# US-Canada alliance faces unprecedented strain amid trade wars and Arctic rivalry



For decades, the United States and Canada stood as close allies, sharing the world’s longest undefended border, deeply integrated armed forces, and mutual support expressed through popular sentiment. However, recent developments indicate a significant strain in this historically strong relationship. Tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on Canadian imports, direct threats involving the potential annexation of Canada as a "51st state," and increased geopolitical competition in the Arctic have all contributed to growing tensions. These changes raise questions about the future of the bilateral military alliance, which remains one of the closest international defence partnerships to date.

The US-Canada trade relationship, valued at approximately $762 billion, has hit a crisis point, affecting not only economic ties but also security cooperation. In particular, attention has been drawn to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (Norad), a binational organisation headquartered in Colorado since 1957, responsible for detecting and managing air and maritime threats across the continent. Both Canadian and US security chiefs now contemplate whether their decades-old military alliance can withstand the current political friction.

The Arctic region sits at the heart of growing strategic rivalry, as it is abundant in valuable minerals and serves as a conduit for critical shipping routes. Russia’s expanding military presence in the Arctic, coupled with US interest in Greenland — a Danish territory rich in strategic significance — highlights competing ambitions. Vice President JD Vance’s recent visit to the US military’s Pituffik Space Base in Greenland on 28 March underscored Washington’s intent to deepen its influence in the region, suggesting a possible challenge to Danish sovereignty there.

Christopher Hernandez-Roy, a former official at the Organization of American States, discussed the evolving situation with the Daily Mail, observing that statements by President Trump regarding the annexation of Canada have shifted from being seen as jocular to a form of coercion due to repetition. He emphasised that “the trouble is, there are ill feelings now, and broken trust, which makes it harder for whoever leads Canada to be seen to appease the US, even if it’s on something like missile defence that’s in Canadians’ interests.”

The trade tensions escalated when President Trump imposed tariffs of 25 per cent on Canadian automobile, steel, and aluminium products. He also criticised Canada as a burden, accusing it of allowing migrants and fentanyl to cross the shared border, and claimed — a figure disputed by many — that the US subsidises Canada by around $200 billion annually. Defending the US role in security for Canada, Trump remarked in January, “we take care of their military,” while controversially offering Canadian access to US Coast Guard icebreakers if Canada became a US state, adding, “But I don’t like doing that if they’re a nation.”

These provocations have caused a sharp backlash in Canada. Mark Carney, a former banker and newly appointed Prime Minister, declared last month that the traditional amity between the two countries was “over,” signalling a departure from long-standing economic integration and shifts in security collaboration. Carney has initiated steps to diversify Canada’s defence relationships and strengthen its military presence in the Arctic, seeking alliances beyond the US.

Among Carney’s defence policy changes is a review of a $13.3 billion deal to purchase 88 F-35 stealth fighter jets from the US defence corporation Lockheed Martin. The Canadian government is exploring alternatives such as the UK’s Eurofighter Typhoon, France’s Dassault Rafale, or Sweden’s Saab Gripen, with discussions underway to potentially build some of these aircraft domestically as part of an economic stimulus. Furthermore, Carney announced plans to acquire a $4.2 billion early-warning radar system from Australia rather than the US, though it will still be integrated under the joint Norad command.

Canada’s Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly articulated the government’s position on the shifting security landscape. She stated that “it’s time for new partnerships,” reflecting concerns over an “over-reliance on American procurement, particularly in the defence sector,” and confronting “a threat to Canadian sovereignty from the White House.” The country is also reconsidering a roughly $22 billion contract for three River-class missile destroyers equipped with the Lockheed-designed Aegis system.

Analysts note that while Canada’s current moves focus on military procurement, they have yet to significantly undermine missile defence cooperation with the US. There remain ongoing talks about expanding collaboration, including under President Trump’s proposed “Golden Dome” missile defence scheme. Henry Ziemer, a fellow at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), told the Daily Mail that a “complete unraveling” of US-Canadian military ties is “unlikely,” despite the broader challenges facing NATO and Western alliances.

“Neither country can afford to lose the other when it comes to defending the airspace, oceans, and access to early-warning radars for incoming missile attacks,” Ziemer explained. Canadian and US generals share concern that further deterioration could jeopardise their collective security, especially given the persistent threats posed by Russian and Chinese military actions in the Arctic.

Politically, the shifting US-Canada dynamic has domestic implications in Canada, as the country prepares for a pivotal federal election on 28 April. Hernandez-Roy noted that US tariffs have revitalised support for the Liberal Party under Carney, which positions itself as capable of standing up to the US, impacting the electoral prospects of the Conservative Party led by Pierre Poilievre, who advocates a “Canada First” populist platform.

In summary, the longstanding partnership between the United States and Canada is under considerable strain amid trade conflicts, military procurement reevaluations, and competing strategic interests in the Arctic. While the alliance has yet to break down completely, the evolving geopolitical environment and changing domestic political landscapes on both sides of the border continue to reshape what was once one of the closest bilateral military and economic relationships in the world.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/us-eu/relations.aspx?lang=eng> - This URL provides information on Canada-U.S. bilateral relations, including security and defence cooperation, trade, and border issues, reflecting the complex nature of their alliance.
* <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47620> - This report discusses the background and current state of U.S.-Canada relations, addressing economic and security issues that have influenced their partnership.
* <https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-matter-canada> - This article explores recent tensions in U.S.-Canada relations, including trade disputes, security concerns, and geopolitical competition, impacting their long-standing alliance.
* <https://as.cornell.edu/news/us-canada-relationship-entering-sad-chapter> - This news piece highlights the deterioration of U.S.-Canada relations due to tariffs and political rhetoric, indicating a 'sad chapter' in their relationship.
* <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/us-eu/env-water-climate.aspx?lang=eng> - This link discusses Canada-U.S. cooperation on environmental issues such as climate change and shared water management, which remains a pivotal aspect of their relationship.