

# 11

## Geriatric Interventions

### The Demographic Horizon of Collective Security

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Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said: “Here I am. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

In the aftermath of the Cold War, there was a modest sense of enthusiasm about making the world a better place. Liberal democracy had won out. Now it was only a matter of turning around the fate of atavistic Cold War remnants manifest in disparate conflicts across the world. Liberal internationalists, longing to realize a Kantian “perpetual peace,” came together with armed forces in search of a *raison d’être* in this new security environment. A quarter of a century on, in the aftermath of Afghanistan and Iraq, those same democracies are morally, fiscally and politically exhausted. Whether it is Libya, the Baltics, Iraq, or Syria, insofar as there are commitments compared to the Balkans and Afghanistan, the parameters of intervention are prone to be limited, patient, local and flexible. In these recent expeditionary missions, NATO member states have been confining themselves to the provision of air capabilities, along with broad-based support and training for local military and security forces, while regional actors have been sharing greater responsibility for operations in their neighbourhood. This chapter argues that this trend of limiting exposure to expeditionary interventions is a function of endogenous effects — not of these conflicts *per se*, but of the demographic constraints faced by Western democracies and their second-order effects on those select countries that have traditionally shouldered much of the collective-security burden.

Interventions, so the argument goes, are demographically contingent. There are two dynamics to this argument: demand and supply. The demand side is concerned with the way demographic change affects stability: local, domestic, regional, international and transnational.<sup>1</sup> Contrast this with the supply side, where there are fewer countries and reduced capability to respond to greater demand for international interventions. This chapter examines how demographic change is constraining the ability of Western industrialized democracies, notably the Anglosphere (Vucetic 2011; Bennett 2004) — the community of English-speaking states, nations, and societies centred on Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States — and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and affiliated countries to intervene internationally, as well as the bifurcation of the “interventionist effect” among allied countries as a result of demographic differentiation.

This chapter first makes the case of the importance of population aging by discussing interventionism, and then explores the constraints that population aging imposes on interventionism. The chapter contends, however, that the criteria that have determined whether Canadian interventions will continue to prevail, albeit qualified by the new demographic reality. However, Canada’s relatively privileged demographic position is likely to extend Canadian leverage, which is likely to make it more expedient for Canada to participate in interventions as it becomes an even more indispensable partner to assuring collective security.

## **The Political Demography of Population Aging**

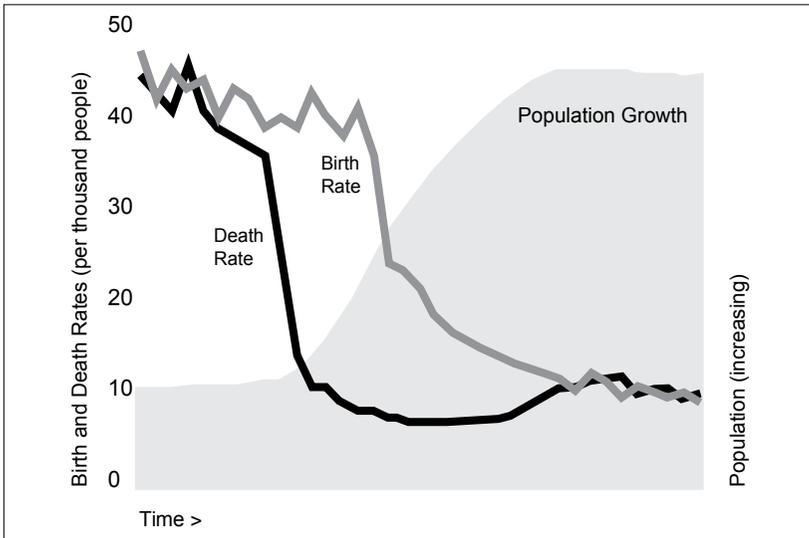
Demography is *not* destiny; it is not deterministic, and neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. Demographic trends do, however, allow us to anticipate future developments in size and distribution of population groups. As such, demography is a harbinger of challenge and opportunity, a multiplier of conflict and progress, and a resource for power and prosperity (Teitelbaum 2014; Winter and Teitelbaum 2013; Dabbs Sciubba 2011). Fertility, mortality and migration are the only set of variables in the social sciences that can be projected forward over the medium term with a high degree of accuracy: the

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1 For the purpose of this chapter, I do not dwell on this dimension (see Goldstone, Kaufmann and Toft 2011). Suffice it to say that demographic change is necessitating plenty of heavy lifting yet to come.

population that will be growing old over the coming decades has already been born and we also know the average number of children to which a woman in a given location is likely to give birth. Until fairly recently, high birth rates kept populations fairly young. Due to war and epidemics such as the plague, few people ended up growing old (Livi-Bacci 1996). Innovations in public health and food security have changed that. The result was a decline in death rates. Birth rates would initially remain high before eventually levelling off. That change in birth and death rates, and the delta between them, is largely responsible for the phenomenon depicted in Figure 1, known as the demographic transition.

**Figure 1: The Demographic Transition**



Source: Leahy et al. (2007, 17).

Yet, the demographic transitions occur at different times in different countries, and among different ethnocultural groups, resulting in countries and population groups at various stages along the demographic transition. This explains why some countries are aging rapidly, while others are bulging with youth.

With the exception of the United States, all NATO members are affected by population aging. The scope of this aging process is remarkable. By 2050, at least 20 percent of the population in allied countries will be over 65. This

demographic development is historically without precedent; we do not know what to expect from a state under these demographic conditions, because never will the proportion of old people have been as large, nor do we have a good understanding of the impact of population aging on economic growth and finances will be affected (Friedman 2005; Bloom, Canning and Fink 2011). Most of the world's affluent countries — in Europe, East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) and North America — have completed their demographic transition and have stable or very slow-growing populations. For a state to sustain its population (assuming zero net immigration), fertility levels must exceed about 2.1 children per woman. Today, the United States is the only liberal democracy that comes close to meeting this requirement. Most other liberal democracies fell below this threshold some time ago. A growing number, including Germany and many in Eastern Europe, have seen their total fertility rate fall well below 2.0 children per woman, so that they are forecast to decline in population in the near future (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Countries Projected to Have Declining Populations, by Period of the Onset of Decline (1981–2045)**

Already declining	Onset of decline: 2009–2029	Onset of decline: 2030–2050
Hungary (1981)	Italy (2010)	Azerbaijan (2030)
Bulgaria (1986)	Slovakia (2011)	Denmark (2031)
Estonia (1990)	Bosnia & Herzegovina (2011)	Belgium (2031)
Georgia (1990)	Greece (2014)	Thailand (2033)
Latvia (1990)	Serbia (2014)	North Korea (2035)
Armenia (1991)	Portugal (2016)	Singapore (2035)
Romania (1991)	Cuba (2018)	Netherlands (2037)
Lithuania (1992)	Macedonia (2018)	Switzerland (2040)
Ukraine (1992)	Spain (2019)	UK (2044)
Moldova (1993)	Taiwan (2019)	Puerto Rico (2044)
Belarus (1994)	South Korea (2020)	Kazakhstan (2045)
Russian Federation (1994)	Austria (2024)	
Czech Republic (1995)	Finland (2027)	
Poland (1997)	China (2029)	
Germany (2006)		
Japan (2008)		
Croatia (2008)		
Slovenia (2008)		

*Source:* Adapted from Jackson and Howe (2008); excludes countries with populations less than one million.

Never before has humanity witnessed such dramatic, widespread aging among the world's most industrialized and powerful military allies. Two long-term demographic trends coincided to produce population aging: decreasing fertility rates and increasing life expectancy. These developments have only a moderate effect on the pecking order among the world's three most populous countries. Yet, the impact on "the rise and fall" of other "great powers" (measured by population size), as Table 2 shows, is marked: by 2050, Nigeria is projected to displace the United States as the third-most populous country in the world.

**Table 2: Largest Countries Ranked by Population Size (1950, 2005 and 2050)**

Ranking	1950	2005	2050
1	China	China	India
2	India	India	China
3	United States	United States	Nigeria
4	Russian Federation	Indonesia	United States
5	Japan	Brazil	Indonesia
6	Indonesia	Pakistan	Pakistan
7	Germany	Nigeria	Brazil
8	Brazil	Bangladesh	Bangladesh
9	UK	Russian Federation	Ethiopia
10	Italy	Japan	Philippines
11	Bangladesh	Mexico	Mexico
12	France	Philippines	Congo, DR
		(15) Germany	(16) Japan
		(21) France	(23) France
		(22) UK	(24) UK
		(23) Italy	(25) Germany

*Source:* UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division (2012), Tables S.3, S.4, 20-21).

As Table 2 shows, demographic changes are having a marked impact on countries that have shared the brunt of international security obligations in the past. These changes in demographic size and composition are also having important second-order effects on the political and social culture in those countries, with ramifications for international interventions. Aging populations tend to be less predisposed toward war. As fertility rates decline, parents become disinclined toward risking the life of a child by going to

war. At the same time, social citizenship obligations of the welfare state are increasingly crowding out defence spending, as evidenced by national debt loads and the difficulty experienced in realizing major military procurements.

## **The Demographic Horizon of Interventionism**

An unprecedented 70 percent of people in the developed world are between 15 and 64 years of age. Never before has that proportion been as high — and it is only expected to decline. This has important implications for consumption, productivity, tax revenue and fiscal expenditures. The costs created by the NATO allies' and great powers' aging populations will constrain spending on economic development and national defence. Population aging causes military personnel costs to rise. As demographic growth slows — Canada's birth rate has been below replacement fertility for decades, and demographic growth has been sustained increasingly by immigration — but as economies continue to grow, the labour market tightens. Concomitantly, the nature of modern military organizations — as Morris Janowicz (1960) observed four decades ago — is less and less “an organization set apart” for a uniquely specific purpose, but is instead increasingly approximating any other private- or public-sector organization. As a result, it competes for the same highly skilled and educated labour. The combination of a tightening labour market and growing competition of a small pool of highly qualified labour causes salaries to grow exponentially (European Defence Agency 2006).

As population aging stresses the dependency ratio between the old and the young, the provision of international security is partially a function of pension systems, health care and social spending. Aging populations and shrinking workforces are forcing NATO member countries to spend more of their defence budgets on personnel costs and pensions, to the detriment of research, development and procurement of sophisticated technology. This is especially problematic given that technological innovation is not just essential to assuring the ability to assert collective-security interests; technological innovation is also integral to harnessing the efficiency gains that are more indispensable than ever to secure, maintain and augment collective-security “productivity” in heavily constrained fiscal times.

Although the United States spends about four percent of GDP on defence (as opposed to roughly one percent in Canada), about 50 cents of every dollar spent on defence goes to compensation, an amount that, *ceteris paribus*, is slated to

rise to 70 percent before 2030; pension payments amount to over \$50 billion a year, health care costs to another \$50 billion (of a total US defence budget of about \$735 billion in 2014). As the military organization continues its shift from an institutional to an occupational format that is driven by self-interest and a free market, these liabilities are projected to rise (Moskos 1977). To ensure an all-volunteer force remains an attractive and competitive employer of choice in a tightening labour market, it needs to overhaul compensation systems, increase pay and benefits, and modernize pension plans (Williams 2004; 2007). Pensions, then, are a liability insofar as they are ongoing and growing obligations that add little value to defence capabilities per se, but an asset in attracting and retaining highly qualified personnel in a tight labour market where secure pensions are increasingly scarce. The substitution effect of capital for labour — manifest in advanced technology — is premised on highly motivated, qualified, trained and skilled operators to contest fourth- and fifth-generation warfare (Moskos, Williams and Segal 1999). In opting for quality over quantity, mandatory military service is jettisoned for a professional all-volunteer force. Yet, savings generated through reductions in personnel are at risk of being reallocated to attract and retain highly qualified personnel. Moreover, the cost of intervention is disproportionately borne by those few who commit to military service.

The distributive effects that pension obligations have within public and defence budgets stand to be mitigated or exacerbated by the way pension obligations are funded. Funded pension systems, such as those found throughout the Anglosphere — nuances due to demographic differences notwithstanding, such as the US baby boom — redistribute income through the purchase of assets by workers and the sale of assets by retirees. They encourage workers to save, thereby increasing capital, productivity and GDP growth (Culhane 2001). By contrast, countries such as China, France, Germany and Russia tend to pay pension obligations out of general revenue (i.e., current contributions, instead of being invested to grow, pay for current liabilities — a system commonly known as “pay as you go”). Assuming that defence spending in the aggregate remains constant, every euro spent on retirement benefits is one less to spend on other services, let alone weapons, research or personnel. The United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, by contrast, use funded pensions to augment social security. Pay-as-you-go systems redistribute revenue from the working-age population to pensioners through taxes. When the benefits paid replace a high proportion of average earnings, they also create a disincentive to save and work past the normal

retirement age, both of which depress GDP. In light of population aging, pay-as-you-go systems are fiscally unsustainable, because they have to be paid for either through tax increases by the working-age population or through issuance of government debt (thus crowding out defence spending). Yet, many pay-as-you-go countries already register some of the highest marginal tax rates in the world. This is problematic insofar as high payroll taxes are a drag on a workforce's competitiveness. Pay as you go is a vicious circle: as countries raise taxes to pay for pay as you go, their workers become increasingly uncompetitive, thus, further undermining the ability to pay for the pay-as-you-go system.

At the same time, the Anglosphere is aging less rapidly than other countries, owing largely to higher fertility rates and immigration. As a result, the pressure of having to choose elderly care over defence spending remain favourable, and the increased substitution effect of labour for capital in defence budgets is bound to be smaller. Table 3 is notable for stagnating or declining populations of prime working age due to aging outpacing population growth, even in countries with high rates of immigration, such as France, Spain and Switzerland.

While these countries' labour force faces an unprecedented decline, the proportion of their population over 60 years of age will rise by 50 percent on average. As Europe, Japan and South Korea lose one-quarter to one-third of their prime labour force by 2050, the dependency gap widens. A growing dependency ratio aggravates the situation further by depressing GDP growth as people work less, exercise their exit option by defecting to lower-tax jurisdictions, migrate to the underground economy, opt not to work at all and, squeezed by high taxes, opt for fewer children.

Owing to comparatively low social security promises, the Anglosphere tends to be less affected by social aging than other allied countries. Americans, for instance, have the highest prediction of when they expect to retire (67.2) and by far the lowest expectations regarding governmental support of their retirement (AgeWave and HarrisInteractive 2009). Conversely, countries with some of the greatest expenditure burden on aging populations are making matters worse by encouraging early retirement to ease their unemployment burden while shying away from reducing old-age benefits. The opportunity cost of stressed pension schemes and social services is less money for more sustainable investments in technology to spur gains in productivity. Suboptimal use of productive labour also risks exacerbating social conflict

over pensions, migration and labour/employer relations (Friedman 2005; Kaufmann 2012; Vanhuysse and Goerres 2012).

In terms of comparative demographic constraints, Canada has greater potential to spend more on defence than some other allies; nonetheless, it has long preferred to minimize what it spends on guns in favour of maximizing spending on butter (Leuprecht and Sokolsky 2015). This proposition is difficult to measure in the short term, as either cuts to defence spending, cuts to authorized troop strength or both, and, consequently, per capita military spending and active soldiers are omnipresent across NATO member countries, the United States first and foremost among them. Still, the US defence budget's expenditure burden within NATO is on the rise: from an apex of almost 77 percent in 1952, it bottomed out near parity at 55 percent in 1999 (Davidson 2012). Yet, the spread in transatlantic expenditure bifurcation among NATO member countries has been widening ever since (Larrabee et al. 2012). Adjusted for constant prices and exchange rates, the current US contribution to NATO could be argued to be approaching 75 percent. Over the same period, the authorized active strength of Canada's, Australia's (which, at roughly two percent of GDP, spends about twice as much on defence as Canada) and New Zealand's armed forces has remained remarkably stable, while those of the United States and United Kingdom has been on the wane. Yet, total military spending cannot be readily parlayed into military commitment and capabilities, endogenous and exogenous determinants of levels of defence spending can be difficult to disentangle, and US defence spending encompasses defence elements that in many other countries are a civilian expenditure, notably the coast guard. The United States, for instance, is estimated to comprise some 85 percent of NATO's combat capacity. For the majority of NATO members — those already moderate in size — cuts are impeding their ability to sustain a full-spectrum warfare capacity and its deployment. Henceforth, the fiscal room necessary to maintain the extent of their global position and involvement, let alone adopt major new initiatives, is becoming ever more constrained. The political demography of population aging is, thus, an intervening variable in projecting political, economic and military power. In terms of continental defence, Canada is hardly immune, since its population is older than that of the United States or Mexico. Still, relative to demographic trends among conventional European NATO allies, Canada is well positioned, a differentiating trend that is poised to bolster Canada's international security partnership with the United States (Leuprecht 2014).

**Table 3: Aging and Labour Force Change in Major European and Other Countries (2009–2050)**

	% Change in:		
	Total population	Population 15–60	Population 60+
Bulgaria	–29	–46	13
Belarus	–24	–42	46
Ukraine	–23	–40	21
Japan	–20	–37	19
Romania	–19	–38	50
Poland	–16	–38	70
Russia	–18	–36	47
Germany	–14	–32	32
Hungary	–11	–26	33
S. Korea	–9	–36	146
Portugal	–6	–26	54
EUROPE	–6	–24	47
Italy	–5	–24	41
Greece	–2	–23	54
Czech Republic	–1	–23	57
Denmark	1	–6	29
Austria	2	–18	59
Finland	2	–10	36
China	5	–17	175
Netherlands	5	–9	53
Belgium	8	–7	52
France	9	–6	56
Switzerland	13	–4	56
Spain	14	–13	93
Sweden	14	4	40
United Kingdom	18	7	51
United States	28	15	97
Canada	32	9	116
Ireland	39	17	164

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011, chapter 2).

## Discussion: When to Intervene

When most of the public does not have to bear the human risk involved, citizens may be more disposed to intervene. Fiscally stretched governments, however, are less likely to answer the call, as they pander to electorates that prioritize health and social spending over defence (Global Agenda Council on Aging 2012). The extent to which people today are older, richer, taxed, subsidized and cynical is without historical precedent. That makes the sort of financial sacrifice necessitated by a prolonged intervention less likely to bear. Government spending and taxation relative to private income has grown substantially over the past 50 years. The overwhelming majority of this dividend accrues to the public at large via entitlements. During a period of prolonged peace, the public have structured their lives (in particular, the size of their houses and their debts) on the assumption that current levels of income, taxation and benefits will remain fairly stable. The sacrifices necessary to pay for a robust intervention would be felt more keenly by publics that are not only used to comfort, but in fact rely on it: one cannot make one's house smaller and easier to pay for, magically reduce one's mortgage or readily revert to early-twentieth-century levels of medical care.

Such sacrifices may be bearable if the public identifies strongly with the endgame of the intervention. However, whereas publics mostly used to believe that the nation was an end in itself, modern publics are less idealistic. Given the experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq, calls to sacrifice for the nation will ring hollow when there is money to be made and a comfortable life to be lived, especially if the goal of the intervention is not immediately palpable.

As I have observed elsewhere (Leuprecht and Sokolsky 2015), Canadian interventionism has rested on two seemingly contradictory dimensions of its strategic culture. The first is that Canada has historically embraced an expeditionary approach when it comes to defence policy and the posture and deployment of Canadian military power. "From Paardeberg to Panjwai," as eminent historians David Bercuson and J. L. Granatstein (2012, 193) have written, "Canadian governments...have believed that one of the key missions of the Canadian military is to deploy abroad." These deployments have served the national interest because in imperial wars, world wars, the Cold War and myriad limited conflicts that have characterized the post-Cold War and post-9/11 period, Canada has contributed extremely useful and highly regarded forces to the efforts of allies to contain global threats and lesser challenges

posed by regional instability to the security and stability of the West and, therefore, to Canada.

Along with an expeditionary orientation, Canadian interventionism has a predilection for expediency. Forces have been dispatched overseas to send a message and, by so doing, to guarantee Ottawa “a seat at the table,” along with a sense of status and prestige (Sokolsky 1989; Massie 2014). This expeditionary strategic culture allowed Canada — which was never regarded, nor saw itself, as a great power — to nonetheless

show larger nations (e.g. Britain and the United States), international organizations, such as the United Nations, or allied nations such as the members of NATO that Canada is ready and able to put a shoulder to the wheel when military forces are needed to defend allies, deter aggression, or keep or enforce the peace. In other words, Canada has been willing to do its share of the hard, dirty work. Doing so wins Canada diplomatic recognition, political acceptance, entrée into arrangements, treaties, and alliances that are important to Canada and Canadians, and a voice on how future international policies will be pursued. Were Canada not to take part in such missions abroad, friends and enemies alike would have concluded long ago that Canada is of no consequence, does not deserve to be heard and ought not to be accorded any favours in bilateral or multilateral negotiations over matters of consequence. (Bercuson and Granatstein 2012, 193-194)

These operations assured Canada an international profile which, safely situated between two oceans and adjoining a decidedly benign and friendly hegemon, it would otherwise not have enjoyed: “the main and overriding motive for the maintenance of Canadian military establishment since the Second World War has had little to do with our national security as such...it has had everything to do with underpinning our diplomatic and negotiating position vis-à-vis various international organizations and other countries” (Eayrs 1965, 84).

When assessing whether and how to intervene, Canada will continue to weigh the benefits of securing a seat at the table and leveraging influence over international decision making on collective security, as well as electoral payoff in the form of status and prestige with domestic electorates. Given

the growing demand on strained resources, as well as the nature of alliance politics, no meaningful contribution will be turned away. In the end, when and where allies do opt to intervene, the parameters are likely to be limited, patient, local and flexible.

Given reduced overall capacity among allies, two subsidiary conditions are likely to qualify as Canada's core condition for intervention: expediency. First, Canadian participation in coalition operations stands to benefit from participation by regional partners, not solely to maximize tactical effect, but for purposes of legitimating an intervention both domestically and abroad. Insofar as allied interests and Canada's align, allies have a vested interest in bringing Canada into the proverbial boat. Second, for interventions to be saleable and sustainable, it needs to be evident that Canada will be better off as a result of the intervention. The cost of interventions makes that a high bar to clear.

## Conclusion

Never have there been so many people in the world. Never have there been so many old people. Never have they comprised a greater proportion of the population. Never have they been more affluent. And never have they wielded more political power. Such are the endogenous effects imposed by a historically unprecedented demographic horizon that is introducing considerable uncertainty into international interventions by virtue of being historically unprecedented. The rise in age of the median voter and the proportion of older voters is bound to affect public policy priorities. Older people tend to be more reliant on the state than younger ones. Not only do older voters thus have an incentive to resort to rent seeking, but because of their advanced age they also have an incentive to favour short-term payoff over long-term strategy.

Foreign policy rarely wins elections; domestic policy does. Ergo, social entitlement programs are likely to crowd out defence spending. Politicians are not just loath to curtail entitlement programs, electoral logic suggests that they are actually prone to expand them to appeal to this, the fastest growing cohort among the electorate. Stubbornly soft economic conditions further exacerbate the impact on defence spending as governments strive to balance their budgets by cutting defence. Yet, national defence and international

instability tend to require a long view, which will be increasingly difficult to defend as the gambit of existential political payoffs for an aging population grows. The end effect is less overall capacity to intervene among allied countries.

Technological innovation goes some way toward harnessing the sort of efficiency gains that are more indispensable than ever to secure, maintain and augment collective security “productivity” in heavily constrained fiscal times. Robotics in military operations, whether cyborg “soldiers” on the battlefield or drones in the air, hold out considerable promise, at least insofar as the ability to reduce the labour intensity of collective security. But innovative military technology is exceptionally expensive, requires sustained patience over long development horizons, and an eventual political commitment to procure and roll it out. It is also neither clear nor obvious that such technological innovation necessarily reduces labour requirements. While military robotics may automate some functions previously performed by human beings, operators will remain indispensable to ensure strict compliance with international law, such as the Law of Armed Conflict, the constitutional and legal bounds within which armed forces in democracies operate, as well as military and professional ethics, national caveats, mission mandates and rules of engagement. Machines may perform functions, yet we are still far from the age where machines will be able to make the many and complex difficult judgments that encumber civil-military relations and, perforce, strategic planning, military operations and tactical decisions. Democratic citizens are unlikely to relegate such judgment calls to machines anytime soon. And in a tight labour market where the skillset such operators will need to have are increasingly at a premium and reflected in their ability to command hefty salary premiums, the fiscal gains from substituting capital for labour will be less than “technoptimists” might anticipate.

More populous countries with economies that are accordingly larger will necessarily continue to have greater potential military capacity than Canada. Nonetheless, relative demographic trends and differentiation bodes well for Canada’s ability to continue to assert its strategic interests through international interventions. Canada can leverage its relative demographic advantage to meet and bolster the expediency conditions for intervention: its relatively favourable demographic trends will make Canada an increasingly indispensable defence partner country. Canada’s demographic trends are less favourable than America’s, but they are better than those of many allies.

Owing to its privileged demographic position, Canada will continue to benefit from a great deal of discretion and autonomy over both, the extent of the interventionist burden it shares, and how it shares that burden.

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