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# Missile defense goes global

## It's time for Canada to join the IMD team

*Alan W. Dowd*

IN 2005, after then-Prime Minister Paul Martin decided Canada would not participate in the US-led international missile defense system (IMD), Washington moved ahead without Ottawa, as expected. What was less expected, perhaps, was the very different reaction Washington's missile defense plans received in other allied capitals—and the wide-ranging progress missile defense has made.

Missile defense advocates can be thankful that the IMD coalition didn't wait on Canada.

### Yesterday

BEFORE recapping IMD's progress since Martin politely rebuffed President George W. Bush, it pays to recall some of the history that preceded Martin's surprising reversal.

Some critics of IMD—in both Canada and the United States—believe it was Bush who forced the issue and pushed missile defense from the realm of theory into the arena of international politics. In fact, this shift began in the late 1990s, after a Congressional commission raised a number of warnings about ballistic missile threats and, as if on cue, North Korea test-fired a three-stage rocket. President Bill Clinton then signed legislation that paved the way for deploying a system “as soon as is technologically feasible” to defend against “limited ballistic missile attack” (National Missile Defense Act of 1999).

Clinton's critics say he could have done more, which is true. But he also

could have done much less. In the end, he followed the Hippocratic Oath when it came to missile defense: he did no harm.

By endorsing missile defense, Clinton reflected the emergence of broad agreement in the US on the issue. As General Henry Obering, director of the United States Missile Defense Agency (MDA), observes, today's missile defense program is the product of four administrations, 11 Congresses, and \$115 billion in US investment (Obering, 2008a).

Thanks in part to this convergence of opinion on missile defense, Bush was able to accelerate the program. First, he notified Moscow of America's intentions to scrap the anachronistic Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. He promised to slash America's nuclear arsenal from 6,000 warheads to 1,700 and assured the Russians that IMD would not upset the US-Russia deterrent balance. At the time, Vladimir Putin agreed, albeit less than wholeheartedly, concluding that Washington's decision “does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation” (*BBC News*, 2001, Dec. 14).

Then Bush began to build the IMD coalition.

In February 2003, the British government agreed to needed upgrades of ground-based radar stations in the United Kingdom. Denmark soon approved similar upgrades at radar and satellite-tracking stations in Greenland.

Tokyo had been cooperating quietly with Washington on missile defense since the late 1990s. But it was not until February 2003 that Japan's Defense Agency announced its intention to join the US military for missile defense tests

in and around Hawaii. In December 2003 then-Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi gave military officials the go-ahead for construction of a Japanese missile defense system, in close partnership with the United States.

Word of Australia's participation in the IMD coalition also came in December 2003 (Dobell, 2003, Dec. 5). The United States and Australia signed a 25-year pact on missile defense cooperation in 2004.

It was also in 2004 that Ottawa formally notified Washington of its desire to participate in the blossoming missile defense program. Citing “the growing threat involving proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction,” Canadian defense minister David Pratt informed his US counterpart that the Martin government envisioned “a mutually beneficial framework to ensure the closest possible involvement ... in the US missile defense program” (Pratt, 2004). That same year, Ottawa ordered Canadian personnel at the North American Aerospace Command to share missile-launch information with their US counterparts (Struck, 2005, Feb. 25).

But then Martin had a change of heart, and Canada backed out in 2005. It was not exactly a profile in courage. As the *Globe and Mail* editorialized, “When Mr. Martin put his finger in the air over missile defense, he felt a chill” (Struck, 2005, Feb. 25).

In a recent Fraser Institute report, Alexander Moens, Sean McCarthy, and Cassandra Florio concluded that “Canada worsened the situation by delaying its decision and eventually refusing to take any responsibility for cost-free participa-

tion in ballistic missile defense” (Moens et al., 2007: 3). As Moens and Barry Cooper explained in an earlier study, the costs to Canada of participating in the missile defense program would have been low—“a near free ride”—and the benefits high (Moens and Cooper, 2005).

“The Bush administration had asked for little more than moral support for the new system,” as the *New York Times* observed (Krauss, 2005, Feb. 27). But Martin lacked the political capital to provide even that.

Then-official opposition leader Stephen Harper criticized Martin’s decision at the time, and during his first bid for prime minister raised the possibility of reopening talks with Washington on missile defense. As prime minister, Harper has hinted at his support for the program, noting, as the Associated Press reported in 2007, that he recognizes the need for “a modern and flexible defense system” against missile threats (AP, 2007, Mar. 5).

But trying to corral a minority government has pushed missile defense to the bottom of Harper’s inbox. The result: Harper’s hopes remain in a holding pattern and Canada remains on the sidelines.

It’s worth noting that other voices in Canada have expressed support for missile defense. In 2006, for instance, the defense committee of the Canadian Senate endorsed participation in the IMD program, with a note of common sense. “If there is the tiniest chance that it could [work], why would we turn up our noses at the opportunity to be a partner in this project?” a committee report asked (*CBC News*, 2006, Oct. 5).

## Today

WE can debate IMD’s chances for success, but one thing is certain: the chances that a rogue missile attack or accidental missile launch will occur are growing.

Three decades ago, there were nine countries that possessed ballistic missiles.

Today, there are 32 (Arms Control Association, 2007). As many as 12 of them are unfriendly, unstable, or uncertain about their relationship with the West.<sup>1</sup> With twin terror programs that seek to match rockets with nuclear weapons, North Korea and Iran top this list.

In July, Obering reported, “Iran orchestrated launches of several short- and medium-range ballistic missiles capable of striking Israel and the US bases in the Middle East” (Obering, 2008b).

Once deployed, Iran’s latest variant of the Shahab rocket will be able to hit targets in southern Europe and across the Middle East. The Defense Intelligence Agency estimates that “Iran could have an ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] capable of reaching the United States by 2015,” Obering notes, ominously adding, “We should not assume that we have full understanding of ballistic missile activities around the world. We have been surprised in the past” (Obering, 2008a).

That brings us to the current regime in North Korea. Over the past decade, Pyongyang has test-fired long-range rockets and detonated a nuclear weapon, surprising Western intelligence agencies on both occasions. This September, we learned that North Korea conducted tests on rocket engines for a newer long-range missile and constructed a new facility for ICBM tests—and launches (Hess, 2008, Sep. 10; Harden, 2008, Sep. 17).

Yet if proliferation gives us reason to worry, IMD’s important strides this year offer reason for hope.

On the diplomatic front, NATO officially endorsed the IMD system during its summit in Bucharest earlier this year. No longer noncommittal on missile defense, the alliance now envisions a “NATO-wide missile defense architecture” that will extend “coverage to all Allied territory and populations not otherwise covered by the United States system” (NATO, 2008).

In August, Poland and the United States agreed on deployment of inter-

ceptor missiles on Polish soil. The bed of interceptors will work in tandem with a new radar facility in the neighboring Czech Republic.

To prepare Moscow for this eventuality, US officials held 10 formal IMD discussions with their Russian counterparts in 2006 and 2007. Washington even offered to allow Russian personnel to be stationed at IMD facilities in Central Europe.

However, Moscow was not pleased with the deal. “Poland,” warned Russian General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, “is exposing itself to a strike” (AP, 2008, Aug. 15). Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov called the basing of US interceptors in Poland “a threat to Russia’s security” (AP, 2008, Sep. 11).

To cut through all of Moscow’s bluster, consider an everyday example: few of us would think of a cop wearing a bullet-proof vest as threatening, but most of us would consider a gunman loading his weapon as provocative and threatening.

The gunman that the IMD coalition is worried about is not in Moscow, and the bullet-proof vest offered by IMD is not designed to neutralize Russian missiles. Putin and his generals know this.

It pays to recall that, due to both the placement of the system and the number of Russian missiles, IMD elements in Poland could never defend against Russia’s arsenal. “Ten interceptors in Poland could absolutely not match the hundreds of interceptors and thousands of warheads that the Russians have deployed,” Obering observes (2008b).

Plus, as an MDA report explains, “There would not be sufficient time to detect, track, and intercept” Russian missiles launched toward North America using the radars and interceptors planned for Central Europe (MDA, 2007: 8).

## Tomorrow

BEYOND Europe, Washington and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) an-

nounced plans late this year to cooperate on the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD). It will be America's first THAAD sale (Wolf, 2008, Sep. 8), and the UAE seems like an ideal candidate. Sitting just across the Persian Gulf from Ahmadinejad's Iran, the UAE would be a prime target for Iranian missiles in a time of hostilities. According to the US State Department, the UAE "hosts more US Navy ships than any port outside the US" (US Department of State, 2007).

On the capabilities front, the airborne laser (ABL) was successfully tested in September 2008 aboard its demonstrator aircraft (though not yet in the air; that will come next year). Mounted on a 747, the ABL will be able to loiter just outside enemy territory and intercept missile threats long before they enter allied airspace.

Those threats that the ABL cannot thwart will be engaged by a growing number of sea-based and ground-based assets. There are already 15 Aegis warships equipped with SM-3 interceptor missiles, and three more are set to be deployed by the end of 2008. We glimpsed the real-world capabilities of these ships in February 2008, when the USS *Lake Erie* intercepted a falling satellite—traveling 17,000 mph 150 miles above the earth—with an SM-3.

In addition to naval assets, there will be 30 ground-based interceptors at US sites by the end of the year. By 2011, the United States will have 44 interceptors at US sites, and 10 more in Europe by 2012-13 (Obering, 2008a). "None of this existed just four years ago," Obering is quick to remind us (2008b).

To be sure, the missile defense system has failed tests from time to time. But no weapons system is perfect. Since 2001, IMD assets have scored successes on 35 of 43 hit-to-kill intercepts (Obering 2008b), or 81.39% of the time. The United States Missile Defense Agency is

deploying new radar systems to enhance IMD's ability to distinguish between warheads and decoys, improving the odds of success.

The critics latch on to this as a reason to de-fund or downgrade the program, knowing that defining success as a 100% intercept rate makes "failure" inevitable. But what future president or prime minister would prefer a zero-percent chance of deflecting an inbound missile over an 81% chance, 50% chance, or even a 20% chance?

No less than 18 nations are partnering with Washington on IMD (Obering, 2008b). The IMD roster includes the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, Israel, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, South Korea, Ukraine, Taiwan, and India (MDA, 2008).

It's time for Canada to rethink its ill-considered policy on this issue and join the IMD team.

### Note

1 These include Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Russia, Syria, Vietnam, and Yemen; not all of these nations currently possess long-range missiles.

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