



briefing

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BMD, NORAD, and Canada-US Security Relations

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Ever since the Government announced that it was pursuing ballistic missile defence (BMD) discussions with the United States, the Department of National Defence has made it clear that it wants the US to place responsibility for command and control of the BMD interceptors with NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command. That would make it a joint Canada-US operation, and would mean changing the NORAD agreement.

Currently, NORAD has two primary missions: aerospace warning and control for North America. Warning includes the detection and assessment of aircraft or missile attacks on North America, while control, which includes the capacity to engage intruders in combat, is confined by the NORAD agreement¹ to air defence, specifically excluding missile defence.

So far the Americans have not agreed to expand the NORAD mandate to make it the ballistic missile defence command and control facility. In its overview of the 2005 Budget request, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) describes a “new Unified Command Plan” that assigns “the role of global integrated planning for missile defense to the US Strategic Command.” STRATCOM in turn works with Combatant Commanders, such as US Northern Command (NORTHCOM), to develop operational concepts and to carry out testing and operational exercises. There is no reference to NORAD in the

MDA (2004) document, even in the section, “International Participation.”

During the Cold War, NORAD’s early warning and assessment information² was (and still is) handed off to STRATCOM as the manager of American nuclear retaliatory forces. STRATCOM then had the responsibility (and still does) to launch the retaliatory strikes when given a presidential command to do so. The retaliation targets, in the Soviet Union, for example, were predetermined and preprogrammed and thus data on the trajectory of the incoming missiles was not needed for the counterattack to be carried out. The only purpose of NORAD’s Integrated Tactical Warning and Attack Assessment (ITWAA) function was to confirm that an attack was in fact underway. Hence, the early warning and retaliatory tasks were functionally separate.

In the case of BMD, however, the early warning and assessment functions would have to be directly linked to the command and control of the missile defence interception forces. NORAD’s tracking of the path of the incoming missile would in this case be the primary source of the coordinates that would be needed to direct the intercepting BMD missile toward the incoming attack missile. So, the NORAD warning and assessment functions would be virtually inseparable from the planned BMD interception functions.³

NORAD, however, is a bi-national Canada-US command and does not currently have a mandate to carry out the BMD interception operations. The command and control of BMD interceptions is a national US responsibility, which means that US planners are facing the question of how best to integrate the bi-national early warning function of NORAD with the national BMD interception function of NORTHCOM. Thus there seem to be three basic options available:

1. Non-involvement by Canada: The NORAD ballistic missile early warning functions and the NORTHCOM interception functions would be carried out by personnel who are “dual hatted” and thus act in both NORAD and NORTHCOM capacities (NORAD and NORTHCOM are co-located in Cheyenne Mountain). This would not require an amendment to the NORAD agreement because, when these officials were carrying out the early warning function they would be acting with their NORAD hats on, but when it came to firing back to intercept incoming missiles, they would have their NORTHCOM hats on. This option would effectively confine Canada’s NORAD role to air defence because Canadian personnel would be barred from the NORAD ballistic missile early warning role – the ITWAA function – because as Canadians they could not switch to NORTHCOM hats and carry out the interception phase of the operation.
2. Full Canadian involvement: NORAD could be amended to expand its aerospace control function to include missile defence. In that case, the entire BMD operation in North America, from early warning and assessment to firing the interceptor missiles, would be carried out under the bi-national NORAD command, which would mean that Canadian personnel could participate.
3. Partly in/Partly out: Operationally, everything could stay as it is now – namely, the bi-national NORAD would continue its ITWAA function – but in this case, in addition to the ITWAA data going to STRATCOM and regional commands for theatre missile defence,⁴ it would also hand

off the data to NORTHCOM which would then run the BMD interception. This option would be a change from the status quo if it included a Canadian political buy-in to BMD as a means of seeking greater consultative access regarding the US BMD interception operations.

The second option is currently the primary Canadian negotiating objective – to get the US to agree to a change in the NORAD mandate to permit NORAD under bi-national command to engage in ballistic missile defence interceptions. This would not only keep Canadians involved in ballistic missile early warning, NORAD's ITWAA function, but would also involve them directly in strategic BMD interception operations. The indications to date are that the Americans are unlikely to agree to this arrangement – that is, they are unlikely to permit their BMD system to be placed under a joint bi-national command.

The first option would unambiguously take Canada out of BMD operations, strategic and theatre BMD, and would return Canada to a strictly air defence role within NORAD. While that represents a logical solution, it is the one option that Canadian negotiators are desperate to avoid because of their fear that, when Canadians are removed from the ITWAA role, Canada will be marginalized in North American security operations.

That leaves the rather murky third option as the most likely. That is, Canada continues to participate in the ITWAA function of NORAD, which is directly linked to the BMD interception performed by NORTHCOM. In that case, the early warning and assessment function would be nominally separated from the ballistic missile interception role, but Canada might still push for an amendment to NORAD to reflect the intimate link to BMD, and Ottawa would still look for a formal role within BMD so as to gain a seat at the table and, it is argued, to influence interception scenarios with implications for Canada.

Politically, there is not much to distinguish options 2 and 3 – that is, when BMD actually becomes

operational, even as a test bed, Canadian NORAD personnel would in either case stay in their ITWAA chairs. Both options – especially if option 3 were to include an overt political endorsement of BMD – would have enormous implications inasmuch as they both would make Canada a committed participant in and presumably apologist for BMD, regardless of its implications for undermining Canada's disarmament objectives,⁵ including the non-weaponization of space.⁶

It is not easy for Canadians to believe, but very little of the pressure on Canada to join the US BMD system – i.e., options 2 or 3 – is coming from Washington. While it is obvious that any White House would welcome political endorsements of its weapons programs and in this case would like to be seen to be leading a significant BMD coalition of the willing,⁷ there are many in the Pentagon who would be just as happy for Canada to stay out of sight and out of mind on BMD operations, and perhaps also to confine its musings on banning weapons in space to United Nations committees in Geneva and New York.

The Americans don't need Canadian money, technology, territory,⁸ or the joint Canada-US command structure in NORAD to pursue their strategic or theatre missile defence aims. Furthermore, an Administration fully at ease with dismissing arms control treaties and defying the UN Security Council is unlikely to feel a strong need to win the political blessing of Canada.

It is that absence of pressure that most worries the pro-BMD policy planners at Canada's Department of National Defence (DND) – and it should worry the rest of us as well, but for rather different reasons.

DND officials in pursuit of a BMD role worry that if the Pentagon operates BMD entirely on its own, a potentially significant element of North American security operations will not involve Canada. Canada would not be allowed to be in on US intelligence briefings that relate to the integration of the ITWAA and interception roles, and Canadians would be kept out of discussions related to BMD operational planning, interception scenarios, and the like. And if

BMD is kept out of NORAD, this focal point of the Canada-US security arrangement will not include the security mission that now enjoys high profile and importance in Washington. In the first instance, it is argued, Canada will not be in a position to influence the development of the BMD system, especially in ways in which it either serves or affects Canada. Secondly, NORAD will be marginalized and the Canada-US security relationship will decline in importance for the US, which in turn will mean that Canada will have less influence on broader North American security issues and less access to the US military market.

The rest of us should worry because Canada is going to the US looking for a BMD role in NORAD while relying on a remarkably weak bargaining position. Defence Minister David Pratt (2004) has persuaded Cabinet to allow him to step up his lobbying through direct negotiations “with the objective of including Canada as a participant in the current US missile defence program,” but, as already noted, Canada has neither money, nor technology, nor territory to offer in return. And in the absence of substantive bargaining chips, it is not only paranoia that might lead one to suspect that Canada might be pressed to pull back on its opposition to American plans to include the weaponization of space in its BMD architecture.

It is still something of a mystery why Canadian officials insist that only ballistic missile early warning and interception roles can sustain the Canada-US security relationship. Their assumption that the core, high-priority focus of North American security cooperation will be missile defence ignores the fact that missile defence is on the margins of North American security. For one thing, BMD does not even address the primary ballistic missile threat, namely the Russian and Chinese missiles targeted on North America.⁹ Instead, it is concentrated on a very narrow “rogue state” threat that does not yet exist and which can best be prevented through non-proliferation diplomacy and verification. What is the logic of Canadian negotiators who seem to be calculating that the central North American aerospace security focus will be on an extraordinarily expensive and marginally capable

ballistic missile defence system that awaits the emergence of a very particular threat of one or a few crude missiles but has no capability at all against the real missile threat?

In contrast, 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? While North America remains the most secure and protected continent on the globe, vulnerability to airborne threats is much greater than to rogue missile threats:

- The danger of a repeat of the September 11 kind of attack from airspace inside North America means that NORAD's air defence component must now monitor internal airspace, as well as the air approaches to North America, and increase cooperation with civil aviation traffic control operations.
- A continental airspace frontier of many thousands of kilometers must be monitored to guard against the possibly growing cruise missile threat,¹⁰ and to detect non-military threats in the form of drug traffic, terrorist incursions, and other criminal activities.

The Minister of Defence seems to be telling Canadians, however, that these air defence concerns are marginal and of such little importance that they will wither on the security vine, while a huge technological infrastructure poised to get that one rogue missile in some distant future represents the epitome of urgency and relevance.

Nor is it clear why Canadian defence officials prefer to focus on joining the US in ballistic missile defence when all of the assets that Canada brings to NORAD are directly connected to air defence – coastal radars, fighter aircraft, the North Warning system,¹¹ Northern emergency airstrips, and so on – and none to missile defence.

If logic and Canada's real security needs were the focus of the current talks, Canadian negotiators would clearly be aiming for option # 1 – and it is

likely that the Americans would be agreeable. The aim would be to reinvent NORAD as a vehicle for air defence cooperation, through which each party would credibly assure the other that no undetected air threats to the other were emanating from its territory. Whether a NORAD-style joint command is necessary is an open question – but the need for cooperation is not in doubt. North American air defence is best cooperatively addressed in a manner commensurate with the threat. If there is no credible air threat, air defence will be of minor importance; if the air threat escalates, the importance of the air defence cooperation arrangement will grow within the overall North American security calculus.

The same, by the way, is true of maritime defence. It requires some element of continental cooperation and it is an area in which Canada has significant capabilities to bring to the joint effort.

Shared security concerns are what ensure that Canada has a “seat at the table” of North American security planning. Obviously, Canada should be present at any discussion of missile defence operations that affect our interests and territory. The United States has an obligation to consult with any of its neighbours that are likely to be affected by its current or planned military operations. If the Permanent Joint Board on Defence or the Bi-National Planning Group housed at NORAD, or NORAD itself, does not offer an appropriate venue for such consultation, then such can be created.

In all these discussions Canada needs to come to the table with a clear and distinct understanding of Canadian priorities, interests, and obligations, shaped by our particular worldview and values and by our proximity to the United States, including:

- Cooperation in continental security within clear limits on the level of military integration with the United States;
- Maintenance of an independent capacity for global threat assessment;
- A made-in-Canada approach to global security that links our security to a stable, rules-based international order rather than to the pursuit of a place of favour within fortress North America; and

- An independent capacity to participate in legal international actions designed to protect vulnerable civilians and contribute to a more stable and equitable international order.

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Notes

¹ In the March 28, 1996 exchange of Notes between US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Canada's Minister for Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy the "primary missions of NORAD in the future" were defined as "a) aerospace warning for North America; and b) aerospace control for North America. It is understood that 'aerospace warning' currently consists of the monitoring of manmade objects in space and the detection, validation, and warning of attack against North America whether by aircraft, missiles, or space vehicles, utilizing mutual support arrangements with other commands. An integral part of aerospace warning will continue to entail monitoring of global aerospace activities and related developments. It is understood that 'aerospace control', currently includes providing surveillance and control of the airspace of Canada and the United States. The expansion of binational cooperation in other aspects of the aforementioned missions should be examined and could evolve if both nations agree."

² NORAD carries out these functions through the use of US national assets (operated by SPACECOM during the Cold War but, with the recent elimination of SPACECOM, now operated by STRATCOM), like the Defence Support Program satellites, BMEWS radars, and communications systems. NORAD headquarters, as the recipient of the data from these assets, assesses the location of missile launches, monitors their trajectories, and provides assessment and confirmation of a missile attack on North America (and elsewhere – NORAD assesses missile launches globally and submits data to relevant US regional commands, including, for example, to CENTCOM which is responsible for the Iraq operation). Canadian Forces personnel in

NORAD participate in that function, and did so throughout the Cold War. Two helpful publications are: Jockel 2003 and Lagassé 2003.

³ On October 16, 2003 the US Army activated the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense Brigade and deployed 90 soldiers including National Guard and active duty soldiers to serve as command and control for the missile defence system in Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado. Lt. Gen. Joseph Cosumano Jr., the commander of the Army Space & Missile Defense Command, explained that when NORAD would detect an incoming missile it would notify the brigade soldiers working at computer terminals inside Cheyenne Mountain at Northern Command, as well as in other buildings in Colorado Springs (*Denver Post*, October 17, 2003).

⁴ This third option is the way theatre missile defence operations are now run, in that NORAD's ITWAA function is global, so, for example, when it detected missile launches in Iraq during the Iraq war the information was transferred (by instantaneous electronic transfer) to CENTCOM, the American Command running the Iraq war, which in turn operated the theatre missile interception system.

⁵ See Regehr 2004a.

⁶ See Regehr 2004b.

⁷ The United Kingdom and Denmark, for example, are part of the "coalition" by virtue of their territories hosting ballistic missile early warning radars,

⁸ Notwithstanding Defence Minister David Pratt's refusal to rule out the possibility of US BMD installations on Canadian territory, that certainly is not part of current or imminent plans.

⁹ Which the Minister of Foreign Affairs again confirmed to the House of Commons on February 17, 2004.

¹⁰ Simon Fraser University Political Science Professor Doug Ross (2003) points to "an urgently needed major upgrade to continental air defences in the near future," and notes evidence that Russia and China both are re-emphasizing strategic bomber and cruise missile development – an emphasis that would be accelerated by ballistic missile defence development.

¹¹ Defence Minister Pratt told CTV's *Question Period* on February 22, 2004 that the North Warning System is already part of ballistic missile defence

and that Canada has been in the BMD business for a long time. Of course, this is not correct. The NWS is strictly linked to air surveillance and defence and is intended to identify airborne threats (e.g., Russian strategic bombers).

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"and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4)