

## **Missile defence: sorta, kinda, maybe**

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**Globe & Mail** - Aug 6, 2004: Opponents of missile defence scored a major victory yesterday. Instead of unequivocally embracing George W. Bush's missile defence program, Paul Martin's new government took only the most cautious of small steps. Admittedly, the decision to amend the NORAD agreement is a concession to the Bush administration, Canada's defence industry and our military leaders.

Information gathered by the binational aerospace surveillance and command structure will now be conveyed directly to NORTHCOM, the U.S.-only body initially tasked with operating the missile defence interceptors. As a result, NORAD's role will not have to be scaled back to its initial function of air-only surveillance and defence when the first phase of the program is activated this autumn.

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Yesterday's cautious step opens the door to a rigorous debate about Canada's involvement, says MICHAEL BYERS

By MICHAEL BYERS

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Opponents of missile defence scored a major victory yesterday. Instead of unequivocally embracing George W. Bush's missile defence program, Paul Martin's new government took only the most cautious of small steps.

Admittedly, the decision to amend the NORAD agreement is a concession to the Bush administration, Canada's defence industry and our military leaders. Information gathered by the binational aerospace surveillance and command structure will now be conveyed directly to NORTHCOM, the U.S.-only body initially tasked with operating the missile defence interceptors. As a result, NORAD's role will not have to be scaled back to its initial function of air-only surveillance and defence when the first phase of the program is activated this autumn.

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Proponents of missile defence will argue that Ottawa is now fully and publicly committed. They will say that Canada's ability to contribute is limited to information-gathering anyway, that the designation of NORAD as the mechanism for this inexorably will draw us into the program, and that any later attempt to withdraw will inconvenience and possibly offend our southern neighbour. But yesterday's announcement does expose the fallacy of one of their previously central arguments: that Canada's full participation in missile defence is necessary if NORAD is to survive.

The incremental approach to missile defence is probably driven by a desire not to alienate the many progressive Canadians who voted Liberal rather than NDP earlier this summer. Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew indicated yesterday that the final decision on Canadian participation has not yet been taken. This will only occur after negotiations on a final agreement have concluded, and after Parliament has been consulted.

This concession to public opinion opens the door to a rigorous debate about the true extent, costs and benefits of Canada's involvement, as well as the conditions that should be attached.

Defence Minister Bill Graham will have to explain how the United States' current funding and testing of space-based missile defence components are consistent with the Canadian government's insistence that the program does not entail the placement of weapons in space. An appropriate response would be to insist on a provision in any final agreement that made Canada's continued participation conditional on missile defence remaining strictly land- and sea-based.

Canadians also will learn whether they are expected to make a financial contribution to the program, and what amount is foreseen. The placement of missile interceptors on our territory -- a possibility raised by former defence minister David Pratt -- will at long last be subjected to appropriate scrutiny.

Assurances will have to be secured that civilian aircraft are not at risk of becoming accidental targets. Steps are needed to ensure that nuclear debris will not contaminate Canadian territory after a failed or only partially successful intercept. And Ottawa should insist on language that specifically precludes the placement of small nuclear warheads on the interceptor missiles, as was done with the Bomarc and Safeguard systems to bypass the enormous technological challenge of differentiating between incoming missiles and associated decoys.

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The impact of Canada's possible participation in missile defence on other policy areas must be considered, ideally in the context of the foreign and defence policy review promised for this autumn. Mr. Graham, with his background in international law and arms control, is ideally positioned to take the lead role. Many arms control experts remain skeptical that Canada could maintain its position as an effective proponent of global disarmament after it signs on to missile defence.

The promised benefits to Canada must also be examined. Given the political clout of the U.S. defence industry, binding commitments are necessary to ensure that Canadian companies receive their fair share of missile defence contracts. Similar commitments could help to ensure that the U.S. military accords the same priority to the protection of Canadians as it does to Americans in the unfortunate event that a missile somehow ends up heading toward us.

It may be that the only real benefit of Canadian participation lies in assuaging the United States. Mr. Bush's enthusiasm for missile defence is linked to his policy of pre-emptive military action. Since any unprovoked missile strike on the United States would be suicidal for the attacking state, the threat (such as it is) is restricted to retaliatory or accidental launches.

Mr. Bush also wants to activate the first interceptors before the November presidential election as a tangible demonstration of his commitment to protecting the United States. It is striking that Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry, who promises to avoid unnecessary wars, has pledged to scale back the program and redirect most of the expenditure elsewhere.

Paul Martin was recently reminded that election outcomes are never certain. Although the timing of yesterday's announcement and the incremental approach to missile defence are designed to protect him and his party, they have the additional consequence of pushing the date for a final decision past early November -- when a different set of defence priorities could take hold in Washington.

It says something about the state of Canadian politics that the final decision to participate in missile defence could be made by U.S. voters. But we do have an unexpected opportunity to delve more deeply into the issues, ensure that any eventual agreement is the best possible one for us and, if necessary, politely and respectfully withdraw.

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