



Canada-U.S. Security Relations: Missile Defence

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Background

The North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), the joint Canada-U.S. military command responsible for the aerospace defence of the continent, is the vehicle for Canadian participation in U.S. missile defence initiatives. In the past year and a half there has been considerable activity involving this agreement that is moving Canada in the direction of full participation in missile defence. Having entered into discussions with the U.S. in May 2003 on possible Canadian participation in the U.S. National Missile Defence program (NMD), the government announced in January 2004 that it had exchanged Letters of Intent with the U.S. establishing the basis of negotiations for participation through NORAD.¹ Then, in August 2004 it was announced that the agreement had been amended to allow NORAD to share its global missile surveillance and warning information with the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), the command responsible for the operation of the U.S. National Missile Defence program.

There is more to this amendment, indeed to Canada's missile defence role within NORAD, than is readily apparent. The U.S. National Missile Defence program, together with its plans to eventually weaponize space, is part and parcel of, and cannot be separated from, the constantly evolving U.S. Missile Defence Agency's existing global missile defence systems. These consist

¹ The Letters can be viewed at <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Focus/Canada-us/letter-e.asp>

² From the Missile Defence Agency website at
<http://www.acq.osd.mil/mda/mdalink/html/mdalink.html>

supporting U.S. military initiatives worldwide goes deeper, however, than participating in the transfer of vital information. In 1996, Canada and the U.S. signed a completely rewritten NORAD Agreement that mandated NORAD military personnel, including Canadians, to work within other U.S. commands to perform NORAD duties and it is clearly stated in the rewritten agreement that “NORAD personnel performing NORAD duties in other commands may be called upon to support the mission of that command.”³ This clause situates Canadian military personnel stationed at NORAD as working in support of U.S. military initiatives, such as the War in Iraq, despite what the Canadian government’s position might be on those initiatives. There is no doubt, then, that through NORAD Canada is already participating in the full range of U.S. missile defence activities. Full participation would presumably involve joint management of the system and an active combat role for Canadian forces.

At the time of the signing of the 1996 NORAD Agreement, General Joseph Ashy, Commander in Chief of both NORAD and United States Space Command, announced to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that the new agreement established the NORAD Command as part of a “system of interdependent (U.S.) commands that make important contributions to the security of the United States and Canada, and bring the power of space to U.S. military operations worldwide.”⁴ The issues involved here are more far reaching than are publically acknowledged by the Canadian government.

Issues

Support of U.S. Foreign Policy

As a Canadian military command, NORAD activities have to be seen as reflecting Canadian foreign policy. NORAD, however, is also one of a system of interdependent U.S. commands designed to support American foreign policy, including its present policy of pre-emptive war. By its very nature, then, NORAD institutionalizes Canadian support for U.S. military initiatives and related U.S. foreign policy. Under these conditions, we have to ask what it means when, for instance, the Canadian government decides not to condone the U.S. war in Iraq but Canadian military personnel through NORAD are performing key support functions for that war. There is a serious disconnect here between Canadian foreign policy and Canadian military activity and it is quite possible that our sovereignty depends on less institutionalized participation, not more.

Security or Provocation?

The land-based missile defence system presently being deployed in Alaska and California is designed to address an accidental, or hostile, launch of a limited number of long-range ballistic missiles by intercepting and destroying the missiles in mid-course either in space or at high

³ The 1996 NORAD Agreement, p. 3. The rewritten agreement also contains a clause that allows for amending the agreement without going through a renewal process, and hence the August 2004 amendment.

⁴ Testimony of General Joseph W. Ashy to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 21 March 1996, Federal Document Clearing House

altitudes. The ‘accidental’ missiles would supposedly come from the arsenals of Russia or China, while the ‘hostile’ missiles are expected to be launched from North Korea, Iran, or Syria (Iraq was also in this category before the U.S. invasion of that country), states that do not have a long-range ballistic missile capability now or for the foreseeable future. Further, although there have been some successes in the testing of the system’s intercept capability, these have been under highly controlled experimental conditions that have little resemblance to battle conditions. There have been no tests of the system as a whole and indeed, the Alaska and California sites now being prepared are meant to be test beds before they are considered defence installations. Further, there is no consensus as to what will happen to the warhead on the attacking missile when intercept takes place and this is particularly worrisome if the missile is carrying a nuclear weapon.⁵ Will the warhead simply be destroyed, as some suggest, or will an intercept result in a nuclear explosion in space or at high altitudes or on the ground if the warhead survives, and with what effects? Definitive answers to these questions are not known. As Ernie Regehr points out, the system offers only “theoretical protection from a theoretical threat,”⁶ making NMD theoretical security.

In terms of provocation, and quite apart from issues of proliferation, the U.S. missile defence system in its entirety, designed to project and protect U.S. power worldwide, enables the U.S. to shape global and regional security environments to its own interests, including its economic interests. This is provocative on at least two counts. First, it seriously compromises the ability of peoples to define for themselves what constitutes their security and to pursue that definition within a environment that enables negotiation and cooperation. And second, when U.S. power is used to secure its economic interests, and when those economic interests produce insecurities for others, then the systems that allow the projection of that power can be seen as provocative in that they reinforce relations of inequity amongst the world’s peoples. In considering Canada’s role in missile defence, it is necessary to ask then, how is security defined in a missile defence context, who exactly is being secured by these defence systems, and at what costs to others.

Space Weaponization and Arms Control

The U.S. has long-range plans to develop a range of space-based weapons for their missile defence programs including space-based interceptors for which they hope to deploy a test bed in

⁵ A concern voiced by Dr. Calder in his testimony to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

⁶ Ernie Regehr, “Ballistic Missile Defence and Canada’s Vital Security Interests,” *Project Ploughshares Briefing* (June 2004) p. 2 www.ploughshares.ca

system will evolve over time,” and that “our bilateral co-operation in this area should also evolve.” In this 8)

⁷ For a description of these events see Ann Denholm Crosby, *Dilemmas in Defence-Decision-Making: Constructing Canada's Role in NORAD, 1958-1996* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998)

⁸ Lloyd Axworthy, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada, House of Commons,

the debate may be avoided and no doors need to be closed.

This option, however, leaves unresolved the issues of Canada's implicit support of U.S. foreign policy initiatives that rely on NORAD functions, as it also leaves unresolved Canada's definitive position on the weaponization of space, and indeed, places Canada in the position of having no firm stand on the issue. Arguably, this option does not seriously compromise Canada's work in international arms control and disarmament fora. Canada has managed the contradiction between its support of U.S. missile defence systems through NORAD, and its arms control work in the past, and presumably can continue to do so.

Full Participation in Missile Defence

This option would certainly settle the issues raised in these notes. Canada's full participation in missile defence would be a statement in support of the weaponization of space, as it would also be an indication that Canada is prepared to compromise its work in arm control and disarmament fora; and that it is clearly in support of any U.S. foreign policy initiative that required the services of NORAD technologies and personnel. These, however, might not be the resolutions to these issues that Canadians prefer.

Returning NORAD to an Air Defence Only Role

This option would see the NORAD Agreement amended so as to restrict its activities to air defence of the continent, its original mandate. The means to accomplish air defence functions are already in place within NORAD, and indeed, air defence, particularly in the form of tracking the drug trade, has been a major role within NORAD since the end of the Cold War. In the post-September 11 environment, there are even more reasons for a strong air defence involving monitoring Canadian airspace and borders for criminal and/or terrorist activities that might threaten either Canada or the U.S. and sharing interdiction functions.

This option would most likely be strongly resisted by the Canadian government out of its fear that any down-scaling of NORAD functions would result in a marginalization of the Canadian-U.S. defence relationship within the institutions of U.S. security, including curtailed access to U.S. intelligence. As Regehr asks, however, "why do Canadian defence planners insist that a focus on air defence cooperation would lead to the marginalization of NORAD when most defence analysts point to the security threats to North American air space and coastal waters as the continent's primary security challenges in the early years of this century?"¹¹ Accordingly, an air defence only option would require a continuing Canada-U.S. cooperative defence relationship, a continuing sharing of relevant intelligence, and continuing consultations on existing and developing air defence plans.

Retiring the NORAD Commingling of Developmental Findings with Geographical Widespread Threats and Saturation (un)

¹¹ Regehr, "BMD, NORAD, and Canada-US Security Relations," p.4

