

The future of NORAD and Canada's role. New School of Public Policy report

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Calgary – Most Canadians probably understand that NORAD — the North American Aerospace Defense Command — is an operational military alliance between the U.S. and Canada that has been protecting the two countries from aerial attack and invasion since the Cold War. What few of them likely realize is that NORAD is just as much about protecting Canada from the United States.

Today, The School of Public Policy with CGAI and author Michael Dawson released a report providing a historical overview of NORAD, its political context and Canada's future commitment to it.

According to Dawson "Given the massive imbalance in military power between the two countries, and the determination by the U.S. to defend its own soil at all costs, NORAD provides Canada with a means to have some control over its own territorial defence, neutralizing the threat that the U.S. will impose its own defence on Canada. Throughout its 60- year existence, NORAD has been Canada's "defence against help. But that defence isn't guaranteed. As NORAD evolves, Canada's commitment to it must evolve, too. If there comes a point at which the United States believes that the alliance is no longer sufficiently securing its northern frontier, it may forge its own path and impose its own defence plans for Canada, on Canada. There are already areas where the relationship may be starting to strain.'

One key policy inflection point occurred after 9/11 when Canada declined to participate in the U.S. missile-defence program. This has led to an awkward situation where Canadian officers and troops participate in missile-warning activities within NORAD's structure, but cannot participate in missile-defence activities outside NORAD's structure.

Whether the Canadian government likes it or not, NORAD must adapt to a renewed emphasis on early warning and attack assessments. To date, Canada has, somewhat inexplicably, continued to refuse to participate with the U.S. in continental missile defence. It has also dithered at length over the procurement of badly needed new fighter jets that are key to enhancing North American security under NORAD. As the North Warning System (NWS) approaches obsolescence, a decision on its replacement must soon be made by the two governments The U.S. is watching Canada's commitment closely.

The alliance will not survive merely on the nostalgia for its Cold War record. Canada will be expected to do its part for NORAD in the current context, or the U.S. will do whatever it takes to ensure its own defence, regardless of Canada's sovereignty. There may soon come a moment where Canada has no choice but to step up on continental missile defence and equipping its forces. Otherwise it may risk the end of an alliance that has not only protected North America, but has defended Canada against U.S. help.

The paper can be downloaded at <https://www.policyschool.ca/publications/>

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