

*'Defence Against Help' Revisiting a Primary Justification
for Canadian Participation in Continental Defence with the
United States*

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Nils Ørvik first identified the concept of *defence against help* as a security “strategy for small states” in the early 1970s. To avoid unwanted “help” from large neighbours, he posited, smaller countries had to establish and maintain military credibility:

even a very small force might be fully credible, provided its objectives are within the limits of its capabilities. One credible objective for small states would be, while not attempting military resistance against a large neighbour, to persuade him that they are strong enough to defend themselves against any of the large neighbour’s potential enemies. This could help to avoid the actual military presence of the great neighbour on one’s territory for reasons of military ‘help’ and assistance.¹

¹ Nils Ørvik, “Defence Against Help – A Strategy for Small States?” *Survival* 15, 5 (1973): p. 228.

Geostrategic interdependence meant that the larger power actually posed a sovereignty and security threat to the smaller neighbour, because it would take whatever actions it deemed necessary to protect its own interests by “helping its neighbour,” with or without the smaller state’s consent. Therefore, acting out of its own self-interest, the small state should adopt a broad national defence policy to diminish the likelihood of unsolicited military assistance on or over its territory and adjacent waters. Ørvik’s initial concept was devised based upon the Scandinavian example of non-aligned states (most notably the Soviet-Finnish case), but he suggested that the concept might have applicability in the Canadian case.

In its classic incarnation, the concept of *defence against help* thus represents a trilateral equation, consisting of an external threat (or threatening context), a smaller state (the security of which is inextricably linked to the perceived security of a larger neighbour), and the neighbouring larger power itself. The equation incorporates how the threat relates to the larger state, and how the smaller state plays (or does not play) an intermediary role in the threat relationship between the threatening context and the larger state. The smaller state’s policy decisions are determined by how and what the larger state perceives as threats; whether the smaller state’s territory, airspace, or maritime zones can play a potential role in offsetting or meeting the threat; and whether the smaller state can feasibly provide adequate defences and sustain military credibility to ensure that the larger power does not infringe on its sovereignty in meeting perceived security threats. Although two powers may share common basic values and definitions of the threat, the normative assumption is that it is always in the smaller power’s national interest to be a sovereign state. Therefore, the smaller state’s national sovereignty concerns can confound the interdependent nature of the security relationship between neighbouring powers in the face of an external threat.

In a 1981 paper framing how *defence against help* represented one of the fundamental tenets in post-Second World War Canadian foreign policy, Donald Barry articulated that:

One of the most frequently debated questions in Canadian defence policy vis-à-vis the U.S. is the extent to which the military actually serves Canada’s national security interests. Because Canada’s physical safety is guaranteed by the U.S., which it does so voluntarily out of concern for its own security, and the huge disparity in the capabilities of the two countries, many

observers have concluded that Canada attempts to sustain a credible military posture and participates in North American defence for non-security reasons [particularly diplomatic credit]... Indeed some commentators have taken the extreme view that since Canada's security is assured it ought to take a "free ride," to abandon its participation in North American defence and redirect its military and diplomatic priorities elsewhere.²

He cautioned, however, that these interpretations of the American security guarantee were fundamentally flawed. A conceptual framework for Canadian policy had to recognize the interdependent nature of North American security, whereby the United States' safety was dependent on Canadian territory and airspace. Following this logic, he reasoned that "Canada cannot, consistent with its own national security interests, ignore the requirements of U.S. security nor can it easily isolate itself from the consequences of American strategic policy decisions." Therefore, in response to this security dilemma, Canadian defence policy aimed to establish military credibility to both deter possible external threats and to maximize its security interests vis-à-vis the United States.³

Canada's alignment to the United States did not detract from the value of the concept to its decision-making; it bolstered it. A smaller state can invoke the strategy of *defence against help* in two ways: unilaterally (with or without coordination with the larger state), or conjointly with the larger state. Barry identified that this logic partly explained Canada's decision to conclude formalized, bilateral defence arrangements with the United States. Policymakers in Ottawa paid considerable attention to perceived American encroachments on its sovereignty in the name of security, and thus devised conscious policies to mitigate possible demands from the US while also accruing additional benefits from the bilateral defence association. Through conjoint initiatives, Canadian officials established ground rules for American security activities on Canadian territory. Although Barry demonstrated that the Canada consistently employed 'defence against help' in its security policy vis-à-vis the United States since

² Donald Barry, "The United States in Canadian Security Policy: Defence Against Help" (paper prepared for the annual meeting of the Western Social Science Association, San Diego, 23-25 April 1981), p. 1.

³ Barry, "The United States in Canadian Security Policy," pp. 1-2. For an updated version of his ideas, see Barry and Duane Bratt. "Defense Against Help: Explaining Canada-US Security Relations." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38/1 (2008): pp. 63-89.

the 1930s, he also suggested that the effectiveness of the strategy in protecting Canada's interests was inconclusive.⁴

In a *Canadian Defence Quarterly* article that same year, Nils Ørvik felt confident enough in his theory (and its effectiveness) to boldly proclaim that 'defence against help' constituted "the basic issue in Canadian national security." He lamented Canada's tendency to pragmatically pursue short-term defence policy objectives, rooted in specific issues like the choice of certain weapons systems, rather than focusing on the development of a long-term, cohesive military purpose. In his view, *defence against help* offered "a more explicitly expressed rationale for our defence policy, an agreed framework of principles and basic assumptions which may guide us in the more detailed what-where-and-how decisions." Given the helpful, but ominous, role which the United States played in Canada's national security due to strategic interdependence, Ørvik thought that the concept justified a stronger Canadian Armed Forces better prepared "to defend our part of the continent, [and to lessen] the probability of unrequested American help."⁵

Does *defence against help* continue to represent a workable, basic decision-making strategy for Canada to ensure continental defence in the 21st century? Building upon observations that I initially drew in a 2000 working paper, I maintain that the concept no longer represents an attractive or viable justification for core Canadian strategic decision-making. Rather than conceptualizing United States continental defence priorities as a threat to Canada's sovereignty (as it is conventionally defined in military and diplomatic circles) owing to potential territorial encroachment to protect the American heartland, cost-benefit analysis of Canadian options should focus on the benefits that Canada derives from its bilateral and binational defence partnership. Instead (and in contrast to some recent commentators), I suggest that the driving strategic consideration since the late 1980s has been less about *defence against help* than about the need for Canada to contribute meaningfully to bilateral defence in order to *stay in the game* and secure *a piece of the action*. Current proclamations that the North American "homeland is no longer a sanctuary" suggest, on a superficial level at least,

⁴ Barry, "The United States in Canadian Security Policy," pp. 3, 20-21.

⁵ Nils Ørvik, "The Basic Issue in Canadian National Security," pp. 8-15. Ørvik saw no contradiction between defending against help and helping to defend others, so long as both were based upon long-term national interests.

similar continental defence imperatives to those which justified *the defence against help* concept during the Cold War. While this may invite commentators to resurrect the concept as a strategic justification for costly Canadian investments in continental defence programs (or an argument for why Canada should opt-out), I contend that this would be out of step with current and future realities facing Canada in a North American context. In a recent book chapter, Andrea Charron and James Fergusson conclude that *defence against help* was never applied in Canada's case and continues to represent the "wrong theory for the wrong country at the wrong time."⁶ I contend that it was not always an inappropriate concept to drive Canadian thinking and may have represented a relevant and attractive concept in the early Cold War – but times change, and so must strategic justifications.

The Right Theory at a Certain Time? From the Second World War through the Cold War

From the Second World War through the Cold War, the impetus for Canadian decisions to actively participate in continental defence programs came not only from external security threats (primarily the Soviet Union), but also from a sovereignty-security paradox vis-à-vis continental security and the United States. Canada formulated defence policies that were consistent with the need to counter the dangers posed by hostile enemies to North American security, but also to ensure that Canadian sovereignty was not jeopardized by American military activities and installations on Canadian soil. Although the perceived intensity and magnitude of external threats varied over time, as did the perceived need to offset potentially threatening American influence, the idea of *defence against help* formed the basis of rational Canadian calculations to participate, or not to participate, in continental defence schemes.

Several considerations must be stressed. Canadian sovereignty was perceived to be the terrestrial, maritime, or air spatial integrity of the nation-state. Security was embodied in external threats to the nation-state, framed in realist terms. Therefore, the following assessment uses these terms as predominantly understood during policy

⁶ Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, "Canada and defence against help: the wrong theory for the wrong country at the wrong time," in *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas Juneau et al (Cham: Palgrave, 2020), pp. 99-115.

development and in media and academic circles during the Cold War. This particular conceptualization of interests shaped the concomitant bilateral security discourse.

The “modern” Canadian-American defence relationship traces its origins to 1938 and US President Franklin Roosevelt’s security pledge to Canada. With war looming on the horizon, Roosevelt publicly promised American “help” if Canada was ever attacked. Not only did it draw Canada into the American security embrace, but explicitly revealed the shared geostrategic significance of the northern continental approaches to both countries. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King recognized American security needs, offering a reciprocal pledge that Canada would take adequate steps to ensure that an enemy could not use the country as a military corridor to the United States. In contrast to the American guarantee, however, Canada did not offer a guarantee to defence outside of its own borders. The bilateral security relationship, predicated on the idea that America would intercede on Canadian soil in the event of an incursion, and that Canada would bear responsibility for defending its own territory, took on its basic form for the next half-century. However, this earliest Canadian expression of ‘defence against help’ was rooted in promises of unilateral security action rather than a conjoint policy.

The Second World War saw the first application of Canadian ‘defence against help’ policy in practice. The influx of large numbers of American troops on Canadian soil during the war highlighted the King Government’s need to take a more active role in Canadian defence to offset perceived encroachments on Canadian sovereignty. Massive American infrastructure development in the Canadian Northwest to build an air-staging route to Alaska, the Alaska Highway, and the Canol oil project, drew the first serious Canadian attention to the bilateral security-sovereignty balance and heightened political and public sensitivities to perceived *de facto* sovereignty infringements. Concurrently, the prime minister recognized that the intrinsic security concerns of the United States in the region (the lifeline between the continental United States and Alaska) had to be met. Therefore, an acceptable solution to Northern defence had to be conjoint rather than unilateral, given fiscal realities, manpower shortages, and the exigencies of war. Acting through the newly-formed Permanent Joint Board of Defence (PJBD), the King Government’s policy response was a series of agreements to bolster Canadian involvement in defence projects on its own soil, through shared funding, increased Canadian personnel in the North, and postwar ownership

arrangements that ensured Canadian *de jure* and *de facto* terrestrial sovereignty. Although the anxious and pragmatic King was leery of American intentions in the Canadian Northwest, he began to chart a cautious course in continental defence policy based on cooperation.⁷

The early postwar relationship was structured around American security and Canadian sovereignty and security concerns. The cooling of Soviet-American relations meant that North America's northern front took on ever increasing geostrategic importance as the shortest distance between the two superpowers. American strategists worried that there were "no boundaries upstairs" and began to pester Canadian officials for greater commitments to the northern extremities of the continent. Although a land-based continental invasion was improbable, the likelihood of an airborne, transpolar attack by Soviet bombers preoccupied strategic thinking. Canada acknowledged and even shared American security concerns, but it also required assurance that the United States would not undermine Canadian sovereignty in helping to secure the northern flank. Accordingly, the King Government again adopted policies that ensured an adequate Canadian presence and level of involvement in defence projects in the North – a clear case of defence against help.⁸ At Canada's insistence, guarantees of Canadian sovereignty accompanied tightening bilateral defence ties. For example, the agreement to construct the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line in May 1955 contained the first explicit acknowledgement of Canadian *de jure* terrestrial sovereignty in the Far North, and stressed Canada's contribution of land to continental defence.⁹ By actively participating in continental defence on and over Canadian soil, along lines determined by American (and joint) strategic interests, Canada asserted her sovereignty and ensured that the burgeoning superpower to the south would not be obliged to take matters into its own hands.

Although Canadian contributions to North American defence were not commensurate to those of the United States, the government did enough to establish the

⁷ See Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988).

⁸ David Bercuson, "Continental Defense and Arctic Sovereignty, 1945-50: Solving the Canadian Dilemma," in *The Cold War and Defense* eds. Keith Neilson and Ronald Haycock (New York: Praeger, 1990), p. 155; Joseph Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs: Canada, the US and the Origins of North American Air Defence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987).

⁹ Canada, Treaty Series 1955, No. 8, "Establishment of a distant early warning system," 5 May 1955.

perception - militarily, politically, and publicly - that it was a credible ally that was taking responsibility for its own sovereignty and security protection. The binational North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) agreement represented the most enduring policy manifestation of 'defence against help,' guaranteeing that both parties would work binationally to meet the Soviet airborne threat under a joint command and a single air defence plan and enshrining senior Canadian involvement in direct decision-making relating to home defence commitments. The institutional structure meant that a Canadian became deputy commander of NORAD, and therefore established that Canada would have a say in what was going on over and on its territory. Such an arrangement did necessitate additional personnel and materiel, but the main Canadian contribution was land required for forward installations built mainly at American expense.¹⁰ Air space defence operations in northern Canada could no longer be construed as unilaterally American - rather, any United States activities would be done *with* Canada as embodied in the bilateral agreement. By working in tandem, activities could no longer be considered a threat to sovereignty. "Help" was thus made less identifiably "American" and "Canadian" at a time when defences blended the territories almost into one for defence purposes and could have generated serious Canadian sovereignty concerns once again.¹¹ Deterrence strategies met with complete Canadian approval; after all, a mass build-up of nuclear weapons and the threat of massive retaliation to deter any Soviet attack represented the antithesis to strategies based on terrestrial-based defences.

Historian Richard Goette's important work on sovereignty and command in the Canada-US air defence relationship from 1940-57 explains how Canadian participation in continental defence efforts "enabled Canada to protect its sovereignty from American intervention." Senior defence officials perceived a risk if Canada tried to "free ride" off the Americans in peacetime. "If nothing is done until war comes," Air Commodore W.I. Clements noted in 1954, Canadians "might find things moving with great rapidity and the Americans might, on the excuse of national survival, suddenly take over everything overnight and if New York, etc., were being hydrogen bombed Canada's complaints

¹⁰ On the creation of NORAD, see Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs*, chapter 5, pp. 91-117. See also Joel Soklosky and Joseph Jockel, eds., *Fifty Years of Canada-United States Defense Cooperation* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1992).

¹¹ For an early articulation of this in the missile age, see R.J. Sutherland, "Canada's Long Term Strategic Situation," *International Journal* 17, 3 (1962): pp. 199-201.

about national sovereignty might not be heard above the other noises.” Instead, Goette observed that, by working in partnership with the US, the RCAF had a “seat at the console,” and Canadian airmen secured “a piece of the action” in continental air defence operations “while simultaneously safeguarding Canadian sovereignty.” Furthermore, the arrangement protected Canada and its citizens from a Soviet attack. The cooperation ultimately institutionalized in NORAD allowed Canada to retain command of its military forces – thus passing what Goette identifies as the “acid test” of sovereignty.¹²

NORAD’s mandate was defensive, and its original primary roles were surveillance and warning of bomber attack. The emergence of intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the purported “missile gap” of the 1960s, rendered the early warning systems erected across the North a hollow security promise. The capacity to detect a bomber attack did not translate into security against new strategic delivery systems. Henceforth, NORAD’s mandate expanded to include aerospace warning of an incoming ballistic missile attack. Missile and satellite technology posed a new issue in continental security, shifting discussions that had previously centred on terrestrial, maritime, and air space into the realm of outer space. Nevertheless, an assessment of the discourse and policies from the 1960s to the 1980s does not indicate a discernable shift in Canadian strategic thought. When deciding whether (or how) to participate in new bilateral initiatives, the government still focused on the *consequences* of participation in joint defence projects with the United States for Canadian sovereignty, not the *opportunities* that the relationship presented.

The space domain is a case in point. In 1962, Canada became the third country in the world to orbit a satellite, largely due to military-directed programs since the Second World War, but in the ensuing decades Canadian space efforts became increasingly sporadic, civilian, commercial, and internationalised in orientation. The Americans made space research a national priority for government spending and recognized new security implications. By contrast, Canada undertook no major national satellite projects (apart from communications) during the 1970s, “renounced the development of an indigenous launch capability,” and refused any military effort to explore policy and

¹² Goette, *Sovereignty and Command*, pp. 5, 10. Contrast with Michael Byers, “Canadian Armed Forces under United States Command,” *International Journal* 58, 1 (2002-03): pp. 89-114.

technological areas where commercial benefits were not immediately identifiable.¹³ Consequently, Canada abandoned its initial, leading-edge position in space strategy and capability.¹⁴ As long as Canada's strategic outlook was reactive instead of proactive, and the need to defend against infringements on earth-based sovereignty preoccupied policymakers, the space domain remained a remote priority. Hence, Canada's decision to confine activities to "highly selective, mostly ground-based niches" is comprehensible. Although Canada was increasingly dependent on the satellite assets of the United States (and the United Nations),¹⁵ this was not perceived to jeopardize Canadian sovereignty in the realist sense.

As Fergusson has shown in his definitive historical analysis,¹⁶ Canada played a somewhat ambiguous role in continental missile defence from the onset. The 1968 NORAD renewal included a clause precluding any Canadian involvement in Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD),¹⁷ which neutralized the argument that Canada would need to be directly involved for geostrategic and sovereignty reasons. Instead, Canada remained indirectly involved through terrestrially-based installations on its soil.¹⁸ The 1971 White Paper on Defence noted that US anti-ballistic missiles (ABM) interceptions outside of the atmosphere would not fall under Canadian jurisdiction, and thus did not pose a direct sovereignty threat. In the case of nuclear war, the United States would do

¹³ John Kirton, "A Renewed Opportunity: The Role of Space in Canada's Security Policy," in *Canada's International Security Policy* eds. David B. Dewitt and David Leyton-Brown (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 111-17.

¹⁴ Andrew B. Godefroy, "Space and National Security: Canada's Sporadic Strategy, 1985-1999," *Proceedings of the First Graduate Student Symposium* (Ottawa: Conference of Defence Associations Institute, 1999); and Godefroy, *Defence and Discovery: Canada's Military Space Program, 1945-74* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Kirton, "A Renewed Opportunity," p. 115. It would be wrong to suggest that 'defence against help' was the only, or even the single most important, consideration in Canada's decision to not develop a military space program. There existed a widespread perception that any potential militarization of space automatically included the endorsement of a weaponization of space, and thus was anathema to Canadian societal values. See Godefroy, *Defence and Discovery*.

¹⁶ James Fergusson, *Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence, 1954-2009* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Joel Sokolsky, "The Bilateral Defence Relationship with the United States," in *Canada's International Security Policy*, pp. 178-79.

¹⁸ Although the surveillance systems (Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, or BMEWS) deployed to warn of an ICBM attack were not located on Canadian soil, communications passed through Canada to NORAD headquarters in Colorado. Furthermore, the Canadian Forces' Baker-Nunn camera facilities at Cold Lake and St. Margaret's, New Brunswick, constituted part of the U.S. Space Detection and Tracking System (SPADATS). Department of National Defence, *Defence in the 70s*, p. 26.

what it needed to protect its cities, and Canadian sovereignty would not factor into its calculus.¹⁹ There was no point trying to defend against help in this scenario. Encouraging diplomatic solutions to avoid nuclear war, through arms reduction talks rather than active military measures to counter the Soviet threat, seemed more appealing. In this period of relative calm, Canadian worries about unrequested American encroachments on the land and in the air largely abated.

The 1980s brought both renewed US-Soviet tensions, and eventually the end of the Cold War itself. In 1981, NORAD was renamed North American *Aerospace* Defence Command, reflecting the new emphasis on defence and warning against missiles (including the new threat posed by cruise missiles) and the growing influence of space technology in defence and exploration. By the mid-1980s, BMD again captured North American headlines. The Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, colloquially known as *Star Wars*), announced in 1983, was predicated on perceptions that the Soviets had an advantageous first-strike capability that threatened US strategic forces. The US focused on designing a comprehensive, high-tech, "total defence" umbrella to thwart a full-scale Soviet ICBM attack.²⁰ As a research and development program (even if based on fabricated data), SDI complied with the 1972 ABM Treaty; had it gone into testing and deployment phases, it would likely have violated it. It was only ten years, two presidents, and thirty billion dollars later, that the SDI project was officially cancelled.²¹

The Mulroney Government officially announced on 8 September 1985 that Canada would not officially participate in SDI - a decision heavily influenced by Canadian nationalist voices and after much study and public discussion.²² Part of the concern was that SDI would entangle Canada "in a more elaborate continental defence arrangement." Defence officials worried that Canada could be increasingly left out of

¹⁹ DND, *Defence in the 70s*, pp. 26-7.

²⁰ SDI consisted of six major subsystems: space-based and ground-based interceptors, a ground-based sensor, two space-based sensors, and a battle management system. Donald Baucum, "Ballistic Missile Defense: A Brief History," [<http://www.acq.osd.mil/bmdo/bmdolink/html/origins.html>]. On Canadian policy options in the early 1980s, see Brian MacDonald, ed., *Canada's Strategies for Space: A Paradox of Opportunity* (Toronto: Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, 1983).

²¹ On SDI, see P.M. Boffey, et al., *Claiming the Heavens: Complete Guide to the Star Wars Debate* (New York: Times Books, 1988).

²² The announcement did not stop Canadian companies from participating in SDI.

American technological “ventures that should be of interest to [the Canadian military].”²³ The Canadian media concentrated on management of the East-West rivalry more than bilateral security issues, and the government (prior to its September policy decision) portrayed SDI as a “prudent programme” that would “benefit the Canadian defence production industry and, hence, the Canadian economy.”²⁴ Clearly, the debate on Canadian participation focused less on issues of sovereignty than on research and development contracts and technology transfer.

Nevertheless, the rational calculation of sovereignty concerns was indeed present, and ‘defence against help’ arguments emerged once again in some academic and media coverage. “If a truly effective ballistic missile defence could be deployed, a likely Soviet reaction would be a massive augmentation of its strategic bomber and long-range cruise missile forces, which in turn would require additional offsetting improvements to the North American air defence system,” Ron Purver noted. “The cost of rejuvenated North American air defences, and of Canada’s proportional share in them, would be very high; if Canada neglected to take up its share it would be faced with all the possible encroachments on its sovereignty from south of the border that continued membership in NORAD was at least partly designed to avoid or minimize.”²⁵ A study at York University suggested that Canada should support SDI because “whatever follows offers at least some prospect of influence, however modest, with American decision makers that otherwise might not be possible at all. If Canada has no formal involvement with any future incarnations of the SDI programme, it will have to either surrender vast portions of its sovereignty or protect them at enormous cost.”²⁶ The notion that components of the envisioned SDI system could require installations on Canadian territory also generated issues that theoretically implored Canada to get involved in (or get “dragged into”) Star Wars should the Americans need to base anti-

²³ Sokolsy, “The Bilateral Defence Relationship,” in Dewitt and Brown, p. 179.

²⁴ Ann Denholm Crosby, “The print media’s shaping of the security discourse: cruise missile testing, SDI, and NORAD,” *International Journal* 52 (1996-97): pp. 89-117.

²⁵ Ronald G. Purver, “Ballistic Missile Defence and Canada,” in *Canadian Perspectives on the Strategic Defence Initiative* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament, 1985), pp. 15-16.

²⁶ Research Programme in Strategic Studies at York University, “Canadian Participation in Research on the Strategic Defence Initiative: An Examination of Canadian Policy Options,” submission to Joint Special Committee on Canada’s External Relations, 25 July 1985, pp. 8-9.

missile technology in the Canadian North.²⁷ “As Canada cannot avoid being drawn under the US umbrella of defence,” Paul Rohrlich argued, “it might be logical to partake in the planning and implementation of the new security system.”²⁸ In the end, the Canadian Government decided that Canadian sovereignty was not in jeopardy. Therefore, a decision-making model based on ‘defence against help’ lent credence to official non-participation in SDI.

Canadian participation in the North American Air Defense Modernization (NAADM) plan, agreed to by both countries in 1985, involved the modernization of the DEW Line terrestrially-based radar stations across the Canadian Arctic into the North Warning System (NWS).²⁹ Because this defence infrastructure was located on Canadian soil, it had an intrinsic security *and* sovereignty dimension and was therefore marketable to the public as something the required Canadian participation. In short, the northern radar project was perfectly compatible with the logic of *defence against help* - Canada needed to participate in continental defence initiatives that necessitated a geographical footprint within its borders. By contrast, the 1986 NORAD renewal negotiations included parliamentary hearings recommending a military space program to concentrate on early warning, surveillance, and communication tasks necessary to the protection of national security. The program was scuttled in 1989. Collective consciousness did not posit space as a national domain. The public unpopularity of SDI, coupled with a lack of identifiable national and thus political benefits, contributed to its demise.³⁰

²⁷ See Michel Fortman, “Le Canada et l’initiative de defense strategique,” pp. 3-4; Albert Legault, “L’initiative de defense strategique et le Canada,” 6; temoinages presentes au Comite mixte special du Senat et de la Chambre des communes sur les relations exterieures du Canada, Montreal, 23 juillet 1985; Jeff Sallot, “Deployment of Star Wars systems could require Canadian territory,” *Globe and Mail*, 24 February 1986, p. A1; John Honderich, “The Facts of Geography,” *Toronto Star*, in *World Press Review* (February 1986), p. 28; “U.S. won’t rule out Star Wars in Canada’s North,” *Toronto Star*, 13 November 1986, p. A3.

²⁸ Paul E. Rohrlich, “Canada and Star Wars,” *International Perspectives* (May/June 1985), p. 18.

²⁹ On the role of the NWS to counter Soviet long-range Air-Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs), see Joseph Jockel, *NORAD 1957-2007: A History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), pp. 123-34.

³⁰ Kirton, “A Renewed Opportunity,” pp. 119-20; Godefroy, “Space and National Security”; Norris Ripsman, “Big Eyes and Empty Pockets: The Two Phases of Conservative Defence Policy,” in *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984-93*, ed. Nelson Michaud and Kim Nossal (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), pp. 100-12.

The rapid fall of the Soviet Union and the promise of an American-led new world order prompted a re-evaluation of security assumptions in the Western World. Voices within the United States, bolstered by the confidence of “winning” the Cold War, began to preach about an expected peace dividend in a new era of liberal peace. In Canada, the Mulroney Conservatives’ *Cold Warrior* policy platforms of the 1980s seemed to hold little public appeal in an era of fiscal retrenchment and no obvious existential external threats to Canada. There was little political marketability in advocating defence against anyone, let alone the commitment of precious resources to defend against the almost unthinkable possibility of American encroachments on Canadian sovereignty in the name of continental defence. “SNORAD”³¹ all but went into hibernation with no obvious strategic threats to North America. Nevertheless, during the debate over the 1996 NORAD renewal agreement, critic Douglas Ross contended that Canada had no option but to sign up to the arrangement “because of the rapidly declining ability of the Canadian military to project force or even exert control over Canadian territory and airspace.” He lamented that policy-makers in Ottawa had to renew NORAD on whatever terms the Americans offered because “only capability can inspire serious consultation and cooperation on vital issues.”³² Canada, he suggested, had no capability, and thus no leverage.

When I initially wrote this paper in 2000, I asked where we should situate the concept of ‘defence against help’ in contemporary debates about Canada’s strategic policy and direction. Was the idea still employed, and if so for what purposes? Did Canadians still feel compelled to take on resource-intensive security responsibilities in partnership with the United States to preserve Canadian sovereignty from American “help,” or had the emphasis and justification shifted? I focused on two cases studies: the Canadian debate over potential participation in continental Ballistic Missile Defence (and more specifically the American National Missile Defense program); and the attendant issue of space-based military systems. I observed that the evolution of the BMD issue had moved away from a defence policy-making posture predicated on the United States as a potential security threat to Canada, towards one that places a

³¹ Jim Fergusson offered this apt descriptor at a January 2020 conference in Washington on “The PJBD@80.”

³² Douglas Ross, “Canada and the World at Risk: Depression, War, and Isolationism for the 21st Century,” *International Journal* (1996/97): pp. 1-24.

premium on assessing the costs and opportunity costs of non-participation such as the potential ramifications on the NORAD agreement. Similarly, I noted that arguments in favour of a more activist Canadian space and satellite surveillance policy were rooted in ideas that Canada was missing out on “the action,” not any threat to its sovereignty.³³

At the turn of the millennium, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff considered NORAD a logical organization to control a BMD system, given its existing surveillance and warning role for protecting North American air and aerospace and its close organizational relationship with US Space Command.³⁴ “In a world of proliferating ballistic missile capabilities, subject to the agreement and tasking of the governments of the *US and Canada* [emphasis mine], NORAD may be the logical organization to have command and control of a ground based North American limited ballistic missile defense system,” USSPACECOM promoted.³⁵ Canada’s 1994 White Paper had recognized the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and associated delivery systems to both Canada and her “friends and allies,” indicating that Canada was not opposed to an expansion of NORAD’s missile warning function so long as the “missile defence posture ... enhances global stability and is consistent with existing arms control agreements.” It renewed NORAD in 1996 with provision for the traditional activities of “the surveillance and control of North American airspace; the collection, processing and dissemination of missile warning information within North America; and the examination of ballistic missile defence options focused on research and building on Canada’s existing capabilities in communications and surveillance.”³⁶ No one mentioned the need to participate in BMD to prevent American encroachments on Canadian sovereignty. When senior American military and political leaders quietly pushed for Canadian participation in BMD, they sold a vision of “extend[ing] the umbrella of this system to all of North America”³⁷ – but, from the onset, explained that

³³ See Lackenbauer, “‘From ‘Defence Against Help’ to ‘A Piece of the Action,’” for a detailed discussion.

³⁴ See James Fergusson, *Déjà vu: Canada, NORAD, and Ballistic Missile Defence*, Occasional Paper #39, Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba (November 1999): pp. 11-17; David Pugliese, “Military seeks Star Wars role: Axworthy, Eggleton headed for clash over \$600M investment,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 February 1999, A1; and Fergusson, *Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence*.

³⁵ NORAD, SPACECOM, “Entering the 21st Century,” <http://www.spacecom.af.mil/norad/21stcent.htm>.

³⁶ Department of National Defence (DND), Backgrounder, “Canada’s Policy on Ballistic Missile Defence,” BG-99.055, 19 August 1999, http://www.dnd.ca/eng/archive/aug99/19BMD_b_e.htm

³⁷ NORAD, Commander, USSPACECOM, speech for the Air Force Association Annual Symposium, 18 October 1996, Beverly Hills Hilton, Los Angeles, CA, <http://www.spacecom.af.mil/norad/speech1.htm>.

US did not require the use of Canadian territory or airspace to deploy an National Missile Defence (NMD) system.³⁸

A decision-making model based on ‘defence against help’ might suggest that, since Canadian sovereignty and security was not threatened in the realist sense, there was no national security imperative (vis-à-vis the United States) to participate in BMD or NMD. Analysis of newspaper and journal articles suggested that the discourse has made a discernable shift away from *defence against help* to the *opportunity* costs of non-participation.³⁹ Indeed, some Canadian officials and journalists argued that Canada opting out of participation in the NMD system would mean that the US might not defend them against attack – the very antithesis of *defence against help* – and might threaten the future viability of NORAD.⁴⁰ I observed similar logic at play with respect to space. Being left out of the American security embrace was a fundamentally different worry – and one more attuned to the realities of the twenty-first century.

In 2000, I observed that justifying investments in Canada-US defence projects as an imperative to counter the “threat” of the United States encroaching on Canada’s sovereignty had less salience in contemporary debates than their perceived value as an opportunity to derive national military, economic, technological benefit and enhanced security. This conceptual shift represented a transition to a predominantly “piece of the action” mindset. Canada no longer could count on having a “seat at the table”⁴¹ by virtue of its geostrategic location. Lieutenant General (ret’d.) Charles Belzile explained to a Calgary audience in 2000 that Canada must “ante up” like everyone else if it wants to accrue the benefits from bilateral security arrangements.⁴²

³⁸ “U.S. picks Alaska as anti-missile-network site,” *Vancouver Sun*, 10 September 1999, A9.

³⁹ A survey of 85 Canadian newspaper articles from February 1999 to February 2000, based on Webspirs.

⁴⁰ For rich ideas from the leading proponent of these views, see Fergusson, *Déjà vu*, pp. 13-16; “Getting It Right: The American National Missile Defence Programme and Canada,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* (Summer 1998), pp. 20, 24; Fergusson, *Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence*. See also Jeff Adams, “Long-range U.S. missile system offers role for Canada: NORAD deputy,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 October 1999, p. A4.

⁴¹ See, for example, E.L.M. Burns, *A Seat at the Table: The Struggle for Disarmament* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1972).

⁴² “The Military and Society and its Government,” presentation to 2nd Annual Society for Military and Strategic Studies Colloquium, Calgary, Alberta, 24 March 2000.

Recent critiques of *Defence against Help*

Has *defence against help* lost its utility to predict Canadian involvement in continental defence and security arrangements with the United States? Three recent studies reappraising the concept arrive at different conclusions about its continued relevance to understand the logic behind Canada-US security relations after 9/11. Furthermore, in critically analyzing how the concept may have been misinterpreted or misapplied, they invite further reflection on its applicability. Because none of these studies cited my 2000 paper, I have analyzed them to see if (and, if so, how) they consider the *seat at the table* or *piece of the action* ideas that I suggested were supplanting *defence against help* arguments in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Donald Barry and Duane Bratt tried to resurrect *defence against help* as an explanation for Canada-US security relations in 2008. After tracing the general history of how Canada had applied the concept (which closely resembled Barry's 1981 paper and what I wrote in 2000) and situating it in more general international relations theory, they suggest that *defence against help* had gained new relevance in the post-9/11 war on terrorism. When the US focused its attention on border security, "Ottawa was forced to broaden the application of its defense against help strategy beyond the traditional calculation of external threats *against* North America to include terrorist threats *within* North America." They cite Public Safety minister Anne McLellan's 2003 statement that "We refuse to be a weak link or a haven from which terrorists can attack others."⁴³ In short, Canada could not be a source from which (and not just through which) security threats penetrated the United States. This seemed to meet the spirit of Ørvik's original concept, particularly in light of broadening and deepening definitions of "security"⁴⁴ and the increasingly porous distinction between defence and security during the War on Terror.

⁴³ Barry and Bratt, "Defense Against Help," pp; 77-78.

⁴⁴ On this debate, see Stephen Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *Mershon International Studies Review* 41 (1991): pp. 211-39; Edward Kolodziej, "Renaissance in security studies? Caveat lector!" *International Studies Quarterly* 36, 4 (1992): pp. 421-438; Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); and Sarah Tarry, "'Deepening' and 'Widening': An Analysis of Security Definitions in the 1990s," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 2, 1 (1999): pp. 1-13.

When they move beyond border security, however, Barry and Bratt's reformulation of *defence against help* loses its conceptual focus and utility. To show how the concept informed Canada's decision to decline participation in the US BMD program in 2005, they cite US Ambassador Paul Cellucci's comment questioning "why Canada would in effect give up its sovereignty, its seat at the table, to decide what to do about a missile that might be headed toward Canada." Barry and Bratt then note that supporters of Canada's decision "pointed out that interceptions would take place in the atmosphere outside Canadian territory or airspace."⁴⁵ In this context, sovereignty means something quite different from what Ørvik had intended. Examples of *defence against help* rationales are strikingly absent from their conclusions, which instead point to how Canada opted out of US continental defence projects, did not invoke it for "offshore situations" (an idea which has no obvious resonance with Ørvik's original concept), and sought security collaboration with the US to derive "certain benefits," particularly "access to senior US national security officials, significant influence in a joint decision-making mechanism, and access to the largest and most sophisticated intelligence-gathering system in the world." In short, they ultimately compress the *seat at the table* and *defence against help* justifications as one in the same – thus negating the analytical value of *defence against help* as a distinct concept. Ending with Canada's access to training experience with the US and "economic spin-offs" as benefits of bilateral and binational defence cooperation further undermines their suggestion that *defence against help* remains the core pretext for collaboration.

Two years later, Philippe Lagassé offered a refreshing appraisal of how Canadian scholars have employed the concept. Returning to Ørvik's original theory, he observed that the concept had been intended as a prescriptive strategy designed to bolster Canadian investments in defence and to articulate national interests and priorities more clearly. "Ørvik did not think that Canada followed a defence-against-help approach to continental security," Lagassé perceptively noted. "Quite the contrary; when Ørvik wrote about Canada and defence against help, he was telling Canadian governments what they ought to do in matters of continental defence, not evaluating what they were already doing."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the concept proved useful as a descriptive framework to

⁴⁵ Barry and Bratt, "Defense Against Help," pp. 78-80.

⁴⁶ Philippe Lagassé, "Nils Ørvik's 'Defence against Help': The Descriptive Appeal of a Prescriptive Strategy," *International Journal* 65, 2 (2010): p. 64.

understand the logic behind Canada's approaches to managing continental security-sovereignty dilemmas that it faced from the late 1930s to the end of the Cold War. Proponents of Canadian involvement in BMD "echoed some of Ørvik's contentions" when they suggested that "defend[ing] the continent against ballistic missiles without Canadian input ... would undermine Canadian sovereignty," but "few analysts suggested that Canada needed to build its own missile defences, share a proportionate burden of the system's costs, or even offer to locate interceptors on Canadian soil." Instead, most arguments noted that Canadian territory and treasure was not in play, and that the US only sought Canadian political support and NORAD involvement. Ultimately, the sovereignty argument had little traction, and the decision to opt out of the program seemed to suggest that Canada believed it could enjoy a "free ride" without bearing the political costs of participating in a US -led project that could be perceived to undermine the global strategic balance.⁴⁷

After 9-11, Lagassé noted a proliferation of references to *defence against help*, but "the concept only faintly resembled what Ørvik had meant." Antiterrorism, homeland security, and homeland defence measures were reflected in bilateral "smart border" and "safe third country" accords, as well as NORAD's expanded mandate, but did not amount to a "continental security perimeter." Nevertheless, Canada sent a clear signal to its neighbour: "Washington need not worry – Canada was serious about North American security and concrete, credible measures to guard the two countries' interdependent security.... While some commentators saw this as evidence of Canadian subservience, others saw it as Canada's latest pursuit of defence against help."⁴⁸ He concluded that *defence against help* still held some appeal to describe the history of Canada-US security relations, but analysts seldom presented it as a prescriptive strategy:

Today, Canadian defence against help is as much about passing legislation, improving police and intelligence capabilities, and tracking shipments and money as it is about antisubmarine warfare, aerospace defence, and military aid of the civil power. As a result, when analyzing whether Canada is pursuing a defence-against-help strategy, today's scholars must pay as much attention to Canada's refugee policies as they do to Canadian defence

⁴⁷ Lagassé, "Nils Ørvik's 'Defence against Help,'" pp. 469-71.

⁴⁸ Lagassé, "Nils Ørvik's 'Defence against Help,'" pp. 471-72.

spending. When they do so, they discover that defence against help explains Canada's behaviour quite well. Moreover, even when gazes are turned squarely on Canada's continental defence efforts, the country appears to be attaining its defence-against-help objectives. This implies that descriptive uses of Ørvik's catchphrase are likely to remain more appealing than his prescriptive admonitions.⁴⁹

Most recently, Andrea Charron and James Fergusson – Canada's leading academic experts on continental defence – have published a chapter arguing that *defence against help* is, and has always been, an inappropriate theoretical framework to understand Canada's defence relations with the US. They suggest that “there has never been a scenario in which the United States have provided help which the Canadian government has rejected”⁵⁰ – a blanket statement with which historians will quibble⁵¹ and which invites the rebuttal that this might be precisely because Canada effectively defended against such help historically. Furthermore, the conceptual underpinnings do not require that Canadians see no national security threat from would-be adversaries and only a threat from the US, which the authors intimate.⁵² Their general argument is predicated on faith (which I share) that the US will not do anything within Canadian territory without Canadian government permission, and that the binational relationship institutionalized in NORAD is an expression of Canadian sovereignty and leaves Canada in control of its airspace. Instead of defending against help, they argue convincingly that “Canada's defence decisions are not motivated to avoid unwanted help” but to “borrow help.” According to this argument, Canada has adopted a strategy of “borrowed power” that ensures sovereign control over its territory while “expropriating or borrowing US airpower and investment capital to meet its national defence needs over time.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Lagassé, “Nils Ørvik's ‘Defence against Help,’” p. 474.

⁵⁰ Charron and Fergusson. “Canada and defence against help,” p. 100.

⁵¹ The Second World War and early Cold War period provide various examples of situations where the U.S. embarked on projects, particularly in the Canadian North, without prior Canadian authorization. See for example Grant, *Sovereignty or Security*; Peter Kikkert, “The Polaris Incident: ‘Going to the Mat’ with the Americans,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 11, 3 (2009): pp. 1-29; and Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Setting an Arctic Course: Task Force 80 and Canadian Control in the Arctic, 1948.” *The Northern Mariner* 21, 4 (2011): pp. 327-58.

⁵² Charron and Fergusson. “Canada and defence against help,” p. 101.

⁵³ Charron and Fergusson. “Canada and defence against help,” pp. 103-05, 107.

The quiet assumption that the US will inherently defend Canada puts the latter in a precarious position. By “borrowing power” from their American neighbours rather than spending more on national defence, Charron and Fergusson observe that “the issue today is exactly the reverse of defence help” in which Canada’s insufficient defence capabilities pose a risk to the United States. Although this logic, and their description of Canada as a “weak link,” seems to resonate with Ørvik’s theory more than they acknowledge, they point to perceptions of “easy riding” or doing defence “Walmart style”⁵⁴ as highly problematic. Pointing to the future, they highlight several issues that could complicate or undermine NORAD’s place in Canada-US relations, including an emerging strategic threat environment where hyperspace weapons transcend any delineation of the air and space domains. Furthermore, NORAD modernization – and particularly the future of the NWS terrestrial-based radars strung along Canadian coasts – has the potential to resurrect Ørvik’s thesis if the US demands more from Canada than the latter is prepared to invest.⁵⁵

“The Homeland is Not a Sanctuary”: Present and Future Implications

In April 2019, NORAD commander General Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy proclaimed “the homeland is not a sanctuary” – a declaration reiterating that year’s *National Defense Strategy*. “We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order – creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory,” he described. “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”⁵⁶ The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* had offered similar logic, describing “the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition by ... revisionist powers” as “the central challenge to US prosperity and security. It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model – gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic,

⁵⁴ Christian Leuprecht and Joel Sokolsky, “Defense Policy ‘Walmart Style’: Canadian Lessons in ‘Not So-Grand’ Grand Strategy,” *Armed Forces & Society* 41, 3 (2015): pp. 541–62.

⁵⁵ Charron and Fergusson. “Canada and defence against help,” pp. 108-11.

⁵⁶ NORAD and USNORTHCOM Commander speech to Strategic Forces Subcommittee Hearing, 3 April 2019, <https://www.norad.mil/Newsroom/Speeches/Article/1845927/norad-and-usnorthcom-commander-sasc-strategic-forces-subcommittee-hearing/>.

and security decisions.”⁵⁷ In turn, senior officials have linked this competition to emergent threats to North America. US Assistant Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rapuano insists that “we must anticipate multi-dimensional attacks on land, in the air, at sea, in space and in cyberspace, targeted not just against our military forces, but against our critical infrastructure and our population...Indeed, our way of life at home and abroad.”⁵⁸

Geography and geopolitics would seem to implicate Canada in these assessments. “Geostrategically, the security of the North American continent is indivisible,” Ørvik argued. “It makes neither military nor economic or political sense to argue that Canada and the United States could or should be seen as two separate defence units.”⁵⁹ While post-Cold War optimism may have diluted the perceived importance of this interdependence, it returned after 9/11 and has ever greater salience with the recent pivot towards strategic competition between the United States, China, and Russia. Or does it? NORAD officials insist that “distance and oceans’ no longer protect North America, with new technologies and hybrid or grey zones tactics negating previous benefits afforded by physical geography.”⁶⁰ While some aspects of geography remain significant and enduring variables,⁶¹ the logic of an emerging strategic environment where the *geo-* in geostrategy is less salient to continental defence renders *defence against help* less of a basic security issue.

Significant policy changes in the US suggest other risks to Canada. The Trump administration’s “America First foreign policy,”⁶² coupled with its “one war” strategy

⁵⁷ “Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America” (2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, 1.

⁵⁸ Garamone, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2109639/us-potential-target-for-malicious-actors-dod-official-tells-congress/>

⁵⁹ Ørvik, “The Basic Issue,” p. 14.

⁶⁰ See, for example, House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence, *Canada and the Defence of North America: NORAD and Aerial Readiness* (September 2016); Michelle Carbert, “Russia poses most immediate military threat to Canada, top general says,” *Globe and Mail*, 4 March 2020.

⁶¹ Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Geostrategy and Canadian Defence: From C.P. Stacey to Twenty-First Century Arctic Threat Assessment,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 20, 1 (2019): pp. 1-64. See also Kim Nossal, “The Imperatives of Canada’s Strategic Geography,” in *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice*, pp. 11-28.

⁶² “National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, December 2017, Available Online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, p.1.

aimed at “preparing to win a single major war against a formidable competitor,”⁶³ may represent significant departures from previous worldviews. Furthermore, US expectations of its allies, support for NATO, and willingness to intervene in “minor” global conflicts seem to have shifted. President Trump’s foreword to the 2017 *National Security Strategy* suggested that “unfair burden-sharing with our allies and inadequate investment in our own defense had invited danger from those who wish us harm.”⁶⁴ He has vowed to end American defence support to “free riders,” particularly NATO allies who are not carrying their weight, and has targeted Canada for spending only 1.27 percent of its GDP on defence (well below the 2 percent NATO guideline).⁶⁵ Will US “isolationism” leave Canada to fend for itself in this brave, new, Trumpian world? Does “America First” portend the end of the stable and predictable defence relationship between Canada and the United States since the Second World War? If the United States is increasingly less dependent upon Canadian territory and airspace for surveillance and other defensive activities (a trend since the 1980s), should Canada worry about the prospect of too little, rather than too much, help from its superpower ally?

While a small cluster of experts writing on continental defence and NORAD lament Canadians’ ignorance of new threats and growing capability deficits to detect, defeat, and deter them, official statements suggest intentions to elevate the issue on the political agenda. In 2016, a House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence report emphasized the importance of inter-operability with the US in defending North America and recommended “that the Government of Canada consider a plan to replace and upgrade the North Warning System by extending the infrastructure’s operational life cycle, adapting new technology, and expanding the system to cover Canada’s Arctic Archipelago.”⁶⁶ The overall tenor highlights the need for material investments to defend against strategic military threats to North America,

⁶³ Hal Brands and Evan Braden Montgomery, “One War Is Not Enough: Strategy and Force Planning for Great Power Competition”, *Texas National Security Review*, 11 March 2020, Available Online: <https://tnsr.org/2020/03/one-war-is-not-enough-strategy-and-force-planning-for-great-power-competition/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, p.1.

⁶⁵ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1164231651351617536>.

⁶⁶ House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence, *Canada and the Defence of North America* (2018), p. 80.

not US threats to sovereignty. Similarly, Canada's 2017 defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE), highlights how trends in the global threat environment are "undermin[ing] the traditional security once provided by Canada's geography. Defending Canada and Canadian interests...demands robust domestic defence." This might suggest unilateral action, but the second pillar of SSE emphasizes "secure in North America." The document promises that "Canada takes its responsibility to defend against threats to the continent seriously" and "will expand Canada's capacity to meet NORAD commitments." In particular, the policy commits to "modernize NORAD to meet existing challenges and evolving threats to North America, taking into account the full range of threats."⁶⁷

While SSE is "the most rigorously costed Canadian defence policy ever developed,"⁶⁸ it does not include NORAD modernization and renewal in its funded commitments. "In the case of the NWS, the estimated cost is in the billions of dollars of spending," Charron and Fergusson note. "While there is lots of attention to and discussion of the projects, there is next to no discussion around the costs or plans to pay for them."⁶⁹ NORAD has developed a classified Homeland Defense Design that will guide modernization, which includes a layered sensing system for awareness across multiple domains, a new system for joint multi-domain command and control, and lastly "new defeat mechanisms for advanced threats, including cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, and small unmanned aerial systems."⁷⁰ While efforts to replace the NWS are progressing, NORAD's deputy director of strategy reported in January 2020 that it is taking "longer than any of us would like."⁷¹

How will the Canadian government build political and public support for this costly endeavour with the United States? NORAD's public release of information about Russian 'Blackjack' bomber flights in the Arctic represent a form of strategic domestic

⁶⁷ Government of Canada, *Strong, Secured, Engaged* (2017).

⁶⁸ DND, "Executive Summary to *Strong, Secure, Engaged*," <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/canada-defence-policy/executive-summary.html>.

⁶⁹ Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, "The Elephant in the Room: Canada and NORAD Modernization," in *The Strategic Outlook for Canada 2018* (Ottawa: Conference of Defence Associations Institute, 2018), p. 32, <https://cdainstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/36-THE-STRATEGIC-OUTLOOK-FOR.pdf>.

⁷⁰ O'Shaughnessy, "STATEMENT OF GENERAL TERRENCE J. O'SHAUGHNESSY," p. 9.

⁷¹ Canadian Press, "Senior officer warns NORAD can't detect Russian bombers in time, needs upgrades," *National Post*, 29 January 2020.

messaging intended to justify continental defence modernization,⁷² with larger discussions and public consultations expected soon. Along these lines, O'Shaughnessy observed in February 2020 that:

this is not the first time that a peer competitor has elected to hold our homeland at risk. Early in NORAD's history, when nuclear-armed Soviet bombers first presented an existential threat to the United States and Canada, our nations faced down that daunting challenge by establishing the Distant Early Warning line of radars and the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) command and control system in less than three years. That stunning achievement demonstrated the power of shared resolve and innovation by our great nations and had an immediate deterrent effect. We hear echoes of that era in today's strategic environment, and while the challenges before us are significant, history makes clear that innovation and resolve will allow us to bolster our strategic advantage.⁷³

Will we hear echoes of 'defence against help' as well, given the salience of that line of thought in the mid-1950s?

Findings and Analysis

Michael Dawson, the Canadian Political Advisor to the Commander of NORAD from 2010-14, wrote in late 2019:

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

⁷² Ryan Dean and Whitney Lackenbauer, "Blackjack Diplomacy," *North American and Arctic Defence and Security Quick Impacts*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.naadsn.ca/research/>.

⁷³ O'Shaughnessy, "STATEMENT OF GENERAL TERRENCE J. O'SHAUGHNESSY," p. 13.

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*. (emphasis added)⁷⁴

In suggesting that, "throughout its 60-year existence, NORAD has been Canada's 'defence against help,'" Dawson unabashedly invokes the idea that "NORAD is just as much about protecting Canada from the United States" as it is about defending against other adversaries.

It is telling that *Strong, Secure, Engaged* avoids such exhortations – perhaps because it does not attempt to specifically define what NORAD modernization will look like or how much Canadians will have to pay for it. The threats that it identifies are those of hostile actors who might seek to threaten Canada and Canadian interests across the military mission spectrum; and not the United States, which is appropriately cast as our core ally. This runs counter to the fear that Dawson seeks to invoke when emphasizing the potential threat that the US poses as a superpower determined "to defend its own soil at all costs" – or, conversely, the fear that Canada runs the risk of the US *not* coming to our defence if we do not partner with them. These narratives of *defence against help* or *defence to ensure help* may detract from more substantive debate about the relative benefits that Canada secures in having a seat at the table or might accrue through investments in capabilities with mutual benefits to our primary security partner.

I anticipate that *defence against help* will arise in discussions about NORAD modernization, if only as a hangover from a Cold War mindset and fears associated with an unpredictable commander-in-chief in Washington. The idea that geography does not matter as much as it used to may hold true for some external threats and strategic delivery systems, but it certainly has mattered – and will continue to matter – when it comes to *SSE* commitments to expand Canada's military presence in the Arctic. Historically, Canadian commentators have invoked *defence against help* most frequently

⁷⁴ Michael Dawson, "NORAD: Remaining Relevant," University of Calgary School of Public Policy *Briefing Paper* 12, 39 (2019).

and stridently with respect to continental defence investments in this region. Given the stable Canada-US partnership embodied in NORAD and consistent official references to the two countries as “premier partners” in the Arctic,⁷⁵ constructing the US as a potential sovereignty threat to justify Canadian investments is unlikely to have significant resonance with policymakers. Instead, calls for *defence against help* might come from Inuit and other Northern Canadians, if for some reason the US and Canadian governments proceed with modernizing existing or building new defence infrastructure without involving them – an unlikely scenario given the commitments to policy co-development and co-implementation in Canada’s recent Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.

Recent developments, assessed against Ørvik’s original concept and recent articles, appear to confirm my earlier assessment that the concept of *defence against help* no longer offers a viable, primary justification for Canadian strategic decision-making on continental defence imperatives. This changed reality may pose a problem for politicians in a democracy who need to “sell” the public on defence policies that contribute to security according to identifiable national interests. During the Cold War, successive Canadian governments conditioned voters to think of continental defence according to both external threats and a need to participate in joint endeavours lest their sovereignty be eroded by US assistance. Canada did emerge from the Cold War with its territory and air space intact – in this respect, the strategy of *defence against help* achieved its historic objectives. The danger is that a strategic justification can survive beyond its useful life, and when no longer applicable can work against national interests. The close Canada-US defence and security relationship remains vital to core Canadian interests, but ‘defence against help’ should no longer serve as a conceptual metric to assess the potential costs of non-participation in continental defence initiatives.

In 1996, Joseph Jockel and Joel Sokolsky declared that “the Cold War Canada-US defence relationship, just like the 50-year struggle that necessitated and sustained it, is over.”⁷⁶ The return of great power competition does not portend a return to the Cold War, despite familiar references to Russian and Chinese authoritarian ideology in the

⁷⁵ See, for example, P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Rob Huebert, “Premier Partners: Canada, the United States and Arctic Security,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 20, 3 (2014): pp. 320-33.

⁷⁶ Joseph T. Jockel and Joel J. Sokolsky, *The End of the Canada-U.S. Defence Relationship*, Occasional Paper Series, Centre for International Relations, Queen’s University, Kingston (1996): p. 1.

US defense strategy. Instead, new interpretive frameworks are needed to respond effectively to an evolving strategic environment – and to explain why Canadians must invest in essential, and expensive, capabilities to defend North America as a shared homeland. I concluded my paper in 2000 with the assertion that a fundamental characteristic of *defence against help* remains intact: the need for Canadian military *credibility*. A shift in emphasis towards space-based operations lessens Canada's once inherent leverage in continental defence decision-making. In an age when access to and control of information is critical to domestic protection and international operations, Canada is more, not less, reliant on its chief ally. Accordingly, *defence against help* can no longer prescribe a high-level conceptual solution to current debates about specific continental defence policy direction. New realities require a refocused relationship that no longer sees the United States as a potential sovereignty and security threat, but a vital means of accruing definite political and military benefits. Mutual cooperation and benefit, not wariness and fear, should drive the policy agenda of the future. As Lagassé suggests, the concept of *defence against help* may retain analytical value to describe some aspects of Canadian strategy, particularly historically, but it has outlived its helpfulness as a prescriptive strategy or defence policy catchphrase to guide continental defence investments in the twenty-first century.