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<v SPEAKER\_1>In this episode of Defence Deconstructed, which we're recording May 23rd, 2025, I'm sitting down with Will Richardson.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>He's a PhD candidate in Political Science at Carleton University, and a fellow of The Canadian Global Affairs Institute, and a participant is in our Triple Helix Minds Collaborative Network to talk about some research they recently did for us.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So we brought you on today to chat about some work that we had you do in your capacity as a graduate student involved with our Triple Helix Minds Collaborative Network, looking at continuous capability sustainment.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>You conducted a pretty extensive and novel research project for us.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>That's up on our website as a compendium of papers, and we'll talk about some of those, the papers specifically and the research and the findings that went into those.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>But before we dig into that specifics in those texts, start us off by talking about continuous capability sustainment as you understand that the Government of Canada is approaching it.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Thanks, Dave.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So continuous capability sustainment, I see it as complementary to agile procurement, to some of the research that we've been doing and that's been going on within the Materiel Group and within DND more broadly on how to maintain capabilities, military capabilities, particularly ones that are enabled by sophisticated and dynamic technologies at the speed of relevance.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So trying to move along more efficiently and sort of generate capabilities that are perhaps less obsolete, more cost effective and more flexible and dynamic.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so continuous capability sustainment actually appears

in the 2024 Defence Policy Update, Our North Strong and Free.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And I can briefly read the definition.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So according to the Government of Canada, continuous capability sustainment, I'm going to refer to it now as CCS, seeks to identify ongoing investments in technology upgrades over the in-service phase of a capability to ensure that the CAF equipment remains technologically relevant, fit for purpose, and aligned with the extent high level mandatory requirements.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And so the juxtaposition of this view about how the Canadian military would continue to have capability relevance through this new model is to simplify it.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>The existing model oversimplified is that we tend to buy something, wait a decade or more, do a midlife upgrade, in some cases because we're military hoarders and keep things longer than we should.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>We do another midlife upgrade, but generally only one.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And then we dispose of it and buy something new.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And as part of that paradigm, one, it's difficult to keep pace with changes in technology.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Two, it's hard to keep pace with changes in requirements for interoperability, which may or may not be driven purely based on capability changes.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And there's also different things that can happen over time like changes in a regulatory environment for navigation standards or environmental standards.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And so this is an effort to be more on a continuous, to use the term, basis, having currency in the capability in the Canadian military.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, I think it's about flexibility to respond to

developments and sort of the categories that you just highlighted.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And I would also add, just drilling down a little bit into the traditional or legacy cycle for procurement, we've set up the way we govern and pay for capability procurement in Canada around this notion of a major capital project, the so-called collar of money.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then that can give you a new capability, or it can substantially upgrade a capability, which also involves the introduction of new capability.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And that is framed organizationally as really distinct from the regular sort of daily operational funds that go into sustaining a capability.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But when you look at a capability like a small drone or something like the F-35 fighter aircraft, the F-35, it gets software upgrades up to once a week.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so how do you differentiate between what is a quote unquote new novel capability versus just keeping something going?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And it's that tension that continued capability sustainment promises or has potential to resolve because you can more flexibly respond to keeping a capability going and inserting new technology without a major capital upgrade project.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And I think one of the key drivers of this is that as you have kind of a continuum in evolution and shift from military capabilities, the ratio between the steel and aluminum in it and the software that makes the metal work more irrelevant, there's an increasingly higher ratio of software enablement, advanced computing technology enablement, a number of different applications for emerging technology and advanced capability to turn the physical asset into a weapon system with advanced capability.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>That the evolution and the technical pace, in addition to some of those other regulatory and other considerations we touched on, that the change with the evolution and increase in modernization that comes with the software is obviously happening much faster than the evolution and just the aluminum or the steel.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, and I guess one last thing before we dive into the study itself is I was doing a little bit of research about the P8 Poseidon in preparation for the pod, and I was struck by how a lot of the materials emphasize the open nature of the software and of the platform.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>It is designed to have overhead for power and physical space to incorporate new systems and to remove systems over the course of its lifetime.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And again, we're talking about regular upgrades that really challenge the existing Canadian military defense procurement and sustainment practices.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Okay, so to pivot to the research project, I guess from my landscape, just to situate what we asked you to do, there had been discussions for a number of months and sort of general, or I think more than months really, a couple of years even, that CCS seemed like a good idea.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>A lot of people would nod north and south that changing the model was needed, different technology space, different paradigm about wanting to keep pace with those various different changes that we alluded to earlier.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And so there's a need for a different model as well as a different approach in delivering it that got away from treating everything with a project, which in the Government of Canada's governance framework comes with a whole lot of procedural steps, work, effort, in some cases where it didn't necessarily seem like projects were warranted given, as we're talking about, given the need to sustain or continue a capability versus creating one new.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And there's a whole bunch of things that come with that.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>But part of those discussions, I think there was sort of a recognition that this was needed in a broad sense, and that it could be highly applicable, but had a difficult time figuring out exactly what the potential scope for this was going to be and empirically how much of the current investment plan the National Defence has in terms of projects would potentially benefit from this project.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And there are a number of potential considerations of making this shift in terms of resourcing, potentially getting different kinds of money, colour, to use your terminology earlier, colours of money allocated.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>But that didn't have a lot of kind of grounding in empirical data about what the potential utility was.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So as part of this, we talked to some officials in Defence about undertaking this project.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And I'll let you talk through some of the ways that we worked out some survey questions to try and identify what some attributes of continuous capability sustainment would look like.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Okay, yeah.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So through several engagements with subject matter experts in the Materiel Group, the L1, the Level 1 Organization at National Defence, we came out with a series of yes-no questions.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>It was sort of 14 or 15 questions that we thought could capture the appropriateness of an ongoing D&D project or continuous capability sustainment.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so one of the ones that ended up being most prevalent, I'll give this as an example, was, do you anticipate having future technological obsolescence challenges that will require further investment?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And, spoiler alert, that was almost universally yes, the answer.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So that was an indicator that, wow, perhaps continuous capability sustainment planning that addresses future technological obsolescence issues, that creates that sort of decision space and perhaps a funding envelope down the line for those considerations that could be useful.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So we had a number of different indicators developed, and they're listed in the documents published.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But what I would say is that we broke down the CCS indicators, which were derived from the yes-no questions about the applicability of different CAF projects to CCS, into three large buckets.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And that's really what we based a lot of the analysis on.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So the first bucket, and I've alluded to it earlier in this response, is future planning and obsolescence management.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So questions that get to that question of what will be required to keep these capabilities going in the future and will that cost money?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The second was the evolution of interoperability requirements.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>We spoke a little bit earlier about how the rate of technological change has enabled new forms of interoperability, enhanced systems interoperability, but also much more dynamic systems interoperability.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so the evolution of interoperability requirements among our allies and partners is a factor that is likely to cost money across a wide range of CAF projects currently being undertaken.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And the third bucket was regulatory changes.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so that's things like airworthiness standards, environmental protection standards, seaworthiness standards, Canadian Motor Safety Vehicle Standards.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So as these regulatory regimes change, as they're as they want to do, do we expect that more money will be required to keep these capabilities going in the future?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so we had those buckets of CCS indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And what we were able to do is we reached out to the CAF services, and we asked them if they were able to answer the questions that we had devised with the Materiel Group about the projects that they were responsible for.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And we used projects that had been briefed publicly in the 2024 CADSI Outlooks.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And we used this because these projects are up to date, they've been vetted for public release, and we had a little bit of information about each one as a result of its being briefed.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>However, some of these projects were not formally approved, so we didn't necessarily have super concrete information on all of them.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so you'll see that in the project list that was published.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But we had 66 surveyed projects ultimately, and we had 340 instances of the CCS indicators that we identified with AVM-MAT appearing across these projects, sort of being identified as relevant factors.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And 65 out of the 66 ongoing projects had at least one CCS indicator present.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So it suggests that CCS is broadly applicable across the capability portfolio.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And we can sort of drill down into a couple of those buckets further as you'd like.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>One quick qualifier, anybody can read the methodology section of this report if they want to geek out on this.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>We tried to find a representative sample of the projects, recognizing that there are close to 400 of them total in the investment plan.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And the burden of doing a survey on all of those would be high.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>It might not be relevant on all of those, because some of those close to 400 projects are nearing completion and project closeout.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So there's not much point in figuring out whether or not on an ongoing basis, they might have this approach be relevant, because some of those are capabilities that are going to be sunset at some point.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So we thought that this is a reasonable compromise of getting a representative sample, but one that was not going to be exhaustive and therefore relatively feasible for the very kind of folks in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal Canadian Navy, and Canadian Army's Force Development Shop to be able to do a survey on.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So with that throat clearing on the methodology, and I say this knowing that you are trending towards your PhD dissertation defense.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So can you talk about-

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<v SPEAKER\_2>My Excel skills are okay, but they're not that good.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So 400 might have been a little bit of a challenge.



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<v SPEAKER\_1>Right.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So to get you to go into a little bit more detail about some of those, maybe just across some of those buckets of capability obsolescence, interoperability, or regulatory change.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>What kind of prevalence did you see between those different buckets in terms of how across those three, which ones appeared most often as being recognized as being applicable?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So the top three, and this I'm speaking from results that are presented in the first introductory paper if people are interested.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But the most prevalent CCS indicator, and I mentioned this earlier, is the anticipated technological obsolescence issues.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So that's in the future planning bucket.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so 48 out of 66 projects or 73 percent of projects exhibited this indicator.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And the second and third most prevalent indicators respectively were the NATO interoperability requirements requiring future investment, and the NORAD interoperability requirements requiring future investment.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so when I think of those, I did my master's thesis on interoperability in advanced fighter aircraft.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so when I think of the interoperability requirements, I often think of communications and information systems interoperability.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And when you think about how quickly those systems evolve and how information is increasingly fused together in a multi-domain

battle space, these interoperability requirements are really quite pivotal and they're dynamic.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>They change.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so those are the top three.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And the most prevalent category overall, perhaps no surprise, is the future planning.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And its indicators were identified 168 times, and that's 168 out of 340 total appearances.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so that is the future planning category.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Again, if you happen to have the paper open, which I do, but don't worry if you don't, it's the first six questions that we identified on figure 2.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so the interoperability requirements, that was the second most prevalent category, 27% of all visible indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then finally, the regulatory changes had had the fewest, visible indicators at 24% of all visible indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then if you'd like, Dave, I can do the breakdown by the service as well.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Well, I think maybe folks can read, if they want to go into the detail, I guess just keep it at a high level.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So you mentioned that 65 of the 66 projects had at least one of the indicators for the projects.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>But there was many, there were a number of different projects that had basically more than one indicator.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And it basically would try to create this in a way that would show, is there some indication that this new CCS approach would be applicable to this basket of projects or portfolio?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Or in some cases, are there a whole bunch of different indications on each individual project?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So maybe give a bit of a flavour about how many had three or more, etc.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, so 80% of the surveyed projects, that's 53 total projects across the three services, add at least four different CCS indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then there's a pretty steep drop off as we go up to seven.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So that was 20 projects or 30% of all projects surveyed had at least seven CCS indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And finally, it's just three projects had 10 CCS indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And those were basically the top three projects that we found suitable for CCS.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And just which were those in particular?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, yeah.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So the top three projects, the first one was a Navy project and it's a counter drone system.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And when you think of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the speed with which the battle space there is changing, to me it makes sense that this is a very dynamic capability set, counter drone capabilities.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so that's something that's being acquired for the Navy.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And that had, I want to say, 12.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, it had 12 different CCS indicators.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then it was followed by two RCAF aircraft.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So the F-35, the Future Fighter Capability Project and the P-8 Poseidon.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And just as two short asides on those projects, I'm struck by how the F-35 is now being developed at the Block 4 capability level.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And in that capability level, the US.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>DOD is actually trialing continuous capability development and delivery in that Block.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So it's pursuing an agile capability methodology and effectively CCS through Block 4.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So that was an interesting sort of external validation of our results.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then the other thing is that the P-8, as I mentioned earlier, it has an open mission architecture and is already being upgraded by the US.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Navy, despite being quite a new platform.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And when you consider the range of different sensors that that platform integrates, then there is lots of scope for upgrades throughout its service life.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And then the last thing is that Canada joins a capability operators group on the P-8.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so there will be no doubt cooperation and opportunity for regular upgrades there.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Okay, so to kind of to step back, pull it up to a little higher level.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Part of what you've been doing your doctoral research on is basically advanced technology in military acquisitions.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, the international relations dimension of it.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, right.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And you've done a bunch of other great work with both at The Canadian Global Affairs Institute and other places talking about procurement reform, the need to adopt some of our practices.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So I guess high level takeaways are that this approach is broadly applicable to essentially the majority of the defence portfolio, at least in some of the aspects of the indicators that we developed that would attribute utility for CCS for the projects.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>And there are in some cases, some projects, like the ones you just named, where there are a huge number of indicators, multiple indicators being flagged with some of the key projects, where there's basically multiple reasons for the applicability of a change in approach.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The considerations that will be needed to keep it relevant and up to date and current, with the funding.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So I guess, what would you take away from this work, this research, these findings?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>What is the so what of this?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess, for me, it's that there's empirical evidence now substantiating that this approach has a lot of utility.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Where do we go with that?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>What does it mean?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, I guess I would say that it could revolutionize as a strong term, but it's the term that comes to mind.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Obsolescence management, right?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Within the military, that's one of the key takeaways for me.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>That's the top bucket of CCS indicators that came up, was the future planning and obsolescence management.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And the military has a number of, we learned through the interviews that the military has a number of capabilities that are outmoded in some ways now, incorporating antiquated technology, but they don't have the right procedures or funding models to keep things going, to bring them back up to speed.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So why this matters is we've identified potential, I think we've identified potential issues that will likely cost money in the future of these advanced platforms, but we've also identified potential apps to keep them updated.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And when we look at the vote one, vote five, the color of money, we learned that a funding model that goes in between could be useful in keeping these capabilities relevant.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So I think we've identified some of the problems being experienced with technical obsolescence and with obsolescence management and the dynamism of modern technology, but it also points towards potential solutions.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And one of those solutions, I think, would be a new color of money.

00:22:19.760 --> 00:22:32.880

<v SPEAKER\_1>So, as we say this, we're just a few weeks after the completion of the last federal election, the winning party proposed some fairly significant change to the Defence Acquisition Model in Canada.

00:22:32.880 --> 00:22:41.280

<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess, where does that leave the potential opportunity as the proposed Defence Procurement Agency is shaped out?

00:22:42.640 --> 00:23:11.540

<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, so, I noticed, yeah, that we have, if we go back to the, this has been proposed in previous federal elections, a single Defence Procurement Agency, and breaking down silos or inter-organisational stovepipes, it's a promising avenue towards greater agility and efficiency in technology insertions that keep these platforms up to date, interoperable and compliant with regulations.

00:23:13.060 --> 00:23:31.220

<v SPEAKER\_2>But one thing that struck me in my research is how the UK, the US and Australia all already use different, to varying extents and with different names, but the same general concepts, integrated capability management teams in their defence acquisition and sustainment models.

00:23:31.220 --> 00:23:43.120

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so, I think we need to move away from the distinct or discrete notion of defence acquisition and defence sustainment into a more sort of unified vision of the two.

00:23:43.120 --> 00:23:50.680

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so, when we talk about a defence procurement agency, I wonder if we're really talking about a defence capability management agency.

00:23:50.680 --> 00:24:03.700

<v SPEAKER\_2>That's the synergy that I would see there, and that would bring in some of the agile methodologies that CGAI has researched, and I know remain a topic of interest within the forces and DND.

00:24:03.700 --> 00:24:07.620

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so, that's how I would put those two things together.

00:24:08.520 --> 00:24:20.340

<v SPEAKER\_2>And a single agency, a single capability management agency, it would bring together folks from, excuse me, from different organizations within DND, but then within the broader government

community.

00:24:20.380 --> 00:24:47.640

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so these cross-functional teams would potentially take a more sort of whole life or through life view of capability management, including procurement, sustainment, upgrades, and you build more institutional memory there and more frankly, relationships between different organizations and skill sets there that I think would be quite useful.

00:24:47.820 --> 00:24:56.240

<v SPEAKER\_2>So in broad strokes, that's how I would integrate some of this research into the notional Defence Procurement Canada.

00:24:58.520 --> 00:25:08.440

<v SPEAKER\_1>Well, thanks very much for joining us to give a verbal description of this research, which is available on our website, of course, and thanks for undertaking this study for us.

00:25:08.440 --> 00:25:09.520

<v SPEAKER\_1>Last question to you.

00:25:09.520 --> 00:25:12.800

<v SPEAKER\_1>We know we ask all our guests, what are you reading these days?

00:25:12.800 --> 00:25:17.180

<v SPEAKER\_2>Right now, I'm reading Tim Alberta, The Kingdom, The Power, And The Glory.

00:25:17.580 --> 00:25:21.700

<v SPEAKER\_2>A study of American Evangelicalism in an age of extremism.

00:25:21.700 --> 00:25:24.060

<v SPEAKER\_2>And it's absolutely fascinating.

00:25:24.380 --> 00:25:27.080

<v SPEAKER\_2>I'm learning a lot.

00:25:27.080 --> 00:25:32.400

<v SPEAKER\_1>And I'm sure that given where you are, you're also reading drafts of your PhD dissertation.

00:25:32.400 --> 00:25:36.520

<v SPEAKER\_1>Appreciate you taking time from that and good luck getting it over the finish line.

00:25:36.520 --> 00:25:37.380

<v SPEAKER\_2>Thanks very much, Dave.



00:25:37.380 --> 00:25:39.100

<v SPEAKER\_2>Thanks for the opportunity.

00:25:39.100 --> 00:25:41.280

<v SPEAKER\_1>Thanks for listening to Defence Deconstructed.

00:25:41.280 --> 00:25:46.400

<v SPEAKER\_1>For more of our work, go to [cgai.ca](http://cgai.ca) or follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook.

00:25:46.800 --> 00:25:53.340

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00:25:53.340 --> 00:25:55.960

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00:25:55.960 --> 00:25:57.440

<v SPEAKER\_1>Music credits go to Drew Phillips.

00:25:57.440 --> 00:25:59.600

<v SPEAKER\_1>This episode was produced by Jordyn Carroll.