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NORAD renewal: Further down the slippery slope?

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Following the May 2006 debate and vote in the House of Commons (257 in favour and 30 opposed), Canada and the United States finalized a permanent extension (rather than the usual five-year term) of their binational defence cooperation arrangements through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) (Governments of Canada and the USA 2006). The new agreement broadens NORAD functions to include “maritime warning,” but not maritime surveillance and control. It continues NORAD’s “aerospace warning” function, which is to warn of aircraft, missiles, and spacecraft attacks on North America, and enshrines the August 2004 amendment that authorized NORAD to share its warning data with the US national commands responsible for missile defence. NORAD’s shared surveillance and control (i.e., active defence) role continues to be confined to a single domain, namely North American airspace.

Other new elements in the agreement include a commitment to greater intelligence sharing and the conduct of “information operations.” The agreement certainly does not put to rest ongoing questions about North American security integration, including concerns about the gradual insinuation of Canada into the US strategic ballistic missile system.

The three primary functions set out in the new NORAD agreement – aerospace warning, maritime warning, and aerospace control – are run out of NORAD Headquarters, which is moving from Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs to the nearby US Peterson Air Force Base, and a series of regional operational control centres – two in Canada (Canada East and Canada West, both located in the underground complex of Canadian Forces Base North Bay), and five in the US.

Warning is NORAD’s primary function, and under normal circumstances, in peace time, it is essentially a joint Canada-US situation awareness and tactical analysis facility that receives, integrates, and analyzes data from nationally operated US and Canadian surveillance facilities and then disseminates the results to Canadian and US operational commands. For example, Canadian surveillance information from satellites, radars, ships, and aircraft is collected by Canadians using Canadian assets and then forwarded to NORAD, which processes and assesses it. Normally, defending Canadian territory,

including airspace, which is nominally under NORAD command, is the exclusive responsibility of Canadian forces.

NORAD's warning role extends beyond North America. NORAD identifies, tracks, and interprets missile launches anywhere in the world and makes that information available in real time to American commanders in military operations outside North America. The Canada-US agreement describes the warning function as one that is focused on "attack against North America," but adds that "an integral part of aerospace warning shall continue to entail monitoring of global aerospace activities and related developments" (Article I, para 2.a).

Four new elements

The government highlighted the following changes to the Canada-US agreement in an "Explanatory Memorandum" made available at the time of the Parliamentary debate:

- the new *maritime* warning mission,
- the permanent extension of the agreement, which includes provision for a *review* "at least every four years or at the request of either party,"
- a "recognition of the importance of *intelligence/information sharing*," and
- a provision for NORAD to "conduct *information operations*."

Maritime warning

The maritime warning mission is under a much more restrictive mandate than the champions of Canada-US defence integration wanted. According to the new agreement, maritime warning

consists of processing, assessing, and disseminating intelligence and information related to the respective maritime areas and internal waterways of, and the maritime approaches to, Canada and the United States, and warning of maritime threats to, or attacks against North America utilizing mutual support arrangements with other commands and agencies, to enable identification, validation, and response by *national* commands and agencies responsible for maritime defense and security (emphasis added, para I.2.c).

Maritime cooperation specifically and appropriately excludes surveillance and control (defence operations), which will continue to be the responsibility of national commands. This separation of warning and control operations also applies to the space domain and, we have previously argued, should also apply to the air environment. Thus NORAD would act as a continental warning and attack assessment service, with defence and enforcement roles performed in all domains through strictly national commands in each country.

Quadrennial review mechanism

NORAD has been renewed with such regularity and certainty that it is, in practice, a more or less permanent fixture of North American security arrangements. Its permanent extension (with provision for a one-year notice of withdrawal) is not a surprise, but care

will now certainly have to be taken to ensure that the quadrennial reviews are serious events. Government, for example, should give assurances that the mandated reviews will include public and Parliamentary consultations. A review and report by the Parliamentary Defence Committee would also require a formal response by the Government.

Intelligence/information sharing

At least two elements in the new agreement's provisions relate to intelligence and information.

First, the previous agreement described "warning" as "monitoring of man-made objects in space" and the "detection, validation, and warning of attack..." The new agreement replaces the reference to "monitoring" with the phrase, "processing, assessing, and disseminating intelligence and information related to man-made objects in the aerospace domain..." The new formulation reinforces the fact that NORAD itself does not monitor, in the sense of doing the surveillance and gathering relevant information. Instead, NORAD receives information from Canadian and US monitoring and surveillance operations, analyzes and interprets the received information, and then alerts (warns) operational commands.

The second reference is more operational; it says that "arrangements shall be maintained to ensure effective sharing, between the Parties, of information and intelligence relevant to the NORAD missions" (Article II, h).

In part, the new emphasis on sharing information and intelligence appears to be there to satisfy concerns of the Canadian Department of National Defence that Canada is gradually being frozen out of US intelligence briefings in the deepening culture of security secrecy in the post-9/11 United States. Canadian officials explain that Americans are oriented to function on a need-to-know basis. So, for example, Canadians are routinely excluded from briefings relevant to NORAD if they touch on issues such as ballistic missile defence, for which Canada does not have operational responsibility. The agreement's commitment to effective intelligence/information sharing, say Canadians, begins to move the US from a "need-to-know" policy to a "need-to-share" policy.

Information operations

The new agreement includes a provision (para II.a) that "Commander NORAD shall...conduct information operations supportive of NORAD missions." And in the Explanatory Memorandum issued at the time of the May Parliamentary debate, the "confirmation of NORAD's ability to conduct information operations" is described as an "enhancement" of the NORAD mission.

The Bi-National Planning Group (BPG) is a Canada-US military-led task force that has been working since 2002 on enhanced security cooperation. The BPG report on Canada-US security relations (2006) defines defensive information operations as

the integration and coordination of policies and procedures, operations, personnel, and technology to protect and defend information and information systems. Defensive information operations are conducted through information assurance, physical security, operations security, counter-deception, counter-psychological operations, counterintelligence, electronic warfare, and special information operations. Defensive information operations ensure timely, accurate, and relevant information access while denying adversaries the opportunity to exploit friendly information and information systems for their own purposes. (D-8, note 16)

It is obvious that a wide range of activities is included under “information operations.” Current Canada-US coordination is managed through a Military Cooperation Committee Information Operations Working Group. The BPG recommends that planning and development of information operations also be coordinated with Canada Command and Northern Command.

The full meaning of “information operations” in the NORAD context is unclear, partly because in both Canada and the United States other agencies have primary responsibility for such activities. The agreement’s apparent green light to NORAD to engage in “counter-deception” and similar operations warrants detailed examination and monitoring, not to mention clarification by Ottawa of just what is involved.

Two big questions

The agreement does not answer two prominent and persistently pertinent questions about the Canada-US slippery integration slope:

- Do the expansion and indefinite extension of NORAD represent a significant step toward further Canada-US military integration?
- Does the new NORAD agreement strengthen Canadian involvement in US strategic ballistic missile defence (BMD) efforts?

Integration

Canada-US security integration has been a prominent theme since World War II and received a new jolt of energy in Canada after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States illustrated the impact of any rupture in cross-border flows. The private sector Independent Task Force on the Future of North America (2005), co-chaired by former deputy prime minister John Manley and counterparts in the United States and Mexico, and supported by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, called for the “three sovereign states” of North America to transform their region into “a single economic space” and establish it as “a security zone that protects the region from external threats while facilitating the legitimate passage of goods, people, and capital.”

While Project Ploughshares has raised concerns, and continues to do so, about the implications of Canada/US integration, the starting point of our approach is to affirm that security cooperation among neighbours is to be encouraged, but in the context of mutual

respect for the sovereignty of each, and with each retaining a capacity for independent threat assessment and decision-making in response to any threats.

Shared warning assures each country that threats to its security are not emerging undetected from within or through the other country's territory. In the case of airspace and the maritime environment, each country takes responsibility for monitoring activities and forwarding data to NORAD. US assets provide the surveillance data on missile launches and trajectories and space objects.

The new NORAD agreement enhances integration in the sense that it expands joint activity to include maritime warning, but as already noted, it is a significantly restricted role that leaves surveillance and control under national commands. But this agreement also needs to be understood in the context of the BPG report, which is unrestrained in promoting Canada-US security integration and largely sees the Canada-US border as an irritant in the way of continental integration ambitions.

The BPG (2006, 31-32) is effusive in its call for the integration of the "defence" and "security" missions within and between Canada and the United States. The focus is on "a continental approach to defence and security" to be formalized in a Canada/US Comprehensive Defense and Security Agreement.

The BPG presents four models of varying degrees of security integration. All are excessively integrationist. Absent from these models and from the Independent Task Force report is a focus on national, sovereign responsibility for independent strategic threat assessment and for independently determined national defence or enforcement responses to identified threats.

Option 1: NORAD would be expanded to include "all-domain" warning, while its control functions would be confined to its current "aerospace control" role.

This model, adopted by the new NORAD agreement, is the least desired by the BPG. In fact, the report expresses concern that "in this concept, there is risk that NORAD could become increasingly marginalized as the prominence of the two national commands continues to grow." The BPG offers no rationale for retaining NORAD as a joint air defence command, except the judgment, with no supporting evidence, that "marginalization of NORAD might well create political problems in Canada" (BPG 2006, 37).

Option 2: NORAD would be expanded as the primary agency for joint warning and enforcement to become an all-domain warning and all-domain control or defence joint command.

In this model NORAD would become an all-domain North American Warning and Defense Command. Canada Command (CANCOM) and Northern Command (NORTHCOM), the respective integrative national commands of the two countries, would become secondary and "would maintain the capability to respond unilaterally to

threats against their respective countries, specifically in situations where both Canada and United States national interests varied and a combined response was not deemed appropriate” (37).

This model maximizes Canada-US defence integration. And while the BPG report refers to the “great appeal” NORAD has among Canadians (38), it acknowledges that this level of integration could face problems on both sides of the border: “Concerns over sovereignty and maintaining freedom of action will likely emanate from both nations. Further, this option is counter to the prevailing trends in Canada and the United States towards the strengthening of their national defense Commands” (38).

Option 3: NORAD would essentially be eliminated. CANCOM and NORTHCOM would be the primary players over all domains in their respective countries, and would operate a Standing Combined Joint Task Force (SCJTF), which would take on “all-domain awareness and warning, and where appropriate, a combined and coordinated response to threats and attacks” (39).

This model describes “bi-national cooperation” through the SCJTF. It comes closest to envisioning a separate surveillance, warning, and information-sharing mechanism. The BPG also notes that it could be expanded “to include other countries in the region” (39).

Option 4: This model expands Option 3 to integrate defence and (domestic) security functions. A Continental Joint Interagency Task Force would include national commands and agencies from both countries.

“This task force would fuse defense and security information, providing comprehensive continental awareness and threat information to all organizations. A Continental Joint Interagency Task Force could also be responsible for the conduct of bi-national operations where agreed upon by both nations” (40). This is the most extreme integration model, calling for the “fusion” not only of defence forces, but also civilian security and law enforcement mechanisms.

The NORAD renewal agreement can be taken as another step toward integration, as the authors of the BPG report clearly hope. But it can also be taken as a brake on the BPG report’s ambitious integrationist agenda.

BMD

While Canada rejected any direct operational involvement in the US strategic, mid-course interception, ballistic missile defence system, through NORAD Canada has certainly been involved. The involvement is essentially the same as Canada’s involvement in the US strategic deterrent: NORAD confirms and identifies the location of a missile attack, and decisions related to US retaliation are based on that information. In the same way, NORAD information of a missile attack would be used by the US BMD operators to launch an interceptor, but in this case NORAD information would be used in real time. In

both cases, Canada is involved through NORAD in providing relevant information, but in neither case is Canada part of the decision-making or the operational response.

The agreement allows for NORAD-assigned personnel to be based at Canadian and US commands that are not part of NORAD but that provide support to NORAD missions in order to perform NORAD duties. Furthermore, NORAD-assigned personnel at such commands “may be called upon to support the mission of that command” (para II.c). In other words, Canadian NORAD personnel could be assigned to US Northern Command because its surveillance facilities provide support to the NORAD mission, but NORTHCOM also manages the strategic missile defence operations. Thus, Canadian NORAD personnel assigned to NORTHCOM could be called upon to support its missile defence interceptor operations. While Canada remains outside US BMD operations, we cannot claim to be complete strangers to them.

For further discussion see Regehr, Ernie 2006, Retiring NORAD: Time for a new kind of continental security cooperation, The Ploughshares Monitor, Spring, 14-18, <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/monitor/mon06list.htm>; and Regehr, Ernie 2006, NORAD renewal: Considerations for the Parliamentary debate, Project Ploughshares Briefing 06-4, <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/Briefings/Briefingslist.html>.

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