

We need to prepare for the possibility that the U.S. uses military coercion against Canada

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So, this is the “peace president?”

Donald Trump promised that under his leadership the U.S. would eschew “nation building,” “forever wars,” “regime change,” and violent foreign engagements more generally.

Yet since his second inauguration, he's ordered military action in Syria, Yemen, Somalia and Iraq; bombed Iran's nuclear weapons complexes; and blown up more than a score of boats allegedly carrying drugs in the Caribbean. In just the past two weeks, he has launched missiles against Islamic terrorists in northern Nigeria, declared that the U.S. was “locked and loaded” for another attack on Iran, and now decapitated Venezuela's government.

In this context, Canadians must acknowledge the real risk that Mr. Trump will use military coercion against our country.

It's important to connect three recent data points. First, in his press conference on Saturday, Mr. Trump explicitly stated that the Venezuela operation's aim was to secure access to the country's oil. Then, in an interview with The Atlantic on Sunday, he refused to rule out military action to seize Greenland – despite the fact that Greenland is a democracy and, through Denmark, a NATO member – saying, “We do need Greenland, absolutely.”

Editorial: In a national emergency, Canada does not have a moment to lose

From Mr. Trump's perspective, three dominant powers – Russia, China, and the U.S. – are establishing coercive hegemony in their respective domains. With its oil, minerals and water, Canada is a vital resource hinterland in the U.S.'s part of the map.

Second, the just-released U.S. National Security Strategy outlines the “‘Trump corollary’ to the Monroe Doctrine” and identifies U.S. “pre-eminence” in the Western Hemisphere as a main geostrategic objective.

But Canada can’t count on exclusion from the doctrine’s ambit. In the 1950s through the 1980s, when the U.S. intervened in Guatemala, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Chile, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Panama, it was looking south and treated us as more an irrelevancy than a vassal. In contrast, today the Trump administration has little affection for Canada, and it’s clearly concerned about geostrategic insecurities as far north as the high Arctic.

Third and finally, nothing in international law protects Canada that shouldn’t have protected Venezuela. As a nation, we rely on exactly the same rules – the obligation to respect state sovereignty, the prohibition on use of force and the principle of non-intervention – for our own safety.

Connecting these dots, a plausible scenario for U.S. application of military force against Canada to seize our oil resources goes something like this. An independence referendum in Alberta – during which separatists receive a huge infusion of grey MAGA money – sees a majority vote to remain part of Canada, but with 30 per cent or more voting for separation. Mr. Trump declares the result is “fake” and that actual support for separation was “well over” 50 per cent. Alberta separatists then appeal to the U.S. for help, claiming various kinds of oppression. The U.S. moves troops to the northern Montana border and tells the rest of Canada that Alberta must be allowed to join America as the “51st state.”

Doug Saunders: Change – but not regime change – comes to Venezuela

Canada should game out such scenarios and plan specifically how we’d respond. In the above situation, ensuring electoral-process integrity is clearly job one. We can also make it clear to the U.S. that any use of military force will be extremely costly, by dramatically accelerating investments in national service and homeland defence, rapidly building out domestic defence industries, and developing a national drone strategy.

Finally, we should bolster ties with traditional allies and novel partners alike and work alongside those who are similarly threatened by giant neighbours, such as Finland, the Baltic republics, Mexico and Taiwan. We should aim to marshal a global consensus that such flagrant violations of international law are unacceptable and will bring the U.S. costly reputational harm, as has been true for Russia – harm that will only grow exponentially if the U.S. repeats such actions in Canada or elsewhere.

The world is wildly non-linear now, so little can be predicted with confidence.

“Running” Venezuela – whatever that means – will almost certainly not work in the longer term, as the country fractures or rallies against the U.S.; and elsewhere in the world, China might use the action against Venezuela as a license to attack Taiwan.

But whatever surprises are in store, one fact is certain: our neighbour's autocratic and avaricious leader is demonstrably eager to use his country's massive military power to advance his interests. We must get ready.