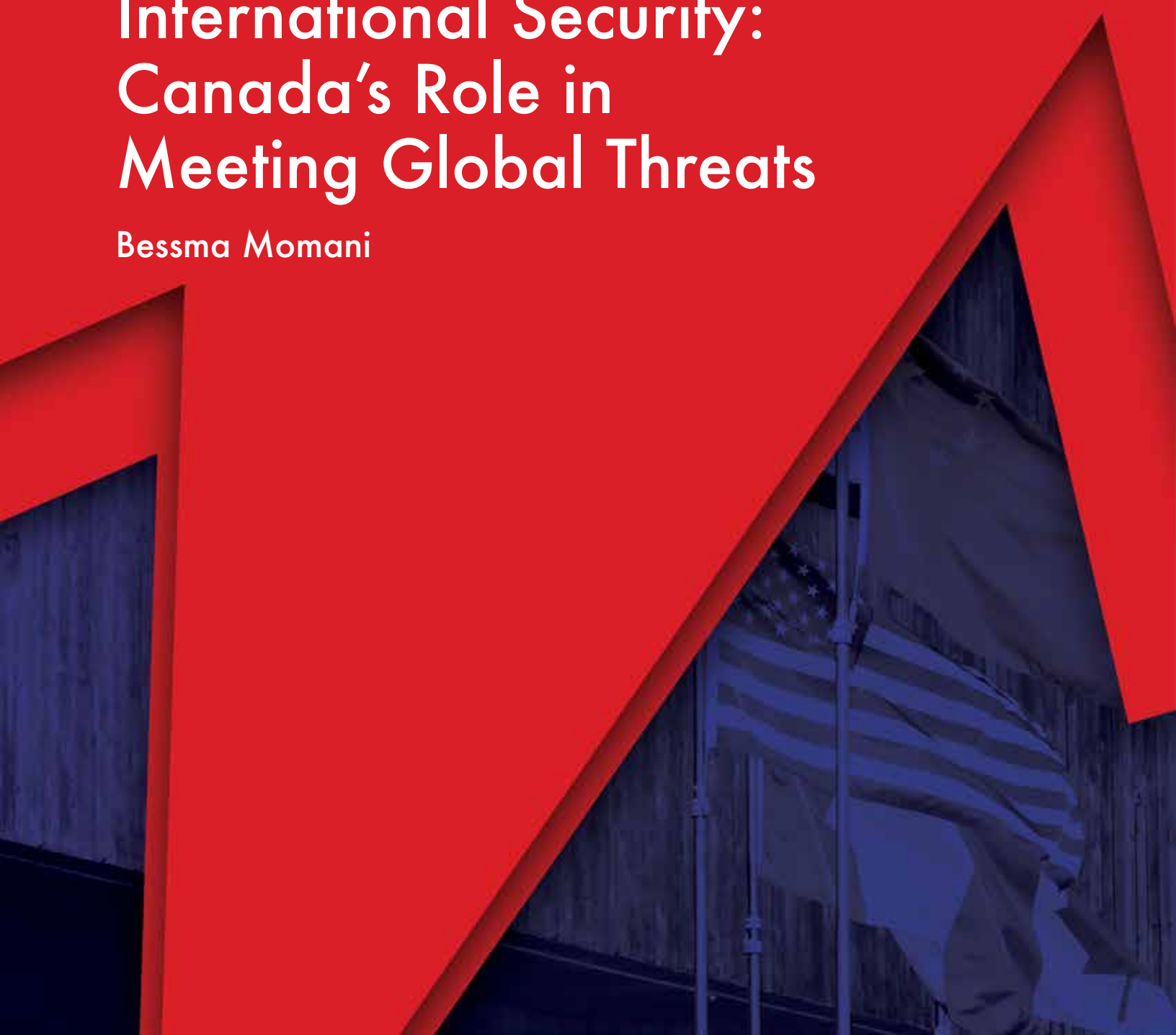

Centre for International
Governance Innovation

Reimagining a Canadian National Security Strategy

No. 4

International Security: Canada's Role in Meeting Global Threats

Bessma Momani



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About the Project

Canada's approach to domestic and international security is at a profound moment of change. The shock wave of COVID-19 and its looming future effects highlight the urgent need for a new, coordinated and forward-looking Canadian national security strategy that identifies emerging and non-traditional threats and considers their interrelationships. Complex interactions between foreign policy, domestic innovation and intellectual property, data governance, cybersecurity and trade all have a significant impact on Canada's national security and intelligence activities.

Reimagining a Canadian National Security Strategy is an ambitious and unprecedented project undertaken by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). It aims to generate new thinking on Canada's national security, inspire updated and innovative national security and intelligence practices, and identify ways that Canada can influence global policy and rulemaking to better protect future prosperity and enhance domestic security.

CIGI convened interdisciplinary working groups, which totalled more than 250 experts from government, industry, academia and civil society, to examine 10 thematic areas reflecting a new and broad definition of national security. Each thematic area was supported by senior officials from the Government of Canada, designated as "senior government liaisons." They provided input and ideas to the discussions of the working group and the drafting of thematic reports.

The project will publish 10 reports, authored independently by theme leaders chosen by the project's co-directors. The reports represent the views of their authors, are not designed as consensual documents and do not represent any official Government of Canada policy or position. The project was designed to provide latitude to the theme leaders to freely express new thinking about Canada's national security needs.

A special report by the project's co-directors, Aaron Shull and Wesley Wark, will analyze Canada's new national security outlook and propose a security strategy for Canada.

About the Author

CIGI Senior Fellow **Bessma Momani** is full professor and interim associate vice-president, interdisciplinary research, at the University of Waterloo. She is a non-resident senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, DC, and a Fulbright Scholar. She was a 2015 fellow of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and previously served as a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, and as a non-resident fellow at the Stimson Center, and was a visiting scholar at Georgetown University's Mortara Center. Bessma currently sits on the board of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. She is also an adviser to the National Security Transparency Advisory Group at Public Safety Canada.

Executive Summary

The current state of international politics presents new and unprecedented challenges for Canada as a middle power with vital global interests. Canada's interests in upholding global security have long been underpinned by a commitment to multilateralism and a concept of a rules-based international order. The old assumptions on which Canadian governments approached the maintenance of international security are now threatened by great power competition, the fraying of the international order, the decline of liberal democracy worldwide, the challenges of maintaining alliances and the rise of non-traditional global threats — all of which can only be met effectively through improved global cooperation.

In order to effectively navigate in a world of rising international insecurity, Canada must:

- reflect on thorny challenges presented by key state actors;
- reinforce a Canadian multilateral role, particularly in the context of our core alliances;
- respond to the challenges presented by authoritarian nationalist regimes and a “crisis of democracy”; and
- consider how best to leverage Canadian capabilities and gain the support of the Canadian public.

The following recommendations are made:

- Canada needs a well-formulated and independent foreign policy strategy, designed to protect and advance Canadian interests, particularly to guide its fraught relations with China. This foreign policy strategy must be integrated with our national security, defence and economic strategies.
- Canada must continue a process of working with allies to confront Russian efforts to destabilize international security and to combat Russian cyber aggression, while engaging in cooperative efforts with regard to the Arctic region.
- The Canadian government must commit to ongoing deep and multi-faceted engagement with the US political system to ensure

Canada's ability to develop an independent foreign policy. This involves devoting resources to greater strategic and long-term planning with respect to the United States.

- Canada should advance our interests through multilateral engagement, especially through our core alliances. Our core alliance commitments must be strengthened through investments and action.
- Canada should position itself in international relations as a progressive middle power with a strong commitment to democracy. International development assistance and devoted crisis relief aid to respond to refugee flows should be hallmarks of our stance.

Introduction

When Canada published its original national security policy in April 2004, titled *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (Government of Canada 2004), the chapter devoted to international security identified concerns around terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the dangers posed by failed and failing states. These concerns persist in 2021, but the international system has changed profoundly, prompting the need for Canada to rethink its approach to national security. The key changes highlighted in this report involve the increase of geopolitical tension and the destabilizing role played by key state actors such as China and Russia; challenges to the rules-based international order, the maintenance of which is critical to Canada's national interest; and new problems created by the rise of authoritarian nationalism and its explicit challenges and threats to democracies.

Looking back to 2004, the international environment, while fraught, seemed simpler in its dynamics. The complexities of the current situation require new investments in thinking about and delivering on a Canadian role in the world.

Key State Actors and Challenges to the International System

China

The greatest change to the international system in recent years has been the rapid rise of China as an economic and technological giant, and a related effort by China to project its power regionally and globally. Understanding China's ambitions as a great power are complicated by uncertainty over its foreign policy strategy and the links between foreign and domestic policy under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. China fits a rising model of states that can be labelled as authoritarian and nationalist and who wish to challenge the dominance of a Western democratic model of governance. China's approach to human rights issues, as exemplified by its policies toward civil liberties in Hong Kong, its domestic surveillance apparatus, and the repressive treatment of the Uighur minority, is antithetical to Canadian values and presents a persistent point of friction. While the continued growth of China's power may be blunted by some internal societal and economic pressures, it will present, for the foreseeable future, a principal challenge to Canada's international security policy.

Canada's national security is directly impacted by elements of current Chinese policies, including China's conduct of espionage, aggressive use of cyber power, willingness to engage in hostage diplomacy, and efforts to interfere with our democracy and society. Popular opinion toward China is at a historic low in Canada. Chinese foreign investment in Canada is now closely scrutinized on national security grounds, especially investment on the part of Chinese state-owned enterprises. Far greater attention will need to be paid in future to these kinds of national security threats.

Yet Canada cannot afford to be locked into a relationship with China in which this new giant is viewed purely as an adversary. Our national interest compels us to adopt a policy of confrontation where necessary, on matters that threaten global security and liberal-democratic norms, and of cooperation where possible and desirable, including on global climate change mitigation.

While relations with the Chinese government will remain complex and challenging, there remains room for elements of soft power diplomacy, which are advantageous to Canada, including promotion of tourism, Canadian arts and culture, Indigenous arts and culture, and university student recruitment. University research engagement with Chinese counterparts will invariably be more closely scrutinized on national security grounds as well.

A dedicated strategic policy approach to China must be fully integrated with our national security, defence and economic security needs.

Russia

Russia remains a disruptive power for the international system. While it may be in decline as a great power, it has embraced "below threshold" activities to further its foreign policy agenda and to target its opponents among the Western powers. Russian support for the Syrian regime, its annexation of Crimea, its military efforts to support a breakaway movement in Eastern Ukraine and its use of prohibited chemical weapons in assassination attempts are all points of friction. Russian state-sponsored cyberattacks are of special concern. The 2015 cyberattacks on Ukraine (the "NotPetya" worm), followed by interference operations in the 2016 US presidential election, represented a new and unprecedented deployment of cyber weapons to advance Russian objectives.

Russia, also exemplifying an authoritarian and nationalist model of governance, has proven its willingness to engage in disinformation campaigns designed to undermine political stability and erode trust in democratic processes and institutions.

As with China, Canada's approach to Russia must combine elements of confrontation and resistance to Russian behaviour, particularly through support for coordinated sanctions to deter Russia's illicit actions; our military contributions to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) deployments designed to secure NATO partners from Russian aggression; and strong national security measures to protect Canada against interference with our democratic practices.

There also remain important points of contact and cooperation with Russia, especially on Arctic issues, which are of increasing importance to the conduct of Canadian foreign policy. While

Russian modernization of its military assets in the Arctic may pose future security challenges for Canada and its allies, Russia, to date, remains committed to multilateral cooperation through the Arctic Council, goals which Canada shares.

The United States

The United States remains Canada's principal partner and ally in the conduct of foreign policy. The US position and leadership on the world stage were destabilized during the presidency of Donald Trump. While domestic forces in the United States still exert a gravitational pull in the direction of a more "America-first" and unilateralist stance, the rhetoric of the current Joe Biden administration seems focused on renewing American global leadership and setting a Western agenda for relations with China. For Canada, the process of negotiating the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement demonstrated the importance of deep and extensive engagement with diverse American political actors, from the White House and Congress to state-level governments.

Canadian relations with the United States have never been posited on a blind following of American initiatives, and that stance will most likely persist. But in the face of an uncertain future in terms of the conduct of American power on the world stage, it is incumbent that Canadian foreign policy be based on both deep engagement, to advance our interests, and deep understanding of developments in the United States. This deep understanding must reach beyond day-to-day developments in the Canada-US relationship to embrace broader strategic trends.

Canada's Commitment to Multilateralism and the Rules-Based International Order

Canada cannot "go it alone" when it comes to an international security policy. Insularity and a "Canada-first" approach are not options for a middle power dependent in economic terms and for its security from external threats on the

maintenance of international order and systems of global cooperation. In order to advance its interests and its values on the world stage, Canada must be able to work with like-minded partners and allies. In order to defend itself against growing international threats, Canada must look to the support of its allies, while making a strong contribution to networks of allies. These are not new ideas, but they have been made more urgent by the nature of current and projected international insecurity.

At the end of World War II, Canada was among the key architects of multilateral institutions and a strong voice for the liberal international order, participating in the creation of the United Nations, NATO and the Bretton Woods institutions. In addition to these international institutions, alliances and multilateral engagements such as the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), the Group of Seven (G7), the Group of Twenty (G20) and the Five Eyes security alliance have all provided valuable and friendly fora in which to both discuss issues of national security concern and, at times, devise a collective response.

For Canada, multilateralism has been both a sword and a shield. Multilateralism provided a mechanism while the construction of a "rules-based international order" provided an implicit consensus around the dos and don'ts of state behaviour. While the rules-based international order was never universally accepted and has been championed primarily by liberal democracies, this system has very much benefited Canada and its interests. Recent examples include the global fight against Daesh, where there was a concerted global effort that worked to diminish the group's strength and preserve collective security from terror attacks at home. The G20 response to the international financial crisis in 2008 is another successful example of international cooperation, in this case to avert global economic collapse. The coordination that was involved ensured that governments did not only fortify their own economies but instead worked together to find global solutions to shore up the international financial system, and prevent severe economic depression or international conflict. The fragmentation of multilateralism potentially removes an instrument of conflict resolution and prevention.

To respond to this fragmentation, Canada must strengthen its commitment to its core alliances. These include the Five Eyes intelligence

partnership, which Canada greatly values for its access to a wider pool of intelligence, but where Canada must contribute and share part of the burden with other member countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States). Canada's NATO commitment is often rhetorically affirmed but the country is still at the cusp of upgrading its military capabilities. That effort may be delayed or threatened by post-pandemic budgetary pressures. The long-standing NORAD agreement for the defence of North America has taken on new salience with the need to modernize capabilities for surveillance and domain awareness in the Arctic region. Modernizing the North Warning System, a joint US-Canada early-warning radar system, is important to the future of NORAD and to the bilateral security partnership with the United States. The G7 and the G20 are important venues for Canada to advance its interests and ideas. In both fora, Canada should strive for a leadership role, in particular to tackle new transnational global threats such as those posed by pandemics and climate change.

In renewing our commitment to alliances in the midst of a fragmenting international order, it is important for Canada to retain a realistic sense of itself as a middle power, neither over-vaunting our image nor under-representing it. Former US President Barack Obama once said that "the world needs more Canada" (Canadian Press 2016). The thrust of this comment was to imply that Canada was not doing enough on the international stage, presumably in support of the United States, yet we have interpreted this as a compliment on our foreign policy and role in international affairs. This is a perfect example of the tension between what we think about ourselves and what other countries think about us.

The Resurgence of Authoritarian Nationalism and the Challenge to Democracy

The rise of authoritarian regimes with strong nationalist agendas is a key feature of the contemporary international system, challenging any post-Cold War consensus about the triumph of democracy. How Canada reacts in defence of democracy and in defence of global civil liberties will be a pre-eminent challenge for the conduct of Canadian international policy. Part of this reaction must involve attention to growing anti-democratic and illiberal tendencies within Western democracies themselves. Globalization has not brought equal benefits to all within societies but instead has created a yawning divide between a wealthy minority and the rest. Distrust of government and a sense of disenfranchisement are strong forces. The social contract between democratic governments and their populations needs renewal. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this need.

Canada is a committed progressive nation on the world stage. In the face of a rising tide of authoritarianism, our progressive spirit must be a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy, but it also has to be constantly earned through improvements in our own social contract and practice of democracy. Canadian foreign policy cannot fight all global democratic rights battles; to do so would be to end up winning none. Canada can and should promote a progressive and inclusive vision of democracy on the world stage. Much of this promotion will need to be achieved in alliance settings and through the exercise of soft power. But there are dedicated approaches we can take, including in a progressive international development program, and in responding to international refugee and migration crises, even when these might require modification of our own immigration policies. The tempo of such crises may well increase with societal displacements caused by authoritarian regime actions and with the rise of health insecurity and climate change.

Canada has a strong normative reputation and clear incentives to respond to such crises in a generous spirit, not least to affirm our fundamental reality and strength as a multicultural society.

Leveraging Canada and Canadians

Canada's capacity to deliver on its foreign policy objectives depends on four things: articulating our foreign policy strategy; deploying adequate resources; ensuring a deep talent pool; and developing a fit-for-purpose governance machinery to make sure that coherent and timely foreign policy decisions can be made.

Canada's capacity in all four areas is in doubt and reflects a downturn from an earlier post-World War II era when Canada was deeply committed to an internationalist stance, driven by its contribution to war efforts but also, importantly, to multilateral organizations and efforts, such as the Bretton Woods organizations and NATO, that were born in this period of crises.

Canada faces another crisis moment in international affairs. This one is a product not of a world war but of the impending collapse of, or at least major destabilizing change in, the international order.

To meet this new crisis, Canada must restore its strength in foreign policy through a rebuilding of its ideational foundations and institutions, both within and outside the walls of government.

An important first step involves identifying the drivers of and challenges to formulating Canadian foreign policy and spelling these out in a foreign policy strategy.

These drivers and challenges include:

- a new focus on China;
- strengthened engagement with a polarized United States;
- deepened commitment to multilateralism and alliances with diminishing financial resources;

- a progressive stance on democracy protection in a world of rising populist-nationalists;
- leadership roles in global health security and climate change mitigation;
- advancement of a progressive international development aid program;
- and responsiveness to global refugee and migration crises.



Recommendations

- A new foreign policy strategy is necessary to account for significant changes in the international political system, particularly in light of the rise of an assertive China.
- Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the cyber realm can only be countered effectively when Canada works closely with its allies. This work does not preclude advancing shared interests with the Russians in regard to the Arctic.
- The US political system is in flux and Canada's dependence on a healthy southern neighbour requires us to be nimble, practical and strategic in our bilateral relations.
- Canada is stronger when working in concert with our allies. Investing in multilateralism, particularly our core alliances, is necessary and vital to our collective political and economic stability.

As a progressive middle power with a strong commitment to democracy, Canada needs to embrace this identity and reputation through continuing to provide international development assistance and remaining a welcoming place for refugees and immigrants.

Conclusion

Canada faces great challenges in pursuing its interests in international relations. It is squeezed by pressures from great powers; must continue to work within a multilateral framework and, indeed, strengthen such a framework; determine how best it can advance democracy protection in the face of assertive authoritarianism; and make hard decisions on where it can play a leadership role in facing some of the new threats to international “peace, order and good government” outlined in this report. Reactive and ad hoc policy initiatives will not suffice. The absence of a strategic framework for the pursuit of Canadian foreign policy is detrimental to advancing our interests. Questions of how best to resource and organize Canada’s international security policy must be addressed.

Canada’s 2004 national security policy promised a “dynamic [national security] system that is able to continually evolve to address emerging threats and that will rely heavily on contributions from all stakeholders” (Government of Canada 2004, 6). That promise was not met in the years since and must now be addressed with fresh eyes on measures to “contribute to the creation of a safer world” (*ibid.*), a quintessential Canadian ideal.

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Acknowledgements

The Reimagining a Canadian National Security Strategy project wishes to acknowledge the valuable engagement we have enjoyed with senior officials during working group discussions and the drafting of the report. The senior government liaisons who took part in discussions about the International Security: Canada's Role in Meeting Global Threats theme and who consent to be acknowledged are:

- Dan Costello, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Security, Global Affairs Canada
- Scott Millar, Vice-President, Strategic Policy Branch, Canada Border Services Agency

Their involvement with the project does not in any way indicate their agreement in whole or in part with the theme report and their participation does not reflect any official Government of Canada policy or position.

The project wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by working group members during discussions and the drafting of the report. The working group members who took part in discussions about the International Security: Canada's Role in Meeting Global Threats theme and who consent to be acknowledged are:

- Chris Alexander, Distinguished Fellow and former MP, Canadian International Council
- Kerry Buck, former Canadian Ambassador to NATO
- Bruno Charbonneau, Professor, International Studies, and Director of the Centre for Security and Crisis Governance, Royal Military College Saint-Jean
- Laurence Deschamps-Laporte, Invited Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal
- Marie-Eve Desrosiers, Associate Professor, Public and International Affairs, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa
- Balkan Devlen, Director, Centre in Modern Turkish Studies, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University

- Norbert Eschborn, Director, KAS office in Canada, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
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Their involvement with the project does not in any way indicate their agreement in whole or in part with the theme report.

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