

Canada should not participate in U.S. national missile defence (NMD)

The United States is due to decide this year on whether to begin deployment of a national missile defence (NMD) system. There are compelling reasons for Canada to say no to either operational participation, through the joint U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defence Command (Norad), or political participation through declared or tacit support. In a nutshell, deployment would reduce security for the United States itself, Canada, and the world.

The compelling reasons for saying no to NMD can be summarized under seven headings.

1. National missile defence is in reality neither defence nor deterrence. Unreliable in testing, easily evaded, NMD can only be considered as a first step in trying to escalate to a more extensive and effective ballistic missile defence system.

2. The threat against which NMD is supposed to defend - long-range missiles from rogue states - has been grossly exaggerated. Only Russia and China have long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles. Proponents of NMD argue that economic cripples like North Korea could seriously threaten the U.S. with an ICBM. This is about as credible as the suggestion that it, or other so-called rogue states, assuming they did manage to develop ICBMs, would commit suicide by attacking the United States with these weapons, when covert means for a nuclear attack - or attack with other weapons of mass destruction - are infinitely easier.

3. A fully-deployed NMD will gut the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, a cornerstone of strategic stability. No satisfactory alternative to the ABM Treaty is even remotely in sight. The U.S. and Russia have been negotiating off and on since 1991 on retiring or amending the Treaty to allow the U.S. to field its proposed NMD systems. These negotiations are in themselves a reason for Canada not to participate in the program. True, they could result in a decrease in nuclear warheads on both sides. But they could also result in approval of Russia's treaty-altering demands to be allowed to MIRV their newest missiles (equip them with multiple independently-targeted re-entry vehicles) in return for allowing the U.S. to proceed with NMD (which in its present state would not defend against MIRVs).

The NMD system being developed by the U.S.A. is contrary to the fundamental objective of the ABM Treaty, an objective as valid today as in 1972 when it was first negotiated. That objective is to forestall an all-out offensive nuclear arms race by strictly limiting the right of the United States and Russia to build defences that, if effective, would neutralize the retaliatory capability of the other side. While the current "limited" NMD system

might be within those limits, Russia would have to take it on faith that the U.S.A. would not seek at any time in the future to deploy a more comprehensive system of the type being demanded right now by the Republican leadership in the Senate.

4. The United States' NMD could well impede further significant nuclear weapons reductions by Russia. That country will be forced to rely even more heavily on dangerous rapid reaction command and control procedures. The Russian nuclear military establishment is deteriorating and its early warning system is in disarray. To defend its retaliatory capability against pre-emptive destruction by a United States protected by ballistic missile defence, Russia would have to intensify its reliance on "launch-on-warning" procedures. A deployed NMD would thus increase the chance of a nuclear attack by Russia on the U.S.A. through inadvertence or miscalculation.

5. For China, even the "limited" NMD system threatens its modest retaliatory capability of about 20 nuclear warheads. Like Russia, China is being asked to trust the word of the United States that the system is not intended to be used against it. China is more likely to look at the capability of the system and respond by deploying several hundred long-range strategic warheads, particularly MIRVs. Russia and the United States have abandoned the dangerously destabilizing MIRV weapons by treaty. The United States should be looking at ways to encourage China to do the same, rather than provoking it to do the opposite.

In addition to destabilizing the old Cold War nuclear competition between the United States and Russia, NMD would therefore shift the nuclear arms race to a global context involving China, India and Pakistan. In an editorial on April 10 opposing NMD, *The Globe and Mail* noted, "Sha Zukang, director of arms control in China's foreign ministry, warns that rewriting the ABM Treaty to permit a national missile defence 'will tip the global balance, trigger a new arms race and jeopardize world and regional stability'." *The Sunday New York Times* of May 28 reported that, according to U.S. administration officials, "American intelligence officials are warning that such a system (NMD) could set off a cold-war-style arms race between China, India and Pakistan".

6. The deployment of NMD will seriously undercut other approaches to combating proliferation. These include arms control, economic incentives, co-operative programs to reduce nuclear threats, and export controls, all of which enjoy wide international support and legitimacy.

7. The NMD program spurs an arms race in conventional and covert weapons and delivery systems. Research and production in alternative attack systems, as well as decoys, would be undertaken to get around the supposed ballistic missile "defence". These are all systems that the global community, for the most part, presently abides. So, while the issue of proliferation of nuclear weapons is raised by the NMD program, the more worrisome aspect is the escalation in conventional weapons proliferation, research, and development that would be unleashed.

In short, NMD is a new Maginot Line. "Build it, and they will go around it," as one critic has observed. Incapable of defence or deterrence, it would provoke a whole range of destabilizing responses, any one of which would be far more dangerous and probable than a suicide attack on the U.S. mainland by North Korea.

In the United States, the large body of opinion opposing NMD blames the success of the campaign to date largely on the billions of dollars going to the American defence industry. In effect, NMD means massive subsidies to the American high tech sector and a porkbarrel of such enormous proportions that members of Congress find it hard to turn NMD down. Yet opinion polls show American support for NMD dropping even as program costs continue to skyrocket.

Canada stayed out of "Star Wars" research

Where does Canada stand? As presently conceived, the United States NMD does not depend on Canadian territory, weaponry, detection capability, personnel, or financial support. While the United States says it would like to use Norad to control the national missile defence system, this is not necessary; control could almost as easily be handled through the U.S. Space Command. In other words, Canada's non-participation would be a minor inconvenience for the United States at the operational level.

It is clear that insofar as the United States has any interest in the views of allies on this issue, what it really wants from Canada is political support for NMD. Given Canada's role as a consistent champion of international peace and security, Canadian participation would provide a veneer of legitimacy.

Seeking Canadian approval for ballistic missile defence plans is not new for the United States. In 1984 it sought the participation of the newly elected Mulroney government in joint research toward President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), an elaborate ballistic missile defence system dubbed "Star Wars" by the media. Advocates of Canadian participation envisioned lucrative contracts if Ottawa said yes and direly predicted the end of Canada-U.S. defence relations if the answer was no. After extensive public and private consultation, including the establishment of a Special Joint Committee of Parliament, as well as the commissioning of an internal report by senior public servant Arthur Kroeger, the Mulroney government said a polite "Thanks but no thanks" to the United States' invitation.

The present government of Canada should respond in the same manner to today's pressure from the United States to join in NMD. It is a more limited system than SDI, but joining it would make it all the more difficult to get out when the program escalates to more sophisticated space-based systems.

National missile defence is bad for global stability and will result in a net decrease in national security for countries deploying it. Canadian participation in NMD deployment could even increase our risk of becoming a target of covert terror. We agree with Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy in his forthright stand against NMD and his view that it is one

of several threats to the global effort to reduce nuclear arms. The Group of 78 calls on Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to lead his government in saying no to Canadian participation in U.S. national missile defence.