

Missile shield doesn't fly as an issue: Liberal, Conservative positions are entrenched

Posted by

Tuesday, 15 June 2004 01:33 - Last Updated Tuesday, 15 June 2004 01:33

Ottawa Citizen: But these days, with a poll showing Mr. Broadbent heading to victory in his riding, and the Pentagon's unveiling of recent plans that would move ahead with the development of weapons in space as part of the shield, the NDP now counters it's [Defence Minister] Mr. Pratt who is out of date.

From: "Sara Kemp" <sara@polarisinstitute.org>

To: "Peace Listserv" <peace@watserv1.uwaterloo.ca>

Subject: Missile shield doesn't fly as an issue: Liberal, Conservative positions are entrenched; NDP fights o-n (and other news stories o-n BMD)

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Missile shield doesn't fly as an issue: Liberal, Conservative positions are entrenched; NDP fights o-n

The Ottawa Citizen

Tue 15 Jun 2004

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Section: Federal Election 2004

Byline: David Pugliese

Source: The Ottawa Citizen

In April, Defence Minister David Pratt took a swipe at the NDP and its claims that the U.S. *missile* *defence* shield Canada is looking to join is a throwback to president Ronald Reagan's controversial Star Wars plan.

"Star Wars is an '80s concept just like Ed Broadbent," said Mr. Pratt, referring to the former NDP leader who has come out of retirement to run in Ottawa Centre.

But these days, with a poll showing Mr. Broadbent heading to victory in his riding, and the Pentagon's unveiling of recent plans that would move ahead with the development of weapons in space as part of the shield, the NDP now counters it's Mr. Pratt who is out of date.

This past week, NDP leader Jack Layton vowed to make Canada's participation in the missile shield an election issue.

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But it appears that in a political contest where voter anger is focused on recent scandals, accountability and government waste, the NDP leader could be facing an uphill battle.

At this point, the sides are well established in the *missile* *defence* debate.

The Conservatives are eager for Canada to take part and have repeatedly called on the government to sign on to the system, which would use ground-based interceptors to shoot down rockets.

The NDP and Bloc Quebecois are opposed, warning it would lead to weapons in space and start a new arms race. Mr. Layton and the Bloc's Gilles Duceppe have accused the Liberals of already deciding to take part in the shield, but keeping that information hidden from the public until after the election.

The Liberals deny that, although they acknowledge they support the idea of a Canadian role in the system.

They say no decision has yet been reached, but there is little doubt the government wants a successful conclusion to negotiations currently taking place. Indeed, Canadian officers have already taken part in missile shield war games as they learn about how the system would work.

On the thorny issue of whether the shield would place weapons in space, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham has said such claims are in the realm of science fiction. Besides, he notes, Canada would walk away from any missile shield deal if such devices become part of the system. Mr. Pratt has aggressively gone after the NDP, accusing it of scaremongering by linking the shield to Star Wars.

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That may be the political line for public consumption, but it's not what Mr. Pratt and Mr. Graham's officials are saying behind the scenes.

Last year, the Defence Department produced several studies acknowledging that weapons in space, some with their genesis under Mr. Reagan's Star Wars program, were to form an important part of the shield in the future.

One study produced last spring acknowledged the shield may pave the way for putting weapons into orbit and could threaten the peaceful use of space for years to come.

American analyst Theresa Hitchens says the Liberal government's claim that weapons in space are not part of the shield is highly misleading.

While such a statement is true now, U.S. President George W. Bush's administration is clearly headed toward launching weapons into orbit, adds Ms. Hitchens of the Washington-based Center for Defense Information.

She notes that in its recent budget request, the U.S. *Missile* *Defense* Agency asked for an initial \$47 million U.S. to start development of a space-based interceptor to be ready for testing in 2012.

In February, the U.S. air force unveiled its plan to put weapons into orbit and destroy other countries' satellites as part of a strategy that views space as being dominated by the U.S. and its allies. The plan, strikingly similar to the Star Wars scheme, outlines the building of systems such as a space-based radio frequency weapon and anti-satellite missiles.

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Canadian defence analyst Alain Pellerin acknowledges space weapons could come at a later stage in the shield's development. But he questions whether that will even be an issue.

"I'm not convinced that the general public is too concerned about having weapons in space," says Mr. Pellerin of the Conference of Defence Associations lobby group.

The dilemma for Canada would come if and when space weapons go into operation sometime after 2012. Does the government of the day then follow through with Prime Minister Paul Martin's promise to withdraw from the shield, which at that point will be fully controlled by the joint Canadian-U.S. North American Aerospace Defence Command?

Not likely, argues Ms. Hitchens. "If you think you had a political problem with the U.S. now over your decision not to support the Bush administration on the Iraq war, just wait until you try to leave *missile* *defence* once you've signed on and it's up and running," she says. "Then watch the fireworks really begin."

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Harper aims to fix what isn't broken

The Record (Sherbrooke)

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'Embarrassing and gutless' he said. Canada was abandoning her allies and 'cheering for Saddam Hussein.' Petulant anti-Americanism guided the decision. Those were Stephen Harper's own words o-n our country's refusal to join the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Seven out of ten Canadians lauded the government's courageous stance which held out for the missing U.N. sanctions to validate such a momentous decision.

For a man who extols the virtues of grassroots support up to and including a referendum to recall a Member of Parliament who strays, Harper's position o-n Iraq was curiously out of step with the nation. He even took the time to disavow any association with Canada's official position in an article published in U.S. World Today in which he supported the George W. Bush war unequivocally. Given the consequences to date of that invasion, is it any wonder that Harper is now trying desperately to backpedal?

To reveal such flawed judgment o-n such a major issue in complete opposition to the Canadian electorate says a lot about Stephen Harper. When prime ministers make decisions, they don't have the luxury of second guessing if and when it becomes politically expedient. The dead can't be unburied.

The U.S. *Missile* *Defense* System appears to meet with Harper's approval without any pause for considering the consequences of weaponizing space.

Dubbed Star Wars under the Ronald Reagan regime, sober U.S. strategists themselves doubt that it is doable, much less that it offers any effective defence of the continent in an age when box cutters and an envelope of white powder can effectively bring the most powerful nation o-n earth to a standstill.

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A willingness to invoke the notwithstanding clause to override the charter of rights promises a troubled future of reopening old wounds on such loaded topics as Quebec separatism or the death penalty or abortion. Allowing for free parliamentary votes on such policies invites much more acrimony and discord than casual references to them might suggest.

Harper is emerging as a throwback to the past, dealing with issues already agreed upon by the Canadian electorate for those old enough to remember or informed enough to know. Who wants to revisit bilingualism or to generally unbalance major issues that were so painstakingly woven into the fabric of the nation?

Who among us as we observe the convulsions occurring elsewhere in the world has not remarked on how privileged we are to live in this great and tolerant and stable country. Stephen Harper is obsessively determined to fix what is not broken. He wants rigid laws that punish crime, not those that prevent it. He wants to respect the U.S. first amendment on the right to bear arms, forgetting that he lives in another country that seeks an acceptable means to control them. His shameless support of the Fraser Institute's right wing agenda on health care while painstakingly omitting the word 'privatizing' also deserves close scrutiny.

Concerns for the environment, a national day care plan, primacy of the Charter of Rights don't consume much space in the doctrinaire Harper bible.

His revivalist fervour subscribes to two commandments. Cut taxes and increase military spending, deservedly unleashing warning signals of again straying unto the Bush reservation. Canadians share a healthy skepticism of the same so-called god who directs a nation to wage war, just or unjust. Quebecers have good reason to remember that confusing the lectern with the podium has not served us well in the past.

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What ails Canada can be corrected without traumatic realignment of the body politic. As the election approaches and Harper's favourable polls inch upward, his well-documented black and white conservative policies fade to gray, all the better to lure the wider audience.

Let us not be so easily fooled or we will end up with the government we richly deserve but don't really want. Picture o-ne possible scenario of a Bloc Quebec with Harper reigning over the rest of Canada. Could de facto separatism without a referendum in sight be far behind ?

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Voters make their voices heard

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Byline: Joan Walters

Source: The Hamilton Spectator

Roy Oommen

Engineer, MBA student

Hamilton Centre

For Roy Oommen, who believes voting is a privilege, none of the

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major parties feel just right.

"What a depressing time to be a Canadian of majority age," he says.

"A colleague pointed out that if I'm so despondent, I should simply not vote. But o-nly a hypocrite would salute the 60th anniversary of D-Day, then not exercise the very privilege afforded to him or her by those who died."

Oommen, 26, believes the Conservatives are intolerant and too right-wing and that the NDP is anti-corporation.

"I happily work for o-ne of the large Canadian corporations, which (Jack) Layton would tax into bankruptcy."

As for the Liberals, they "know how to squander and lose millions, if not billions of dollars," he says. Plus, the party's "child-like infighting" does not inspire confidence. Still, he says, at least the Liberals have delivered balanced budgets and more employment.

"Given the lack of options," he guesses he has to "go with the Liberals because the other two terrify me."

Ruth and Reuven Kitai

Retired

Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale

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Like many Canadians, Reuven and Ruth Kitai believe better public health care and education are important election issues.

But they are particularly concerned about Canada's possible involvement in the U.S. Ballistic *Missile* *Defence* plan (BMD), known as Star Wars.

The U.S.-led program would deploy a BMD system for all of North America by this fall.

The Paul Martin government continues to participate in discussions.

"We deem this to be an extremely undesirable and dangerous undertaking," says Ruth.

"Canada is not threatened because our foreign policy is one of peacekeeping.

"The U.S. is endangered as a consequence of their meddling with the internal affairs of and/or invading other countries."

The Kitais are leaning to the Liberals, but want more information on what a Martin government would do on BMD.

Pat Klein

Retired nurse

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Burlington

The issues that count most for Pat Klein centre o-n the welfare of families and children -- from ethics to health care to poverty prevention.

That's because "I, like lots of others, have given hundreds of volunteer hours to programs that help kids in our community and their parents," she says.

She looks for politicians who support traditional households, because "stable families are clearly in the best interest of our kids.

"As a society we need to strengthen our families rather than continue to stress them."

Specifically, Klein wants to see better low-cost housing, decent-paying jobs with benefits, so that parents are able to adequately care for children, parenting courses and teaching money-management to youth.

"But it would be hypocritical to demand that politicians alone effect these changes.

"These are challenges for all responsible Canadians."

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