



A Flight from Responsibility: Canada and Missile Defense of North America

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The Government of Canada's decision not to participate in the U.S. missile defense program is unfortunate and disappointing. While the U.S. – Canada relationship is strong and much larger than missile defense, the decision is likely to have long-term effects that cannot be fully predicted now. This is true because:

-- The decision is a retreat from the 1938 Franklin Roosevelt – Mackenzie King understanding that both countries would work together to defend North America. Now Canada has decided to opt out of one aspect of North American defense in the knowledge that the United States would have welcomed such cooperation. This is a significant policy change, and it will clearly have consequences.

-- The decision to opt out of missile defense is an abandonment of some Canadian sovereignty. Canada has put the United States in the position of having to decide independently how to defend North America including Canada from missiles and whether to do so in specific instances.

-- Taken together these two results must affect the U.S.-Canadian relationship in that Canada has reduced its role in that relationship, leaving part of its national defense responsibilities (and their costs) to the United States. This has brought the basic partnership policy underlying the U.S.– Canadian defense relationship into question. These developments will have long-term consequences that will take time to be revealed fully. But we can anticipate that the industrial benefits, R&D opportunities, and a diminution of the availability of U.S. space-based information and technology that are associated with the program will not now accrue to Canada. These deficits may well be cumulative and could ultimately cost jobs in Canada. One early example may be cancellation of consideration by a U.S. company of proposing the construction of a major radar installation in Newfoundland.

The Government's decision also raises questions about the future of NORAD. While the Prime Minister stated his support for last summer's agreement concerning NORAD's role in the U.S. missile defense program (and this is most welcome), we in the United States must remember that the NORAD Agreement itself is due for renewal in the first half of next year. Both governments have been discussing informally how to proceed in those negotiations. Among the ideas put forward is the notion of extending NORAD to the coastal maritime environment and possibly to land forces as well (for combined U.S – Canadian support to the civil authorities for disaster management where appropriate, for example).

The decision not to proceed with missile defense reveals a lack of leadership by the Prime Minister and his Government. It is well known that the Prime Minister favored missile defense and that the Government was preparing to move forward on it. Yet he and his Government did nothing whatever to explain the importance to Canada of participation. That failure and the related dithering created the Canadian crisis that led to opting out.

Now comes NORAD renewal and possibly expansion. And now NORAD includes last summer's agreement that provides for some Canadian participation in the missile defense program. In light of the missile defense experience, should we in the United States be confident that the Prime Minister and his Government will fight for renewal of the amended Agreement, much less push to expand it? Do we need a plan B?

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