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Development Without Displacement: Breaking the Cycle of Urban Development Uprooting Black Communities

BY DAVID OKOJIE

Source: African Nova Scotian Flag, designed by Wendie L. Wilson, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Development Without Displacement: Breaking the Cycle of Urban Development Uprooting Black Communities

This Black History Month, it is essential to talk about how public policy, such as housing and urban development, while at first glance may appear as net positives across the board, have been harmful to Black communities throughout Canadian history. Many Black communities that represent important aspects of Canadian history, as well as being cultural hubs, have been virtually erased. The 16-year construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT is a strong example of this fact. According to the local Business Improvement Area (BIA) of Little Jamaica, the LRT has reportedly put the neighbourhood in a "state of emergency". Over 300 businesses have closed since the construction of the LRT; the construction has made it increasingly difficult for customers to reach them. Little Jamaica is an essential cultural feature of Toronto. An influx of Caribbean migrants arrived in the area thanks to the West Indian Domestic Scheme in 1955, and the neighbourhood became a nexus for reggae and soul in the 1970s and 80s, all the while serving delicious Caribbean food. For these reasons, the city had rightfully recognised the neighbourhood as a heritage conservation district, but more work is needed to protect it. Unfortunately, the plight of Little Jamaica is not an anomaly in Canadian history; black communities have suffered their neighbourhoods being uprooted, and inhabitants dispersed due to urban development policy. This was the case for one of the first predominantly-black settlements in Canada, Africville, and the first and only concentrated black neighbourhood in Vancouver, Hogan's Alley.

Source: Africville from the lots beside the Seaview Baptist Church, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Africville was a historically Black community located in the north end of Halifax but was demolished by the city in the 1960s. The American Revolution and the War of 1812 brought formerly enslaved Black people to Halifax because they were promised freedom by the British Crown if they fought for them. They are known as Afro-Nova Scotians, a distinct ethnic group in Canada and an integral part of its history. Due to the racial discrimination they encountered, Black settlers established themselves on the outskirts of Halifax, and the area became colloquially referred to as Africville. Over time, Black people continued to migrate to Africville, building a vibrant community that served as a haven from the racism faced in Halifax. However, despite local government tax collections, residents of Africville were not provided with paved roads, running water, or other infrastructure. In the 19th century, Africville was deemed an "industrial district" by the municipal government, resulting in the placement of slaughterhouses, a prison, and a fertilizer plant. This tradition of selective policy continued in the 1950s, when the Halifax government decided to build an open-pit garbage dump they deemed a "health menace" in Africville. None of the city council's minutes mentions the protests or any consultation with the inhabitants of Africville.

The garbage dump placement was part of a larger urban development plan approved by the Halifax City Council in 1947 to turn Africville into an industrial land, and the city council would later vote in the 1960s to relocate Africville inhabitants for an "urban renewal" of the area. Starting in 1964 and over the next five years, Africville houses were bulldozed, and residents were relocated to derelict or rented public housing (at one point, residents and their possessions were relocated with dump trucks). Many residents had their homes bulldozed without their permission, while others only had a few hours' notice before. Africville was completely demolished in 1969, and the sums paid to the residents for the demolition of their homes covered only the down payment on a home. Combined with the difficulties of securing employment in Halifax, this led to Africville's residents dispersing to areas in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg. Africville was redeveloped into private housing, with its central area becoming a dog park. Through urban planning and policy that did not seek or acknowledge local consultation, one of the most important cultural sites in Canada was destroyed.

What happened in Africville was not a rare occurrence; Hogan's Alley in Vancouver was home to much of Vancouver's Black community and was demolished to make room for the Georgia Viaduct. Hogan's Alley had a vibrant community of renowned black performers and Musicians, including Nora Hendrix - vaudeville performer and the paternal grandmother of Jimi Hendrix. Ever since the destruction of Hogan's Alley, Vancouver lost a cultural hub and the only predominantly Black neighbourhood in Vancouver.

If history is any guide for the future, the outlook for Little Jamaica is troubling. The rapid closure of local businesses that have historically served their communities removes social hubs where locals can connect and support each other, while the owners lose their livelihoods. What follows is cultural erasure: a community hollowed out as the institutions that once served as its heartbeat disappear.

Still, all is not lost; initiatives are underway to prevent this future and protect these historic communities, such as the Little Jamaica Community Land Trust (LJCLT). Community land trusts (CLTs) are community-based, non-profit, non-governmental organizations aimed at securing long-term affordability and community control over space by removing land from the speculative market and from gentrification pressures. CLTs acquire land through purchase or donation and hold it in perpetuity for various community needs, such as housing, urban agriculture, commercial space, and cultural uses. The aim is to ensure there are places for local businesses and affordable housing, preserving the community's cultural richness. The City of Toronto is also in the process of developing a Cultural Districts Program, which would offer formal recognition to areas like Little Jamaica and provide them with access to resources to protect their diversity, such as capacity-building programs for community groups and grants for community-led stewardship initiatives.

Source: Jamaican specialities bring Clara Lemontagne, 24, left, to shop at store run by Florrie Temple, Toronto Public Library Digital Archive.

Urban development is only equitable when local residents have a meaningful seat at the table in decisions that shape their communities. One way to achieve this is participatory budgeting (PB), a system that allows residents to make decisions about which projects will be funded with an allocated budget in their community. PB is not simply commenting on municipal proposals.

Rather, they decide what will happen in their neighbourhoods. PB originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989 and was used to engage citizens to rank the city's priorities. Civic engagement rose significantly and, according to the UN, led to a 20% increase in sewer and water connections. This has inspired other municipalities to follow suit. New York City has allocated at least $23 million for PB projects, and Vancouver and Toronto have also participated on a smaller scale. PB is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and each municipality can determine how to organize a democratic system of project proposals and voting for what works best for them. Through PB, residents could propose and/or vote for projects in their community's best interest. In the case of Little Jamaica, this could be the distribution of funding to support local businesses, or the construction of a cultural center; the opportunities are endless and up to the community's residents. These initiatives give residents the tools to protect their neighbourhood's cultural richness.

The aforementioned community and municipal initiatives are positive steps to ensure the perseverance of a historic Black community in Toronto. Still, it is integral that governments include and engage with the affected communities at every step of the planning process with initiatives like PB. The displacement of Black Canadians has been a habitual occurrence in Canadian history, but the practice does not need to continue in the future. A more equitable urban development process is necessary for Canada to protect these communities because diversity is and will always be our strength.

Source: Little Jamaica street view, Toronto Public Library Digital Archive.

Diaspora Through Dessert

BY CASSANDRA PORTELLI

Diaspora Through Dessert

Food is more than mere calories; it is far more complex, intertwining identity, culture and belonging. When we eat, we are not just nourishing our bodies; we are symbolically "taking in" the meanings, histories, and identities attached to that food. Sociologist Claude Fischler calls this process "incorporation", arguing that eating is one of the most intimate ways in which we construct identity. For me, this complexity is expressed in ladyfinger pastries (savoiardi) dipped in coffee, layered with a whipped mixture of mascarpone, sugar, egg yolks, and topped with cocoa powder: tiramisu. As an Italian-Canadian born to first-generation immigrant parents, this dessert is not only delicious but an embodiment of my family's history. Through it, I navigate the tension between heritage and adaptation, authenticity and reinvention, family and self.

Growing up in Toronto, tiramisu was not an everyday dish but a special ritual. It appeared at birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving dinners, and community gatherings. As a child, my mother prepared tiramisu days in advance, carefully dipping the ladyfingers "just enough" in espresso and whipping the mascarpone until it reached the perfect fluffy texture. Food historian Steven Shapin writes that our "stomachs are the citizens of the world", meaning that what we consume quietly connects us to global histories far beyond our kitchens. In our small Toronto kitchen, tiramisu became a link between two worlds, across an ocean, a generation and a bridge between two languages.

According to my mother, tiramisu has an interesting history. Though considered quintessentially Italian, it is a modern creation from the 1950s. It emerged amid postwar modernization and exposure to global tastes from the Fruili-Veneto region of Italy. Its key ingredients: coffee, cocoa, and sugar were colonial imports that had been absorbed into the Italian culinary imagination. These ingredients travelled through global trade networks shaped by empire and exchange. Tiramisu itself is a product of international circulation rather than culinary isolation. In this way, tiramisu mirrors the immigrant experience; it is both local and global, rooted yet adaptable. If authenticity depended on isolation, tiramisu would not exist. Its "Italian-ness" is the result of integration. Its very name, tira-mi-su ("pick me up"), captures the essence of immigrant life; the effort to lift oneself between cultures, to sustain identity through taste.

When I make tiramisu in Canada, the ingredients and the way I prepare it tell their own story. The mascarpone may be imported from Italy, but the espresso is brewed in a Canadian-made machine, the eggs come from a local farm, and the cocoa comes from my local Walmart. Each layer reflects global trade, local adaptation, and personal choice, much like immigrant identity itself. The dessert, like me, is a product of multiple geographies and histories.

Fischler describes what he calls the omnivore's paradox: People constantly negotiate the tension between neophobia (fear of the unknown) and neophilia (the need for change, novelty, variety). In other words, we navigate between foods that feel safe and familiar and those that allow us to grow and change. This paradox applies not only to individual food choices; it can also describe how societies approach immigration, balancing preservation of shared norms with openness to new cultural influences. My tiramisu sits precisely in this space. It honours the traditions of my Italian heritage while also adapting to the contexts of life in Canada, where ingredients and taste inevitably shift.

Still, questions of authenticity linger. Is the version I make in Toronto as "real" as the ones my grandmothers once made in Lamezia or Udine? Would they approve of my shortcuts, such as skipping the steps of using egg yolks (I sometimes do), adding maple syrup instead of sugar, or adding espresso pods instead of stovetop moka? These are not trivial changes; they reflect the way immigrant families adapt their traditions to new contexts. Shapin reminds us that food customs become so embedded in daily life that they feel like a part of who we are, and this continuity is often maintained even when circumstances change. Through Shapin, I have come to understand that authenticity is not about strict replication, but about emotional fidelity. The tiramisu I make may not match the original recipe, but it carries the same intent: to gather people, to comfort and to celebrate moments of life.

The sensory experience of tiramisu for me is like no other; its aroma, texture, sweet and bitter combination is inseparable from my memory. When I taste it, I am transported to my grandmother's kitchen, to Sunday lunches stretched for hours, to the melodic chaos of family chatter. But I also think of my Canadian friends who have learned to love it, and now request it at our gatherings. In these shared moments, tiramisu becomes a tool, a way to invite others into my layered identity without translation. As Fischler mentions, incorporation is also the basis of collective identity, cuisine is a central component of the sense of collective belonging. Through tiramisu, I have learned that identity is not fixed but continuously composed, and I can invite others into my layered identity.

In Canada, questions of identity are never singular. Canadian society is shaped by layered diasporas, where cultural traditions are preserved, renegotiated, and sometimes reinvented across generations. Many Canadians move through what many call hybrid identities, carrying inherited cultural worlds while also participating in a distinct Canadian civic and social culture. The process is rarely linear; it involves choosing what to keep, what to adapt, and what to quietly let go. This negotiation is not only experienced by immigrants of the past, but also by their children and grandchildren who continue to reconcile inherited memories with contemporary life. The balance between "where we come from" and "where we are" is a defining feature of Canadian identity, and food often becomes one of the most accessible tools for making sense of this dual belonging. In this way, multicultural societies are not only a policy framework but an everyday negotiation between familiarity and change, much like the omnivore's paradox. This experience also reflects Canada's official multiculturalism model, where cultural preservation and integration coexist as guiding principles rather than mutually exclusive demands.

Today, when I serve tiramisu at a family dinner celebration, I see it as more than a dessert. It is a narrative told through taste. It speaks of migration, adaptation, and love. It reminds me that multiculturalism is not only a policy framework, but an everyday practice lived through food, memory and community. It reminds me that identity, like a good tiramisu, depends on balance between heritage and innovation, and between espresso and cream. Each layer carries traces of global trade, history, migration, and reinvention, reinforcing that identity is assembled rather than inherited whole. Each layer tells part of the story of who I am, an Italian-Canadian continually expanding the possibilities of self.

The Twilight of Strategic Ambiguity: The Latest Congressional Consensus on Taiwan

BY DOMINIC TANG

The Twilight of Strategic Ambiguity: The Latest Congressional Consensus on Taiwan

On December 2, 2025, President Trump signed the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act into law after it passed the House and the Senate with broad bipartisan support. The act mandates the State Department to review its guidelines on US-Taiwan relations at least every five years and report to Congress. The reports must "identify opportunities and plans to lift self-imposed restrictions on relations with Taiwan." Behind celebratory reactions in Taipei, however, lies a risk. The law reflects a sustained congressional trend that erodes US strategic ambiguity on Taiwan – the very policy principle that has maintained peace across the Taiwan Strait for decades. To truly safeguard Taiwan's security, Washington must move beyond performative hawkishness on Capitol Hill. Instead of symbolic gestures that provoke Beijing without providing tangible military aid, the focus must pivot to a coordinated policy that preserves executive flexibility.

Strategic ambiguity remains the bedrock of US policy toward Taiwan. By remaining intentionally vague about whether it would intervene militarily if China used force, Washington maintains a double deterrence: restraining Beijing from aggression and preventing Taipei from a unilateral declaration of independence. The primary document guiding US-Taiwan relations, the Taiwan Relations Act, states that the United States will "consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means [...] of grave concern." The statement creates ambiguity because it does not constitute an explicit defense commitment.

The executive branch historically clings to this ambiguity to preserve room for diplomatic maneuvering, with Presidents George W. Bush and Joe Biden being the exceptions: each implied that the US would defend Taiwan if China used force, only for senior officials to later walk back those comments. So far, the current Trump administration appears aligned with this traditional approach. In a recent interview, Trump declined to give a clear answer on how he would respond to a Chinese

attack on Taiwan. The 2025 National Security Strategy preserves the careful language on Taiwan of prior administrations.

By contrast, Congress is moving in a different direction, appearing increasingly determined to pursue policies that may narrow or complicate strategic ambiguity. In 2018, Congress unanimously passed the Taiwan Travel Act, which urges the US government to encourage visits between US and Taiwanese officials at all levels. Two years later, the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act was also passed unanimously. The 2025 Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act builds on this trajectory. These acts reflect a sustained congressional effort to pressure the White House toward clearer, more visible, and elevated support for Taiwan.

This divergence stems from a distinctive bipartisan alignment on Taiwan in Congress. Checks and balances on the administration's ability to steer foreign policy have been waning for decades, in part because growing political polarization has narrowed Congress's capacity to exercise oversight. Yet, the support for Taiwan has remained robust and bipartisan for decades.

Historically, Taipei has leaned on lobbyists in Washington to influence Congress, with its foreign agents contacting nearly 90% of members of Congress in 2019. With US-China relations still strained, both parties have strong incentives to keep leveraging the "Taiwan card": Republicans often use Taiwan issues to redirect electoral attention away from domestic agendas, while Democrats frequently respond by toughening their stances to avoid being outflanked.

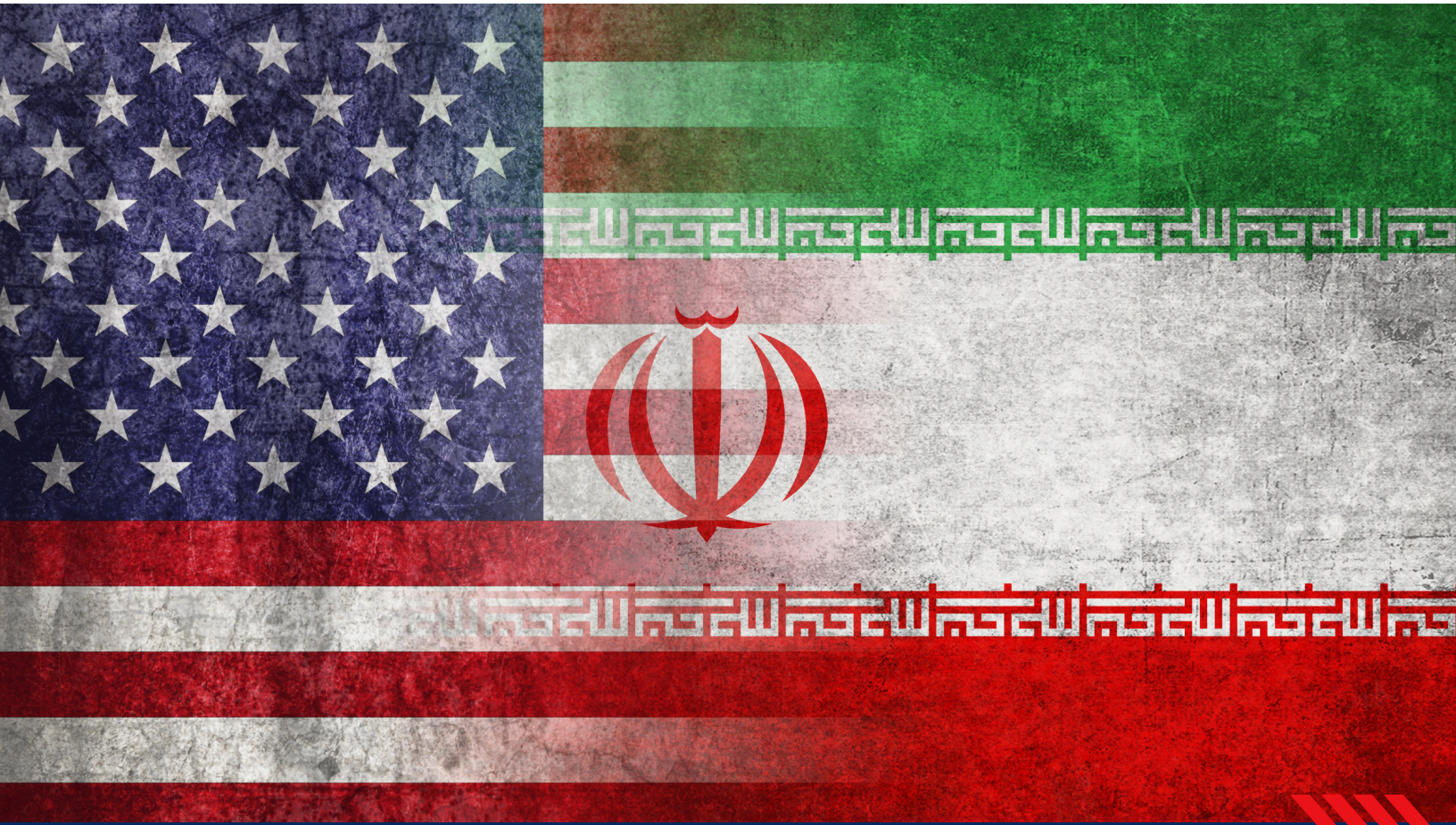
However, this activism creates substantial costs that the White House and even Taiwan itself were often left to manage. Congress can codify commitments that bind the executive branch in ways sitting or future presidents cannot easily ignore. The Taiwan Travel Act, for example, departed from previous policy as it explicitly permits bilateral official visits between the United States and Taiwan. This congressional action facilitated more frequent visits by senior-level officials and members of Congress to Taiwan. In 2022, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made the highest-level visit to Taipei in 25 years, and Beijing responded with heated rhetoric and large-scale military exercises; then-National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan later remarked that, in his view, the cost of the visit to Taiwan far exceeded the benefits. The executive branch now faces a persistent dilemma: allow escalatory symbolic visits or face Congressional accusations of weaknesses. The Biden administration reportedly spent weeks warning Pelosi about the risks, but refrained from officially opposing the trip. Conversely, the Trump administration's decision to deny a US stopover by Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te drew criticism from Democratic representatives, who argued that the decision violated the Taiwan Travel Act.

The danger is that many of these Taiwan-related laws, however symbolic, chip away at the deterrent power of uncertainty. They also often contain "irritating wording" for Beijing, such as "diplomatic" or "strategic," which are read as evidence of a deepening US commitment. This ambiguity, along with its deterrent effect, evaporates entirely if congressional activism appears to confirm Beijing's assumption that Washington will steadily deepen its support of Taiwan, making the use of force seem inevitable. Beijing may believe that a Republican White House would align with Republican majorities in both the House and Senate on Taiwan, providing executive backing for Congress's direction and ultimately pushing US policy toward more "normalized" relations with Taipei. In Beijing's view, this would constitute a fundamental violation of the One China policy – likely prompting it to harden its stance, including reiterating that it will not renounce the use of force against Taiwan. As debates over ending strategic ambiguity intensify, the continued push for concrete commitments risks locking both nations into an escalation spiral.

These realities make it difficult for the US to maintain a coherent line between Congress and the President, let alone to build the envisioned "collective strategic ambiguity" to strengthen the assurances Taiwan receives from US allies and partners. Congress must upgrade its own expertise on the bills' military and diplomatic consequences, not just their symbolic value at home. House and Senate hearings on Taiwan-related legislation should routinely bring in military and regional experts to discuss escalation risks. The executive branch should be more transparent with Congress about the red lines and the limits of US commitments. For both Taipei and Washington, Taiwan's security is better served by coordinated policymaking between the White House and Congress. A competitive cycle of symbolic gestures risks antagonizing China and limiting the executive branch's flexibility in adapting its Taiwan policy, without substantially advancing Taiwan's long-term security.

The Limits of U.S. Sanctions on Iran in an Era of China's Global Influence

BY WILL HICKS



The Limits of U.S. Sanctions on Iran in an Era of China's Global Influence

The Trump administration remains steadfast in its focus on Iran. October 9th, 2025, marked yet another introduction of new U.S. sanctions aimed at curtailing Iran's crude oil exports. This is, of course, a familiar story given the laundry list of American sanctions restricting Iran's ability to break through to the global economy. However, this new development equally signals a much more worrying trend regarding the limits of U.S. sanctions policy. As Iran's trade relationship with China continues to strengthen, any new sanctions are unlikely to meaningfully disrupt the Iranian regime's behaviour. And with the Trump administration still pursuing economic instruments to disrupt Iran's military activities, sanctions may exhibit diminishing returns. Indeed, this paper establishes that the effectiveness of continued sanctions on Iran is largely limited; they not only fail to constrain the behaviour of the regime, but struggle to address the economic lifeline China provides to Tehran, ultimately challenging the integrity of sanctions as a credible tool for U.S. foreign policy.

In a statement made by spokesperson Thomas Pigott in October, the U.S. Department of State has issued the sanctioning of several "individuals, entities, and vessels" involved in Iranian crude oil exports. For the Trump administration, these measures are part of a broader ambition to "drive Iran's export of oil to zero" and "[disrupt] the regime's ability to fund terrorist groups that threaten the United States". These new sanctions have primarily been directed not toward Iran, but rather their largest trading partner, China. Indeed, the United States has identified several Chinese companies and shipping vessels allegedly associated with Iranian oil, as well as independent "teapot refineries" operating in mainland China. For Washington, Iran's foreign policy is becoming increasingly intertwined with U.S-China relations.

In theory, sanctions act as the perfect middle ground between words and wars. Used as tools of coercion, deterrence, or punishment, their use is predicated on the idea that they are the best non-violent instruments to achieve foreign policy objectives. In practice, however, sanctions can backfire. For one, they can catalyze innovation, diversification, and workarounds that deem economic sanctions essentially futile.

What's more, the very existence of Chinese teapot refineries and oil imports suggests that Tehran has found an alternative channel for new U.S. sanctions thrown their way. Even with Washington's "maximum pressure" sanctions announcement in October, China remains its top buyer at 90.6% of exports. Furthermore, the Iranian regime's response to the collapse of the Rial in early 2026 suggests that Tehran will not change its behaviour despite economic struggles and mass demonstrations. These recent sanctions mirror the previous "maximum pressure" campaign of Trump's first stint in office. In 2018, the Trump administration assumed economic sanctions would hinder Iran's regional power projection, although, while adversely affecting the Iranian economy, the sanctions "have arguably not… altered Iran's core strategic objectives of extending influences throughout the region". Yet still, the same cards are being played

by the Trump administration in late 2025. Even if sanctions manage to tank aneconomy, how effective can they be when the regime's behaviour remains the same?

Beyond Iran, this points to a deeper issue in the U.S.' projection of power globally. In America's Global Advantage, Carla Norrlof argues that the U.S.' global influence depends on managing the international economy in a manner that benefits other states. If their management turns too coercive, such as through repeated ineffective sanctions, this can galvanize states to seek alternatives in the global market. Iran's deepening relationship with China illustrates this very pattern.

Indeed, China has clearly capitalized on the incentive for non-Western trade networks. Due in part to these "maximum pressure" sanctions, Beijing has imported crude oil at significant discounts not only from Iran, but also Russia and Venezuela. As financial economics advisor Saeed Ghasseminejad specifies, China offers a viable alternative for the U.S.' "axis of aggressors" mired in economic sanctions, keeping these states financially stable and challenging U.S. international interests.

As John Mearsheimer suggests, great powers are inherently opportunistic, maximizing power at the expense of their global rivals. In this context, China's expanding role as an importer of Iranian oil is a rational response to the economic opening produced by further U.S. sanctions. If the Trump administration cannot identify alternative strategies to change Iran's behaviour, teapot refineries will continue to operate, Chinese demand for Iranian oil will only grow, and the U.S.'s leverage as a great power will gradually erode. Yet, it does not currently appear as though Washington has articulated alternative strategies, let alone realized the strategic limitations of sanctions.

With the use of economic sanctions against Iran getting stale, it is reasonable to ask what comes next. Even in the absence of formal diplomatic relations with Iran, the Trump administration should consider policy alternatives beyond the economic measures it currently employs. Sanctions should not be the default non-military answer, but a component of a broader array of policy options, complementing each other. This could include offering conditional sanctions relief based on specific changes to regime behaviour, multilateral coordination with international institutions to limit alternative shipping channels, or even fostering academic discourse and engagement with civil society groups. The key, in this case, will be for Washington to escape the echo chamber of assuming that Iran policy must be a binary between either sanctions or military escalation. Otherwise, the U.S. will not only fail to change the Iranian regime's behaviour, but possibly provide Beijing with even more economic leverage in a world where China's status as a great power becomes increasingly evident.

Seeing the Taboo Through the treaty – Why Canada should sign the TPNW

BY GEORGIA MAXWELL

Seeing the Taboo Through the treaty – Why Canada should sign the TPNW

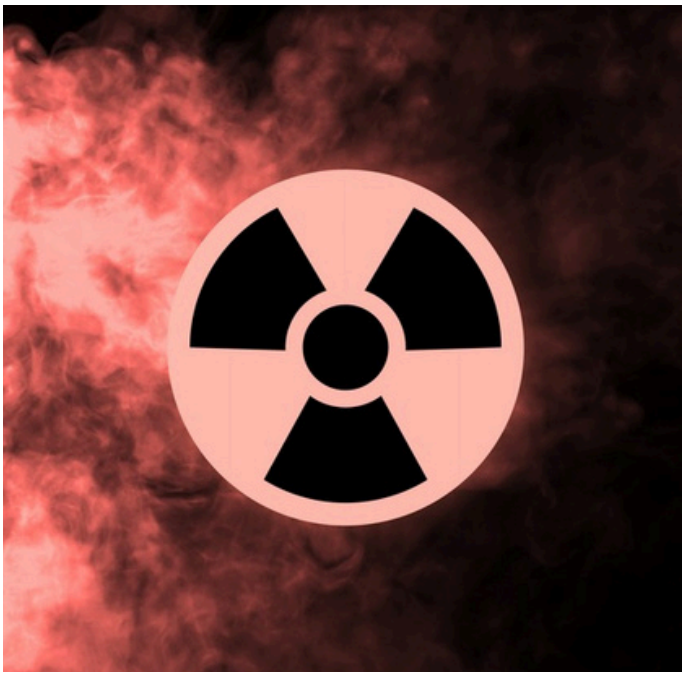
The world is changing, but the government's stance on nuclear weapons has not.

In 2017, 122 countries voted in favour of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which prohibits states from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing or stockpiling them. Yet Canada declined, with then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arguing that the Treaty is "useless" because it has not been signed by any nuclear states. Fast forward to this past November, and the government continues to make the same argument.

In the last nine years, the world has become a more dangerous place, and the fear of nuclear war has bloomed once again. Russia's War in Ukraine, growing US-Iran tensions, and many other global conflicts involving both nuclear haves and have-nots highlight these risks.

The rising threat of conflict creates two camps of thought for a nuclear-deficient state such as Canada. Either we should strengthen our ties to nuclear allies (or maybe develop nuclear weapons ourselves) or push for a world without such weapons. As evidenced by the government's continuous refusal to sign the TPNW, Canada is clearly still placing our eggs in the basket of nuclear deterrence.

While the government claims the Treaty is useless because no nuclear states have signed it, the likely real reason is they fear repercussions from NATO, who has vehemently opposed the TPNW since its creation. NATO continues to assert that it will "remain a nuclear alliance so long as there are nuclear weapons in the world."



While it does support the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), this Treaty only prohibits the expansion of nuclear weapons, and its global impact is rapidly diminishing.

Canada does not want to risk its position in NATO and potentially lose the deterrence threat the association provides through supporting the Treaty. There is some merit to this logic: Research has shown that nuclear-armed states are more likely to initiate disputes with new non-nuclear opponents.

However, whether our NATO alliances would actually protect us from a nuclear threat is questionable. For a deterrence threat to be effective, it has to be credible. In our case, credibility means aggressors need to believe that our allies are willing to incite nuclear war—and likely destroy humanity— to save us. Yet Trump's continued economic attacks on Canada and his own threats of invasion dampen the credibility of our most important ally, and the West's reluctance to escalate the war in Ukraine doesn't help either.

With this harsh reality check in mind, the second option of nuclear disarmament becomes more attractive. To argue that the TPNW is useless unless it is signed by nuclear states represents a fundamental misunderstanding of its value. Treaties do not only aim to constrain the behaviour of states who sign them (although this is nice when it happens) but they help create international norms that apply to all states, whether they are signatories or not. In the case of the TPNW, this norm is a taboo against nuclear weapons, which makes their use unacceptable, and threatens severe reputational consequences for any states who choose to use them. This taboo helps to at least partially explain the astounding fact that no nuclear weapons have been used since 1945.

Yet the nuclear taboo is beginning to vanish, in part due to the Trump Administration's infatuation with nuclear armament, which is helping to undue America's long history of upholding and promoting non-proliferation globally. This terrifying reality makes the TPNW more important than ever.

If Canada were to sign the TPNW it would likely provoke harsh backlash from NATO, who could theoretically pressure us to leave the club. At the same time, however, we must remember that we are on the front lines of Russian aggression by virtue of our Arctic border. Our geographic position makes Canada strategically important to NATO, and should give us some wiggle room when it comes to negotiating for things we believe in and benefit from, like the prohibition of nuclear weapons. As such, losing our NATO alliance over the TPNW is unlikely, and the friction it may cause is well worth the benefits.

Canada needs to realize both the value of signing the TPNW and the value we bring to NATO. Should we continue to refuse the Treaty, then we have done nothing to strengthen the weakening nuclear taboo, and gained little in the way of deterrence. Should the nuclear taboo disappear, it will only benefit aggressor nuclear states. As the first NATO state to sign the Treaty, our support would likely have disproportionate effects.

No Other Land and the Responsibilities of Future Policymakers

BY SARTHAK SHIVAM SHARMA

No Other Land and the Responsibilities of Future Policymakers

Lā arḍ ukhrá, No Other Land, is a documentary film by Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham, and Rachel Szor that was co-produced between Palestine and Norway, which won the Best Documentary Feature Film at the 97th Academy Awards. The documentary captures the demolition, displacement and daily experiences of Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta between 2019 and 2023. The documentary provides a stark reminder to students and future leaders that policy does not exist in the abstract; it materializes in people's homes, in their access to land and a livelihood, and in their ability to live a life with security and dignity.

The decision to host a screening of No Other Land at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy presents meaningful opportunities for students to engage with the material and each other in a grounded manner. Representatives from the Master of Public Policy Students' Association (MPPSA), the Master of Global Affairs Students' Association (MGASA), and the Munk School Black Student Association (MSBSA) contributed to the discussion, bringing diverse perspectives on governance, equity, and global justice. Their participation underscores the importance of interdisciplinary and cross-community dialogue when grappling with complex ethical and political issues. The film provides a case through which we can examine the relationship between a state and its most vulnerable populations engaging in meaningful discussion and debate about our role as future decision makers. It encourages us to think critically about how policy can be designed to prevent harm, strengthen accountability and support communities facing structural disadvantages.

The film forces the viewer to see the human consequences of governance. Education is often focused on institutional design, regulatory tools, and technical analysis. While necessary, they distance policymakers from the communities affected by their decision-making. No Other Land bridges that distance. It shows how administrative decisions -demolition orders, zoning decisions, and military designations- can dismantle a community's shelter, livelihood and sense of self. As leaders of tomorrow, we often fail to consider every policy instrument and each decision's immense weight, which is far too often carried by marginalized communities with limited political power and representation.

The documentary also focuses on the role of legal ambiguity and administrative grey areas. The designation of part of Masafer Yatta as a military training zone demonstrates how state institutions use legal tools to expand their influence and control. The film shows how a marginalized community is forced to navigate a court, appeals and bureaucratic process that provides the technical legality for actions that destabilize the community. Policy makers often speak about accountability, oversight, and the ethical use of state authority, but when the courts deny you a building permit for your sole source of shelter, it becomes difficult for individuals to operate within the system of rules. There is a need for greater emphasis on transparent decision-making and legal protections that prevent the misuse of administrative power.

No Other Land contrasts two people with similar worldviews who are experiencing totally different conditions. The film was produced through a partnership between Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers, demonstrating that through shared documentation and cooperation, racial and ethnic inequalties can be brought to light. The film forces the viewer to see the impact of privilege in real time with one director being concerned about the lack of momentum on media pieces while the other contemplates how to keep his family fed once his father is jailed. It shows that for long-term solutions to occur, we not only require institutional negotiations but trust and a willingness to confront the often uncomfortable realities and weaponize privilege against oppression.

While the documentary focuses on the regional context, it has global themes. Displacement, contested land use, and state-led redevelopment projects are not unique to Masafer Yatta. Similar issues have been ongoing with Indigenous land use disputes and climate-based relocation across the world. No Other Land shows that Masafer Yatta is not an exception but instead part of a broader governance pattern. The film emphasizes that state development often comes at the expense of marginal and indigenous groups and we must ensure that protecting vulnerable communities and upholding international human rights standards are a part of that statebuilding rather than something abandoned for development and security objectives.

When we discuss ethics in public policy, we generally just examine political scandals. However, Masafer Yatta shows that public policy determines who is protected, who is heard, and who is left without any political, social and economic future. Watching the film, I re-examined how policy makers decide what is fair, what institutions should be reformed rather than demolished and how the inequality is not sporadic but cyclical. It reminded me that although we must strive for a better future tomorrow, we must also clean up the mistakes of the past.

In the current global order, decision makers must navigate a complex social, political, and ethical framework. No Other Land serves as a reminder that complexity is no excuse for complicity. We shape the conditions under which people live, move and build their future. As students entering the public service, the documentary encourages us to approach our work with an understanding of our responsibility and a commitment to justice in all aspects of our lives.

Strengthening Canada-ASEAN Ties: Linking Hands and Minds by Connecting Hearts

BY ERIC TAN

Strengthening Canada-ASEAN Ties: Linking Hands and Minds by Connecting Hearts

"AY-zhuhn", loudly enunciated my peeping friend, like how North American English speakers say "Asian", as I perused the latest news on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on my laptop. For the record, it's usually pronounced "AH-see-ahn".

ASEAN was formed in 1967 to promote political, economic, and social cooperation between the Southeast Asian states of Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and the newest member, Timor Leste. The intergovernmental organization has been a key element of Canada's foreign policy since 1977 and gained further prominence with the launch of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2022. Then, in 2023, a Strategic Partnership was announced to deepen cooperation across societal, political and economic domains.

The 47th ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October last year made a flurry of headlines. It was attended by major world leaders, including the somewhat surprising appearance of US President Donald Trump. It welcomed Timor-Leste as its 11th member-state and officiated the ceasefire between Cambodia and Thailand. Prime Minister Mark Carney, in his first major appearance in Asia at that time, got a lot done for Canada at the Summit – a slew of trade, technology, and energy partnerships were inked, and $25 million in assistance to ASEAN nations was committed.

Source: Global Affairs Canada

Despite recent developments, the Canada-ASEAN trade equation remains largely imbalanced. Canada has ASEAN as its 4th largest trading partner, but it does not feature in ASEAN's list of top 10. Mark Carney has called for negotiations on the Canada-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to be accelerated, originally to be concluded by end-2025. These moves clearly demonstrate Canada's urgency to diversify trade through its Indo-Pacific partners. As asserted by Carney at Davos, the "rupture in the old world order" ushers in a more chaotic, multipolar world. The stakes for the Canada-ASEAN relationship have never been higher.

Yet, Canada needs to do more to build deeper levels of trust with ASEAN member states if it wants to shed its reputation as a "fair-weather friend" whose interest in the region is perceived to be superficial and meretricious.

More must be done by the Canadian government to deliberately invest in interpersonal ties between Canadians and Southeast Asian communities. This new investment could come in the form of expanding people-to-people exchanges, cultural visibility, and mutual awareness

The strategic importance of ASEAN to Canada

The collective ASEAN market currently measures at over US$4 trillion and is expected to be the world's 4th-largest economic body by 2030. With manufacturing a key engine of growth, ASEAN continues to see strong demand for energy and resources. Moreover, the region's digital economy is poised to grow from $300 billion to $1 trillion by 2030, a trend that is catalysed by its massive, young and educated populations. Its immense growth potential and strategic convergence with Canada's economic strengths make ASEAN the optimal option for trade diversification and economic security.

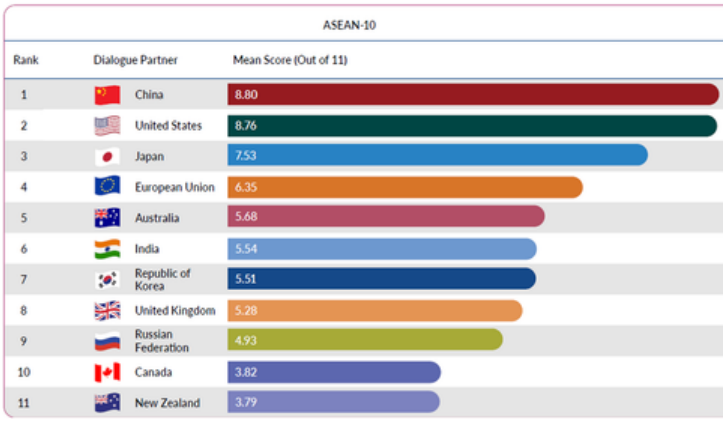
Despite successfully restoring some normalcy to its relationship with China, sharp edges remain in the Canada - Sino relations. Diametrically, ASEAN has been China's largest trading partner since 2018 and now hosts massive Chinese investments, with major Chinese companies such as Alibaba and Tencent using the region as homebase for their global operations. With the right incentives and messaging, ASEAN can provide a meaningful platform for Canadian-Chinese dialogues and commercial collaborations without triggering political and security sensitivities back home.

Amid unrelenting great power competition and an increasingly belligerent United States, ASEAN offers Canada a vital strategic counterpart – a like-minded middle power committed to safeguarding the rules-based multilateral institutions and norms that sustain global trade, peace and security. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that things are not all rosy in Southeast Asia. Border skirmishes between Cambodia and Thailand simmer on, and potential flashpoints in the South China Sea and Taiwan occupy ASEAN governments. The realities in ASEAN are incredibly complex or even contradictory at times, and Canadian policymakers and diplomats will need to keep this top-of-mind .

Deficit of mutual recognition and trust between Canada and ASEAN

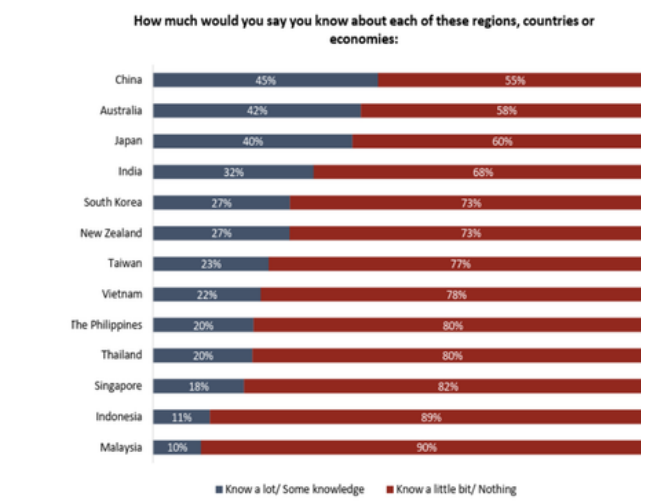
According to a 2025 survey that looks into how Southeast Asians perceive how ASEAN Dialogue Partners engage with the region, Canada ranks 10th out of 11 dialogue partners, faring only better than New Zealand and worse than Russia. Among the G7 countries in the list, Canada is the worst performer. The country certainly has limited influence and recognition in a region that attracts many suitors for attention and cooperation among the world's major powers.

Q26 Rank the following Dialogue Partners in order of strategic relevance to ASEAN:



Source: The State of Southeast Asia: 2025 Survey Report (Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2025)

Within Canada, the same trend is also true. Stroll down Spadina Avenue in Toronto, or any major street in Canadian cities, and you won't miss the myriad of Vietnamese, Thai and Filipino restaurants. Yet, a survey by the Asia Pacific Foundation and the Angus Reid Institute reveals that most Canadians possess little knowledge of countries in Southeast Asia, with over 80% reporting scant familiarity even with key ASEAN members like Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.



Source: Most Canadians say they know little of Asian countries, prefer closer trade ties with more familiar regions (The Angus Reid Institute & Asia Pacific Foundation, Oct 2025)

This predicament seems paradoxical, since Canada is home to the fastest-growing Southeast Asian diaspora outside the region, and projections point to further growth ahead. More deliberate strategies should be undertaken by the federal government in Canada to catalyze broader public awareness or knowledge of ASEAN's societies and cultures. I recommend strengthening youth-level exchanges, raising public visibility of ASEAN and its composite cultures and lastly, improving the flow of news and perspectives between both regions.

Structured immersion programmes to ASEAN for Canadian youths and students

Beyond drawing ASEAN students to experience life in Canada via the Canada-ASEAN SEED program, structured initiatives mirroring the U.S. Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) should be launched throughout higher education institutions or youth organizations nationwide. Fully or partially subsidized initiatives should be developed to incentivize young Canadians, including students and young professionals, to venture into ASEAN nations for a number of weeks.

These immersion programs should feature collaborative exchanges and workshops pairing Canadians with ASEAN counterparts on areas of shared priorities, like civic engagement, innovation and entrepreneurship, natural resource management, and indigenous rights.

Participants should be encouraged to do homestays with local hosts, thereby allowing them to gain first-hand insights into local lifestyles, from daily routines to authentic cuisine and deepen mutual understanding beyond formal interactions. There's no better way to build interpersonal connections than to have Canadian youths interact with their Southeast Asian counterparts, experience the way of life and indulge in local cuisine first-hand. These engagements can genuinely anchor the ties and lead to lifelong friendships between both sides.

Source: The United States-Indonesian Society, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Professional Fellows Program

Celebrating Southeast Asian cultures on ASEAN Day

ASEAN Day, observed annually on August 8th to mark the organization's founding, currently features only modest embassy-hosted events with limited public participation. The Canadian federal government should sponsor large-scale celebratory festivals in major Canadian cities, showcasing ASEAN's rich cultural heritage through gastronomy, music and dance performances, as well as interactive exhibits to engage everyday Canadians. These festivals should also encourage Canada's Southeast Asian diaspora communities to celebrate and reconnect with their heritage through dedicated pavilions, recreational activities, and storytelling sessions. Members of the diaspora can be empowered as cultural ambassadors, encouraging them to promote ASEAN identities and traditions to broader Canadian audiences in their daily lives. Nevertheless, promotion of cultural identities must be carefully balanced with the upholding of the core Canadian national identity and its values.

Source: KawarthaNOW.com. Photo by Linda Cardona

Exchange news and perspectives through international TV channels

It is not uncommon to find America's C-SPAN and UK's BBC World Service channels, along with their French and Chinese counterparts on the television screens of hotel rooms in many parts of Asia. Conversely, existing networks like CBC and CTV are predominantly domestic-oriented and have a negligible global footprint. It's critical for the Canadian government to establish a flagship international television channel that is as recognizable as the US and UK's renditions. This will ensure global audiences, particularly those in ASEAN, can access and connect with Canada's independent perspectives, values and debates. Beyond this, Canada should expand access to leading Southeast Asian channels such as Singapore's Channel NewsAsia on domestic cable platforms, giving Canadian viewers direct access to regional news and hot topic issues affecting communities in Southeast Asia, and their interpretations of global events.

Canada-ASEAN : A lasting relationship for the times

With persistence and time, these efforts to deepen interpersonal connections will elevate trust between Canada and ASEAN, and thus form the bedrock for an enduring relationship beyond pragmatic interests. Canada can show ASEAN it's not just a marriage of convenience; it's a partner who's in for the long haul. Just like the smoked meat bánh mì, Canada and ASEAN can craft their shared story—one of cultural fusion, respect, and a feast of opportunities waiting to be savoured by Canadians and Southeast Asians alike.

A Frozen Tundra, and a Melting Claim to Sovereignty

BY MICHAEL UNSWORTH

A Frozen Tundra, and a Melting Claim to Sovereignty

For generations Canada has wrapped its national identity in the idea of the North. This phrase, "True North Strong and Free", a central line in Canada's national anthem, reflects how deeply the northern identity is embedded in the country's self-image. But in today's Arctic, where Russia has reopened military bases, China has declared itself a "near-Arctic state", and the United States has renewed interest in Greenland, symbolism is no longer enough. Canada's sovereignty in the North depends on two urgent priorities: correcting decades of underinvestment in Arctic infrastructure and ensuring that security investments are built in partnerships with Indigenous communities.

Sovereignty is often imagined as a legal concept, or a line on a map. It is the ability to see what is happening in your territory, to reach it, and to protect the people who live there. The war in Ukraine has underscored this reality. Sovereignty is not simply declared; it is enforced by the capacity of a state to sustain presence on the ground. By those measures, Canada risks watching events unfold in its own Arctic, which is nearly 40 percent of its own territory, rather than shaping them.

The current sovereignty gap is no accident. It is the direct result of years of underinvestment. Canada has historically spent roughly 1.3 to 1.4 percent of GDP on defence well below the NATO 2 percent benchmark, and much of its northern surveillance architecture can be traced back to the Cold War. By contrast, since the mid-2000s, Russia has drastically expanded its Arctic military footprint, reopening and modernizing dozens of Soviet-era bases while investing heavily in advanced missile capabilities designed to challenge North American defences. At the same time, China has expanded its Arctic research presence and commercial ambitions, signaling its intent to reshape regional governance altogether. Of course, even the United States has now shown renewed interest in the North, from the Northwest Passage to Greenland. One thing is clear: the arctic is no longer remote –it has become a strategic frontier.

Adding to these pressures, the Canadian Armed Forces' ability to operate at scale is constrained by logistical limitations. There are too few year-round deep-water ports, all weather roads, and reliable air access. In any crisis, either geopolitical or environmental, these would quickly become glaring vulnerabilities.

The federal government has acknowledged the need for action with the announcement of a $1 billion Arctic Infrastructure Fund under Budget 2025, part of a broader $6 billion trade and transportation initiative supporting projects with civilian and defence applications. While the dual-use approach is a welcome step toward reinforcing sovereignty and improving connectivity in Northern and Indigenous communities, announcements alone do not create runways or ports. The question is whether Canada can move quickly enough to translate policy intent into real, on-the-ground capability.

Consider the Port of Churchill in Manitoba and the Nanisivik Naval Facility on Baffin Island. Today, both serve primarily as seasonal refueling hubs for Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships. With proper investment, they could become regional logistics hubs, reducing the cost of food and fuel faced by Northern residents while strengthening Canada's year-round presence in Arctic waters.

The same is true for aviation infrastructure. A 2017 Auditor General's report found that 85 percent of Arctic runways remain unpaved for gravel. Extending and upgrading these runways in remote communities is not simply about accommodating military aircraft, but also about ensuring that medical evacuations, food shipments, and emergency supplies can take off and land in extreme weather. The federal government's 2024 defence policy update, Our North Strong and Free, makes clear that Arctic security is becoming more urgent. As climate change makes new sea routes and resource frontiers, both Canada's allies and competitors are expanding their activities. If Canada cannot provide credible enforcement and infrastructure on land and at sea, others will move to fill the void.

This points to a crucial dimension of sovereignty, a human one. Inuit leaders, primarily through Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), have long emphasized that Inuit sovereignty is Canadian sovereignty. A region facing chronic housing shortages, food insecurity, and the accelerating impacts of climate change cannot be considered secure, regardless of how many ships Canada deploys. Infrastructure built with, not merely for, Indigenous communities is essential to any credible presence in the Arctic – not only for legitimacy, but also for effectiveness.

Canada's claim to the Arctic must be more than aspirational. Sovereignty is a practice, something exercised through the ability to live, move, protect, and endure the North. That begins with sustained investment–not only in military capabilities, but also in communities. Canada will be judged not by rhetoric but by whether Northern residents have the infrastructure to endure a changing Arctic.