



DISPATCHES

Martin's Muddle

by James Fergusson

WINNIPEG, CANADA—On February 24th, the government of Canadian premier Paul Martin formally announced that it would not participate in the ground-based mid-course defense (GMD) segment of the Bush administration's emerging missile defense system. Delivering the surprising verdict, Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew declared that the decision had been based upon "policy principles," not "sheer emotion."

But Pettigrew failed to articulate those principles at that time, and no other government official has done so since. Moreover, the mystery over how and why the Martin government reached its decision is deepened by four other considerations.

First, as justification, Pettigrew emphasized Canada's preference to invest in other areas of North American defense and security cooperation with the United States. Yet there is no evidence of an investment trade-off between missile defense and other areas of cooperation—or of an American "price tag" for Canadian participation.

Second, there had been no formal negotiations between Canada and the United States regarding participation in the run-up to the decision. Previous talks had concluded nearly a year earlier, and had led to an August 2004 agreement placing GMD under the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

Third, Mr. Martin had previously identified two parameters for Canadian participation—no interceptors on Canadian soil and no weapons in outer space.



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Neither, however, was at issue at the moment. The U.S., then deeply engaged in discussions with East European allies about possible basing options across the Atlantic, had not requested an interceptor site from Canada. Furthermore, GMD had nothing to do with weapons in space. Not only is the technology to place weapons in space at least a decade away, but the space side of the missile defense equation is assigned to United States Strategic Command (STRATCOM), which does not include Canada.

Finally, Canada had long placed a premium on missile defense dialogue with the U.S. Mr. Martin's predecessor, Jean Chretien, had initiated discussions with the White House on the subject in June of 2003. Upon taking office at the end of that year, Prime Minister Martin took pains to shore up this policy, stressing the importance of Canada having a "seat at the table" on missile defense, as well as initiating moves to engage the Bush administration even more deeply on the missile defense issue.


Given these realities, Ottawa's sudden about-face can only be explained by the exigencies of short term domestic politics—a weak minority government, wracked by scandal and partially dependent upon the anti-American or anti-Republican New Democratic Party for survival; a divided Liberal caucus; and public opinion that had shifted against participation, especially in Quebec.

Ironically, however, the missile defense decision had no bearing on the domestic political situation in Canada. The government could not have fallen on the missile defense question, because there was nothing before the House of Commons that required a vote. But even if there had been, it could not have brought the government down, and would likely have passed with the support of the Conservative Party. More fundamentally, the future fate of the Canadian government does not rest one way or another on missile defense; Canadians simply do not vote for reasons of defense.

Perhaps, then, the real domestic political factor was the use of missile defense as a political instrument to demonstrate distance from the United States in general and the Bush administration in particular. After all, this had been Martin's strategy in the June 2004 election; facing imminent defeat, the Liberal Party had wrapped itself in the Canadian flag and portrayed its opposition as toeing American values. Moreover, leadership from the Martin government could easily have moved public opinion back toward support of participation in missile defense, where it had been for nearly a decade before the Fall of 2004. It, however, chose not to do so.

Whatever the reason, the missile defense decision could prove to be a fateful one for Ottawa. Despite Canada's rhetorical commitment to North American security cooperation, the Administration and Congress now must wonder whether other initiatives could also fall victim to short-term domestic contingencies at any time.

Just as importantly, American decision-makers must, or should, have serious questions about the credibility of a government that professes to place a premium on the defense of its territory and population, yet turns over this responsibility to another nation. Even more troubling is the audacity of the Prime Minister to speak of an American obligation to give Canada a say on intercepts passing over Canadian territory (albeit in outer space), even though the government has rejected cooperation.

In the end, perhaps the greatest puzzle is that no one actually knows what Canada has said “no” to. Regardless, the decision does not speak well of Canada’s commitment to national defense. And the United States, as well as other Canadian allies, is likely to respond accordingly. Much of Ottawa’s choice derived from a belief that its post-September 11th defense and security relationship with Washington is a durable one, immune to specific domestic decisions. Canadian politicians, however, could well discover that they were wrong. 

Total Recall

by Kamil Tchorek

WARSAW, POLAND—Change is afoot in Poland. The country’s upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for September and October respectively, are widely expected to produce a fundamental transformation in political outlook, and Warsaw’s foreign policy is sure to follow suit.

Poland is ripe for just this sort of overhaul. The reputation of the country’s ruling left has been destroyed by a series of cataclysmic sleaze scandals. Allegations include a conspiracy theory—one taken seriously by the electorate—that ex-communists in government conspired to enable Russian infiltration of Poland’s energy sector through a closed network of tycoons and former security agents in both countries. Meanwhile, the country’s rising political right, riding high on public outrage at these charges, is staunchly anti-Kremlin.

In Poland, after all, fear of Russia runs deep. To understand the reasons for this sentiment, it is instructive to take a look at a fifteenth century map of Europe. Back then, a Polish-Lithuanian dynasty, the Jagiellos, ruled across an area covering much of the modern “post-Soviet space,” including what has become known as “New Europe”: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Croatia, modern Moldova and the Czech and Slovak territories. In the centuries that followed, however, that geopolitical space became dominated by Germans and Russians, leading many Poles to embrace the notion that the region should again unite for self-preservation.



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