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n-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

Canadian-U.S. Conflicts

By Tanaka Sakai

EVEN CANADA IS LEAVING AMERICA'S SIDE

Recently, not only are countries in Latin America parting ways with the United States, so too is its northern neighbor, Canada. On February 24, 2005, Canada's Prime Minister, Paul Martin, announced that Canada would no longer participate in the Ballistic Missile Defense agreement (or the BMD, the anti-ballistic missile defense system organized by the United States for the defense of the U.S. and North America). This decision repudiates parts of the NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) agreement which Canada accepted in 2004.

Martin's announcement touches on a sensitive issue that has rankled the relationship between the two nations ever since the Cold War: if the United States is attacked by a missile, in order to intercept it, it must be shot down over Canada (depending, of course, on the origin). Until now, Canada has been supportive of this. Martin's announcement, however, which appears to question this long-standing policy, has sparked national debate. Former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien did not support Washington's decision to go to war in Iraq. Since then, Canadian-American relations have faltered. In an effort to mend fences, and wishing to build closer ties with the United States, Martin supported the White House decision on Iraq after taking office in December 2003.

However, with the problems and failures of the U.S. occupation of Iraq -- to say nothing of the Bush administration's international misconduct -- anti-Bush sentiment has grown strong among Canadians. Canadians feel that cooperating with the United States in the Ballistic Missile Defense system is supporting global U.S. imperialism. Martin's decision to withdraw from the BMD agreement simply reflects strong Canadian sentiment at this time.[1] And with the United States implying that invasions of Iran and Syria might be imminent, criticisms of the Bush administration are sharply increasing in Canada. With more than half the members of Martin's own Liberal party at odds with Washington, in order to avert a collapse of the government, Martin had to take an anti-American stance.

THE U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM HAS LITTLE EFFECTIVENESS

Another reason why Ottawa finally decided to opt out of the BMD program could be related to the system's apparent ineffectiveness. In October and December of 2003, the U.S. Army tested its interceptors by trying to shoot down missiles over Alaska fired from the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific. Both times, however, the interceptor missiles failed to ignite. Although the military said that the reason for the failures were very minor software glitches, it is assumed that they were caused by the highly complex way the interceptor missile system operates.

Today's incoming ballistic missiles launch inflated balloons as decoys. Thus, an interceptor missile has to distinguish the warhead from the decoys when attempting to shoot down an incoming missile. According to MIT professor Ted Postol, the changing paths and spatial orientation of decoys and warheads are indistinguishable as they fall through the near vacuum of the upper atmosphere. Thus, there are few clues to help an interceptor missile decide which is the real payload and which are diversions. Yet the White House continues to claim that interceptors have a 99.9 percent success rate in making these judgments, contradicting the report of one of the Defense Department's own contractors, TRW.

Although Dr. Postol had previously sent a letter of concern to President Clinton's chief of staff John Podesta in May 2000, his warnings were ignored.[2] Furthermore, although Dr. Postol's letter did not include any secret information, the White House classified it as a secret document and tried to prevent him from even talking about it, despite the fact that the letter was distributed all over the internet.[3]

Even knowing of these problems, the U.S. has continued to fund the anti-ballistic missile defense program. After the Bush administration took office, the system has been aggressively pushed. In 2003 alone, the administration spent almost ten billion dollars on it. In spite of the two previous failures, the White House is planning to test the system again in October. Currently there are eight interceptors in silos (six in Alaska and two in California).[4]

RUSSIA'S NEW MISSILE AND THE U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAM

Although the U.S. Senate has begun to doubt the effectiveness of the BMD system, there has yet to be a test conducted along the lines pointed out by Ted Postol on the ability to distinguish decoys from warheads in the upper atmosphere. Such tests are scheduled for sometime in the future.

Meanwhile, in 2003 Russia built a new missile -- the SS27 Tobol M -- which apparently cannot be destroyed by current missile tracking systems. There are three ways to destroy incoming ballistic missiles: (1) shoot down the missile with interceptors soon after take off, before it reaches the upper atmosphere, (2) shoot down the missile with interceptors as it flies in the upper atmosphere, (3) use laser beams instead of interceptors to shoot down the missile. According to a Russian press conference on the SS27 Tobol M, it has been designed to reach its flight ceiling fast enough to avoid being destroyed soon after launch; it also carries more decoys than previous Russian missiles, and its body is made to withstand the impact of laser beams.[5]

Russia states that this missile involves no new technology, but just modifies models used during the Cold War. And here lies the problem: Since it is always much easier to make existing missiles stronger rather than develop a new technology, it is in fact, almost impossible for the U.S. to develop a new defense system to overcome ever-improving existing missiles, regardless of its economic advantage over an opponent. The U.S. Senate, which supported Bush's missile defense initiative until recently, cut the BMD budget for the 2006 fiscal year.[6]

FAILURES OF THE PATRIOT MISSILES IN THE GULF WARS

Doubts about American missile defense effectiveness are due not only to BMD problems; it seems that America's smaller Patriot missiles are almost useless. In fact, the main reason why the Pentagon so disliked Postol is that he publicized the failure of Patriot missiles to shoot down Iraqi Scuds in the first Gulf War. During the first Gulf War, American TV broadcasters reported almost daily on the use of Patriot missiles by the United States. After Dr. Postol analyzed these TV reports he found that half of the total Patriots used during the Gulf War -- forty missiles -- hit no Scuds at all.[7]

In response, the Pentagon -- which initially boasted that over ninety percent of the Patriots hit their targets, responded that "It is impossible to determine the number of hits through TV images." However, when the Government Accounting Office -- the research arm of the U.S. Congress -- later investigated, the Pentagon reduced its earlier claim of a ninety percent success rate to sixty percent. Furthermore, in private conversations, many Pentagon officials admitted that most Patriots failed to hit their targets.

Nor is that all. During the 2003 Iraq invasion, American Patriots missiles shot down three American and British fighter planes in separate incidents, killing three airmen by friendly fire.[8]

Japan is also co-developing a missile defense system with America. However, I recently heard a well-known Japanese military expert express doubts that interceptor missiles can hit incoming missile warheads. I assume that Japanese military specialists know how unreliable the U.S. missile defense system is, but remain silent since Japan is involved in developing it.

CANADA, PARTING WAYS WITH THE UNITED STATES, EXPANDS ITS OWN MILITARY

For some time the Canadian government, and not only the Japanese military, has been aware that the American anti-ballistic missile defense system was unreliable. The Pentagon practiced some outrageous manipulation of intelligence to boost military budgets in the 1970s (often crafted by the so-called Team B, a group of defense experts associated with the Committee on the Present Danger). For example, during this period of the Cold War the Pentagon flagrantly and deliberately overestimated Soviet military capabilities to increase the budget. Some of those involved in this budget scam include many of today's most prominent administration Neoconservatives, including Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld.[9]

Japan and Canada have long been involved in developing missile defense systems with the United States in part because the economic and military benefits are so great. Thus, they have ignored the negative reports about the American missiles, and have supported the American position. Eighty percent of Canadian exports go to the United States and forty percent of its GDP is dependent on trade with the U.S. Since 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began, Canada and America became even more strongly interconnected, both economically and militarily. Last fall, Canadian financiers insisted that the Martin administration cooperate with the United States on the BMD program, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong military and economic ties to the United States.[10]

After Paul Martin announced that Canada would not participate in the BMD program, Ottawa sent the House of Commons a record-breaking military budget. Still, some left wing Canadians claim that this hardly demonstrates Canada's military independence. While the American BMD system is not being supported, Canada is still buying massive amounts of arms from the American producers. In other words, dependence continues. I disagree with such an opinion, however. Canada did not support the U.S. missile defense system financially. Rather, its support was political and diplomatic. Canada also provided intelligence support.[11] Thus, it seems to me that like France and Germany, Canada has recognized the danger posed to its allies by the U.S. military. Therefore, instead of aligning itself with the U.S., Canada should join the ranks of the "anti-U.S. confederation" and prepare to defend itself by itself.

FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND TRADE FRICTIONS

Canada-U.S. economic frictions are also increasing. Last year, the U.S. charged that Canada dumped lumber, and added a twenty percent import surcharge on Canadian wood. When Canada took legal action before the World Trade Organization, it ruled in Canada's favor.[12]

Canada and the United States have clashed over other trade issues, like mad cow disease. In 2003, based on a U.S. report which claimed that mad cow disease was found on some imported beef raised in Canada, the United States prohibited the import of cattle from Canada. Although the Bush administration wants to ease trade friction between the two countries, the U.S. Congress has refused to relax import restrictions. There seems to be no immediate solution to this problem.[13] Other sources of trade friction between the two countries include wheat subsidies. If economic and diplomatic relations between the two nations do not improve, the free trade system of NAFTA will be reduced to insignificance.[14]

Lately, the U.S. Congress has been heeding advice from the economic "hawks" even more than the White House. For instance, after Japan and South Korea stopped importing American beef because of the threat of mad cow disease, Congress threatened diplomatic consequences if they did not resume importing U.S. beef. Congress also claimed that China was dumping textiles and seafood in the U.S. and proposed placing an excise tax on these Chinese goods. Congress is also thinking about taking counteraction in response to the renewal of arm sales to China by the EU.

Considering all these false allegations, it seems to me that the United States cares little about maintaining good diplomatic relations with other nations. Prior to the Iraq invasion, the U.S. did not project such a bad image to the rest of the world as it does today. But considering both the decline of the dollar and the current situation of Iraq, of the U.S. appears more and more like a paper tiger, with isolationism increasing beneath its aggressive pose. With these political and economic global realignments, Canada has no choice but to reconsider its relationship with the United States.

TAKING TIME TO SHIFT DIRECTIONS

Since Canada is a member of the British Commonwealth, it is possible for it to develop closer relations with the EU if it distances itself from the United States. However, trade between Canada and the EU is just one tenth that with the United States; thus, it is almost impossible for Canada to choose to develop closer relations with Europe at the expense of the United States.[15]

Another option for Canada is that since it is located along the Pacific Rim, it might try to develop stronger relations with Asia. However, it will take time for Canada to strengthen its ties with Asia at a time when nations such as Japan are themselves reevaluating their relationship with the United States. Also, Canada is geographically distant from Asia.

Not only Canada and countries in Central and South America, but also many other nations in the world have started to keep their distance from the United States; some are even considering joining the anti-American camp. Even nations such as the UK and Australia, which sent troops in support of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, are moving closer to the EU rather than the United States. For example, Britain is cooperating with the EU on the problem of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. And Australia is siding with the EU on the export of weapons to China, suggesting that a EU-China alliance may be more important to Australia than its relationship with the United States.

Notes

[1] http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1108163415275

[2] the complete text of the letter can be found at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2000/10/30/6011/main245366.shtml>

[3] http://www.fas.org/spp/starwars/program/news00/posto1_051100.html

[4] <http://www.spacewar.com/2005/050215203121.6db3qiae.html>

- [5] <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0104/p09s02-coop.html>
- [6] <http://www.spacedaily.com/news/bmdo-05f.html>
- [7] <http://www.estarwars.net/tedpostal.htm>
- [8] <http://jang.com.pk/thenews/mar2005-daily/06-03-2005/world/w5.htm>
- [9] <http://tanakanews.com/d1214neocon.htm>
- [10] <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/nov2004/cana-n11.shtml>
- [11] http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1109187593182_13
- [12] <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/mar2005/cana-m07.shtml>
- [13] <http://www.cbc.ca/story/business/national/2005/01/14/softwood-050114.html>
- [14] <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/mar2005/cana-m07.shtml>
- [15] http://www.rfa.org/english/news/business/2005/03/16/china_textiles
- [16] <http://www.caltradereport.com/eWebPages/front-page-1110259353.html>

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