

Call for Papers

Re-Imagining Defence: Strategic Autonomy, Dual-Use Innovation, and Canada's Future Security Architecture

19-20 January 2027

Co-hosted by the Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA) and the School of Social, Political and Historical Research, University of Waterloo

Symposium Overview

Canada is entering a historic period of defence transformation. Recent defence-related announcements, including the launch of Canada's Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS), the establishment of the Defence Innovation Agency (DIA), engagement with NATO DIANA (Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic), and Canada's future role in hosting the NATO Defence Innovation Bank, signal an important shift in Canada's strategic posture.

At the same time, Canada has committed to meeting NATO's 2% defence spending target immediately, and to reaching the Alliance's newly agreed 5% spending guideline by 2035. Under this framework, approximately 3.5% of GDP will be directed toward core defence expenditure, while 1.5% will support broader security-related investments.

These commitments create a generational opportunity for Canada. Unlike many allies, Canada enters this period after decades of relative underinvestment in defence capability. While this has produced important capability gaps, it also creates an opportunity to modernize Canada's defence posture by integrating conventional capabilities with next-generation technologies. Rather than viewing traditional and emerging capabilities as competing priorities, Canada has an opportunity to develop a more integrated force that operates effectively across land, sea, air, cyber, and space.

The future of defence is no longer defined solely by traditional domains of land, sea, and air. States must increasingly defend and operate across land, sea, air, cyber and space. Increasingly, the challenge lies not simply in operating within each domain, but in integrating capabilities across them through multi-domain operations. Future defence effectiveness will depend upon secure communications, data fusion, interoperable systems, and resilient command-and-control architectures capable of functioning in contested environments. This shift requires new thinking about capability, infrastructure, procurement, and governance.

Defence investment increasingly requires integrating conventional military capabilities with dual-use technologies, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, robotics, cyber capabilities, advanced materials, quantum technologies, space systems, edge computing, and secure communications, to enhance readiness, interoperability, and resilience. These technologies constitute the emerging general-purpose infrastructure of the future, with transformative implications not only for defence but for productivity, economic competitiveness, critical infrastructure, and broader societal resilience.

At the same time, dual-use technologies raise important questions about governance, access, and control. Decisions regarding who can develop, access, deploy, or restrict emerging technologies increasingly shape both national security outcomes and broader democratic values. These allocation decisions may be made through government regulation, export controls, procurement policies, or private-sector governance mechanisms, raising important questions concerning accountability, transparency, equity, and democratic oversight. How these decisions are structured can strengthen security objectives, unintentionally constrain innovation and resilience, or create tensions with broader democratic principles and rights. A central strategic question for Canada is how defence investment can simultaneously strengthen military readiness, foster technological innovation, and contribute to broader economic resilience. This question extends beyond defence readiness, and connects with Canada's trade diversification agenda, strengthen domestic productivity, scale high-potential AI and advanced technology firms, and deepen sovereign capability in critical sectors. More agile, innovation-enabling procurement systems could help Canadian SMEs and start-ups scale while supporting national capability development. In this context, government also has an important role to play in supporting experimentation, prototyping, commercialization, and access to allied defence markets and procurement ecosystems.

The governance and policy dimensions concerning dual-use capability are equally important. As a democratic middle power and trusted international partner, Canada is well positioned to contribute to the development of norms, standards, and governance frameworks for the safe, responsible, and democratic use of revolutionary technologies. This includes important questions concerning:

- data sovereignty and digital ownership in buy/sell/partner arrangements
- standards for autonomous control and human oversight of uncrewed systems
- AI accountability and algorithmic transparency in military applications
- cyber resilience and protection of critical infrastructure
- satellite interference, signal denial, and secure communications governance
- export controls, interoperability, and allied regulatory harmonization

The strategic challenge in “re--imagining defence” is therefore two-fold: to strengthen Canada's technical and industrial capabilities while simultaneously shaping the policy, regulatory, and governance architecture needed for the defence ecosystem of the future.

This symposium will bring together scholars, policymakers, industry leaders, defence practitioners, and allied partners to examine how Canada can re-imagine defence in an era increasingly shaped by strategic autonomy, dual-use innovation, and technological disruption.

Themes and Topics

We invite abstracts and papers addressing (but not limited to) the following themes:

Strategic Defence and National Capability

- Strategic autonomy and defence sovereignty

- Defence capability integration across land, sea, air, cyber, and spaceDefence modernization and future force design
- Canada's defence industrial strategy and capability priorities

Dual-Use Technologies and Emerging Capability

- Artificial intelligence and defence applications
- Autonomous and uncrewed systems
- Cybersecurity and digital infrastructure
- Space systems and satellite resilience
- Quantum, advanced computing, and secure communications
- Interoperability across allied defence systems
- Integration of emerging technologies with existing defence platforms and systems

Defence Procurement and Industrial Development

- Procurement reform and innovation-enabling acquisition
- Defence procurement as industrial strategy
- Scaling SMEs and start-ups in defence ecosystems
- Public-private partnerships and commercialization pathways
- Innovation financing and defence investment models

Governance, Policy, and Regulation

- Data governance and digital sovereignty
- Standards and regulatory frameworks for dual-use technologies
- AI governance and responsible autonomy
- Democratic governance of emerging defence technologies
- Governance of access to dual-use technologies and export controls
- Public and private governance of emerging technologies
- Ethics, oversight, and accountability

Canada and Allied Partnerships

- NATO and strategic defence transformation
- NATO DIANA and innovation ecosystems
- Defence collaboration among middle powers
- Canada's role in shaping allied standards and norms

- Trade diversification through defence innovation

Submission Details

Please submit an abstract of 500 words along with a short biography to:

info@balsillieschool.ca

Submission Deadline for Abstracts:

5 October 2026

Successful applicants will be notified mid-October.

Draft papers for symposium circulation and consideration for a **special journal issue/edited publication** will be due on:

9 December 2026

We welcome submissions from scholars, policymakers, practitioners, industry leaders, and interdisciplinary researchers working across defence, security, governance, innovation, and public policy.