



NORTHERN COMMAND AND THE EVOLUTION OF CANADA-US DEFENCE RELATIONS

by Philippe Lagassé

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, defence of the North American continent has returned to the forefront of American national security policy, and the United States recently formed a cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. In an effort to better protect the United States, the administration of President George W. Bush has mandated the Department to “assume responsibility for operational assets of the Coast Guard, Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service and Border Patrol, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the Department of Agriculture, and the recently created Transportation Security Administration.”¹ Militarily, the revival of continental defence resulted in a similar initiative. On 17 April 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that the American Unified Command Plan (UCP) was being updated to include a new regional command, United States Northern Command (NorthCom). Allocated responsibility for the continental United States, Canada, Mexico, portions of the Caribbean and the contiguous waters in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans up to 500 miles off the North American coastline,² NorthCom’s mandate is to “provide a necessary focus for [continental] aerospace, land and sea defenses, and critical support for [the] nation’s civil authorities in times of national need.”³ In no sense an incidental modification, Rumsfeld estimates that the introduction of NorthCom, and its resulting designation of North America as a geographic command, “is part of the greatest transformation of the Unified Command Plan since its inception in 1947.”⁴

Although NorthCom is a uniquely American command, its presence will inescapably influence those foreign states included in its area of geographic responsibility. Indeed, Canada, with its historic and continuing military ties to the United States, has witnessed an increase in the number of debates regarding the significance of the UCP revision. Particularly, NorthCom and the other modifications of the UCP have revived traditional debates about Canada’s sovereignty and its role in continental defence.

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This article examines the impact of NorthCom on Canadian national security policy. The first section reviews the history of the Canada–US continental defence relationship, paying special attention to Canadian debates regarding sovereignty. This serves to highlight lasting trends in the North American continental defence relationship. Next, an outline of NorthCom’s structure and functions is provided, to illustrate the increasing attention which continental defence has received in the United States since 11 September 2001. Lastly, NorthCom’s influence on Canadian foreign and defence policy is evaluated. It is argued that Canada’s relationship

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with NorthCom and future contributions to continental defence will evolve in ways that mirrors its previous experiences.

SOVEREIGNTY AND AMBIGUITY

To assess the importance of NorthCom to Canada, it is necessary to review how Canada approached cooperative continental defence with the United States in the past. This reveals an unmistakable trend in Canadian foreign and defence policy: despite concerns about its sovereignty, Canada has tended to embrace joint continental defence efforts with the United States. At the forefront of these efforts is the Canadian military, which has been remarkably successful in convincing their political masters of the necessity of binational cooperation in the defence of North America.

Reflecting on the importance assigned to the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), renowned Canadian diplomat John W. Holmes noted the following in 1982:

NORAD, which seems a step in the continentalization of North American defence, can be regarded from another angle as a means of preserving a Canadian role and an appropriate degree of sovereignty in a situation in which, if there were no rules, the Americans would simply take over the defence of the continent.⁵

Typically characterized as a “defence against help” strategy, the reality described by Holmes characterizes the Canadian approach to continental defence for the better part of the 20th century. To be precise, since before the Second World War, Canada has continually chosen to forego a vulnerable pure sovereignty in favour of a truncated, but better secured, sovereignty by cooperating with the United States. In truth, of all the trends in the Canada–US defence relationship, this sovereignty dilemma is an ever-present, but surmountable, concern.

Speaking at Queen’s University in August 1938, American President Franklin Roosevelt pledged that “the people of the United States will not stand by if domination of Canada is threatened by any other Empire.”⁶ Replying within the week, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King declared that “enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way either by land, sea or air to the United States across Canada.”⁷ This ‘Kingston Dispensation’, as named by Michel Fortmann and David Haglund,⁸ reveals an early manifestation of Canada’s sovereignty dilemma. Faced with an implicit suggestion that America would be willing to protect the continent alone if necessary, King realized that Canada had to bolster its own defences to alleviate its neighbour’s concerns. While Canada and the United States did not establish any joint continental defence measures at this time, Canadian defence policy was nonetheless influenced by American interests.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, apprehensions about the security of North America were heightened. In an effort to coordinate the defence of the continent, Canada and the United States established the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) in 1940. Throughout the war the PJBD was an essential link between Ottawa and Washington, serving to facilitate cooperation in defence production and infrastructure projects.⁹ It is of interest that the PJBD continues to be the highest bilateral defence forum between Canada and the United States, providing both governments with senior military and diplomatic contact.¹⁰ Despite the success of the PJBD, however, the Second World War also informed Canadian decision-makers about the need to be cautious in dealing with the United States. Early in the war, in an effort to build the Alaskan Highway and man the Northeast Staging Route to Europe, the United States stationed a formidable number of its forces on Canadian soil.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, the American presence was not well received by many Canadian officials. For instance, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, was



NORAD Photo

The Command Centre at NORAD Headquarters. The NORAD Commander-in-Chief also serves as the Commander-in-Chief of US Northern Command.

unapologetic in his sentiment that “Canada has been too preoccupied with her own war effort to cope with the Americans who unfortunately under the cover of the needs of war are acting in the Northwest as if they owned the country.”¹² Luckily for Ottawa, before the war’s end, guarantees of an American withdrawal were obtained. While Canadian officials did not question that these deployments had been made in good faith, the ease with which they occurred signalled that concrete steps were needed to prevent a similar strain on Canadian sovereignty.¹³

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Canada and the United States expanded their formal military links at the operational level. Whereas the PJBD dealt primarily with political aspects of the defence relationship, a new body, the Military Cooperation Committee (MCC), was conceived to manage joint military planning between American and Canadian forces. Wary of surprise attacks after Pearl Harbor and concerned about the military power of an increasingly hostile Soviet Union, Canadian and American defence officials used the binational planning structure of the MCC to design a first joint continental defence initiative in 1946. Known as the Basic Security Plan (BSP), the new arrangement included “a comprehensive continental air defence organization, cartography, air and surface surveillance to provide early warning of attack, anti-submarine and coastal defence, counter-lodgements plans, and a joint command structure.”¹⁴ However, the BSP did not at first meet the demands of all Canadian officials. Of particular concern was that the BSP, as an operational arrangement, evaded political oversight.¹⁵ The Canadian Department of External Affairs (DEA) was especially displeased by the fact that it was denied access to the BSP working group on account of its purported secrecy.¹⁶ Irrespective of these reservations, the BSP was approved by both the United States and Canada. Hence, despite the negative experience of the American presence during the Second World War and notwithstanding DEA misgivings, the PJBD and MCC established a precedent of formal discussions and respectful consideration between Canada and the United States regarding the defence of the continent.

In 1949, faced with Soviet brinkmanship over Berlin, and Moscow’s refusal to grant promised self-determination to its Eastern European satellites, Canada, the United States and their European allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Being uniquely situated across the Atlantic Ocean, Canada and the United States were accorded their own Canada–US Regional Planning Group (CUSRPG) to coordinate the defence of North America within the NATO structure. Accordingly, following the rearmament program that Canada undertook in response to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, a substantial portion of the Royal Canadian Navy’s 154 ships were assigned to NATO’s Supreme Commander Atlantic (SACLANT).¹⁷ For the most part, the RCN performed anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and escort operations.¹⁸ These efforts inevitably led to close cooperation and joint exercises between the RCN and the United States Navy (USN). Moreover, both navies were permitted to operate in each other’s territorial waters if pursuing Soviet submarines.¹⁹ Hence, with respect to the maritime defence of North America, strong links were forged early on between the RCN and the USN.

A second 1949 event that shaped North American continental defence was the detonation of an atomic weapon by the Soviet Union. Coupled with the deployment of the Soviet Tu-4 Bull long-range bomber,²⁰ the end of the American atomic monopoly imparted a new urgency to continental defence. For Canada especially, Mackenzie King’s 1938 declaration was of greater import than ever before. As the now oft-quoted quip of American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles revealed, Canada became “a very important

piece of real estate.”²¹ Consequently, while the BSP included provisions for continental air defence, Washington was determined to better protect North American air space. Drafted in 1952, National Security Council Memorandum 159 (NSC-159) explicitly stated: “The present continental defence programs are not now adequate either to prevent, neutralize or seriously deter the military or covert acts which the Soviet Union is capable of launching.”²² Pertaining to air defence in particular, NSC-159 was adamant that the new initiative needed to be binational:

It seems clear...that since the success of our distant early warning system and the consequent effective deployment of defensive measures, both military and civil, depend upon the speed with which Canadian cooperation might be brought into play...Canadian agreement and participation on an adequate scale is essential to the speeding up of several of the highest priority programs.²³

Unfortunately for American planners, the Canadian government of Louis St. Laurent was hesitant. At issue for the Prime Minister and his Minister of Defence, Brook Claxton, were the implied cost and sovereignty infringements of a continental air defence expansion.²⁴ As the successors to the King government, the St. Laurent Liberals had experienced first-hand the American presence in Canada during the Second World War. Any suggestion by the United States of grander defence mechanisms thereby invoked images of American soldiers on Canadian soil and a corresponding loss of sovereignty. In opposition to the government, the Canadian Chiefs of Staff argued that American concerns and recommendations were legitimate and necessary.²⁵ In particular, after the detonation of a thermonuclear device by the Soviet Union in 1953, Canadian military officials implored Claxton and St. Laurent to reconsider their cautious approach. Ultimately, Claxton recognized that Washington’s steadfastness left Ottawa with few options.²⁶ Geography and the nature of Canada–US relations were such that Canadian involvement in an improved continental air defence system was inevitable when requested by a resolute United States. Securing Canadian interests, therefore, was better achieved by negotiating a favourable regime structure.

In 1953 a Canada–US Military Study Group (MSG) was formed. At Claxton’s request, the MSG exposed Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) officers to detailed information about proposed radar installations. In turn, these officials provided the Canadian government with independent assessments of projected air defence infrastructures. When the June 1954 MSG report was released, the RCAF, which had been working closely with the United States Air Force (USAF) since the BSP, supported and bolstered American arguments favouring new binational early warning systems.²⁷ Specifically, the MSG report stated that building a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line in northern Canada was “necessary if the development of the Air Defense System is to be kept abreast of anticipated improvements in Soviet capabilities to attack by air the vital areas of Canada and the United States.”²⁸ Despite the fact that

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it meant the return of American soldiers to Canadian soil – albeit in minimal numbers – the St. Laurent government agreed in September 1954 to build the DEW Line. To address the sovereignty issue and national defence industry interests, Ottawa ensured that the sites for the primarily American-funded DEW Line radars were chosen by both governments, that Canadian equipment was used to build them, and that Canadian law applied on the sites.²⁹

Beyond radar installations, an integrated operational command was seen by both the RCAF and the USAF as a necessary step to enhance the effectiveness of their current collaborative efforts.³⁰ Though the RCAF and USAF already had a measure of tactical cooperation, both services realized that such an approach was insufficient in light of the Soviet threat. As long as the two air forces functioned independently at the operational level, a measure of efficiency was being sacrificed. Hence, from a military perspective, close operational coordination of air defence forces was a logical necessity.

Though still an unsigned arrangement (the agreement was officially signed on 12 May 1958 by the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker), North American Air Defence Command (NORAD) ‘stood-up’ on 12 September 1957.³¹ Headed by an American Commander-in-Chief (CINCNORAD) and a Canadian Deputy, NORAD was structured to give each country a relatively equal representation despite their disproportionate financial and force contributions – the United States shouldered the greater burden. As part of its binational status, CINCNORAD was to report to both Canadian and American military authorities. Moreover, to uphold the sovereignty of the states involved, a key factor in the formation of NORAD was the retention of national command over respective military units. In addition, the selection of permanent stations, the maintenance of discipline, and the training, logistical support, and composition of national forces remained the responsibility of the Canadian and American governments.³²

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Despite a lessening of interest in continental air defence during the 1960s, new threats such as the cruise missile and stealth aircraft technology reinforced the need to maintain and strengthen continental air defence in the late 1970s.³³ To meet these challenges, NORAD (renamed North American Aerospace Defence Command in 1981) underwent a substantial modernization program in 1985. This project included replacing the aging DEW Line with a new North Warning System (NWS), basing American E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft in Canada, and deploying over-the-horizon backscatter (OTH-B) radar to monitor ‘dead areas’.³⁴ Alongside these systems, Canada currently assigns four CF-18 Hornet squadrons to NORAD.³⁵

In sum, Canada’s approach to continental defence has been remarkably consistent since 1938. Beginning with the Kingston Dispensation, Canada and the United States recognized that their security was inescapably intertwined. This reality first manifested itself with the creation of the PJBD. After the war, the MCC was added to the PJBD structure. This allowed an expansive collaboration on the part of the Canadian and American militaries, whose efforts produced the Basic Security Plan, the first Canada–US continental defence plan. The maritime component of the BSP was

bolstered in 1949 with the formation of NATO and the creation of the CUSRPG. Most importantly, the presence of an equally threatening nuclear-capable Soviet Union drove both Canada and the United States to create an air defence system which executed joint operational control of binational forces. Yet, when radar sites were built in northern Canada, guarantees were obtained such that a broad conception of Canadian sovereignty was respected. Similarly, when NORAD was negotiated, both countries retained their national command authority. The trend is thus unmistakable: Canada has stood next to the United States in the defence of North America. While Canadian governments are careful to properly balance their sovereignty dilemma, geography and military logic compel them to participate in continental defence initiatives.

CANADA, NORTHERN COMMAND AND THE UCP

The events of 11 September 2001 cultivated an unmistakable sense of vulnerability in the United States. After decades of being primarily concerned with external enemies, the United States now sees internal threats as its top national security priority. Although the United States had been moving steadily towards bolstering the defence of its homeland in the late 1990s, it is an unfortunate reality that only the 2001 terrorist attacks gave homeland defence its current priority. From a military perspective, nothing better illustrates this point than the revisions to the Unified Command Plan (UCP).

The UCP was first implemented in 1946. In light of the United States’ emerging superpower status and its corresponding leadership of the Western powers, the UCP established the structure through which the United States coordinated its world-wide military responsibilities. Two types of command exist under the UCP: regional commands and functional commands. Regional commands are assigned geographic sections of the world, for instance, Europe and much of Africa fall under the umbrella of United States European Command (USEUCOM). Moreover, it is critical to note that while regional commands are responsible for military operations in their designated geographic area, they are uniquely American. Though joint operations may be conducted with allied states, regional Combatant Commanders do not command foreign military forces under the auspices of the UCP. For their part, functional commands control a specific branch of the United States military. United States Strategic Command (StratCom), for example, oversees the American nuclear arsenal. Finally, each UCP command is under the direction of a Combatant Commander who reports to the National Command Authority, made up of the President and the Secretary of Defense.

On 17 April 2002 revisions to the UCP were announced. Most significant was the unveiling of United States Northern Command (NorthCom). A regional command, NorthCom’s functions are twofold. First, NorthCom will assume the defence of the American homeland. This role requires that NorthCom “conduct operations to deter, prevent, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States, its territories, and interests in the assigned area of responsibility.”³⁶ Second, NorthCom will, “as directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense, provide military assistance to civil authorities including consequence management operations.”³⁷ Both of these NorthCom missions have affected the structures and organization of the United States military, the National Guard and United States Coast Guard.

Previously, the defence of the American homeland and support to civil authorities were delegated to United States Joint Forces Command (JFCOM). Immediately following the attacks of 11 September, Joint Force Headquarters-Homeland Security

(JFHQ-HLS) was formed. JFHQ-HLS is responsible for the territorial and shore defence of the continental United States.³⁸ In addition, JFHQ-HLS coordinates the US military's aid to civil authorities by working in conjunction with agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).³⁹ JFHQ-HLS is complemented by two subordinate commands: Joint Task Force-Civil Support (JTF-CS) provides military assistance to civil authorities, and Joint Task Force 6 contributes military counter-drug support to civilian agencies. Among the operations undertaken since 11 September, JFHQ-HLS has trained rapid reaction forces, established bio-attack consequence management elements, and coordinated military support for security during the Super Bowl and the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. Under the revised UCP, these units are now under NorthCom.⁴⁰ For its part, JFCOM became a functional command, concentrating "almost entirely on military transformation and joint interoperability."⁴¹

In conjunction with those forces conceived as part of JFCOM's original homeland defence organization, NorthCom is expected to be given the authority to command forces from all services in times of need. Specifically, NorthCom will be permitted to utilize all "Atlantic-oriented" service commands for vital continental defence operations.⁴² Hence, the USN Atlantic Fleet, USAF Air Combat Command, Marine Forces Atlantic and US Army Forces Command may come under the direction of Combatant Commander NorthCom.⁴³ Operation "Noble Eagle", launched immediately after the 11 September attacks, provides an insight into how these forces might be used. At the time, JFCOM placed the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit on alert, assigned Air Combat Command tactical aircraft and Aegis-equipped ships from the Atlantic Fleet to assist NORAD.

Although NorthCom is responsible for the defence of the continental United States, the air defence of North America remains NORAD's charge. Indeed, post-11 September, NORAD's role has expanded. Notably, NORAD has begun tracking North American air traffic in conjunction with the American Federal Aviation Administration and Nav Canada.⁴⁴ This new responsibility also includes streamlining new Rules of Engagement, allowing for a more aggressive defence of North American airspace.⁴⁵ Previously, NORAD was principally concerned with external aerospace threats and drug trafficking. Furthermore, to better coordinate their intertwined and mutually relevant tasks, the UCP review 'dual-hatted' Combatant Commander NORAD and Combatant Commander NorthCom. Combatant Commander NORAD, General Ralph E. Eberhart, thus assumed command of NorthCom when it was created on 1 October 2002.

NorthCom's homeland defence and aid to the civil authority priorities will also affect the National Guard. Traditionally, the National Guard has fulfilled three roles. First, as the militia of the individual states of the Union, National Guard forces have been called upon by state governors to aid local civil authorities. As part of its aid to the civil authority function, the National Guard currently deploys approximately thirty Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Teams (WMD-CST).⁴⁶ Secondly, National Guard reservists can be integrated with the professional forces of the United States military for overseas operations as part of the Total Force Concept.⁴⁷ Lastly, under Titles 10 and 32, the National Guard can be mobilized and commanded by the National Command Authority to serve as "an integral part of the first line defenses of the United States."⁴⁸ Coupled with their aid to the civil power and

WMD-CST capabilities, this last function ensures that National Guard forces will be included in NorthCom homeland defence planning. In fact, the Department of Defense (DoD) has noted that under Title 10, the National Command Authority can transfer command and control of the National Guard to Combatant Commander NorthCom.⁴⁹ Moreover, as part of its regional command prerogatives, NorthCom will be directly involved in setting the training and readiness standards of the National Guard. However, when not under Title 10 status, authority over the National Guard remains with the state governors.⁵⁰ Hence, while the National Guard is an essential component of those forces made available to NorthCom for homeland defence, their state and Total Force Concept contributions are not to be diluted.

For its part, the United States Coast Guard is undergoing an organizational alteration. Before the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Coast Guard served the Department of Transportation. Recently, in an effort to enhance border security, the Bush administration transferred control of the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security.⁵¹ In the Administration's estimation, this would allow better communication and coordination between the Coast Guard, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and Border Patrol, the Customs Service and the Transportation Security Administration, all of which are slated to be amalgamated under the Homeland Security department.⁵² Interestingly, DoD appears to have a different vision of the Coast Guard's future. Recent dialogues between high-ranking Coast Guard and USN officials show that there is interest in strengthening peacetime ties between the US Coast Guard and the USN.⁵³ As early as September 1998, the Coast Guard and USN issued a joint statement in favour of a 'national fleet'. This concept would see the Coast Guard and the USN



A joint Canadian-US team of officers, working under the direction of the Canadian Deputy Commander-in-Chief NORAD, is examining the possible future evolution of North American aerospace defence arrangements.

cooperating "more closely in various areas, including ship acquisition, research and development, concepts of operations, logistics, training, exercises, and deployments."⁵⁴ Thinking more broadly, the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, released shortly after the 11 September attacks, envisaged the following:

Preparing forces for homeland security may require changes in force structure and organization...It is clear that U.S. forces, including the United States Coast Guard, require more effective means, methods, and organizations to perform these missions. As part of this examination, DoD will review the establishment of a new unified combatant commander (for homeland security) to help address complex inter-agency issues and provide a single military commander to focus military support.⁵⁵

Echoing these sentiments, Admiral Vernon E. Clark, Chief of Naval Operations (USN), has recommended the creation of a “maritime equivalent to NORAD...established under the control of the Coast Guard with support from the Navy, other federal agencies and the private sector.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, “this capability must be coordinated with NorthCom.”⁵⁷ Finally, recent statements by General Eberhart indicate that a “naval NORAD” linked to NorthCom is being considered by DoD.⁵⁸

American contemplation of a “naval NORAD,” homeland defence and civil support inevitably raised questions about Canadian collaboration. Despite the fact that NorthCom is a uniquely American command which does not, and will not, integrate any foreign forces into its configuration,⁵⁹ geographic necessity demands that a successful completion of the NorthCom mission be undertaken alongside the United States’ North American neighbours. Consequently, the United States has communicated a decided interest in securing Canadian cooperation in an expanded continental defence. As Paul Cellucci, the American ambassador to Canada, remarked on 10 September 2002: “We can’t defend North America alone. Canada occupies a huge piece of territory here in North America and we need Canada’s help in defending the air, the land and the sea.”⁶⁰ In response to the American request, the Canadian government is following its traditional path in cautiously studying new military arrangements with the United States.

For the Canadian Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS), Lieutenant-General George Macdonald, asymmetric threats from terrorist and criminal elements are a menace to Canadian security.⁶² Indeed, even if Canada is not directly targeted by such groups, the destructive effects of WMD and the disruption of vital communications and economic stability recognizes no national borders. Moreover, echoing Mackenzie King, the VCDS was unequivocal that “[w]e cannot permit Canadian territory to be used as an avenue of attack on the United States.”⁶³ For high-level CF officials, therefore, there is no question that Canada should work with the United States to protect North America from dangerous elements and the asymmetric means they employ.

As part of this effort, DND formed a binational Planning Group to structure an “Enhanced Canada–US Security Cooperation” with the United States.⁶⁴ Given an initial two-year mandate, the Planning Group will work alongside NorthCom and NORAD in Colorado Springs, though it will not be integrated into either command. Instead, the Planning Group aims to “improve current Canada–United States arrangements to defend against primarily maritime threats to the continent and respond to land-based attacks, should they occur.”⁶⁵ Composed of approximately twenty CF officers and representatives from the Canadian Office of Critical Protection and Emergency Preparedness (OCIPEP), and headed by Lieutenant-General Kenneth Pennie and an American deputy,

the Planning Group will draft joint Canada–US contingency plans to ensure cooperative “response[s] to national requests for military assistance in the event of threat, attack, or civil emergency in Canada or the U.S.,” to enable a sharing of maritime surveillance and intelligence, to establish binational coordination between militaries and civil agencies, to and conduct and design joint training programmes and exercises.⁶⁶

While not yet a “naval NORAD”, bolstered communications between the Canadian Navy and the USN may compel the Planning Group to pursue a more encompassing venture. Recalling that the USN and Canadian Navy have a long tradition of cooperation dating back to the NATO CUSRPG, joint maritime continental

defence would be nothing new. In truth, given that interoperability with the USN is a central tenet of the Navy, “it may be easier for Washington to reach an agreement (maritime) with Canada than amongst the American services and other federal agencies.”⁶⁷

The intent of both governments to allow transnational deployments in the event of nuclear, biological or chemical attacks is a more controversial Planning Group contingency. If sent across the border, both Canadian and United States forces will be under the operational control of the host country.⁶⁸ According to DND, this provision allows both Canada and the United States to “exercise control of [their] respective sovereign territory and to *command* [their] national forces.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, DND insists that such cross-border missions would only occur “under conditions approved by both governments, on a case-by-case basis.”⁷⁰ Lastly, in so far as the CF is already equipped to fulfill civil support functions, DND asserts that these new arrangements will not require “the assignment of any new standing forces for the defence of the continent.”⁷¹ Consequently, it appears that the Canadian government hopes to



HMCS *Montréal*. The question of whether or not closer Canadian–US bilateral coordination of maritime defence matters is possible is also likely to be examined by the joint study team at NORAD Headquarters.

On the day of the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington, the Canadian government without hesitation offered assistance to the American government and people in their time of need. Nearly all civilian flights headed to American cities were diverted to Canadian airports, Canada’s CF-18 fighters were mobilized through NORAD, the entire Canadian Forces (CF) was put on a state of increased readiness, and the CF Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) from 8 Wing in Trenton, Ontario, was prepared to deploy to the United States.⁶¹ Similarly, in the months that followed, Canada allied with the United States in its war on terrorism, joining American ground and naval forces in and around Afghanistan. In addition, the Chrétien government passed Bill C-36, the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, and signed a Border Security Declaration with the United States on 12 December 2001. Clearly, in light of these undertakings, the Canadian government has been unambiguous in its expression of continental solidarity with the United States. Beyond a simple expression of friendship, Canada’s interest in bolstering North American defence stems from a recognition that terrorism is a decidedly transnational peril.

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improve continental defences without having to divert sparse resources away from other DND priorities.

Canadian reactions to the renewed interest in continental defence have been divided. On one hand, Senator Colin Kenny, Chairman of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, has been a leading voice in Parliament supporting greater Canada–US continental defence collaboration.⁷² Conversely, the likelihood of increased cooperation between Canadian and American forces has also invoked critical responses. When DND provided the press with details about the Planning Group and its mandate, Canada’s two national newspapers focused their attention on the possibility of American soldiers operating on Canadian soil. In *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, a headline read: “Deal would let U.S. troops operate in Canada.”⁷³ For its part the *National Post* proclaimed: “Terror fight may bring U.S. troops here.”⁷⁴

Foremost among the academic detractors of further continental defence collaboration is Michael Byers of Duke University. In his report, *Canadian armed forces under U.S. command*, Byers provides several cautionary warnings about Canadian involvement in an expanded joint continental defence with the United States. Most prominent among his warnings are the degradation of Canadian sovereignty and undue American influence in the foreign and defence policies of Canada. For Byers, the notion of American operational control of Canadian forces – foreseen by the Planning Group in the event of a cross-border aid to the civil power mission – is problematic. To be precise, Byers believes that the line between operational control and national command is too easily blurred. In fact, in his estimation, the distinction between operational control and command is merely an exercise in semantic logic.⁷⁵ With respect to the conduct of Canadian foreign policy, Byers contends the United States might also use the force requirements of continental defence to prevent Canada from engaging in unilateral endeavours which go against American policy aspirations, such as an airlift to Cuba. In opposing greater Canada–US defence cooperation, therefore, Byers and the Canadian press are recasting sovereignty apprehensions that have plagued Canadian participation in continental defence since its beginnings.

Ultimately, in light of Canada’s traditional response to continental defence, the arguments of Byers and other fervent Canadian nationalists were acknowledged but unheeded. Concerns about Canadian sovereignty and independence have given way to the close Canada–US defence relationship, the “defence against help” argument, and the presence of a common threat. As discussed, Canada and the United States have cooperated in defending the continent since the Basic Security Plan of 1946. Moreover, as NORAD and NATO demonstrate, threats to Canadian sovereignty resulting from military cooperation with the United States are generally exaggerated. Truthfully, the envisaged compromise of sovereignty goes both ways. As the possible deployment of the CF DART team shows, Canadian soldiers could find themselves on *American* soil. Similarly, the USN and RCN have been permitted to operate in each other’s waters and to share data since the formation of the CUSRPG. Furthermore, as has been the case since the declaration of the Kingston Dispensation, Canadian governments are keenly aware that they must contribute to the defence of North America, or they run the risk of having the United States shoulder the burden alone, usurping the final pillar of any national sovereignty: self-defence. Arguably, then, the true menace to Canadian sovereignty is not collaboration with the United States in defence of the continent; rather, it is an abstention from collaboration. Furthermore, as with a nuclear-capable Soviet Union, the threat posed by terrorist and criminal elements is perceived by DND and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as being as much a Canadian concern

as an American one. Finally, given the Chrétien government’s continuing participation in the War on Terrorism, it seems unlikely that the current, or future, Prime Minister will not reach a similar conclusion. Clearly, if these enemies are worthy of being pursued across the globe, they merit being defended against.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that NorthCom and the increased American interest in continental defence have had, and will have, a noticeable impact on Canadian national security policy. Geography and history present this as an incontrovertible reality. In many ways, the current Planning Group represents an evolution of the principles of the BSP. Both came about due to the emergence of a common threat and a recognition on the part of both Canada and the United States that North America cannot be effectively defended alone. Likewise, both agreements recognized the need to cooperate on land and at sea. Not unexpectedly, both initiatives also raised concerns about Canadian sovereignty. For its part, the BSP survived the scrutiny of guarded sovereignists. Thus far, the Planning Group appears to have done the same, though it is subject to review after its initial two-year mandate by both the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁶

A final point of consideration relates to the possible expansion or enlargement of the Planning Group. It is noteworthy to recall that the 1953 MSG, a planning group similar to the current one, led to the creation of NORAD, in spite of early misgivings by the St. Laurent government. At present, senior military officials in the United States are already suggesting the formation of a “naval NORAD.” Since the Planning Group is examining enhanced maritime and coastal defence cooperation, it is not inconceivable that a joint maritime command could be considered for this task. Indeed, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the NorthCom’s relations with the binational Planning Group could lead to a North American version of NATO Allied Command Europe, conducting binational land, sea, air defence and aid to the civil power operations on the continent.⁷⁷

Whatever the future of the Planning Group, the continued existence of NorthCom is not to be doubted. As long as the United States is committed to defending the North American continent, Canada will be compelled to work with its neighbour or face exclusion from decisions related to its own territorial defence. Consequently, though NorthCom is a uniquely American venture, its impact has been, and will be, truly *North American*.

Portions of this paper were first presented at the CDA Graduate Student Conference and the SMSS Conference in Calgary. The author would like to thank Dr. Joel Sokolsky, Dean of Arts at Royal Military College, for his guidance and advice.



“Recalling that the USN and Canadian Navy have a long tradition of cooperation dating back to the NATO CUSRPG, joint maritime continental defence would be nothing new.”

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