

# CANADA

## PARTNERSHIP IN FLUX

---

Rob Huebert

---

It has been said that Canada's biggest defense problem is that it does not have one. Sharing a continent with the United States has meant that any military threat to Canada is a threat to the U.S. as well. Ultimately, the United States guarantees Canada's security. What further simplifies Canadian defense requirements is the fact that the two countries share core values. While there are differences regarding some issues, Canada and the United States are both societies that are committed to the maintenance and promotion of democratic governance, the development of free market economies, the protection and entrenchment of human rights, and share a common cultural, linguistic and historical experience. Good relations are further protected by a shared but very complex economic partnership that is primarily (but not exclusively) based on the Canadian export of natural resources (including oil and gas) to the U.S., and the Canadian import of finished products.<sup>1</sup> The net result is that since the end of the Civil War, Canada has not needed to fear an attack from the United States, while it remains in the American interest to ensure that Canada is protected from external military threats.

Such circumstances suggest that Canadian political leaders may be inclined to simply "free-ride" on American military capabilities. In fact, however, this has not happened. It is true that there have been times when Canadian officials have



DR. ROB HUEBERT is an associate professor with the department of political science at the University of Calgary, and associate director of the University's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies. His main areas of research are Arctic security, maritime security and Canadian defense, foreign and security policy.

not given defense issues the attention that they deserved. But today, Canada's security policy is centered on a small but robust military capable of serving as a force multiplier for the United States. And, because Canadian officials have long worried that if the U.S. feels Canada is not doing enough, the U.S. will take action on Canada's behalf, they have learned to anticipate—and be sensitive to—American security concerns.

### **The Cold War balance**

Throughout the Cold War, Canadian defense policy was committed to three main elements: 1) the national defense; 2) the common defense of North America; and 3) collective security. While the defense of Canada always ranked as the most important priority, the bulk of Canadian spending and planning was ultimately dedicated to overseas operations in the name of collective security and peacekeeping. This was the result of the belief that Canada was best defended by meeting military and security threats as far as possible from its shores. But this approach was also bolstered by the reality that any direct threat to Canada would invariably be met by American capabilities.

### **The defense of Canada**

The real physical threat to Canadian soil during this period was posed by the USSR and its nuclear missiles and bomber forces. Canadian defense planners quickly recognized that the best defense against an attack on Canadian soil was to deter the Soviets from attacking in the first place. Thus, Canadian planning focused on contributing to the common defense of North American air and aerospace, and to collective security in Europe. In both instances, homeland defense

needed to be undertaken away from Canadian territory.

### **The common defense of North America**

As the Soviet Union expanded its strategic arsenal throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the direct threat to Canada grew. Canadian cities were at risk of nuclear annihilation if war broke out. It soon became evident to Canadian and American military planners alike that there was a need for a common defense of North American airspace—both to defend against Soviet aerial capabilities and to deter against the missile threat from Moscow. The result was the creation of NORAD, the North American Air Defense Command (later re-named the North American Aerospace Defense Command), on May 12, 1958. Its original mission was to oversee the air defense of the North American continent against the possibility of Soviet bomber attack. But as the Soviets developed their missile capability, this role shifted to also include an early warning system for the maintenance of nuclear deterrence. Over time, NORAD became the central Canada-U.S. defense organization, and a cornerstone of the strategic relationship between Washington and Ottawa.

### **Collective security**

Canadian officials led the effort to develop the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. The reasons were practical: policymakers in Ottawa recognized that the growing Soviet threat was best met by collective security. They also wanted to create a forum where Canada's defense relationship with the United States could be balanced by the inclusion of other states. The military strength of the United States

may have been central to defending against the USSR, but Canadian officials also knew that a bilateral alliance would permanently relegate their country to the role of junior partner. In pushing for the creation of NATO, Canadians hoped simultaneously that the Soviets would be deterred from taking aggressive action and that Americans would not overwhelm Canada.<sup>2</sup> In turn, the Canadian contribution to NATO was substantial. From the 1950s to the late 1980s, Canadian land and air assets were stationed in Europe and its naval forces were tasked almost exclusively for anti-submarine duties against the USSR.

Over time, a secondary priority—peacekeeping—also emerged. Today, this role has become accepted by most Canadians as the main reason why Canadian forces exist. The fact that peacekeeping was something that Canada appeared to do without the assistance of the United States also appealed to those concerned about American dominance. Thus the mythology of Canadian peacekeeping was actively encouraged by successive Canadian governments, who found it a politically saleable concept.

These priorities had several important implications for Canada's security relationship with United States. On the positive side, they led to the creation of a well-trained, professional force with the ability to deploy worldwide. Membership in NORAD and NATO also meant that Canada was operating alongside the most advanced military powers in the world. Specifically, the Canadian partnership with the United States meant that Canadian forces were required to develop the means—and the technology—to cooperate with American forces on a day-to-day basis.

However, the Canadian commit-

ment to a small but highly capable force for primary expeditionary purposes also carried several costs. Perhaps most problematic was the fact that the expeditionary nature of the forces meant that, with few exceptions, the Canadian military did not have a significant “footprint” in Canadian society. As a result, there was little political support for—or interest in—increased military expenditures. And, as the Cold War progressed, there was a tendency on the part of Canadian political leaders to reduce the funding provided to these forces. As well, over time, the overseas focus of Canadian defense policy led to the domestic misconception that the principal mission of these forces was for international peacekeeping, rather than collective security against the USSR—resulting in a lack of appreciation for their warfighting nature and ongoing difficulty in acquiring new and necessary equipment. As a result, by the time the Cold War ended a substantial disconnect existed between Canadian society and its forces.

A related problem was the reluctance to acknowledge the close ties between Canada and the United States. Cooperation between the two countries in the defense of North America and Europe occurred largely out of the view of the Canadian public. Greater public attention was instead given to peacekeeping operations that often did not include cooperation between American and Canadian forces. The outcome was that the Canadian public did not fully appreciate the closeness and complexity of what can best be termed a security partnership.

### **Closer, yet farther apart**

The end of the Cold War created new circumstances that both confounded and complicated Canadian

defense needs. On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union eliminated the most serious military threat to Canada. The danger of a nuclear attack by the USSR was gone, removing the need to station Canadian forces in Europe and greatly reducing the forces necessary for the aerospace defense of North America. But the expected peace dividend never arrived. While Canadian leaders had hoped that the end of the Cold War would result in a more peaceful international system, outbreaks of violence in the 1990s in Yugoslavia, Africa and Asia soon destroyed any optimism that there would be a peaceful and just “new world order.”

The impact on the Canada-U.S. relationship has been profound. First, while policymakers saw an opportunity to reduce military expenditures and the size of Canadian forces, they also have increased the number of their country’s overseas deployments. The nature of these deployments has also changed; while still committed to the support of NATO and the United Nations, Canadian forces increasingly are deployed on peacemaking and peace enforcement missions,<sup>3</sup> and on missions composed of a “coalition of the willing” rather than strictly those sanctioned by the UN or NATO. Second, challenges and irritants have begun to plague Canadian-American defense relations, even while U.S. and Canadian forces have moved to even closer interoperability.

### ***Decreased funding, but increased and different deployments***

Even before it was entirely clear that the USSR had ceased to exist, Canadian leaders were moving to reduce both the size and expenditures provided to the forces. From 1988 to 2001, defense spending was slashed

by approximately 30 percent, from slightly over \$15 billion (Cdn) in 1988 to just \$11 billion (Cdn) in 2001.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 2005 that the country’s military saw its first post-Cold War budgetary increase. The number of available forces has shrunk as well, from 90,000 in 1990 to a low of 62,000 in 2004.<sup>5</sup> The Canadian commitment to NATO was likewise reduced with the closing of Canadian bases in Germany.

At the same time, however, Canadian forces faced an increase in the number and operational tempo of overseas commitments. As it became clear that the new international environment was becoming more—rather than less—violent, Canadian leaders from both major parties stepped up the number of deployments, as well as providing these missions with increasingly robust rules of engagement.<sup>6</sup>

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, further accelerated this transformation. The Canadian government’s support of the United States was manifested in two important ways. First, Canada agreed to send forces to assist in the war in Afghanistan. The naval commitment, authorized in October 2001, was sustained and substantial, ultimately involving almost all of the Canadian fleet (only Canada’s maritime coastal defense vessels and submarine were not sent). In February 2002, Canada also announced that it had decided to send ground forces. Initially this deployment was based in Kabul, but in 2005 moved to the more dangerous region of Kandahar. Currently, with over 2,300 troops deployed, this operation has become a major Canadian commitment.

But even more telling is the nature of this effort. Canadian land forces are engaging the Taliban on a warfighting basis, targeting the enemy and being targeted in return.

This represents a paradigm shift for Canadian warfighting—and a concrete demonstration of Canada's commitment to the War on Terror. During the Cold War, while Canadian forces were targeted by the Soviet Union, no actual fighting took place, keeping the conflict out of sight and out of mind for the Canadian public. Today, with over 20 servicemen killed, Canada's commitment can no longer be ignored. While these human costs have generated some domestic controversy, at this point there is no sign that the current government is thinking about withdrawing. Rather, Ottawa has shown its determination to support and continue this mission, voting to extend it for another two years into 2009.

### **Canadian-American defense relations**

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, Canada-U.S. relations faced contradictory trends caused by the process described above. Operationally, Canadian forces have substantially improved their ability to cooperate with the American military. The U.S. and Canadian air forces have always enjoyed close cooperation via NORAD, but Canada's participation in the air offensive in Kosovo has further refined combat interoperability. Naval coordination has also increased. In 1998, Canada offered to deploy one of its frigates, the HMCS *Ottawa*, with an American carrier battle group following successful combined naval operations in the Persian Gulf.<sup>7</sup> This gave the Canadian Navy the opportunity to train with the world's largest and most advanced navy, while providing a supplement to U.S. capabilities. Since then, more than five additional deployments have allowed Canadian forces to share in American com-

mand and communications and fostered substantial American reliance on Canada.

Land forces have followed suit. While Canadian troops had previously trained with U.S. forces in Europe under the auspices of NATO, the end of the Cold War saw a substantial decrease in such training opportunities. The commitment of Canadian and American ground troops to Afghanistan changed all that; Canada's initial deployment took place in August 2003, with its troops placed under the authority of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. In reality, however, this meant that Canadian troops were operating jointly with American forces. And, as time progressed, both forces have begun conducting more numerous and complex operations together.

Politically, however, a number of governmental decisions have generated tensions between Washington and Ottawa. The first was the war in Iraq. As the U.S. government began to make its case for the invasion of Iraq, it was clear that officials in Canada were uncomfortable considering an invasion of that magnitude without the sanction of the United Nations. Canada had been a willing participant in the war to drive Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991, and had fully supported the subsequent oil and arms embargo against the regime of Saddam Hussein. Moreover, it was clear that successive Canadian governments disapproved deeply of the Iraqi regime's violations of human rights. But, as the Bush administration began to prepare for war in the fall of 2002, the Chrétien government began to send mixed messages about its commitment. When efforts to obtain a UN mandate collapsed and a U.S.-led invasion became imminent,



the Canadian government declined to participate. Yet, although Canada did not join in the conduct of the war, it still provided support to the American effort.

---

The Canadian-American defense relationship has been tested, and has always thrived. Their common commitment to democratic governance, human rights and free markets means that both countries will always share the same understanding of security.

Much more damaging has been the divergence between Washington and Ottawa over missile defense. Under the Bush administration, the United States has begun deployment of a national system to defend against the threat of ballistic missile attack. These steps have been seen by some segments of Canadian society as destabilizing for international security—and as potentially ominous moves toward the militarization of space. Some in Canada believe that if a successful anti-missile system is developed, nuclear deterrence will no longer constrain conflict between the U.S., Russia and possibly China. Secondly, while American efforts are currently focused on the deployment of ground-based systems, some fear that in time anti-missile capabilities will be placed in space. Thirdly, there were those who simply oppose the system because it is being promoted by the Bush administration.

The result has been an enormous lost opportunity. Initially, the minority government of Paul Martin gave indications that it would agree to participate. Ultimately, however, those opposed to participation were able to marshal enough political pres-

sure to prompt the government to reject America's invitation to join in the development of the system.<sup>8</sup>

It is a decision with long-term ramifications. Faced with mounting threats from ballistic missiles launched by either rogue states or terrorist organizations, the United States has been left with the task of defending the entire continent if and when such threats develop.<sup>9</sup> This means Canada will truly be “free-riding” on the United States—a situation with negative ramifications for regional cooperation. Partly in response to Canada's choice, the United States has separated its Space Command from NORAD, and there are fears among some experts that the United States will continue to reduce the organization's importance because Washington no longer trusts the Canadian commitment to continental defense.<sup>10</sup> On a more positive note, however, the most recent NORAD agreement, signed in May 2006, includes an expansion into issues relating to maritime and land forces, suggesting that both the U.S. and Canada do see its continued existence as important. It is too early to tell, however, whether this represents an important new step or simply is a means of papering over the rift caused by Canada's decision on missile defense.

### **Lasting bonds**

Canadian defense policy is now undergoing a profound transformation. The Canadian military is being used in a manner that few could have predicted when the Iron Curtain fell. Central to this transformation is the Canada-U.S. relationship. In some ways it has never been stronger. The ability of the Canadian Forces to operate with their American counterparts has never been more complete, and Canada continues to be an important

partner of the United States in many post-Cold War international interventions. But there are also important disagreements, with many Canadians opposed to the defense and international policies of the Bush administration.

Yet some perspective is in order. The Canadian-American defense relationship has been tested, and has always thrived. Their common commitment to democratic governance, human rights and free markets means that both countries will always share the same understanding of security. Differences can and do arise in how best to achieve it, but a military threat to the United States will be a military threat to Canada, and vice versa.

As such, Canada can be expected to continue working closely with the United States on defense issues both at home and abroad, not because it has to, and not because it is forced to, but because it remains in the Canadian national interest to do so. Exactly how this will happen, however, will be the interesting question.



1. Canada is now the biggest oil exporter to the U.S., surpassing Saudi Arabia in the year 2000. With the development of the Alberta oil sands, it is expected that this market dominance will continue for a long time to come. See "Country Analysis Brief - Canada," U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, February 2005, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/canada.html>.
2. For a complete discussion of the Canadian role, see James Eayres, *In Defense of Canada: Growing up Allied*, vol 4. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
3. The difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking is understood in the nature of the relationship between the belligerents in a conflict and the force that is intervening. With peacekeeping operations, the intervening force is accepted by the combatants and requires only light arms for self-defense. They are there to *maintain* an established

peace. Peacemaking operations occur without the consent of the warring parties. Thus, such forces have to be well-armed and are often required to use deadly force to *impose* a peace.

4. *Canadian Security and Military Preparedness*, Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defense, Parliament of Canada, February 2002, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/defe-e/rep-e/rep05feb02-e.htm>.
5. *Canadian Security Guide Book, 2005 Edition, An Update of Security Problems in Search of Solutions*, Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defense, Parliament of Canada, November 2004, [http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/defe-e/rep-e/rep03nov04part2-e.htm#\\_Toc89252258](http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/defe-e/rep-e/rep03nov04part2-e.htm#_Toc89252258).
6. "Current Operations," Department of National Defense, Government of Canada, March 30, 2006, [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/operations/current\\_ops\\_map\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/operations/current_ops_map_e.asp).
7. Press release, "Canada-US Relations - Canadian Navy Teams up with US Carrier Battle Group," Department of National Defense, Government of Canada, June 7, 2005, [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/focus/canada-us/backgrounder\\_e.asp](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/focus/canada-us/backgrounder_e.asp).
8. "Statement by the Prime Minister on a Ballistic Missile Defense System," Privy Council Office, Government of Canada, February 24, 2005, [http://www.pco.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=archivemartin&Sub=statementsdeclarations&Doc=statement\\_20050224\\_428\\_e.htm](http://www.pco.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=archivemartin&Sub=statementsdeclarations&Doc=statement_20050224_428_e.htm).
9. The recent actions of North Korea indicate that it is very much a question of "when," and not "if."
10. Dwight N. Mason, "A Flight from Responsibility: Canada and Missile Defense of North America," Center for Strategic & International Studies working paper, February 25, 2005. [http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/050225\\_mason.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/050225_mason.pdf).