

#03-5

Canada and BMD

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Geography and economics regularly conspire to ensure that whatever gets onto the American security agenda will soon find its way onto the Canadian political agenda, so it was inevitable that the Bush Administration's tenacious and now reinvigorated pursuit of ballistic missile defence (BMD) would once again deliver to Ottawa an offer that it will find difficult to refuse. After the briefest period of post-September 11 uncertainty surrounding BMD, the Bush Administration has now drawn it fully into its war on terrorism and its doctrine of the resort to pre-emptive force.

The ostensible BMD mission remains the protection of the American homeland from attacks by what Washington has variously referred to as "rogues," and "states of concern" (with the September 2002 *National Security Strategy* settling on *rogue*, without the benefit of inverted commas). That national security strategy, signed and issued by President Bush, puts it like this: "having moved from confrontation to cooperation as the hallmark of our relationship with Russia," the focus turns to the "new deadly challenges [that] have emerged from rogue

states and terrorists." While these states and terrorists may not have access to the same level of destructive power as do Russia and China, "the nature and motivations of these new adversaries, their determination to obtain destructive powers hitherto available only to the world's strongest states, and the greater likelihood that they will use weapons of mass destruction against us, make today's security environment more complex and dangerous."

But Washington's offer to Canada is not an invitation to join America in safe retreat under a protective BMD shield. It is an invitation to support, even cheer, the United States as it confronts that "complex and dangerous" global security environment on the basis of a unique global security doctrine that violates Canadian values and approaches on multiple levels by:

- relying on pre-emption and military superiority over a rules-based international security order;
- favouring counter-proliferation over nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament;
- insisting on the weaponization of space; and

- seriously undermining a Canadian capacity for independent contributions to international peace and security through multilateral disarmament and security efforts.

1. BMD and pre-emption

Defence of the homeland is only indirectly the point of missile defence because Washington knows that reliable protection of national territory from missile attack is simply not possible. While ideological zeal clouds the objectivity of some of BMD's most ardent proponents, the White House obviously knows that it would be folly bordering on criminal neglect to entrust the safety of the homeland to the largely untested and certainly unproven BMD. National missile defence won't work. And it won't work because the only definition of "working" worth considering is perfection. Any success rate against nuclear attack that is less than 100 per cent could mean millions, not thousands, of deaths. So we can be sure that if a "rogue" state were thought to be really and truly acquiring nuclear weapons and intercontinental-range missile capacity, the Americans would not simply sit back and wait for such weapons to be built and fired and then hold their breath to see whether BMD would manage to intercept it.

The Bush National Security Strategy lays out the preferred option quite clearly: "We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends. Our response must take full advantage of strengthened alliances, the establishment of new partnerships with former adversaries, innovation in the use of military forces, modern technologies, including the development of an effective missile defence system, and increased

emphasis on intelligence collection and analysis."

Attacking "rogues" *before* they become a threat is the essence of pre-emption – and just to remove any doubts, the Bush strategy document goes on to explain that to prevent hostile acts, "the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively." And pre-emption in turn requires the forward deployment of American forces and the protection of those forces from short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. More than 30 countries already have operational ballistic missiles capable of ranges up to 600 km.

In other words, the US does have a serious interest in missile defence to protect the American homeland – but the most immediate focus of that interest is in theatre defence, not strategic missile defence, to protect forward military forces sent to pre-emptively attack any state suspected of developing nuclear weapons and long-range missiles (which, by the way, is why the Bush Administration rejected the term National Missile Defence in favour of the more generic ballistic missile defence and is busy obscuring the distinction between theatre and strategic defence).

Canadian support for Washington's missile defence schemes would pull Canada into active support of its doctrine of pre-emption. In other words, in the real world BMD looks a lot more like the war on Iraq than the dazzling computer animations favoured by officials of the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Agency.

2. Counter-proliferation vs disarmament

A primary objection to BMD has always been that it would undermine disarmament and re-ignite a new nuclear arms race. In

this scenario Russia and China would react quickly to expand their arsenals to ensure a capacity to overwhelm any defensive capability that the Americans might deploy. Now, however, Russia and China both appear to be much less perturbed about Washington's obsession with ballistic missile defence. Russia is now focused on its new strategic relationship with the US, and the most recent Russian-US arms control agreement, the May 2002 Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty known as the "Moscow Treaty," is described not only as an arms reduction measure but a strategic reform agreement that changes the fundamental relationship between the US and Russia.

In the process the Russians seem to have virtually withdrawn their objection to BMD – switching their interest more toward cooperation with it, rather than seeing it as an act hostile to their interests. At the 2003 NPT PrepCom, Russia's statement included only an indirect reference to BMD, and that came in the context of lauding its new relationship with the US: the Moscow Treaty was made possible "thanks to new strategic relations between Russia and the United States in the face of new threats . . . , as well as thanks to the confirmation by the parties of close interconnection between strategic offensive and defensive armaments."

Similarly, China's reference to BMD at the NPT PrepCom avoided its usually vigorous denunciation in favour of simply noting that, "missile defense programmes should not undermine global strategic balance or disrupt international or regional peace and stability."

In other words, the fears that US missile defence will be met with radical rearming by Russia and China are now widely

discounted. While that could still all change – i.e., if the Russian-US relationship were to sour and, especially, if China concludes that theatre missile defence is fulfilling its fears of interference in the China-Taiwan dispute – for the moment a more sanguine attitude toward BMD by Russia and China appears to be undercutting a key element of Canada's objection to missile defence.

That, however, must not be allowed to settle the issue. Another kind of nuclear arms race is almost certain to be exacerbated by BMD deployment. In effect, Washington predicts just that: "Such [rogue] states," says the National Security Strategy, "also see these weapons [of mass destruction] as their best means of overcoming the conventional superiority of the United States." In other words, BMD and the threat of pre-emption to counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons encourages the proliferation of nuclear weapons, turning the formula of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on its head. The NPT formula says that the way to control the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons is to do it in tandem with vertical disarmament. States without nuclear weapons agree to permanently forego them in exchange for the promise that the nuclear weapon states will dismantle their arsenals.

But American strategy now says, *we're not going to disarm any time soon. In fact, we're finding new uses for nuclear weapons. And while we know this will lead others to try to arm themselves with nuclear arms as well, we'll deal with that by using our BMD-assisted military superiority to launch pre-emptive attacks.* And it's a strategy that Canada will buy into if it buys into ballistic missile defence.

3. BMD and weapons in space

Canada has opposed the deployment of weapons in space for as long as the issue has been around. This unambiguous position is now facing its most serious challenge to date. If realized, the Bush Administration's ballistic missile defence ambitions will explicitly and intentionally violate, not only Canada's policy, but also the global norm against the weaponization of space that has prevailed since the space age began almost 50 years ago. It is a norm that will either fail or finally prove its worth in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The space environment already hosts an astonishing, and by now, essential array of technology to aid communications, commerce, science, and human security. Military forces rely extensively on space technologies, not only to guide missiles and assist any number of military operations, but also to assist disarmament verification. Space has been militarized, but not yet weaponized -- a fateful transition that promises to be another of BMD's costly consequences.

A succession of Pentagon-linked statements from the mid-1990s (the most well-known being the 1997 *Vision 2020* of US Space Command) has described space as an up-and-coming battle frontier, declaring that, as with land, sea, and air environments before it, humankind will soon be fighting wars in space, into space, and from space. Much of that literature has an air of fantasy about it, but more recently the Bush Administration has been moving from the fantastic to the dangerous. The US Missile Defense Agency's 2004/5 Budget projects the deployment of a weapons test bed in space by 2008 "to determine the feasibility of exploiting the inherent advantages of intercepting threat missiles from space. We will begin developing a space-based kinetic energy interceptor in FY04," the budget

materials explain, "with initial, on-orbit testing to commence with three to five satellites" in 2008/9.

At this stage, the point of such a deployment is more political than military. Whether American technology will be advanced anywhere near the point of readiness for testing by 2008 is doubted by many experts, but the Administration wants to be seen challenging and overturning the norm against weaponization, and that won't make life any easier in Ottawa.

To his and the Government's credit, Foreign Minister Bill Graham has recently insisted that Canada's opposition to weaponization will stand, whatever happens during the course of the Canada-US discussions on BMD. It is a welcome assurance, but it will be of no practical value if Canada ends up politically and operationally in support of a BMD system that includes active development, and ultimately deployment, of weapons in space. Strategic missile defence, in the American mind and plan, is inseparable from weaponization of space -- one more reason for an unequivocal rejection of BMD by Canada.

4. BMD and Canadian multilateralism

But why is Canada now facing pressure to stand and be counted on BMD? Are Washington's plans in any way dependent on Canadian cooperation? Canadian territory, the asset one might think most likely to catch Washington's interest, is not, and has never been, in play. None of the proposed systems requires or contemplates any installations in Canada.

At Canada's Department of National Defence, dependence is understood the other way around. DND worries that non-participation would leave Canada out of a

major North American defence system and thus jeopardize NORAD, the Canada-US Northern Aerospace Defence Agreement, and undermine Canada-US security cooperation in general. But for Washington, security cooperation with Canada is a function of its interests, not a matter of rewarding obeisance. In fact, it is likely that Washington sees no serious need for Canada-US space cooperation. It will continue air defence cooperation (the only element of the NORAD mission that actually has a genuinely bilateral dimension and purpose), as well as cooperation in the border and coastal dimensions of homeland defence, as long as they are in its interests to do so – not a moment longer and not a moment less.

Canadian military industry also worries about its dependence on the US market, fearing that any political “no” to BMD would lead to commercial exclusion from the BMD market in particular (even though the current BMD planners in the US have already placed some contracts in Canada). More significantly, industry worries that non-cooperation on BMD would undermine Canadian industry’s privileged access to the US military market in general. Here again, it is true that Canada’s special access to the American market is being progressively eroded, but that has little to do with the level of Canadian political cooperation with a particular US Administration. It has to do with shifting US interests, and it’s time for industry to come to terms with the realities of the twenty-first century. In the first place, the Americans want to keep as much of their military industry at home as possible; and second, they want the freedom to farm out contracts wherever it is commercially and politically advantageous at the moment. Canada is unlikely to have privileged access

to that market in any event – and political support for BMD won’t change that.

Canadian participation in BMD remains important to the US perhaps primarily because of the considerable political benefit to the US in having a country recognized as a champion of international law and a rules-based international security order on side in an enterprise that is dedicated to an international order in which the military capacity and special interests of the powerful trump the law.

The irony of the current Canadian debate is that it seems to be based on the perception, particularly prevalent among candidates for the leadership of the Federal Liberal Party, that Canada is somehow in debt to the Americans because we declined to participate in the war on Iraq. Given that the United States acted without the authority of the United Nations, was and remains arguably in violation of international law in Iraq, including instances of the possible violation of international humanitarian law, it seems odd that we are the ones who are now obliged to make amends or pay a price.

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Project Ploughshares is an ecumenical agency of the Canadian Council of Churches, formed to implement the churches’ imperative to pursue peace and justice. The mandate given to Project Ploughshares is to work with churches and related organizations, as well as governments and non-governmental organizations, in Canada and abroad, to identify, develop, and advance approaches that build peace and prevent war, and promote the peaceful resolution of political conflict.

*“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)*