Why Canada Should Join the U.S. Missile Defense Program: Ballistic Missiles Threaten Both Countries

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Abstract
Canada and the United States have shared a special relationship for decades. Cooperation between these neighbors has resulted in one of the most successful international partnerships in history. A significant amount of this relationship has involved security cooperation, with Canada participating in the North American Aerospace Defense Command. Despite the many accomplishments in collaborative national security measures between the U.S. and Canada, one area still falls short: Meaningful missile defense cooperation has been rejected by the Canadian government on several occasions, most recently in 2005. Canada and the U.S. could greatly benefit from a missile defense partnership. Increasing threats of a ballistic missile attack from North Korea and Iran necessitate more robust missile defense mechanisms in order to protect the North American continent. Collaborating on this issue would permit the two nations’ leaders to alleviate some of the burdens that missile defense programs entail and provide them with another means of protecting their citizens. Canada should recognize the threat, and benefits, and participate in U.S. long-range missile defense programs.

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**Troubled History**

Canada and the United States are exceptional national security partners. These two nations share the longest undefended border in the world;\(^2\) these two nations have engaged in over 2,500 defense agreements.\(^3\) Canada has benefited from its proximity to the United States. In some regards, however, as former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau pointed out, Canadians “are eager to take refuge under the U.S. umbrella, but don’t want to help hold it.”\(^4\) One example of such an arrangement is Canada’s reluctance to support missile defense systems that would be capable of protecting North America.

Canada’s support for missile defense cooperation with the U.S. has shifted over time. In 1958, Canada and the United States established NORAD—a military structure that provided greater cooperation on aerial defenses.\(^5\) In 1969, Prime Minister Trudeau refused the Nixon Administration’s offer to join the U.S. in an anti-ballistic missile program, then known as the Safeguard. The Canadians rejected American offers of cooperation when President Ronald Reagan extended an invitation to Canada to participate in the Strategic Defense Initiative, the most comprehensive U.S. missile defense research and development effort to date.\(^6\)

Following the George W. Bush Administration’s announcement of withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty in 2001, the opportunity for significant Canadian and U.S. cooperation on missile defense arose again.\(^7\) Right after 2001, Canadian government officials began to reconsider cooperation. For example, in 2003, Defense Minister John McCallum stated that “NORAD represents the logical place in which to lodge ballistic missile defence.”\(^8\) Additionally, in 2004, Canada permitted its NORAD operators “to share information on incoming missiles.”\(^9\) On February 24, 2005, however, Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Pettigrew responded with a resolute “no” to Canadian participation in America’s missile defense program.\(^10\) Within the same year that Canada objected to working with the U.S. on the development of missile defense programs, the Canadian International Policy Statement recognized “that the threat posed by WMD, as well as the desires of ‘rogue’

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6. Ibid.
states and terrorist groups to obtain them, was legitimate and needed to be addressed.”11 Following the 2005 policy statement, Prime Minister Stephen Harper revealed that the Canadian government does realize that “if North Korea would be ready to attack the United States, that would be a risk for Canada’s national security as well, not only because [of] our common values, but because [of] our geographical proximity.”12

Recently, there seems to be some interest on the Canadians’ part in engaging the U.S. in talks about missile defense cooperation. Conservatives in the Canadian government have stated on “two separate occasions that [the Canadian government] is open to re-examining Canada’s position with respect to MD [missile defense].”13 In 2006, Canada announced that it would support “NATO’s decision to examine the feasibility of introducing a form of European missile defense that would work in conjunction with the US MD program.”14 Since Canada still adheres to its NATO commitment, it is bound by the Alliance’s 2010 declaration. According to NATO’s statement, missile defense is “a core element of our collective defense,” and the Alliance is committed to “develop[ing] the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack.”15

**Keeping Up with the Long-Range Ballistic Missile Threat**

A particularly concerning threat to North America involves the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) by North Korea and Iran. These nations’ missile programs have been expedited by the sharing of missile technology among themselves as well as other sources.16 According to the Defense Intelligence Agency’s 2014 Annual Threat Assessment,

> Ballistic missiles are becoming more survivable, reliable, and accurate at greater ranges. Potential adversaries are basing more missiles on mobile platforms at sea and on land. Technical and operational measures to defeat missile defenses also are increasing.... Iran, and North Korea, for example, exercise near simultaneous salvo firings from multiple locations to saturate missile defenses.17

North Korea has aggressively pursued long-range missile capabilities for decades. Since North Korea’s 1971 agreement with China to “acquire, develop, and produce ballistic missiles,” the Hermit Kingdom has made significant steps toward mastering the production of ICBMs.18 The “military first” republic, which has threatened to use nuclear weapons on the United States, recently conducted its third nuclear device test and showcased an alleged road-mobile ICBM.19 Especially worrisome was North Korea’s launching of the “Taepodong-2 missile to put a satellite into orbit, thus demonstrating progress in its development of long-range missile technology.”20

Prior to this progress the intelligence community has “consistently asserted that a functional Taepodong-2 could deliver a small payload to the

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11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Dowd, “Time for Canada to Join the Missile Defense Team.”
western part of the continental United States.”21 The Dynamic Threat Assessment from the DIA gauged with “moderate confidence [that] the North currently has nuclear weapons capable of delivery by ballistic missiles, however the reliability will be low.”22

Iran began its own missile development program in the 1980s and continued it in the 1990s. Iran has claimed interest in developing long-range ballistic missiles, but experts have questioned the true purpose of its ballistic missile program, especially given its opacity regarding Tehran’s nuclear weapons program.24 Iran’s solid-propellant rocket and missile technologies continue to progress as evidenced by their Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) and their “new solid-propellant MRBM with a claimed range of 2,000 kilometers.”25 In 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated, “We continue to be very concerned about the Iranian missile threat, particularly as they continue to work on what we believe are weapons of mass destruction.”26

The Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report produced by the Department of Defense in 2010 projected that the “threat posed by ballistic missile delivery systems is likely to increase while growing more complex over the next decade” due in large part to Iran’s technological advances.27 Cooperation between Iran and North Korea speeds up the timeframe for when these nations will have the ability to reach the United States with a ballistic missile.28 In fact, the Defense Department predicted in 2012 that Iran could possess ICBMs by 2015.29

Currently, “only Russia and China have the capability to conduct a large-scale ballistic missile attack on the territory of the United States, but this is very unlikely and not the focus of U.S. BMD [ballistic missile defense].”30 Vigilance and awareness of these nations’ long-range missile capabilities are vital to U.S. and Canadian national securities. Both Russia and China have aided Iran in its pursuit of a missile development program.31 Since President Vladimir Putin’s rise to power, the Russian military has undergone a massive modernization effort including a buildup of the Russian ICBM fleet.32 Russia has also significantly increased the amount of patrols of its strategic nuclear submarine fleet.33 China is also in the process of modernizing its ballistic missile arsenal. This modernization focuses on a shift from “relatively inaccurate liquid-fueled, silo/cave-based missiles, towards more accurate, solid-fueled road-mobile missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) in order to strengthen its deterrent and increase its strategic options.”34

There exists another scenario that poses an imminent threat to the United States and Canada known as the “scud in a bucket.” According to Dr. William R. Graham, chairman of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the U.S. from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, “Such an attack could be launched from a freighter off the U.S. coast using a

25. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 6.
33. Ibid.
short- or medium-range missile to loft a nuclear warhead to high-altitude.” 35 In the event of the detonation of a nuclear weapon high in the atmosphere above the United States, an EMP would occur; millions of Americans as well as Canadians would die. This attack would wreak havoc on the U.S. power grid by destroying America’s energy centers. Since “three of the eight North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) reliability regions span both the United States and Canada,” the failure of one or all of these grids in the United States would have immediate ramifications for Canada. 36 The technology involved in producing a scud is less sophisticated than for an ICBM; therefore, rogue states could equip terrorists with a scud missile tipped with a nuke and allow them do their dirty work. A long-range ballistic missile defense system, however, would not be effective against this type of attack. 37

Canada and the U.S. are inextricably connected. Their homelands not only share a border, but their economies are mutually dependent and now, more than ever, the level of national security of one of these nations has immediate ramifications for the other. If a long-range ballistic missile carrying a nuclear warhead detonated in the U.S. or in its atmosphere, the results would be devastating for both countries.

Benefits of Missile Defense Cooperation for Canada

Both the Canadian and U.S. governments have demonstrated their commitment to ensuring the national security of not just their homeland, but also that of their closest North American ally. These commitments have manifested themselves in some of the most successful defense agreements in U.S. history.

Instead of continuing a Cold War–era strategy of mutual vulnerability, the U.S. and Canada should promote policies that ensure their security and strengthen their posture vis-à-vis new unpredictable actors, such as Iran or North Korea, in an increasingly dangerous world. The U.S. should move toward a “protect and defend” strategy, a policy “based on shifting away from the retaliation-based strategic posture of the Cold War toward a more defensive posture that is adapted to the emerging international structure.” 38 This posture encompasses offensive and defensive weapons, both nuclear and conventional. It also includes civil defense measures to ensure that the civilians increase their chances of survival in the case of a successful attack. States such as Iran and North Korea value the survival of their own leaders above those of their cities and economic centers, while the U.S. and Canada prioritize the opposite. Ballistic missile defense is an essential element of moving toward a more appropriate posture that would effectively address current national security challenges. Canadian participation in U.S. missile defense would benefit not only U.S. interests; it would also go a long way in serving Canadian interests.

The U.S. and Canada both endorse NATO’s missile defense programs for the protection of European allies. NATO adopted missile defense as a core competency of the Alliance in 2010 in its Strategic Concept. 39

Most important, participation in U.S. long-range ballistic missile defense would provide Canada with the means to defend its citizens and homeland from a potentially devastating ballistic missile attack. Rogue states know that Canada and the U.S. have a special relationship. These enemies may take the
opportunity to exploit that friendship by attacking Canada. They could restrain U.S. freedom of action by holding its neighbor to the north hostage. Indeed, a successful ballistic missile attack would have serious repercussions for both countries as their economies are interconnected.

Cooperation between the two nations could take many forms. For example, Canada contributes to the U.S. Ground-based Midcourse Defense system, which protects the U.S. from North Korean and Iranian ballistic missiles. General Charles H. Jacoby Jr., Commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command, told a Canadian and American audience: “I believe we’re at the point where we must take seriously the North Korean threat to our homelands. This is no longer a relatively primitive threat, but rather they are progressing towards troubling new capabilities.... As such, the threat validates the past and future U.S. investments in developing credible missile defenses against such potential threats.”

Canada could contribute financial resources or territory to U.S. missile defense efforts. Canadian endorsement of U.S. missile defense efforts would show leadership to other U.S. allies seeking to improve their ballistic missile defense capabilities. “Currently, Poland and Romania agreed to host Aegis Ashore missile defense sites. Turkey hosts an Army/Navy Transportable Radar Surveillance (AN/TPY-2) forward-deployed radar. Spain is currently hosting U.S. Aegis missile-defense-capable ships. The Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark are considering upgrading their ships for a missile defense role. The Dutch navy is modifying ship radars to track ballistic missile targets. Spain, Norway, and the United Kingdom have also expressed interest in ship upgrades. Denmark and the United Kingdom host Upgraded Early Warning Radars.”

The military and intelligence worlds have warned of the threat of long-range ballistic missiles to the Canadian and U.S. homelands. And politicians of both countries should endorse cooperation on a missile defense system. As former Canadian Defense Minister John McCallum stated, “It is the fundamental responsibility of the Canadian government to ensure the maximum protection of the lives of its citizens.” Missile defense would provide Canada with an effective system to protect its citizens from one of most effective threats to the modern way of life—ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads.

Canada already endorses missile defense for NATO allies in Europe, so Canadian participation in U.S. missile defense would be a natural extension of the current policy. Canadian positive endorsement of U.S. missile defense efforts would send a message to adversaries that Canada considers protecting its citizens from a ballistic missile threat a priority. NATO members have begun contributing to the U.S. missile defense system. Currently, “21 nations are directly participating in this networked system of systems. Yet Canada is not one of them.” The Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Germany, and Romania have all made contributions. Canada has signed off on NATO missile defense programs; and, therefore, “Canada now officially endorses the logic, strategic utility and security benefits of ballistic missile defense.”

45. Jacoby, address delivered at the Ottawa Conference on Defense and Security.
47. Dowd, “Time for Canada to Join the Missile Defense Team.”
Cooperation on missile defense is a mutually beneficial arrangement. Both European and Asian nations have received U.S. protection in exchange for hosting U.S. missile systems.\(^50\) In return for its endorsement of U.S. missile defense, Canada might seek a voice in U.S. missile defense decisions regarding incoming missiles headed for Canada. For example, the Canadian government could ensure that Canadian cities are at the top of “the priority list for missile interceptions.”\(^51\) Currently, Canada would not have a voice regarding what happens to an incoming missile headed for Canada.

Currently, Canada can “can issue warnings of an impending attack on the continent but cannot participate in decisions regarding interception,” even when a missile is heading straight toward Canada.\(^52\) This leaves the hundred or so Canadian personnel at the Colorado Springs missile defense site with the option of doing nothing in the event of a missile attack on the United States or Canada.\(^53\)

Adversaries may take advantage of Canada’s current vulnerability to a ballistic missile attack. At the moment, Iran and North Korea can most likely reach the U.S. and Canada with a ballistic missile. Additionally, Iran can reach Canadian forward-deployed troops. These nations continue to tenaciously pursue ballistic missile technology. Regardless of the financial or international consequences, they have shown that they will continue their pursuit of these weapons. Currently, ballistic missile defense “is among the only defensive options available to rein-
force the West’s commitment, resolve, and capability to protect key allies against nuclear blackmail.”

Missile defense not only protects a nation and its allies from a direct attack, but also from the manipulation of rogue nations.

Steps for Both Governments

To advance a long-range ballistic missile defense of North America, the United States and Canada can both take the following steps:

- **Endorse Canadian participation in U.S. long-range missile defense programs.** Currently, the Canadian Senate is examining the potential for Canada’s involvement in U.S. long-range missile defense. The Senate should endorse such efforts, as should the Canadian government. The U.S. government should invite such efforts and strengthen military-to-military contacts between the two nations.

- **Initiate missile defense discussions.** Canada and the U.S. should initiate a policy discussion of technological, financial, and economic issues related to the potential participation of Canada in the U.S. long-range missile defense program. Such discussions on the government-to-government level would give the Canadians better access to information required for making an informed decision regarding the government’s participation in U.S. missile defense measures. Such discussions would also strengthen the already existing partnership with the U.S. on other defense issues.

- **Conduct a war game simulating a ballistic missile attack on North America.** Such a war game should be realistic enough to explore command and control issues associated with a decision to intercept a ballistic missile headed for Canada. It would also offer an opportunity to discuss these sensitive issues in a non-committal off-the-record setting facilitating an exchange of opinions and perhaps opening venues for further cooperation.

- **Explore options for deploying an X-band radar in Canada.** Such a radar could augment the capabilities of the U.S.’s long-range missile defense system and potentially an East Coast missile defense site.

Missile Defense: Real Threats Require Real Solutions

Canadian and American leaders have a responsibility to ensure the security of their fellow citizens. The people of North America depend on their governments to provide them with the best possible defense. Through cooperation on missile defense, the two nations could improve their strategic posture vis-à-vis Iran and North Korea, which are pursuing long-range ballistic missile capabilities. The threat of a ballistic missile attack will not diminish in the near future; in fact, it is highly likely to escalate. Canadian participation in the U.S. long-range missile defense program would serve the security interests of both nations.

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