Feedback on "From Middle Power to Great Power: A Path Forward for Canada" by Dr. Ronald Behringer

Overall assessment

The paper's main argument is clear and timely: Canada can no longer rely on its traditional role as a liberal "middle power" because the international environment has become more dangerous, less rule-bound, and more dominated by great-power pressure. The paper argues that Canada should respond by adopting a more realist foreign policy, strengthening its military, diversifying trade, building new partnerships, investing in infrastructure, and thinking of itself less as a vulnerable middle power and more as an emerging great power.

This is a strong and engaging thesis. The paper is most interesting when it connects a broad theoretical claim about Classical Realism to concrete Canadian policy choices: defence procurement, Arctic security, trade diversification, relations with Europe and Asia, infrastructure, immigration, Indigenous participation, and national unity. The paper does not stay at the level of abstract theory. It makes the case that realism has practical consequences for how Canada should act.

Strong and interesting features

One of the strongest features of the paper is its sense of urgency. The paper does a good job explaining why many Canadians may now feel that old assumptions about geography, alliance membership, and American protection are less secure than they once seemed. The opening use of Thucydides and the "at the table or on the menu" framing gives the paper a clear intellectual and rhetorical hook.

The paper is also persuasive in arguing that international institutions alone cannot protect middle powers when major powers are unwilling to respect rules. This does not mean

institutions are useless, but it does mean that Canada needs more independent capacity. The paper makes a strong case that diplomacy is more effective when backed by military, economic, and industrial strength.

A second strength is the way the paper connects theory to policy. The Classical Realist discussion is not simply background material. The author uses Morgenthau's ideas about national power, prudence, military preparedness, geography, resources, government quality, and diplomacy to organize the policy analysis. That gives the paper a coherent structure.

The author's use of Classical Realism is convincing in several respects. Morgenthau's emphasis on prudence fits the paper's concern that Canada should avoid naïve dependence on allies. The paper also wisely avoids a crude militaristic realism. It does not argue that Canada should become aggressive. Instead, it argues that Canada should build defensive capacity, signal peaceful intentions, and remain committed to values. That makes the argument more balanced and more politically attractive.

A third strong feature is the breadth of the policy discussion. The paper does not reduce "power" to military spending alone. It rightly treats power as a mix of defence capability, economic strength, infrastructure, population, diplomacy, culture, trade, and domestic unity. This broader understanding of power is one of the paper's most compelling moves.

The section on defence procurement is especially interesting. The discussion of F-35s, Gripens, submarines, Arctic hubs, and technological dependence on the United States gives the paper practical weight. The argument that Canada should diversify its defence suppliers is sensible and fits the paper's larger concern about reducing dependence on any single ally.

The paper is also strong when it recognizes that Canada cannot become more powerful through external policy alone. The discussion of Indigenous participation, immigration, infrastructure, culture, and national unity usefully shows that foreign policy depends on domestic capacity.

Main limits and areas for improvement

The paper's biggest limitation is that the idea of Canada becoming a "great power" needs clearer definition. Sometimes the phrase seems to mean actual great power status. At other times, it seems to mean a more independent, better-armed, more economically resilient Canada. These are not the same thing. Canada can become a more capable middle power, a principal power, or a more autonomous ally without becoming a great power in the same sense as the United States, China, or Russia. The paper would benefit from a short section that sets out criteria: What would Canada need in order to count as a great power? How much military spending is enough? What population? What level of industrial capacity? How much (and how do we measure) diplomatic reach? Are nuclear weapons absolutely unnecessary given than most great powers have them? Independent defence production? If the goal is not literal great power status, then "great power mindset" should be defined as a strategic posture rather than a status claim.

So, I think the author should define "great power" more precisely and explain whether Canada can realistically become one, or whether the real goal is to become a stronger, more autonomous middle power.

On a related point, while most of the paper seems to focus on Canada as a potential great power or at least a state with a great power mindset, it shifts focus in the conclusion to the less ambitious principal power concept. If that is what the author feels

is a more realistic goal, then I would recommend using this as the core concept throughout rather than great power.

A second limitation is potential feasibility. The paper recommends major increases in defence spending, infrastructure, procurement, population growth, trade diversification, and Arctic development. These may be desirable, but the paper could say more about costs, timelines, political resistance, and trade-offs. Canada may want to do all these things, but can it do them at once? What should come first? Which measures are most urgent?

So, the paper should identify the highest priorities among all of its recommendations. If Canada cannot do everything at once, the author could rank the most important steps: Arctic infrastructure, defence procurement, trade diversification, domestic industrial capacity, or diplomatic coalition-building.

A third issue is that the paper sometimes treats the decline of middle-power diplomacy as too complete. The paper is right that middle powers face a harder environment, but it could engage more with the possibility that middle-power coalitions still matter. For example, minilateral partnerships, trade coalitions, issue-based diplomacy, and institutional reform may still give Canada influence even without great-power status. The paper would be stronger if it explained not only why middle-power diplomacy is weaker, but what parts of it remain useful.

With this in mind, the author could better anticipate and address possible counterarguments by asking: What can middle-power diplomacy still achieve? Why is “great-power mindset” better than “resilient middle-power strategy”? Addressing this would make the paper’s core claim sharper.

A fourth limitation is that the paper’s treatment of the United States is powerful but could use a more careful distinction between short-

term administration behaviour and long-term structural change. The paper argues that the U.S. has become unreliable, but it should more clearly separate temporary political shocks from deeper changes in American society, institutions, and foreign policy. That would make the argument more durable.

A fifth concern is that the paper could engage more seriously with risks created by its own recommendations. For example, increasing military capability may improve deterrence, but it may also create budget pressure, procurement problems, regional disputes, or public resistance. Trade diversification may reduce dependence on the U.S., but it may also increase exposure to China, India, or other partners with their own political complications. Arctic development may strengthen sovereignty, but it also raises environmental and Indigenous governance issues. The paper mentions some of these issues, but they could be more fully integrated into the main argument.

A sixth limitation is the source base. The paper draws heavily on recent journalism and policy commentary. That helps make the paper current, but it would benefit from deeper engagement with academic literature on Canadian foreign policy, middle-power theory, security dependence, alliance politics, Arctic sovereignty, and status-seeking. More scholarly grounding would strengthen the paper's authority.

Finally, the paper should be careful with tone. Some of the language about threats, betrayal, and American hostility is vivid and effective, but at times it may sound more polemical than analytical. A slightly more measured tone would make the argument more persuasive to readers who are sympathetic to the concern but cautious about the conclusion.

Feedback on "Yankee Canucks: A Profile of Canadian Pro-Continentalists Across the 1988-2021* Canadian Election Study Waves" by Samuel Goertz

Overall assessment

This is a strong and timely paper. Its main contribution is to give a long-term profile of Canadians who favour "much closer" ties with the United States, using Canadian Election Study data from 1988 to 2021. The paper's central claim is that support for closer Canada-U.S. ties has not simply risen or fallen in a straight line; rather, the *kind* of Canadian who supports closer ties has changed. In the earlier period, support was tied mainly to free trade. In the most recent period, it is tied much more strongly to right-wing ideology, political interest, and gender. This is the most interesting and important finding in the paper.

The paper works best as a descriptive and exploratory study. It does not try to prove a single causal story, and that is appropriate given the data and method. Its strength is that it shows a shift in the political profile of "pro-continentalists" over time: from a group linked to economic integration in the free trade era to a group that now appears more ideologically sorted. That argument is compelling because it fits both the historical context of Canada-U.S. relations and the patterns found in the CART models.

Strong and interesting features

One of the strongest features of the paper is its conceptual framing. The distinction between descriptive and normative forms of continentalism is useful. The paper makes clear that one can believe Canada is deeply shaped by the United States without necessarily wanting closer ties, and one can favour closer ties without supporting annexation. This helps organize a literature that can otherwise blur together identity, culture, trade, anti-Americanism, and support for integration. The typology of continentalist, distinctivist, annexationist, pro-continentalist, neutral, and anti-continentalist positions is a useful starting point.

A second strength is the paper's historical reach. Harmonizing Canadian Election Study data from 1988 to 2021 is clearly difficult, and the paper makes good use of that effort. The long time frame allows the author to compare the free trade era, the post-9/11 and Great Recession period, and the Trump-era period. That structure gives the paper a clear narrative arc.

A third strength is the use of CART analysis. This method fits the paper's exploratory purpose because it allows the author to identify combinations of traits that predict pro-continentalism. The paper also explains the method in accessible terms, which is helpful for readers who may not be familiar with machine learning. The use of bootstrapping and ROC-AUC scores also shows that the author is aware of CART's instability and is trying to test how reliable the main splits are.

The most compelling empirical finding is the contrast between the 1988–2000 and 2015–2021 periods. In the early period, support for free trade is central. In the later period, right-wing ideology dominates. This is the paper's strongest argument because it connects the data to a broader change in Canadian politics: closer ties with the United States may have moved from being mainly an economic question to being more of an identity and ideology question.

This finding is compelling because its lines up with plausible historical contexts. In 1988 and 1993, Canada-U.S. economic integration and free trade were central political issues. It therefore makes sense that support for free trade would predict support for much closer U.S. ties. By contrast, in the 2015–2021 period, Canada-U.S. relations were shaped by Donald Trump, the MAGA movement, trade conflict, and rising ideological polarization. It therefore makes sense that right-wing ideology would become more important.

The paper is also compelling because it does not overstate every finding. The author admits that the 2004–2011 period is harder to explain. Since "year" is the main predictor in that period, the paper suggests that major events such as 9/11, the Iraq War period, or the Great Recession may have mattered, but it does not claim to prove this. That caution is a strength.

The finding about gender is also interesting. The paper shows that women are less likely to be pro-continentalist in several analyses, especially in the later period. This deserves more attention. The paper currently treats gender as one predictor among others, but the gender divide may be one of the most important clues about what pro-continentalism now means politically and culturally.

Main limits and areas for improvement

The biggest limit is the dependent variable. The whole paper rests on one survey question about whether Canada's ties with the United States should be "much closer." The author is open about this problem, but it remains important. "Much closer ties" could mean different things to different respondents. It could mean closer trade ties, military cooperation, cultural closeness, shared border rules, foreign policy alignment, or even openness to annexation. It also likely meant different things in 1988 than it did in 2021.

A related issue is that the paper codes only "much closer" as pro-continentalist. This captures the strongest supporters, but it may also exclude many people who support closer ties in a meaningful but less intense way. The author should consider a robustness check that uses a broader outcome, such as "much closer" plus "somewhat closer," or an ordinal model using the full range of responses. If the same patterns hold, the argument would be much stronger.

The paper should give more attention to the meaning of “closer ties.” This is the key concept, and the interpretation changes over time. One useful addition would be a short discussion of what respondents may have understood the phrase to mean in each period. In the free trade era, it likely meant economic ties. In the Trump era, it may have carried stronger ideological or cultural meaning. Making this interpretive shift more explicit would strengthen the paper’s main argument.

The paper should also tighten its language around annexation. The opening hook about recent polling on joining the United States is timely and engaging, but the CES question does not directly measure annexationism. The author already notes this, but the paper should keep that distinction clear throughout. Wanting “much closer ties” is not the same as wanting Canada to join the United States.

The second major limit is that CART is mainly a profiling tool, not a causal tool. The paper sometimes uses language like “driven by” or “predicts,” which is mostly fine, but it should be careful not to imply causation. For example, ideology may predict pro-continentalism, but the paper cannot show whether ideology causes people to support closer U.S. ties, whether views of the U.S. become part of ideological identity, or whether both are shaped by some other factor.

Another is the periodization. The three eras are reasonable, but they are still somewhat artificial. The paper would be stronger if it tested whether the main findings hold under alternative period breaks. For example, the 2004–2011 period is described as post-9/11 and Great Recession, but 9/11 occurred before the first survey in that period. The author could say more about why 2004 is the right starting point.

I also think the paper should do more with the gender finding. If modern pro-continentalists are more likely to be men, that may connect to broader work on gender, populism, nationalism, views of Trump, or attitudes toward hierarchy and traditionalism. Even if the paper does not fully explain this pattern, it should flag it as a major finding rather than a secondary one.

Feedback on Connections Between both Papers:
These two papers fit together very well because both are really about Canada's relationship with the United States at a moment when that relationship feels less stable than before. The Goertz paper studies this question from the bottom up: it asks which Canadians want closer ties with the United States, and how that group has changed over time. The Behringer paper studies the issue from the top down: it asks what Canadian foreign and defence policy should look like if the United States can no longer be treated as a fully reliable ally.

Taken together, the papers show that the Canada-U.S. relationship is not only a foreign policy issue. It is also a domestic political issue. Goertz shows that support for closer ties with the U.S. has become more tied to ideology, especially right-wing ideology, in recent years. Behringer argues that Canada should respond to U.S. unreliability by building more independent military, economic, and diplomatic power. That creates a very interesting tension: the foreign policy shift Behringer recommends would require broad national support, but Goertz suggests that Canadians' attitudes toward the U.S. are increasingly polarized by ideology and gender.

Linkages between the papers
The most important connection is that both papers are about **the end of Canadian comfort with the old Canada-U.S. relationship**. Goertz shows that attitudes toward closer U.S. ties have changed over time. Behringer argues that Canada's foreign policy must change because U.S. protection and liberal

international institutions can no longer be taken for granted. One paper shows the domestic political side of the problem; the other shows the strategic policy side.

A second linkage is the shift from **economic interdependence to strategic vulnerability**. In the Goertz paper, the free trade era produced a form of pro-continentalism based on perceived economic benefit. In the Behringer paper, deep dependence on the United States is treated less as an opportunity and more as a risk. This is a major historical reversal. In the late twentieth century, closer economic ties could be sold as prosperity. In the current moment, the same closeness may be seen as exposure to coercion.

A third linkage is realism. Goertz uses the language of realist or material continentalism to describe the earlier free-trade-based support for closer U.S. ties. Behringer uses classical realism to argue that Canada must build its own power. These are different levels of analysis. Goertz is studying realism "from below" — how citizens evaluate material benefits from U.S. ties. Behringer is studying realism "from above" — how the state should act in a dangerous world. Reading the papers together suggests that Canadian realism has changed form: earlier it could mean accepting continental economic integration; now it may mean reducing dependence on the continent's dominant power.

A fourth linkage concerns ideology and public support. Behringer's strategy would require Canadians to accept higher defence spending, more infrastructure building, more trade diversification, and perhaps a more assertive national identity. But Goertz suggests that views of the U.S. are not evenly distributed across the population. They are tied to ideology, gender, and political interest. This raises a major question for Behringer: who would support the great-power project? Would right-wing Canadians who are more open to closer U.S. ties support Canadian autonomy from the U.S.,

or would they prefer continental alignment? Would left-wing Canadians who are wary of the U.S. support military expansion, or oppose it as militarization? The two papers together show that the domestic coalition for a more independent Canada may be complicated.

A fifth linkage is national identity. Goertz treats continentalism as part of how Canadians understand their relationship to American culture and power. Behringer treats sovereignty and national unity as conditions for survival in a dangerous world. Both papers therefore ask, in different ways: what makes Canada distinct enough, united enough, and powerful enough to stand apart from the United States?

Questions for the authors

For Goertz: If the 2025 CES data become available, will it show a sharp decline in pro-continentalism after renewed annexation talk, or will the same right-wing, politically interested group remain comparatively pro-U.S.? That would be a powerful test of whether modern pro-continentalism is driven by material interest, partisan identity, or affinity with U.S. conservative politics.

For Behringer: Is the goal really for Canada to become a great power, or is it for Canada to become a more capable and less vulnerable middle power? Clarifying that point would make the policy recommendations more convincing.

For both authors: Is Canada entering a period where the U.S. becomes a domestic cleavage as much as a foreign policy partner? If so, debates over defence, trade, culture, and sovereignty may increasingly map onto domestic ideology. That would make the Canada-U.S. relationship one of the central fault lines in Canadian politics.