

Defence Insider

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URGENCY OVER PERFECTION: TIME TO GET THE SHIP MOVING

Welcome to 2026! Did anyone have the crazy events of the first few weeks of this year on their bingo card? We certainly are living in interesting times.

With the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and continued turmoil in the middle-east as a backdrop, we are witnessing the historic "rupture" of the traditional world order and the complete reframing of the transatlantic relationship characterized by Prime Minister Carney in Davos just a few weeks ago. Meanwhile Russia acts with apparent impunity, China continues to maneuver and posture, Iran is imploding on itself, the Americas are under constant threat of the emerging "Donroe Doctrine", and Arctic security has finally become top-of-mind in many western capitals - including our own.

Meanwhile, many of us look south of the border with growing concern. Not just because of the recurring threats to world order and our economic and political sovereignty, but also at the increasing indicators of potential fracture in the very fabric of the republic itself.

As we scan the radar and try to interpret what might lie ahead, we must be mindful that there is enormous potential for distraction given the volatility of ongoing events and the hyperbole, and rhetoric that dominate the cluttered screen that defines our new normal.

We must be focused on substance, reliability and credibility. These are the essential metrics of our future success. In the specific context of national defence and security, I am concerned about the very real challenge of balancing urgency with precision and detail is proving more burdensome than it should be.

MOVING WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY

I continue to be confident that our most senior political leadership - and a growing number of Canadians - understand the urgency of what

we are now facing. I am concerned however that those charged with implementing the government's intent are not necessarily on the same page or seized with the same urgency. To be fair, perhaps big things are happening behind the scenes, but there doesn't seem to be the kind of obvious movement one might reasonably expect as the clock keeps ticking.

When maneuvering a warship at sea, attention to detail matters; but so does urgency and the aggressive application of power. Early in their training, junior bridge officers are instructed to apply helm and power and get the ship moving as clear indication of intent. The precise course to station can be updated and adjusted while the ship is moving. Command can quickly become impatient when "the team" are overly obsessed with the details of the plan and the other ships are already moving around them. This is where I fear we might be - obsessed with perfection at the expense of urgency. In the immortal words of General Patton "A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week". This useful maxim however appears to not have been by any of the apparatchik in Ottawa and its starting to show.

DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

I have been consistently supportive of the current government and their expressions of intent, and their initial actions related to defence and security priorities. Regrettably however, the apparent lack of urgency is of growing concern. Take the impending release of the Defence Industrial Strategy as a case in point. Promised repeatedly for months, it is once again delayed. I have no doubt there are many reasons why the document might need updating in the context of the ongoing volatility around us. Absent the requisite clarity the strategy is intended to deliver however, nobody knows how to maneuver the ship. Government officials and industry leaders alike will continue to default

to "how things have always been" as there is no approved or acceptable alternative. This is happening in real time in the context of the Canadian Patrol Submarine Project (CPSP) as bidders and officials often appear to be on completely different wavelengths with regards to expectations and criteria for the next steps of this critical project.

It is entirely reasonable to accept that we cannot fix everything all at once and that the kind of significant structural transformation we require is going to take time. In the interim however, we cannot afford to keep doing things the way we have traditionally; in particular we need to start taking some risk or we will not be able to achieve what is needed. The recent decision to rapidly down-select to the two remaining bidders for CPSP is a positive move. Regrettably, we appear to be constrained in our capacity to tackle more than a handful of big projects at a time.

Government must reject the authorities, processes and accountabilities that have served the restrictive behaviour of Canadian defence and security for the preceding decades as they are no longer fit for purpose. Instead, they must embrace innovative approaches such as private-sector financing, alternative delivery strategies, partnerships with key industries and sectors, and relation-based contracting as priority examples. In the immortal words often attributed to Albert Einstein, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". I think we have already seen enough insanity elsewhere over the first weeks of this year. Perhaps it is time for some plain old common-sense... if that still exists anymore. ■

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