

Open the NORAD Pandora's Box

By Bob Bergen

Release of the Conservative party's policy on national defence Tuesday December 13 is admirable, but a critical piece of the Canadian defence policy puzzle is missing – Canada's involvement in NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defence Command.

NORAD has been the foundation of the Canada-United States defence architecture since 1957. Its surveillance systems detect airplane and missile threats inside and outside North America's airspace.

As of August 2004, its missile warning capabilities are available to U.S. missile defence commanders.

NORAD's five-year agreement is up for renewal on May 12, 2006, but few have yet given this critical defence and security issue the attention it rightly deserves.

Opening a debate on NORAD and ballistic missile defence (BMD) associated with it would be opening a virtual Pandora's Box to be sure, but nothing approaching a frank and honest discussion about these complex issues has yet to take place during this election campaign.

"Given the way ballistic missile defence was killed by opposition from the Bloc, the NDP and part of the Liberal caucus, plus the failure of the prime minister to do anything to get it through, I think there is every possibility that the same thing will happen again," explains Dr. Jack Granatstein, a Fellow of the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (CDFAI).

"And, if that happens again, then our defence relationship with the United States will be in ruins, frankly," Granatstein said.

Conservative leader Stephen Harper was reported Tuesday saying that if the United States made a proposal for Canadian participation in missile defence and if it were to be judged in Canada's interest, he would submit a proposal to Parliament.

That stands in marked contrast to Prime Minister Paul Martin's sudden rejection of participation in missile defence on February 24, 2005.

While running for the Liberal party leadership, Martin stressed the importance of strengthening Canada-U.S. relationships and the need to be at the NORAD table when continental defence is at stake.

The "table" reference is to the Canadian Lieutenant-General based in Colorado Springs who is NORAD's Deputy Commander.

Martin's unanticipated rejection of missile defence in February was a sharp stick in the collective eye of Americans, but it was not the last. Last week, Martin took another jab at Washington after he criticized the United States for not ratifying the Kyoto accord, for lacking a social conscience and for being in denial about global warming.

The prime minister's remarks brought a sharp and immediate rebuke from the White House to Canada's ambassador Frank McKenna and a warning again Tuesday from U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins against U.S. bashing during an election.

In all of this, it is important to note that Martin's remarks were made at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Montreal.

Anti-Americanism plays particularly well in Quebec, where French Canadians perceive English Canadians too quick to support American interests. Quebecers generally are opposed to traditional war fighting, missile defence and defence spending, while they support peacekeeping.

Université Laval political scientist and a CDFAI Fellow Jean-Sébastien Rioux says: "I would agree that Martin is going to be at his anti-American worst in Montreal."

Rioux is also clear on one thing: "It would be a supremely idiotic decision to pull out of NORAD."

It's not just Quebec – where the Bloc Québécois sees majority potential – that has caught the eyes of influential American observers. Canada's grumpy anti-Americanism and dysfunctional politics was put under the microscope in a special 14-page survey of Canada in *The Economist's* December edition.

It examined the sponsorship scandal sleaze; the potential for Quebec independence; NAFTA and softwood lumber; the booming west, Sept. 11, 2001; the Martin government's decision not to support the U.S in Iraq; and Canada's fraying relationship with the United States under successive Liberal governments.

Meanwhile, Paul Martin's Liberals have yet to release their position on NORAD or its defence policy platform for that matter, according to party spokesman Ian Smedley. Smedley said from Ottawa Tuesday that he couldn't say when that platform would be released.

Lt.-Gen. (ret') George Macdonald, a CDFAI Fellow and a former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of NORAD, says the future of NORAD is particularly relevant right now because negotiation is on-going for the renewal of the agreement.

"The new government or the existing government renewed will have to look at the terms of the new arrangement fairly soon after they get established because it has to be done by May 12."

Canadians are entitled to frank debate on NORAD and Canada's decaying relationship with the United States by the parties which aspire to form the next government after January 23, 2006. Should NORAD be expanded to include joint maritime and land security elements? How will the U.S. Northern Command work in conjunction with Canada Command and NORAD? These issues need open discussion.

Only by laying their platforms out in clear concise terms and in a timely manner will all parties let conscientious Canadians decide for themselves who is ready for prime time on the international stage and who isn't.

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