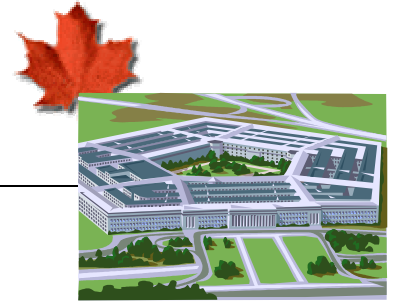


# Our Policy: Made in America

Post-9/11, Canada may simply become a client state of the Pentagon



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The rose-tinted promises of dramatically increased defence spending in the Martin government's recent budget remind me of the preacher who tells his flock: "The good news is that we have enough funds to build the new addition to our church. The bad news is that it's still in your pockets."

Of the pledged \$12.8 billion in new defence funds paraded by Liberal spin doctors as the biggest spending hike for the military in 20 years, only \$1 billion will be invested during the next 24 months, the likely maximum tenure of the Paul Martin minority. Those desperately required transport planes, all-terrain vehicles, supply ships, command communication centres and just about everything that would turn the bedraggled remnant of our once proud forces into an effective military, can, and probably will, be chopped by future governments stressing their own priorities.

That's why any meaningful discourse about our military must concern not future weaponry, but current obligations. There we have a choice. Do we believe Frank McKenna, the new Canadian ambassador to Washington, who, when asked whether we ought to subscribe to American missile defence demands, replied, "The NORAD amendment has given part, in fact a great deal, of what the United States needs in terms of being able to get the input for defensive weaponry"? Or do we accept Martin's assurance that Canada is opting out of George W. Bush's missile defence program? As it happens, they're both right.

The simple side of this confusing equation is that the Prime Minister, having decided that discretion is the better part of valour when facing a vote of confidence from his own party, has come out against enrolling Canada in Bush's anti-ballistic missile fantasy. (The weapons system, based on intercepting hostile missiles travelling toward one another at a combined 24,000 km/h, has been labelled by retired Lt.-Gen. Robert Guard, one of four dozen senior U.S. military experts who oppose its practicality, as "a useless scarecrow in the sky." On the other hand, what McKenna seemed to be saying (at least as I hear him in one of those precious flashes of clarity before being reduced by his handlers to diplomatic doublespeak) was that the Americans have already gained unimpeded access to Canadian territory and most other aspects of our sovereignty, so that the missile decision is superfluous.

About the only fact that all sides who are in the know agree on is that Canadian defence policy is now being decided to an astonishing degree behind closed doors at the Peterson Air Force base in Colorado, where 50 senior U.S. and Canadian military planners are debating joint future activities. This is the headquarters of the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) which falls under the direct authority of Donald Rumsfeld. In April 2002, when the U.S. secretary of defence announced formation of this new organization that in many ways supercedes NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, he boasted that "NORTHCOM, with all of North

America as its geographic command, is part of the greatest transformation of the unified command plan [basic U.S. defence strategy] since its inception in 1947."

In late 2002, Jean Chrétien stood up to Washington's pressures and turned down Canadian membership in NORTHCOM. Thus was born instead a high-level consultative body named the binational planning group, which also operates out of the Peterson base, with a mandate "to prepare contingency plans to respond to threats, attacks and other major emergencies in Canada or the United States." Just before Bush visited Ottawa last November, the existence of this planning group was extended into 2006. It was part of the President's pressure tactic to persuade Martin that Canada should become a full-fledged Northern Command participant. Our PM's reaction is not known, but the Northern Command does exist, we *are* being pressured to become an active part of it and it will certainly treat the defence of the continent as a joint assignment to U.S. and Canadian forces. Guess who'll be calling the shots?

Not joining the madcap anti-missile missile weapons system was an easy decision since, even if it works (which its own designers believe is highly doubtful), it will almost certainly never be called into action. If the rogue nations that Bush classifies as belonging to the "axis of evil" ever decide to attack the U.S., it would be with weapons of mass destruction hidden in ships, trucks or civilian planes. Intercontinental ballistic missiles are not only far too expensive, but satellite cameras could immediately identify their launchers, which would be atomized by U.S. cruise missiles launched from submarines permanently stationed off the Iranian and North Korean shores.

So the debate that matters comes down to how much, if any, of our sovereignty can survive the current "siege" of North America by unknown hostile forces. That has been Canada's dilemma since the 1930s, when the subject of joint defence was first mentioned by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a speech in Kingston, Ont.: "The people of the United States will not stand by if domination of Canada is threatened by any other empire." That same week, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King replied in kind: "Enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way either by land, sea or air to the United States." The substance of that exchange, later formalized by the Ogdensburg Agreement of 1940, has been the operational code of continental defence ever since. It worked because, despite their puny size and firepower, the members of Canada's navy, army and air force have always more than earned their way in combat or civilian emergencies, gaining the respect of their big Yankee brothers.

At the same time, the Americans and Canadians were always involved in common causes, so that sovereignty seldom mattered. It does now. Our international outlook is radically different from the world as seen through the tinted glass of Bush's Oval Office. But military beggars can't be choosers. The defence of the continent has become indivisible. It may well be that the ultimate legacy of 9/11 will be Canada's tragic, but inevitable, descent into becoming a client state of the Pentagon. Pray for us.