



Canada-US Security Issues

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Introduction

The security of North America--as opposed to Canada's historic concerns about its security against the United States--has been a Canadian-American problem since 1917. Once the US entered the Great War, the two countries began to cooperate militarily, mounting naval and air patrols against the U-boat threat. For the first time, American equipment and personnel were based in Canada, and cooperation was ramping up when the Armistice of November 11, 1918 brought the war to a close. In the 1920s, both North American nations turned inward, and military planners in Ottawa and Washington or

together. Over time, the Canadian Forces adopted more US equipment and looked to the American military as its exemplar.

The arrangements generally worked well for the militaries; however, they troubled the Canadian public and politicians on left and right who feared that Canada was being dragged behind America's chariot wheels and in danger of losing its sovereignty and independence. The debate over putting Distant Early Warning Line radars in Canada in the mid-1950s was marked by anti-Americanism; so too was the discussion over NORAD and the question of nuclear arms for Canada in the early 1960s, and the heated arguments over the US role in Vietnam and a dozen other Cold War and post-Cold War flashpoints. At the same time, Canada and the US became each other's best trading partner, and Canadians' economic prosperity increasingly hinged on access to the rich market to the south. Canada needed the US economically, but it was a restive military partner, and the nation's endemic anti-Americanism regularly blew into epidemic proportions. After the

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Key Issues

For Canada, the key issue was and is how best to act to deal effectively with Washington in an era of increased threat to the US and, indeed, the Western democracies. The Canadian Forces, their regular effective strength now only 53,000, their equipment largely obsolescent, had been allowed to atrophy over several decades and were essentially incapable of operating abroad in strength or providing timely effective aid in civil emergencies at home. This did not please the Pentagon which was unhappy that Canada had been able to provide only a handful of ships, a few transport aircraft, and an infantry battalion to the Afghan War in 2002 and had loudly refused to participate in the Iraq War of 2003. At the same time, American deployment of Ballistic Missile Defence met with substantial opposition in Canada, and by mid summer 2004, no decision on Canadian participation (or non-participation)

participation and political support, they can usually live without it. They cannot, however, tolerate a nation of high strategic importance to them that makes no effort to defend its own territory or contribute effectively to continental defence. Such neglect

If Canada acts to modernize and expand the Canadian Forces, the costs will be high. An increase in strength toward 80,000 regulars will be required, as well as the expansion of the reserves to be both a homeland defence first-responder force and a reinforcement for the regular forces. Much new equipment is essential, most notably destroyers, supply ships, long-range heavy- and medium-lift air transport, and a wide range of armoured vehicles and army equipment. The present percentage of GDP devoted to defence would likely need to double toward 2.2 percent (the NATO average).

Such an expanded, updated CF would be able to play many roles: to defend Canadian territory and sovereignty and to contribute credibly to continental defence; to operate abroad in coalitions or peacekeeping/peacemaking roles; and to provide adequate aid to the civil power in domestic emergencies such as earthquakes, forest fires, and floods. These are roles that Canadians historically have wanted the CF to play and that Canadians have adjudged as serving their national interests.

The option of doing nothing is not really a choice. It involves turning the defence of Canada over to the United States with grievous consequences for sovereignty and, dare we say it, pride. The option of minimizing relations with the United States and ensuring Canadian defence of its own air, sea, and land space is possible but even more expensive than the option of cooperating with the US. Both of these options likely threaten the continuance of trade with the US; both certainly threaten the possibility of amicable relations with our superpower neighbour.

Potential Flash-Points

Options/Recommendations

Canadians need to consider their national interests in deciding on their security policies. Stating matters as simply as possible, the first national interest is surely the need to protect Canada's territory and the Canadian people. The second is to protect the continent we share, the third to enhance our economic well-being, and the fourth is to work with our friends for the advancement of democracy and freedom. Balancing these interests at any time is the task of government, but their permanence has been demonstrated by our history and will certainly be crucial to our future as a nation.

Our national interests demand that we abide by the 1938 bargain made by Roosevelt and King. Canada needs the United States to be the ultimate guarantor of its security in a dangerous world just as much as Canadians need Americans to be the best market for their goods. But we have obligations as a good neighbour, and these demand that we protect our air, land, and sea space and control terrorism in Canada in such a way that our neighbour is reassured by our efforts and feels no need to do the job itself. This will enhance our independence and sovereignty and buy us goodwill in Washington.

At the same time, it serves Canadian interests to cooperate in continental defence, again doing so in such a fashion that we merit a share in the decision-making that inevitably must affect us. The US, for example, is now deploying BMD. That decision was taken unilaterally whether or not some Canadians might judge it to be the right one. If any defence question was an issue in the June 2004 election, it was BMD. The question for Canada, however, was never a moral one, as some portrayed it, but a political one: how best could we get some influence on the ways in which this weapons system might be directed and employed? If we did not join in, we would have no say at all; if we did sign on, even at a late date, we might achieve some, and to have a seat at the table at least raises the possibility that, if we play our cards skillfully, we might be able to enhance our influence and possibly protect our sovereignty.

Similarly, Canadian governments can decide whether or not to participate in coalition or UN or other international organizations' operations; those are choices that should be