



Standing around waiting for orders from Washington

by Tim Creery

Appearing before two Senate subcommittees in Washington, the commander-in-chief of NORAD said, "It is a matter of utmost urgency that the anti-ballistic missile defences of Canada and the U.S. be pushed to completion with all possible speed."

Is this a recent report on the Clinton administration's effort to deploy a national missile defence? No, it was a report written by Knowlton Nash when he was Washington correspondent of the *Financial Post* in 1959. It is quoted in Ann Denholm Crosby's 1998 book *Dilemmas in Defence Decision-Making: Constructing Canada's Role in NORAD, 1958-96* (International Political Economy Series; MacMillan Press in Britain, St. Martin's Press in the U.S.).

In a year that has seen Foreign Minister Axworthy opposing Canadian participation in NMD and Defence Minister Eggleton favouring it, the meticulously researched book of the York University teacher - and member of the G78 - is timely reading. NORAD is very much a case of, "As it was in the beginning ... "

Ms. Crosby describes how, from the start, the North American Air Defence Command and its mandate emerged from a process of American military planning, in which Canadian officers took part, followed by consideration and approval at the political executive level in the United States, and only then political consideration of the take-it-or-leave-it variety in Ottawa.

The bomber threat to the North American continent was already declining when the joint command - that is, an American command with a Canadian deputy - came into being in 1957. The threat of intercontinental ballistic missiles succeeded it, with a consequent shift of emphasis from anti-bomber to anti-missile defence. A study approved by the Canadian chiefs of staff and presented to the defence minister in 1962 argued that defence against the ICBM was next to impossible. It said that with the introduction of the ICBM and the "warning, retaliatory and active defence systems now contemplated, Canadian geography and air space will become of decreasing importance to the U.S. defence posture".

A semblance of political consultation had been inaugurated in 1958 with a Canada-U.S. Ministerial Committee on Joint Defence. It held its last meeting in 1964. In 1969, a senior officer of the External Affairs department, Basil Robinson, wrote in a memo quoted by Ms. Crosby, "a reminder of the Canadian Government's intention to assert its rights of

consultation would help to re-assure people that we were not just standing around waiting for orders from Washington." He went on to note the problem, however, that defence consultations with the U.S. usually forced the Canadian government into decisions it would prefer to avoid making.

And so NORAD went forward through successive renewals, enthusiastically backed by the Canadian military and the defence production industry, most particularly the key New Economy sector of aerospace and electronics. While Canada cancelled the Arrow interceptor, which would have competed with an American interceptor under development, and bought the nuclear-tipped Bomarc-B missile from the United States, it received in compensation large orders through the defence production sharing arrangements that accompanied NORAD, particularly during the Vietnam war. With major weapon systems reserved for U.S. production, Canadian firms and branch plants of U.S. firms in Canada did a good business in sub-systems.

In its efforts not to become committed to policies it did not support, Canada in the 1968 renewal of NORAD obtained a clause stating that the agreement "did not involve in any way a Canadian commitment to participate in an active ballistic missile defence". The clause was secretly removed in the 1981 renewal; the removal only became public knowledge in 1985. Similarly Canada resisted a U.S. effort to change the name from "air defence command" to "aerospace defence command" in 1974 and 1978 but acceded in 1981.

NORAD led the Defenbaker government into approving purchase of the nuclear-tipped Bomarc Bs. Then the government tried to renege, but Opposition Leader Lester B. Pearson said he would honour the original agreement, then negotiate to drop nuclear weapons. His Liberals were elected in 1963 and n-weapons were carried by Canadian interceptors under NORAD til 1984.

Ms. Crosby details case after case in which NORAD planning and arrangements stuck Canada with policies of which it appeared to disapprove. For example, Prime Minister Trudeau in 1978 urged "suffocating the arms race", including a ban against the testing of nuclear weapons delivery systems. A few years later, his government was approving the testing over Canada of cruise missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads. It would have been rather awkward not to, since the government had supported Litton Systems Canada Ltd. to make the guidance system for the missile.

The big, broad, and lasting policy breach for Canada was anti-ballistic missile development and the use of outer space for military purposes. NORAD's mission and mandate were altered time and again to give it a role in planning and operating missile defence systems in conjunction with the U.S. Space Command (whose commander-in-chief was also commander-in-chief of NORAD). This applied to both national-missile defence (NMD) and theatre-missile defence (TMD) in a Global Protection System. Canadian military officers with NORAD were fully integrated into the American structure both in NORAD and other components of the global system, which in its design violated the ABM Treaty.

Although the Mulroney government did not accept the U.S. invitation to participate in President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, known as Star Wars, the prime minister "expressed his support for university and private company involvement in SDI research and indicated that both could apply for direct governmental financial aid in this pursuit".

Ms. Crosby's book devotes a good deal of space to newspaper coverage of NORAD issues over the years. She finds that when the press paid attention to the subject, it did a thorough job; but often it let NORAD renewals slip by with hardly a mention. Canada's forty years of resolute ambiguity did not always get the attention the reading public deserved.