

### **LEARNING TO LOVE THE BOMB: CANADA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS DURING THE COLD WAR**

by Sean M. Maloney

Washington: Potomac Books, 2007  
471 + xxv pages, \$US 29.95  
ISBN 978-1-57488-616-0

Reviewed by Jessica Davis

Sean Maloney's eighth book marks a significant departure from his recent publications, which have dealt with the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. *Learning to Love the Bomb* is Dr. Maloney's PhD dissertation from Temple University turned into book form. This detailed chronicle of the Canadian acquisition of nuclear weapons presents several controversial arguments and an entirely new framework for understanding Canadian strategic policy. Dr. Maloney's work differs conceptually with other works in the field in that it presents the Canadian nuclear program as designed to influence both allies and enemies, and not as a way for Canada to serve American interests. In some ways, this work reinforces the existing canon on Canadian nuclear weapons. The author echoes Andrew Richter (*Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons, 1950-1963*) in showing the deep divisions between External Affairs and Defence, but differs significantly in his reading of Canada-US relations. While Richter argues that Canada stood by the US during the Cold War, Maloney argues that Canada antagonized the US at particularly dangerous times, such as during the Cuban missile crisis, and that Canada actively thwarted US attempts to arm Canadian forces with nuclear weapons, instead holding out for more control over the weapons.

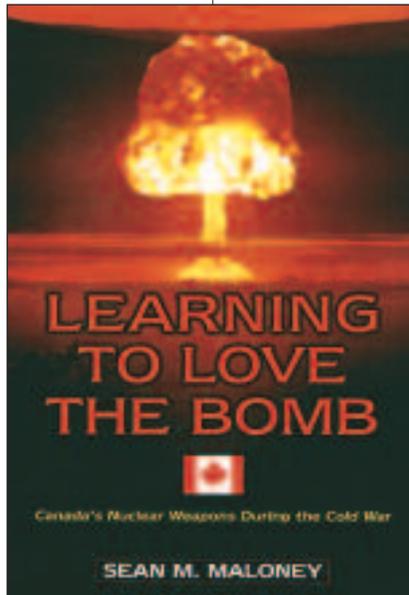
In 375 pages of text and 69 pages of notes that cover the period 1951 to 1964, Maloney reveals a notable amount of detail about the Canadian acquisition of nuclear weapons. He covers the political, military, social, and economic concerns of nuclear weapon acquisition, with an emphasis upon the interplay between the political and the military elements. His aim in writing this book was to make understandable Canadian nuclear weapons acquisition, shed light on previously unexamined sources, and dispel myths about Canada's role in the Cold War. In these endeavours, he succeeds admirably. Not only does he consult previously unexamined sources and present a comprehensive history

of Canada's acquisitions, he also puts forth a new framework for understanding Canada's role in the Cold War. Indeed, examining Canada's role was one of his secondary aims. While much has been written in Cold War history about the major powers, little work has been done on NATO's smaller and less powerful members. Maloney demonstrates convincingly that the Canadian acquisition of nuclear weapons was a deliberate choice, and that Canada played an important role in NATO's strategic deterrence system.

The story begins with the evolution of Canada's strategic policy, leading with the economic concerns that Canada faced in acquiring nuclear weapons. In order to be influential during the Cold War, Canada had to contribute to continental or European defence in a meaningful way, and many allies believed this could be done only with nuclear weapons. Of note, Canada had identified alliance warfare as the only viable option for defence. The lack of coordination that existed between Defence and External Affairs, and a lack of integration between the military force structures and foreign policy goals remain important themes throughout the work.

Preserving Canada's sovereignty is another major theme that weaves its way throughout the story of Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, in particular, was obsessed with the idea that Canada had to have control over all nuclear weapons stationed in Canada or attached to Canadian military units. This issue became a major stumbling block with respect to Canada's acquisition of nuclear weapons. It is on this issue, and in his descriptions of Diefenbaker's leadership style and handling of the nuclear weapons issue, that Dr. Maloney's dislike for Diefenbaker becomes palpable. Diefenbaker is described as obsessed with perceived threats to Canadian sovereignty and the idea that the Canadian people did not support the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

What becomes a major issue for Maloney is Canada's reluctance to meet its military obligations in NATO, as well as for the defence of North America. Further, he points out that opinion polls suggested the majority of Canadians were in favour of the acquisition of nuclear weapons. However, the main deterrent to Canada obtaining these nuclear weapons was a personal clash between President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Their dislike



## BOOK REVIEWS

for one another seriously delayed Canada's weapons acquisition, and, combined with reluctance on the part of External Affairs, it almost brought the issue to a complete halt. Further, Diefenbaker attempted to tie disarmament to Canadian nuclear weapons acquisition, which actually constituted a hypocritical and juvenile power play by the Canadian Government. The deterioration of Canada - US relations, domestic problems in Canada, and the worsening of geo-political stability prevented Canadian nuclear weapons from fully taking their place in the deterrent system. The clash between Diefenbaker and Kennedy came to a head when, during the Cuban missile crisis, Diefenbaker did not raise the alert level for Canada's armed forces. Shortly thereafter, Lester Pearson was elected to form a minority Liberal Government. Improved relations resulted with both the US and the UK, and, thereafter, Canada acquired its long-sought-after nuclear weapons.

Dr. Maloney's main arguments are a controversial reading of history, but he does manage to back those arguments with extensive and credible sourcing. He successfully demonstrates that the three pillars of Canadian strategic tradition (forward security, alliance warfare, and relative military autonomy) played a significant role in the acquisition process. In fact, those three pillars account for the majority of delays and negotiations surrounding the nuclear weapons debate. When viewed from that perspective, the Canadian acquisition of nuclear weapons, and the process that acquisition took, makes a certain amount of sense.

Less clear is his attempt to answer the question of how a smaller power formulates and obtains its strategic objectives while in alliance with great powers. However, this may not in fact be due to Dr. Maloney's scholarly work, and it may have more to do with the fact that Canada had a difficult time formulating and implementing those policies over successive governments. The struggle between the Liberals and Conservatives played a significant role in muddling this aspect of the process, something which Dr. Maloney valiantly attempts to tackle. Ultimately, it is never explained clearly how a smaller

power influences large and superpowers in a bipolar international system, particularly with respect to this historical example.

According to Dr. Maloney, Canada's national security policy was designed not only to influence Canada's enemies but also to influence Canada's allies. It certainly did so. Canada succeeded in obtaining what it wanted from the US (nuclear weapons on Canada's terms) while still able to play a role as a bit of an intermediary between the superpowers. Clearly illustrated in the conclusion is that the long-standing problems of creating a force structure to respond to the continually changing alliances and national strategic concepts were, and continue to be, problematic for Canada, and this is certainly not a problem that was left behind in the Cold War.

*Learning to Love the Bomb* is an extremely detailed tome replete with military details. It can become overwhelming for the reader, and it may, in fact, detract from the important and challenging arguments, since this reviewer believes that the real thrust of the arguments are sometimes lost in the detail. The real possibility exists that this work may be excluded from the small canon on Canadian nuclear weapons for this very reason – as Dr. Maloney admits, this book is really suitable only for people 'au fait' with military affairs.

By directly challenging the main thread of Canadian nuclear history, Dr. Maloney provides an important counterpoint to the majority of Canadian historians who paint Canada as a peaceful, anti-nuclear power. Instead, he points out that Canada deliberately went about obtaining nuclear weapons, an idea that the Canadian public supported, and that Canada was by no means an irrelevant power during the Cold War, but was an integral part of the NATO alliance system.

---

Jessica Davis, holds a Masters degree in War Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada.