



briefing

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Ballistic Missile Defence and Canada's Vital Security Interests

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To join or not to join President Bush's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) initiative will be one of the first major foreign policy decisions facing the Government Canadians will elect on June 28. And the absence of the issue from the election campaign ignores the importance of what is at stake.

The BMD decision will help set the tone of Canada/US security relations and effectively brand Canada's overall approach to international peace and security, and disarmament policy for the life of that Government.

In the US, BMD is a core election pledge of President Bush, who promises a working system by the end of 2004. Since the system under construction will rely on ballistic missile detection and tracking information currently provided through NORAD, the Canada-US North American Aerospace Defence Agreement, Washington is anxious to know whether Canada is in or out.

The Government may, unfortunately, base its decision on non-security grounds, like the perceived need to win greater favour on issues like beef and lumber exports. But the key BMD question is, would Canadian involvement advance or undermine Canada's core security interests? A set of perfectly sensible and relevant criteria for a significant foreign and defence policy decision is available in the new (April 2004) Canadian "National Security Policy." The broad policy declaration, prelude to a more

extensive international policy review, points out that while security *threats* change over time, Canada's basic security *interests* remain constant. Core security interests are: 1) the protection of Canada's people and territory; 2) making the world beyond our borders stable and peaceful; and 3) ensuring that nothing we do, or neglect to do, threatens the security of our neighbours and allies.

Will BMD protect Canada and Canadians? The ballistic missile threat is certainly real. Though the Cold War is over, more than 900 Russian and about 30 Chinese missiles still stand able and ready to deliver more than 4,000 nuclear warheads to targets in North America. Protection from them is devoutly to be wished, but one thing the Pentagon's BMD planners are at pains to point out is that ballistic missile defence is specifically *not* intended to protect North America from Russian or Chinese missiles.

Targeting Russian and Chinese ballistic missiles would provoke a major negative reaction from them (see below), so the current BMD system, with pre-deployment costs running at US\$10 billion-plus per year, is focused on a potential North Korean threat, even though North Korea does not now – and won't in the foreseeable future – have a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to North America.

But even if it did, many experts doubt that BMD would have any reliable capacity. According to the US General Accounting Office (GAO – similar to

our Auditor General), the missile shield is essentially still on the drawing board.

The timetable for 2004 deployment is driven by Presidential politics, not mature technology or an imminent threat. Numerous GAO reports note that BMD has yet to be tested as a system. Moreover, the partial tests that have been carried out have relied on highly artificial conditions, employing computer simulations and, in the case of interceptor tests, on GPS (Global Positioning System) transmitters in the nose of the target missile to guide the interceptors to them – a service the North Koreans would be unlikely to provide, even if they ever managed to build such a missile.

In other words, BMD offers no actual protection from the actual missile threat, and offers only theoretical protection from the theoretical threat.

Will BMD make the world more stable? China and Russia definitely do not think so. They fear that if BMD ever became effective it would threaten their nuclear deterrents and weaken them relative to the US – forcing them to rebuild their nuclear forces. Russia and China are thus responding to the US BMD effort with new research and testing of new generations of offensive nuclear missiles, just in case.

The casualty is nuclear disarmament. Another casualty could very well be effective Canadian support for a prohibition on weapons in space.

If Canada were to join BMD, which Pentagon planners insist includes planning for weapons in space, Canada's arms control diplomacy, particularly at the Geneva UN Conference on Disarmament that

is mandated to negotiate an international convention against weapons in space, would suffer a major credibility gap.

Is Canadian support for BMD essential to being a good neighbour to the US? Canada surely does have a responsibility to ensure that threats to the US do not emerge undetected from Canadian territory, but BMD is not relevant to such an assurance.

The ballistic missile threat does not come from Canada, and it is equally clear that Canadian refusal to join the Bush BMD system would not prevent the Americans from pursuing what they think they have to do; the United States does not need Canadian territory, technology, personnel, or money to mount a BMD system. In other words, good neighbourliness toward the US does not dictate support for BMD.

Viewed through Canada's national security lens, participation in the US ballistic missile defence system would not protect Canadians and would undermine ongoing efforts to achieve greater global stability through disarmament. And if Canada were, for those reasons, to reject participation, there would be no impact on another core security interest, namely to ensure that nothing we do, or neglect to do, threatens the security of our neighbours and allies.

Shields may be protective, but linked to swords they are part of an offensive and provocative system. And the US ballistic missile shield that Canada is considering making its own is being aggressively linked to an ever-sharpening nuclear sword.

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"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)