

The Challenge for NATO's Chairman



Robert Hunter

It's no secret that the Bush administration and the Canadian government do not always see eye to eye on foreign and defense policy. Canada was probably not regarded by US neo-cons as important enough to be put on the list of an allied "axis of appeasers" (such as France and Germany) for opposing the invasion of Iraq. And, while Ottawa has rated a brief US presidential visit since then, it has not been at the center of President George W. Bush's recent wooing of NATO allies.

Part of Washington's tendency to bypass Canada when the big agenda of security is under discussion, is because our northern neighbor is regarded as a relatively small player, at NATO and elsewhere. "Not that small," Canadians will quickly respond, especially when it comes to peacekeeping and peacemaking.

Canada has pulled as much weight in the Balkans as any other ally; it was an early force contributor to US-led, Afghanistan operations; it has troops with NATO in Afghanistan (the largest contributor to the Int'l Security Assistance Force when it was founded); is with the UN in Haiti (another high US priority); and for decades Canada has been a leader in UN peacekeeping (which relieves the US of more burdens than many Americans are prepared to admit).

Quite properly, Canadian defense policy is, and should be, about Canadian interests. In today's world, part of that is about defending borders against access by potential terrorists – and, of course, defending national territory against terrorists that have gained access to Canadian soil. But how much should Canada do – and spend – to prevent the through-put of potential terrorists to the United States? That is a demand being made by Washington, and Ottawa has so far been very cooperative.

A new US-Canadian disagreement has now arisen. Prime Minister Paul Martin last week announced that "Canada will not take part in the proposed [U.S.-led] ballistic missile defence system." It will, however, continue to take part in the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD). Judged from south of the border, this opting-out of BMD is likely to be seen as Canadian willingness to watch

missiles fly overhead, unconstrained, on the way to the Lower 48.

The US Ambassador in Ottawa, Paul Cellucci, said that "We simply cannot understand why Canada would in effect give up its sovereignty – its seat at the table – to decide what to do about a missile that might be coming towards Canada."

From Canada's point of view, however, it is not just that it is unlikely to be the target of nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles from, say, North Korea, a (so far indeterminate) "rogue" state, or even – way down the road – China; it is also a notion that ballistic missile defense against a determined adversary is a waste of money.

The prime minister continued that "ballistic missile defense is not where we will concentrate our efforts," but what will Canada's armed forces actually do? If Canada is to remain relevant in big picture matters, the answer lies in what it will do abroad, especially in areas that engage NATO.

Gone, of course, are the days when Canada would reflexively see its destiny as bound with that of the "mother countries" (Britain and France). But, as a charter member of the post-World War II Atlantic Community, Canada has willingly assumed other security burdens that go well beyond what it could assess as directly affecting the homeland; and it has continued to do so even after the end of the Cold War. It was, after all, Canada's Ambassador to NATO, David Wright, who (as dean of the North Atlantic Council) initiated NATO's first-ever invocation of the Washington Treaty's Article 5 – the allies' "one for all and all for one" commitment – immediately after the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001.

One good sign of Canada's continued commitment to NATO, including the alliance's expanding list of missions beyond Europe, is the selection of **General Ray Henault**, Canada's outgoing Chief of the Defence Staff, to be the next Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, which is composed of all the allied Chiefs of Defense or their representatives in Brussels. This is a bully pulpit for the Chairman, and it is also a chance for Canada to show its stuff within the alliance as its mandate broadens.

Canada is also engaged in other areas of importance to the US and NATO. As Prime Minister Martin said, "we will provide training [for Iraq], and are contributing to the NATO fund. We are also collaborating on efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons to powers such as Iran." For the US – and, indeed, for some European allies who wonder about Canada's future role on the Continent – this can be a major test. Indeed, with its long experience in the practical arts of peacekeeping within a political-military context, Canada can show the way.

Canada could usefully play an even larger role, including training of Iraqis in North America; a leadership role in NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative; a more intense focus on Iraqi and regional nation building; and, in addition to engaging with NATO, Canada could, in time, offer support to the European Union's Rapid Reaction Force, especially in terms of lift, logistics, and command and control. Finally, Canada can play an augmented role – political as well as military – in NATO's adaptation to future requirements, through the new Allied Command Transformation, in Norfolk, Virginia, which is "on the point" in ensuring that all allies can work together in today's much more demanding environment.

In the end, it will be a matter of attitude: does Canada want to continue pulling its weight on the big issues of tomorrow? And will America acknowledge this contribution? As Paul Martin said last week about the US: "Our mutual commitment to a safer and more secure world is resolute." Washington would do well to watch what Canada is actually doing. ■

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