bases in Canada’s North. Canada is thus investing significantly in its deterrence by denial capabilities to face the threats posed by Chinese and Russian advanced strike capabilities (Charron & Fergusson, 2021). The former commander of NORAD and deputy director of operations argued that North America is no longer a sanctuary:

[China and Russia] plan to take the fight to North America so that they don’t have to fight in Europe or the Western Pacific, or at least to ensure that any fight will be against one with reduced participation by the US military. (O’Shaughnessy & Fesler, 2020, pp. 6-7).

Furthermore, Canada’s most costly investment resides in the acquisition of 15 Type-26 frigates in the early 2030s, worth over \$77 billion (Parliament Budget Officer, 2021). The Canadian Surface Combatant (CSC) will be Canada’s only true warship. It is intended to conduct a wide range of functions, including long-range air

defense, anti-surface, anti-submarine, and information warfare, across a spectrum of high-to-low-intensity operations. Its main task will be to defend Canada's three coasts alongside the US, as well as to deploy up to four ships internationally as part of larger formations. The CSC's combination of long-range Standard Missile 2 and close-range Evolved Sea Sparrow will provide layered air defense against incoming missiles. It will thus be an integral part of Canada's defense against advanced missile systems. The CSC will also be capable of conducting offensive operations, notably with Tomahawk missiles, which provide an anti-ship capability as well as a precision-guided capability against land targets (Lloyd & Perry, 2021).

What remains unclear, however, is Canada's investments in the capabilities of its three mechanized brigade groups, including the one on alert for NATO's Response Force, first activated in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Given the discussions at NATO regarding the reinforcement of military contingents in Eastern Europe, which could result in the pre-positioning of troops permanently, it is unclear whether Canada is anticipating the true costs that this could represent (Brewster, 2022b, 2023). It is doubtful that the projected investments in Latvia—doubling the size of its battlegroup, including the deployment of 15 tanks, and purchasing anti-tank missiles, air defense systems, and counter-drone equipment—will suffice to equip the Canadian Forces for the requirements of high-intensity interstate warfare.

In sum, Canada has begun the process of transforming its military from a focus on counterterrorism towards multidomain deterrence. However, absent political willingness to substantially increase its defense budget towards NATO's 2% target, the Canadian military will lack the capability to contribute meaningfully to deter and help defeat a peer or near-peer adversary due to a lack of personnel, ammunition, readiness, and capability. Thus, the bipartisan consensus on the threat posed by Russia amid the return of full-scale war in Europe has permitted significant reinvestments in the Canadian military, but not to the level required by the new security environment.

7. Italian Military Expenditures and Acquisitions

Italy's defense spending has remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2019, with a slight increase in 2020 and 2021, but still below NATO's 2% target, as shown in Figure 4. Italian military spending follows roughly the same trend as Canada's, with one noteworthy difference: Italy's parliament voted on March 2022 to raise the defense budget to 2% of GDP, increasing the defense budget to €37 billion for four years, starting in 2023 (Lanzavecchia, 2022). The objective was originally to reach 2% by 2024, but it was strongly opposed by the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega Nord. The 2% will be supposedly reached in 2028 (Balmer & Amante, 2022). Both parties wanted to invest in the country's domestic economy first. However, Italy had already begun increasing its military spending since 2020, including under a Movimento 5 Stelle government. Under Meloni's coalition government, the appeal of increased military spending is even clearer (Kington, 2023).

Italy has been planning an evolution of its defense posture through military procurement for a few years now. These acquisition projects are designed to deal with future high-intensity interstate warfare. Rome will notably invest in air defense systems, with the first development phase of the Common Anti-Air Modular Missile Extended Range ("The Italian army signs contracts," 2022). Italy's Defense Multi-Year Planning Document 2021–2023 also includes the launch of 85 new procurement and modernization programs and the updating of the 115 ongoing programs, among which some of the strategic importance, such as a defense cloud concept, a new amphibious vehicle, an enhancement of air and anti-ballistic defense, new radars for air defense missile

systems, and new air defense destroyers. The latter will be equipped with anti-ship and deep land-attack weapon systems (Peruzzi, 2021).



Figure 4. Italian defense expenditures (% of GDP).

Italy's Defense Multi-Year Planning Document 2022–2024 gives three main reasons for enhancing defense capabilities: competitiveness vis-à-vis potential contenders, credibility vis-à-vis partners, and attractiveness to countries that share areas of priority national interest (Ministero della Difesa, 2022, p. 35). Rome plans the development of a Ballistic Missile Defence program, jointly with France as part of the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence, aimed at building a ballistic threat defense capability, as well as the acquisition of Bergamini Class frigates and Thaon de Revel Class multi-purpose offshore patrol vessels, the initiation of the development of a new Destroyer Class, the mid-life modernization of the Horizon Class destroyers, the initiation of plans to acquire a new Class of light patrol vessels, the acquisition of a new class of next-generation mine destroyer, the acquisition of the new TESEO MK2/Evolved missile, the 127 mm VULCANO artillery guided munitions, and the New Heavy Torpedo. Italy is further planning to acquire two additional FREMM frigates given the increased Russian presence in the Mediterranean (Rasio, 2023). In 2023, several high-ranking military officials stated that they wanted more military capabilities. For example, Air Force Chief General Luca Goretti said Italy required 41 extra F-35 fighters, while Navy Chief Admiral Enrico Credendino told lawmakers his force lacked drones and submarine-spotting aircraft. Army chief General Pietro Serino said the HIMARS rocket launcher, used by Ukraine against Russian invaders, was on his shopping list (Kington, 2023).

These new acquisitions come from decision-makers' realization of the changing international environment (Fish, 2021). According to the Italian Chief of Defense Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, there is a pressing need for a modernization of the Italian defense to deter adversaries, most notably Russia and China. He stated that, for Italy, the invasion of Ukraine "has shown what can happen to an army that does not value proper

training, doctrine, and professional military education,” and that Italy “should consider technological superiority as a key element of effective deterrence” (“The future of Italy’s armed forces,” 2022).

In short, similarly to Canada, Italy’s force development is moving from an anti-terrorist focus to greater attention devoted towards enhanced deterrence. That said, Italy’s force development is investing much greater sums than Canada. While Italy expects to reach 2% of its GDP in military spending within the next five years, Canada has no plan to reach NATO’s target. The inter-party divergences on threat perceptions and force employment have not been as great on force development. Whereas force employment has been generally consistent with differential threat perceptions, force development seems to be devoid of a similar politicization that has plagued Italy’s defense posture amid the return of high-intensity warfare in Europe.

8. Conclusion

Italy has not undertaken a similar shift as Canada from counterterrorism to deterrence. Given its greater military capabilities, Rome has been able to increase its commitments to NATO’s deterrence posture while maintaining a significant presence in other theaters. Both Rome and Ottawa have furthermore significantly reduced their military commitments abroad, exemplifying a reluctance to engage in combat operations abroad. But in contrast with Canada, military support to Ukraine in Rome is a fluctuant political issue with relatively low public support. As a result, the shift from counterterrorism to deterrence has not occurred simultaneously, as the two allies’ adjustment was shaped by differential political-party threat perceptions. On the one hand, Italy faces greater inter-party divergences, with pro-Russian parties undermining Rome’s ability to commit resources to deter and defend against Russian aggression. Canada, on the other hand, exemplifies greater inter-party consensus on threat perceptions, but it is significantly reducing its level of troop deployments and underinvesting in force development, thereby limiting its capacity to sustain military support to Ukraine and achieving its political objective: the defeat of Russia in Ukraine.

The two countries have adjusted differently to the challenges posed by great power competition to the liberal international order. While Canada is more hesitant than Italy to adapt in terms of force development, Ottawa has been much keener to adjust its force employment to the new security environment. This suggests that force development and employment are not similarly driven by inter-party threat perceptions. Force employment against Russia has spurred greater political divisions in Italy than in Canada due to pro-Russian sentiments amongst some political elites. In contrast, force development has not been subject to similar political debates, with Rome willing to commit more resources to adapt its military than Ottawa. This suggests that the crisis of liberal interventionism has contrasted effects among Western allies. Future studies would do well to investigate the sources of inter-party (dis)agreement and its varying impact on defense policy, for allied commitment levels are key to the sustainment of the US-led international order amid the decline of US relative power.

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Conflict of Interests

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