COMMENTARY

Bombardier Already Builds in America. The New Threat Is About Where Canada Is Allowed to Build.

Bombardier already employs thousands of Americans and buys billions from U.S. suppliers. The latest threat raises a bigger question: how much leverage should Canada keep at home?

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Illustration: Nasty Canuck / AI-assisted.

The U.S. president says Bombardier should lose access to the American market unless it builds there. It may be bluster. If it isn't, Canada has another reason to diversify trade and treat domestic aerospace capability as strategic insurance.

Last week, Nasty Canuck looked at Bombardier's decision to bring a critical Mississauga aerostructures operation in-house. The point wasn't that 750 jobs had suddenly appeared or that Canada had somehow reshored a factory that was already here. Bombardier was taking direct control of skilled people, production knowledge and manufacturing capability that would be difficult to replace if it disappeared.

A week later, that question of control looks considerably less theoretical.

On September 7, the U.S. president said Bombardier should no longer be allowed to sell its aircraft in the United States unless it builds there. The White House did not immediately explain how such a prohibition would work, and Bombardier aircraft already hold U.S. regulatory certification. Similar threats against the company earlier this year were never implemented, so this one may end the same way.

It could also be serious. Either way, it is a useful stress test for a Canadian company that already does an extraordinary amount of business south of the border.

Bombardier already builds in America

For a company supposedly treating the United States like a piggybank, Bombardier leaves quite a lot of money in it.

Bombardier employs about **3,500 people in the United States**, while its supply chain includes roughly **2,800 American companies across 47 states**. The company says it spends more than **US$2.5 billion a year** with U.S. suppliers. Wings for its Global 8000 are made in Texas, crucial flight-control components are produced near Los Angeles, and American companies supply engines, avionics and other major systems used in Bombardier aircraft. (Bombardier statement) (Associated Press)

Kansas politicians noticed the contradiction. Senators Jerry Moran and Roger Marshall raised concerns about what the latest threat could mean for Bombardier's substantial Kansas presence, while Congressman Ron Estes defended the company's contribution to the local economy and U.S. national-security work. (Associated Press) (Reuters)

This isn't a Canadian manufacturer standing at the border tossing finished airplanes south while refusing to let Americans near the toolbox. It is an integrated North American aerospace company whose Canadian plants, U.S. facilities, suppliers, engineers, service centres and customers depend on one another.

Bombardier says its customers operate more than **5,200 aircraft worldwide**, while Reuters reports that roughly half of the customer fleet is located in the United States. The U.S. also accounts for about half of Bombardier's sales. America matters enormously to Bombardier. That still doesn't make Bombardier an American company. (Bombardier statement) (Reuters)

If the complaint is that Bombardier needs to invest and employ people in the United States, it already does. The administration hasn't explained whether "build here" means final aircraft assembly, substantially more component production or something else. If the price of market access is moving more high-value work out of Canada, however, that is a very different proposition.

Bluster can still be leverage

There is good reason not to treat every presidential threat as enacted policy. Earlier this year, the administration threatened to decertify Bombardier Global aircraft and impose a 50% tariff during a dispute involving Canadian certification of Gulfstream jets. Those measures never happened. Reuters also found no immediate explanation this week for how a new sales prohibition would be implemented, and aerospace analyst Richard Aboulafia questioned whether the administration had a practical route to doing what had been proposed.

So we shouldn't turn a threat into a policy. We shouldn't pretend it means nothing either.

Bombardier shares opened down 6.4% on Tuesday before recovering much of the loss. Markets understand the vulnerability: when one country represents roughly half your sales, access to that market is leverage whether the threat ultimately becomes law or not.

And if Washington ever did try to shut Bombardier out, the damage would not stop at the Canadian border. Thousands of American employees, thousands of U.S. suppliers and billions of dollars in annual American purchasing are tied to the same company. That doesn't make a ban impossible. It makes the economics considerably messier than the slogan.

Canada has built enormous prosperity through unusually deep integration with the United States. Canadians should want that relationship to work. But integration looks different when one partner begins treating access to its market as a tool for influencing where another country's factories, jobs and investment are located.

You don't need to pull up the drawbridge to notice the risk.

This is what trade diversification is for

Mark Carney's government has spent much of the past year talking about building strength at home while widening Canada's relationships abroad. In August, Carney said Canada had signed more than 20 trade and security deals across five continents and was pursuing deeper market access with India, ASEAN and Europe. A Team Canada trade mission to Japan in June produced 14 announced commercial deals valued at more than $1.7 billion.

Governments are very good at announcing agreements. Nasty Canuck should judge this strategy by what follows: contracts, exports, investment, factories and Canadian companies gaining customers they didn't have before.

Trade diversification sounds bureaucratic until your biggest customer threatens to lock the door.

Canada is not going to replace the U.S. market for Bombardier next Tuesday, nor should it want to. Geography, shared supply chains and decades of commercial integration guarantee that the United States will remain one of Canada's most important economic relationships.

Diversification isn't about replacing America. It is about having more than one answer.

A Canadian aerospace company with meaningful customers and partnerships across Europe, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere has more room to manoeuvre than one whose future can be determined by a single market. The same principle applies to energy, agriculture, critical minerals, manufacturing and almost every other export industry Canada is trying to grow.

That doesn't make every trade mission or agreement a success by definition. It does make the objective harder to dismiss as diplomatic tourism.

The fighter debate just got another data point

The same concentration-risk question belongs in Canada's fighter-jet review.

National Defence says the government is still reviewing the planned acquisition of 88 F-35s to make sure the aircraft remains the best choice for Canada, while plans for their introduction into service continue. Canada is legally committed to the first 16 aircraft, and the F-35 program already has substantial Canadian industrial value: more than **$5.2 billion in contracts** have gone to over 110 Canadian companies. (Reuters)

Gripen remains among the alternatives being discussed as the review continues. The Bombardier threat does not prove Canada should buy Saab's fighter instead.

It should move one yardstick: **strategic dependence deserves more weight.**

Ottawa has meanwhile selected Saab as the preferred supplier for discussions over GlobalEye, an airborne early-warning platform built on Bombardier's Canadian-made Global 6500. There is no procurement commitment yet, but the government says the proposed arrangement is expected to support domestic production, highly skilled jobs and technology transfer, with potential Canada-based mission integration and participation in global defence supply chains.

The Bombardier threat doesn't settle F-35 versus Gripen. It does make one question harder to leave in the fine print:

When Canada buys a critical military capability, how much control, industrial knowledge and freedom of action stays in Canada?

That question belongs beside stealth, range, weapons, interoperability and cost.

The Mississauga deal looks different this week

Which brings us back to Bombardier's acquisition of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' aerostructures operation in Mississauga.

The facility already manufactures wings for Bombardier's Global 5500 and 6500. Bringing it inside Bombardier gives the company more direct control over people, tooling, manufacturing knowledge and part of a production chain that previously belonged to a supplier.

Canada cannot and should not insist that every component of every Canadian aircraft be made here. Modern aerospace is international by nature, and Bombardier benefits from American expertise just as American suppliers benefit from Bombardier.

The goal isn't to make everything here. It's to keep enough leverage here.

Keep enough engineering, difficult-to-replace manufacturing, intellectual property and skilled work in Canada that international partnerships remain choices rather than necessities.

Bombardier is already looking at bringing another kind of aerospace work north. CEO Eric Martel said this summer that the company expects to choose a Canadian site by late 2026 or early 2027 for special-mission conversion work — work currently performed in Wichita. Martel said the proposed Canadian operation could begin with GlobalEye and later support other missions.

That is domestic aerospace capacity becoming strategic capacity.

Insurance doesn't mean isolation

There is a bad lesson Canada could take from all this: America is unreliable, therefore Canada should turn inward.

That would be economically foolish and strategically self-defeating.

The better lesson is that good relationships are strongest when dependence doesn't become helplessness. Canada should keep trading with the United States, keep buying American technology when it is the best choice, and keep building things with American workers and companies.

It should also keep finding new customers, new partners and new places to sell Canadian expertise. And it should keep enough aerospace capability at home that those partnerships remain choices rather than necessities.

Maybe the latest threat to Bombardier disappears like the earlier one did. Maybe some part of it becomes policy. We don't know yet, and pretending otherwise would be poor journalism.

What we do know is that a Canadian company employing thousands of Americans, buying billions of dollars from American suppliers and contributing to American defence work can still wake up one morning to a threat against access to its biggest market.

That's useful information.

Last week, Bombardier taking more control of a Canadian aerospace operation looked like a smart supply-chain move.

This week, it looks like something else too.

Insurance.
