

Excerpts of Debates of the Senate March 9, 2004

United States Missile Defence System

Motion Recommending Non-Participation-Debate Adjourned

Hon. Douglas Roche, pursuant to notice of February 26, 2004, moved:

That the Senate of Canada recommend that the Government of Canada not participate in the U.S.- sponsored Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system because:

1. It will undermine Canada's longstanding policy on the non-weaponization of space by giving implicit, if not explicit, support to U.S. policies to develop and deploy weapons in space;
2. It will destabilize the strategic environment and impede implementation of Article VI of the Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty;
3. It will not contribute to the security of Canadians, and Canadian non-participation will not diminish the importance of Canada-U.S. defence cooperation under NORAD in addressing genuine threats to Canadian security.

He said:

Honourable senators, the debate I am starting with this motion on Canada's possible participation in the U.S. ballistic missile defence system, known as BMD, deals with a matter of critical importance to Canada's role in building global security and the conditions for peace. I would have preferred that the debate in the Senate be launched by the government because it is the government, after all, that has the responsibility for Canada's security.

I urge the government to recognize that Canada's participation in BMD will undermine, if not destroy, Canada's policies on arms control and disarmament and the non-weaponization of space.

There are three principal reasons that I oppose participation in BMD. First, participation in BMD will constitute Canadian endorsement for the weaponization of space. The government has denied this, arguing that the system the U.S. will begin deploying later this year involves only ground- and sea-based missile interceptors. This is wrong. It involves much more. Ballistic missile defence is like a house. Ground- and sea-based interceptors are the first and second storeys. Space-based missile interceptors are the roof.

The U.S. Missile Defence Agency, charged with developing missile defence, is perfectly clear on this point. BMD will be an integrated system. The system is to involve a layered defence, capable of intercepting missiles in boost phase shortly after launch, in mid-course in space, and in terminal phase as they near the target. As a recent study by the American Physical Society pointed out, a land-based missile defence system will be incapable of intercepting missiles in boost phase launched from distant states. To account for this deficiency, the U.S. will have to deploy weapons in space.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Missile Defence Agency has requested funding for research in 2005 aimed at developing space-based weapons, with the stated intention of deploying a test bed in space in 2012. The deployment of such a test facility will smash the long cherished and widely held norm against weapons in space. Canadian involvement in the current missile defence program, which may include space research as early as next year, will be an endorsement of activities that directly counter Canada's policy on space weapons.

The government is not ignorant of U.S. intentions for missile defence. An internal report done by our Department of National Defence notes that a - ...significant risk associated with BMD...is its reinforcement of trends towards the weaponization of outer space. Despite these concerns, the government has not developed any contingency plans to guide Canadian policy once the United States consummates its desire to place weapons in space. Canadian officials argue that we can better influence U.S. policy if we are inside the missile defence tent. However, if we cannot extract an American guarantee not to weaponize space before agreeing to participate, how will we be able to obtain such a guarantee afterwards?

The letter from Defence Minister Pratt to U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explicitly recognizes that ballistic missile defence, and Canada's participation in it, will not remain limited to the system being deployed in 2004. Instead, Minister Pratt states that the BMD system: ...will evolve over time, and our bilateral cooperation in this area should also evolve. Thus, honourable senators, there will be no escaping the fact that participation in missile defence constitutes an endorsement of U.S. intentions to weaponize space. Second, BMD will destabilize the strategic environment and impede implementation of Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which calls for negotiations to eliminate all nuclear weapons. While some argue that a shield to defend against missile attacks is a purely defensive measure, this ignores the predictable reactions of other states to the deployment of this shield. BMD is intended only to protect against accidental launches from other nuclear powers such as Russia and China, or missile attacks from U.S. adversaries with limited nuclear capability. To preserve a nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis the United States, these states will have to maintain an arsenal capable of defeating BMD.

Indeed, for China and Russia, this means either overwhelming missile defences by having more missiles than BMD has interceptors, or developing missiles capable of evading the interceptors altogether. Russian research on BMD countermeasures resulted in a successful test of a new missile just last month, leading a senior Russian military official to declare: We have proven that it's possible to develop weapons that would make any missile defence useless. For its part, China is expanding its current arsenal of approximately 20 missiles capable of hitting the U.S. to 30 by 2005, and possibly 60 by 2010.

We see, then, that BMD will encourage Russia and China to put their nuclear weapons on high alert, increasing the likelihood of an accidental launch of the kind BMD is intended to protect against. Increased Chinese deployments could also force India to upgrade its own nuclear capability.

What does all of this mean? Instead of decreasing nuclear arsenals and making progress toward the comprehensive elimination of nuclear weapons, as called for under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, states uncomfortable with U.S. dominance of nuclear war-fighting are forced to maintain or increase current arsenals and focus research on developing countermeasures to BMD.

This has led the noted American defence analyst, Dr. Bruce Blair, of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, to declare: ...every [BMD interceptor] missile in the ground will be another nail in the coffin of nuclear disarmament. Even the Canadian Department of Defence has recognized this problem, noting that "BMD could also increase the risk of further proliferation of missile technologies and weapons of mass destruction."

Such an effect runs directly counter to the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda that Canada has traditionally supported. Just as with the weaponization of space, Canada faces a clear choice with respect to disarmament: either participate in BMD and accept current or higher global levels of nuclear weapons, or distance itself from the U.S. missile defence programs and continue to work internationally to decrease nuclear arsenals.

Honourable senators, my third point is this: BMD will not contribute to the security of Canadians, and Canadian non-participation will not undermine Canada-U.S. defence cooperation under NORAD in addressing other threats to continental security. This is extremely important, since the government has said it will base its decision on BMD primarily on whether it will protect Canadians. As has already been noted, BMD makes accidental missile launches more likely. Does it afford any protection against missiles once they are in the air?

The simple answer is, "No, it does not." While much is made of the upcoming deployment of BMD, the system has not yet been shown to actually work. The U.S. Congress General Accounting Office examined the 10 key technologies on which the effectiveness of BMD depends, and concluded last year that prototypes have been successfully tested for only two of these, and no tests of the system as a whole have yet even been made possible.

While offering no protection to North America from ballistic missile attacks, the very deployment of the system has the effect of increasing the likelihood of an attack in the first place. It is not difficult to see that this means less security for Canadians, not more.

Another argument advanced for participation in BMD is that if Canada does not have a seat at the table, the U.S. will either eliminate or marginalize the role of NORAD in continental defence cooperation, opting instead to defend North America without Canadian input. However, Canada already has a seat at dozens of defence-related tables, including the newly created binational planning group, at which we can advance our views about BMD. Such an argument also ignores the reason that the United States cooperates with Canada in defence in the first place: Simply put, it is in the U.S. interest to do so. The fact that we share a common border and maritime approaches means that neither the U.S. nor Canada can effectively provide for its own defence without cooperation from the other.

The United States recognizes the importance of defence cooperation with Canada. Far from marginalizing NORAD, the Pentagon has suggested expanding cooperation to encompass coordination on land and sea in addition to the air defences currently serviced by NORAD.

NORAD is not a function of American charity. It is, instead, a rational response to the ongoing needs of Canada and the U.S. to coordinate continental defence, and will continue to be in the interests of both countries irrespective of the position Canada takes on missile defence.

Honourable senators, I thank you for your attention and conclude with this observation. I ask you to consider that I am not standing alone in my opposition to BMD. Important voices and votes show the rising concern that Canada not make a terrible mistake. Thirty Liberal MPs in

the House of Commons voted against Canada continuing discussions on, let alone participating in, missile defence.

A round table of prominent figures who met recently in Ottawa urged Canada to stay out of BMD. A new Canada-wide coalition of concerned Canadians is being formed. Several important and highly respected bodies, such as the Liu Institute for Global Issues, Project Ploughshares, the Canadian Pugwash Group and the Middle Powers Initiative have all called for Canada to work for nuclear disarmament, instead of undermining it by participating in BMD.

Washington's ardour for an unworkable defence in pursuit of a delusionary Fortress North America may well wane after the 2004 presidential election as costs climb and technology falters. Indeed, the rush to deploy an untested system has also led prospective presidential nominee John Kerry to oppose the early deployment of BMD undertaken by President Bush.

Honourable senators, let Canada stay with global values for peace and work for a world in which everyone can find security.

On motion of Senator Cordy, debate adjourned.