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Defense Policy, Canadian-American Relations, and "Canada's New Government"

Kim Richard Nossal
Queen's University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6
CANADA

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Introduction

Over the last fifty years, defense policy has been an enduring irritant in the Canada-United States relationship. Americans and Canadians generally, and their governments in Washington and in Ottawa more particularly, have frequently and profoundly diverged over a wide range of defense issues. These differences have included the global policies, postures and doctrines of the United States (massive retaliation in the 1950s, brinkmanship over Cuba in 1962, mutual assured destruction in the 1970s, aggressive anti-Sovietism in the 1980s, pre-emption in the early 2000s); the threat or use of force by the United States in world affairs (saber-rattling over the Offshore Islands; interventions of different sorts in Dominican Republic, Grenada, Nicaragua, or Panama; air strikes against Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan; wars in Vietnam and Iraq); particular weapons systems (nuclear weapons for the Canadian Armed Forces in the late 1950s and early 1960s, nuclear weapons testing in Amchitka in the early 1970s, air-launched cruise missiles and the Strategic Defense Initiative in the 1980s, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) and the weaponization of space in the 1990s and early 2000s); and disagreements over the appropriate levels of defense spending and “free riding.”

There can be little doubt that these differences have affected what John W. Holmes liked to call the “atmospherics” of the relationship,¹ particularly but not exclusively at its governmental apex.² Indeed, there is a widespread assumption, both in the literature and in political commentary about the relationship, that poor or estranged relations are *caused* by these irritants; the logic of this position, of course, is that if one were to remove the irritant, the relationship would, of necessity, improve.³

But are differences over defense policy in fact the cause of poor relations between Canada and the United States? The change in government in Canada in 2006 provides us with an opportunity to assess this assumption of causality. In the general election of 23 January 2006, the governing Liberals under Prime Minister Paul Martin were

¹ On Holmes’s views of the relationship, see *Canada: A Middle-Aged Power* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), esp. 204-30; and *Life With Uncle: The Canada-United States Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

² In Canada-US relations, the personal relationship between prime minister and president filters not only vertically downward into lower levels of government, but also horizontally into different domains of the relationship—and in an inevitable but entirely unpredictable way. As Allan Gotlieb notes, “there is no linkage on the part of the United States [in Canada-US relations], but everything, broadly speaking, is linked.” Gotlieb, “Foremost Partner: The Conduct of Canada-US Relations,” in David Carment, Fen Osler Hampson, and Norman Hillmer, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2003: Coping with the American Colossus* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

³ Indicative would be: Edelgard E. Mahant and Graeme S. Mount, *An Introduction to Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), 259-61; Albert Legault, “Canada and the United States: The Defense Dimension,” in Charles F. Doran and John H. Sigler, eds., *Canada and the United States: Enduring Friendship, Persistent Stress* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 161-202; Dwight N. Mason, “US-Canada Defence Relations: A View from Washington,” in Carment, Hampson, and Hillmer, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2003*, 135-55; John J. Noble, “Canada-US Relations in the Post-Iraq-War Era: Stop the Drift Towards Irrelevance,” *Policy Options* (May 2003), 19-24; and J.L. Granatstein, “The Importance of Being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada’s National Interests through Tighter Ties with the U.S.,” *Benefactors’ Lecture*, 2003 (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 2003), esp. 19-27; available on-line at www.cdhowe.org/pdf/benefactors_lecture_2003.pdf.

replaced by a Conservative minority government under the leadership of Stephen Harper. The incoming government was committed to improving the Canada-US relationship, which had become increasingly frosty under both Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin. Relations did indeed improve in the months after the “Canada’s New Government,” as the Harper Conservatives quickly starting calling themselves, was sworn in, but what is noteworthy is that the Conservatives made only marginal changes to Canada’s defense policy; as we will see, the Harper government essentially continued the trajectory established by the Paul Martin Liberals in 2004-2005. However, what had been constructed as an “irritant” in the relationship under the previous Liberal government was no longer an impediment to improved relations, suggesting that we need to rethink causality in the changing “atmospherics” of the relationship.

Defense and the Deterioration of the Relationship, 2001-2006

The arrival of George W. Bush at the White House in January 2001 precipitated a slow but steady deterioration in some strands of the Canada-United States relationship. In part the deterioration was fuelled by the embrace by President Bush of a robust and aggressive global policy, particularly after the attacks of 11 September 2001, and the profound discomfort created in Canada by his Manichean view of the world and especially his eagerness to use force to try to impose democracy in Iraq.

And in part the deterioration was the result of what Denis Stairs has called “the lamentably awkward and embarrassingly public handling of the continental relationship by Canadian politicians with an electoral interest in firing off verbal pot-shots at

American expense – a temptation to which they have succumbed even when they have been perfectly aware that their doing so can serve no useful Canadian purpose, much less exert a constructive influence on American behaviour.”⁴ Certainly Jean Chrétien, who was Canada’s Liberal prime minister from November 1993 to December 2003, would openly oppose the Bush administration on a number of policy fronts, most unambiguously on issues of defense policy, while at the same time seeking to garner political support within Canada by playing to the deep strain of anti-Americanism in the Canadian body politic. Ottawa’s refusal to join the “coalition of the willing” in invading and overthrowing the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in March 2003—announced in triumphal joy by the prime minister in the House of Commons to thunderous applause from the Liberal MPs around him—marked the nadir. By the summer of 2003, the relationship between Bush and Chrétien was completely frosty, with Bush cancelling a planned state visit to Canada, and Chrétien frozen out of the White House. As Gotlieb put it, “relations between the Canadian prime minister and U.S. president became more strained than at any time in decades.”⁵

What is remarkable about the deterioration in the relationship in this period was not only its depth, but also its extraordinary duration. The historical record suggests that relations between the Canadian prime minister and the American president are

⁴ Denis Stairs, “The Menace of General Ideas in the Making and Conduct of Canadian Foreign Policy,” *O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture*, Ottawa, 25 October 2006.

⁵ Allan Gotlieb, “Romanticism and Realism in Canada’s Foreign Policy,” *Benefactors’ Lecture*, 2004 (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 2004); available on-line at www.cdhowe.org/pdf/benefactors_lecture_2004.pdf

normally “corrected” on the Canadian side in what appears to be an almost thermostatic way: prime ministers who are seen to be too estranged from (or too close to) American presidents normally find themselves former prime ministers, voted out of power.⁶ In the case of Canadian-American relations in the early/mid-2000s, however, the thermostat broke just as it was kicking in.

Paul Martin took over as leader of Liberal leader in November 2003, and as prime minister in December, promising to put the Canadian-American relationship back on track. However, once in power, Martin chose not to follow through on this promise. It is true that he took a number of policy initiatives that found favor in Washington, such as promising dramatic increases in defense spending in 2004, announcing an increase in the size of the Canadian Forces of 5,000 regular forces, or embracing a more robust mission with the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2005. But whatever positive effects these initiatives might have had on the relationship tended to be offset by the negative effects of countervailing tendencies.

First, relations were seriously soured over the Liberal government’s rejection of the American invitation to join the Ballistic Missile Defense scheme. Although Martin himself was in favor of Canadian participation in BMD, and had approved the signing of an amendment to the NORAD agreement that deeply involved Canada in BMD.

⁶ Needless to say, the fundamental flaw in the thermostatic analogy is that it implies causality: i.e., Canadians, annoyed at their prime minister’s relations with the US president, base their vote on that annoyance. There is, however, no empirical evidence for this, suggesting that the dynamic may be nothing but coincidence. For an exploration of this dynamic, see Kim Richard Nossal, “A Thermostatic Dynamic? Electoral Outcomes and Anti-Americanism in Canada,” in Richard A. Higgott and Ivona Malbasic, eds., *The Political Consequences of Anti-Americanism*, forthcoming 2007.

Although the official position of the Canadian government was that “The NORAD amendment does not mean NORAD will take on any new functions. NORAD will not be responsible for missile defence,”⁷ in effect Ottawa’s agreement to allow NORAD to be involved in sharing information on missile warning, together with Martin’s own previous statements of support for BMD, suggested to the United States that they could count on Canada’s eventual support for BMD, which was sought by the United States government for the symbolic legitimacy it would help lend the BMD project.

However, in the end Martin could not bring himself to challenge the anti-American sentiment in his caucus and the strong anti-BMD attitudes among his Québec MPs. In Québec, as David Haglund has noted,

missile defence can at times appear to be the most momentous issue on anyone's policy agenda. “Debate” is probably the wrong word to apply to the Québec discussion of missile defence, because a proper debate presupposes that there are two sides in contention over a matter. What is noteworthy is the unanimity on display in the Quebec discussions, with near-total agreement that missile defence must be bad, the only items of disagreement arising over exactly *why* this should be so.⁸

While it still remains unclear whether MPs from Québec—not only Liberals but also MPs from the Bloc Québécois, which was also opposed to BMD—actually threatened to

⁷ This assertion appeared on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade website in 2005 (“Missile Defence: Facts and Definitions,” last updated 15 June 2005, http://maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/missile-defence-facts-en.asp). This document has been “disappeared” from the DFAIT website: clicking the URL causes a redirect to a current DFAIT page on missile security that contains no hint of Canadian opposition to BMD. “Missile Defence: Facts and Definitions” still exists in cache (most easily found by googling “/foreign_policy/missile-defence-facts-en.asp”).

⁸ David G. Haglund, “Does Québec Have an ‘Obsession Anti-Américaine’?” Annual Seagram Lecture, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Montreal, 14 April 2005.

bring the minority government down over the issue, Martin's behavior certainly suggested that he was fearful of such an outcome. In February 2005, without warning the US or offering any reasoned justification for its decision, the government abruptly announced that it would not join BMD. The reaction from the United States was, in the circumstances, understandably negative: the US ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, pronounced himself "perplexed" by the decision; the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, immediately postponed a planned trip to Canada.⁹

A second reason for the failure of some of his government's defense initiatives to have a positive impact was because in the end Martin could not resist succumbing to the temptation of trying to seek votes in the 2004 and 2006 election campaigns by appealing to the voters' anti-Americanism. And at times the anti-American card was played with spectacular carelessness. For example, at an international conference on climate change held in Montreal in the middle of the election campaign, Martin sought to score political points by publicly excoriating the Bush administration for its stance on the Kyoto Accords, calling on Americans to heed the "global conscience" on climate change (choosing not to mention the fact that Canada was much further away from meeting its Kyoto obligations than the United States was). And in a move designed to signal to Canadian voters his distance from Bush, Martin also made a point of arranging a special photo opportunity with Bill Clinton, who remains popular in Canada.¹⁰

⁹ "Rice May Postpone Visit to Canada," *Globe and Mail*, 1 March 2005, A4;

¹⁰ *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 9 December 2005.

The net effect was that Martin's twenty-six months in power saw a continuation of poor relations. It was thus not until the Liberal government was defeated in on a vote of confidence on 28 November 2005 that the thermostatic dynamic occurred. During the election campaign that followed in December 2005 and January 2006, the Conservatives and their leader, Stephen Harper, ran on a platform that, *inter alia*, promised that a Conservative government would improve Canadian-American relations. The opposition Conservatives articulated a well-developed critique of the undercurrent of anti-Americanism that had marked the Liberal government's approach to the Canada-United States relationship. And while it is not at all clear that that promise in any sense *caused* the outcome of the general election of 23 January 2006, a minority Conservative government did replace the Liberals.

Defense Policy and "Canada's New Government"

After Harper's government was sworn in on 6 February 2006, there was indeed a marked and rapid improvement in the Canada-United States relationship. The change in tone was clearly evident at Harper's first summit meeting with Bush held at the end of March in Cancún in the context of the new North American partnership summit of the Mexican and American presidents and the Canadian prime minister that had been inaugurated the year before.¹¹ Certain there was no longer any grumbling from the United States embassy in Ottawa about Canadian policy—even when mere days after

¹¹ Paul Wells, "PM Harper Meets US, Mexican Presidents," *Maclean's*, 10 April 2006.

the election the new prime minister-to-be sharply rebuked the United States ambassador over Arctic sovereignty.¹² But gone too was the resistance to working to clear some of the long-standing issues in the relationship. Thus, for example, President Bush decided to insert himself directly into the softwood lumber process, helping to galvanize an agreement that was more favorable for Canadian interests than the status quo, and allowing the Harper government to remove this long-running irritant from the bilateral agenda.¹³ In short, the new Conservative government quickly made good on its election campaign promise that it would improve relations with the United States.

If defense issues had played such an important role in the deterioration of the relationship in the early 2000s, to what extent did changes in defense policy introduced by the Conservatives after February 2006 play a role in refurbishing the relationship in 2006? Here, I suggest, we find a paradox: for all the change in the atmospherics of the relationship that occurred after February 2006, in fact there was not a great deal of change in the defense policy behavior under the Harper government.

Defense policy was not an issue during the election campaign, except in an indirect way. In early January 2006, with polls showing Liberal fortunes tanking, the

¹² Two days after the election, the US ambassador to Canada, David Wilkins, was asked about the Arctic at a Q&A after a public lecture. He responded by restating the long-standing American claim that the waters of the Arctic archipelago constituted an international strait. The prime minister-in-waiting took the opportunity to criticize the ambassador and reassert the long-standing Canadian claim that Arctic waters were internal waters. "Harper Rebukes US Envoy over Arctic Dispute," *Globe and Mail*, 27 January 2006.

¹³ The agreement announced on 27 April 2006 called for the revocation of countervail and anti-dumping orders and the return of C\$4 of the C\$5 billion in duties collected by the US. See the Canadian government's softwood lumber website: www.softwoodlumber.gc.ca; for an abbreviated backgrounder, see www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1234, 1 July 2006.

Liberal party introduced a series of attack ads against the Conservatives. One ad accused Harper of being in favour of the war in Iraq war, and claimed that a Harper victory “will put a smile on George W. Bush’s face”; the ad ended “Well, at least someone will be happy, eh?” Another ad implied that a Conservative proposal to redeploy Canadian Forces units to different cities for handling natural disasters was in fact a nefarious plot to stage a military coup. The proposed ad was posted to the Liberal party website, discovered by a reporter, downloaded and widely played. Although the ad was immediately pulled before it even ran, the damage had been done, backfiring badly because it was seen to denigrate the professionalism of the CF.¹⁴

Otherwise, defense issues were not a primary focus of the campaigns of any of the five main parties contesting the election.¹⁵ And even when a Canadian diplomat, Glyn Berry, the political director of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar City, was killed by a roadside bomb on 15 January—a week before election day—Canada’s Afghanistan mission did not emerge as an election issue.

One of the reasons why defense policy was not an issue during the election campaign is the major opposition party, the Conservatives, did not choose to focus its

¹⁴ To the beat of a war-drum, a voice-over says: “Stephen Harper actually announced he wants to increase military presence in our cities... Canadian cities... Soldiers with guns... In our cities... In Canada... We did not make this up... Choose your Canada.” All the 30-second Liberal attack ads are archived on-line at www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060103/ELXN_liberal_attackads_060110/20060110/.

¹⁵ The Liberal party, the Conservative party, the New Democratic Party and the Green party all ran candidates across the country; the Bloc Québécois only nominated candidates in the 75 seats in Québec.

campaign on defense issues. Indeed, it is clear that the Conservatives entered the 2006 election campaign without an elaborate defense policy. In a 47-page electoral platform, heavily dominated by a domestic agenda of five “priorities,”¹⁶ precisely 246 words were devoted to defense. The election platform committed a Conservative government to pursue what was called (without elaboration) a “Canada First” vision, which involved defending “our vast territory and three ocean areas.” The Canadian Forces (CF) would continue to be a “multi-role, combat-capable defence force”; the platform promised that a Conservative government would expand the size of the CF by recruiting an additional 13,000 regular forces and 10,000 reservists, and by increasing defense spending by CAD\$5.3 billion on equipment and base infrastructure.¹⁷ However, the platform made no mention of any other of the defense issues on the political agenda, such as the Canadian mission in Afghanistan or Ballistic Missile Defense, or the Iraq war, despite the claims of Liberal campaign advertising that the Conservatives were “pro-Iraq war.”

There were some elaborations of this slim platform during the campaign. For example, on 13 December, at a campaign stop in Trenton, Ontario, home of a large Canadian Forces base (CFB), Harper promised that Trenton would be the “hub” for a new strategic lift fleet that would be acquired to replace the aging and relatively small

¹⁶ “We will clean up government, cut the GST [Goods and Services Tax], offer parents help with child care, cut patient wait times for medical procedures, and crack down on crime.” Conservative Party of Canada, *Stand Up for Canada: Federal Election Platform 2006*, 3; available online at www.conservative.ca/media/20060113-Platform.pdf

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

Hercules aircraft, and thus to free the CF from having to depend on renting Antonov An-124s from Ukraine or Boeing C-17 Globemasters from the United States Air Force. In addition, Harper promised that a new 650-member rapid-reaction airborne battalion would be created and that the size of the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), which was already based at CFB Trenton, would be doubled.¹⁸

Harper also played the “Arctic card”¹⁹ by promising what would have involved a radical shift in Canada’s defense posture. In a speech in Winnipeg on 22 December 2005, Harper promised that a Conservative government would embrace a series of measures that would allow Ottawa to assert Canadian sovereignty in Arctic waters. These measures included commitments to expand personnel, equipment and infrastructure. Harper promised the construction of a new military deep-water port in the Iqaluit region that would be home to 500 members of the Canadian Forces, the opening of an army training center in Cambridge Bay, the establishment of a new 650-person airborne battalion for response anywhere in the Arctic, and an expansion of the Canadian

¹⁸ “Conservatives Call for Boost to Canadian Forces,” Trenton, 13 December 2005; archived online by the Library and Archives of Canada: epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/300/conservative-ef/06-01-06/www.conservative.ca/@section_id=1738§ion_copy_id=35046&language_id=0.

¹⁹ In Canadian politics, the “Arctic card” is an attempt by politicians to appeal to the unique place that the Arctic occupies in the nationalist imagination in English-speaking Canada. While most Canadians seek to live as far away from the Arctic as they can manage, they nonetheless tend to conceive of the North as a crucial part of the country, to be defended against the predations—real or imagined—of others. Political elites in Ottawa learned long ago that “standing up for Arctic sovereignty” (as Harper entitled his Winnipeg speech) is a sure-fire political winner in English-speaking Canada: John G. Diefenbaker’s “Northern Vision” in the 1957 and 1958 election campaigns; Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s Arctic initiatives in 1969-70 in response to the sailing of the supertanker, *SS Manhattan*, through the Northwest Passage; Brian Mulroney’s robust response to the sailing of a US Coast Guard icebreaker, *USCGS Polar Sea*, through the Passage in 1985; or the efforts by the Liberal government in 2004-2005 to politicize a dispute with Denmark over the ownership of Hans Island, an uninhabited rock located between Greenland and Ellesmere Island.

Rangers, the community-based defense force that provides a military presence in remote Arctic communities. He also promised that a Conservative government would purchase three heavy naval troop-carrying ice-breakers, deploy a new Arctic sensor system for monitoring the movement of ships and submarines in Arctic waters, purchase new fixed-wing search-and-rescue aircraft to be based in Yellowknife, upgrade existing Aurora aircraft for coastal surveillance, and add new unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) squadrons at two Canadian Forces bases: CFB Comox in British Columbia and CFB Goose Bay in Newfoundland and Labrador.

No explicit price tag was attached to any of these specific initiatives. However, the promise made during the campaign was that a Conservative government would, over a five-year period, increase defense spending by C\$5.3 billion over and above the C\$12.8 billion increase which had been committed by the Martin Liberal government over the five years from 2005 to 2009-2010.

Once in power, however, the Harper government did little to implement the full range of these campaign promises. The promised C\$5.3 billion increase in defense spending—spread over five years—was included in the government’s first budget in May 2006. The new Canadian Forces recruitment targets were duly implemented, even though, as Elinor Sloan reminds us,²⁰ the Department of National Defence faced a huge structural problem: when the Conservatives assumed office, the nominal strength of the CF was 62,000. But fully 9,000 of those positions were unfilled, so that the effective

²⁰ Elinor Sloan, “Canada’s International Security Policy under a Conservative Government,” in Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2006: Minorities and Priorities* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 155-56.

strength of the Canadian military in 2006 was 53,000. Thus, to implement the election promise of bringing the CF to a strength of 75,000 would require the recruitment—and training—of 22,000 new regulars. In the summer of 2006, the Auditor-General noted that DND was having difficulty implementing the increase of 5000 regular forces announced by the Liberals in 2004, much less finding the recruits that would bring the CF up to the 75,000 level promised by the Conservatives.

The Conservatives also moved ahead with the promise to procure strategic airlift capability to replace the aging Hercules fleet. At the end of June 2006, the minister of national defence, Gordon O'Connor, announced that the Canadian government would buy four Boeing C-17 Globemasters. But of the hugely expensive Arctic promises, there was no further word.

Out of Left Field: The Afghanistan Mission

The evolution of Canadian defense policy in 2006 was very much affected by one issue that had not been fully anticipated by the Conservatives: the transformation of the Canadian mission to Afghanistan undertaken by the Liberal government in 2005. Ottawa agreed to redeploy the approximately 2000 Canadian troops assigned to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul, where they had been serving since August 2003, to the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom in the Kandahar region; the redeployment was to take effect in February 2006. In July 2006, ISAF assumed command of the southern region of Afghanistan from the United States.

The arrival of the main contingent of Canadians in the Kandahar region in February 2006 coincided with the expansion of the insurgency and the importation of insurgent tactics from Iraq, including improvised explosive devices and suicide bombing attacks. The first Canadian combat death from hostile fire came within a month, and over the course of 2006 a total of 31 additional deaths were caused by fire fights, rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices or suicide bombs. By the end of the year, Canada had experienced more deaths in Afghanistan than any other coalition member except the United States (and on a per capita basis, no other coalition member has experienced as many deaths).²¹

In a sense the lethality of the Afghanistan mission came out of left field. It is true that when the Liberal government announced the new mission in the summer of 2005, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Gen. Rick Hillier, who had headed the Canadian mission to Afghanistan before his promotion to CDS, went out of his way to remind Canadians that the new deployment would pit the Canadian Forces against “detestable murderers and scumbags,” and that the job of Canadian troops was to be able to kill them²²—a blunt comment that provoked Carolyn Parrish, an MP who had been expelled from the Liberal caucus for insubordination,²³ to complain that this was a departure from

²¹ See the casualty details at iCasualties.org: www.icasualties.org/oef/default.aspx.

²² “Failed States Pose Grave Dangers, Top General Warns,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 July 2005, A3; “Martin Defends Mission,” *National Post*, 30 July 2005,

²³ Parrish had accumulated a long record of anti-American sentiments, but was not expelled from the Liberal caucus until she told a reporter that Prime Minister Martin could “go to hell.”

Canada's tradition of peacekeeping and that Hillier was a "beast" who should be "muzzled."²⁴ But this exchange appears to have been forgotten in the following months.

Even before the full extent of the transformation of the mission became apparent, Prime Minister Harper had already lashed himself and his new government to the OEF/ISAF mast. His first foreign trip was a visit to Canadian troops in Kandahar in mid-March, during which he promised that his government would strongly support the mission. In May, the government decided to extend the Canadian commitment to the mission until 2009, two years beyond the 2007 commitment made by the Martin government. While Harper reminded the House of Commons that he did not need legislative approval for the extended mission, he nonetheless introduced a motion approving the extension, claiming that he would be happy to call an election on the issue. Thirty Liberal MPs voted with the government, but the vote was still close: 149-145.²⁵

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that, a year after coming to power, the Conservative government's defense policy looks very similar to the defense policy pursued by the Liberal government. And indeed, much defense policy is little more than an extension of commitments made by the Martin Liberals. To be sure, the Harper government

²⁴ "Parrish Rebukes Liberals on Afghanistan," *National Post*, 28 July 2005, A6; "Martin Defends Mission," *National Post*, 30 July 2005, A4.

²⁵ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 39th Parl., 1st Sess., 17 May 2006.

expanded some of those commitments, for example making good on its election promise to increase the defense budget by C\$5.3 billion, but, like the Liberal government before it, the Conservatives back-loaded the expenditures. Likewise, recruitment targets were expanded. And the Conservatives finally made a decision on strategic airlift, ending years of Hamletian indecision under the Liberals.

But in other areas, there have been few initiatives or changes. Certainly the Conservatives have not changed Canada's position on Ballistic Missile Defense, and there is little prospect that Harper will reverse Martin's decision of February 2005 any time soon.²⁶ The May 2006 budget demonstrated that the huge commitments made about the Arctic during the 2005-2006 election campaign—commitments that would have radically transformed Canada's defense orientation—have simply been shunted to a backburner. And, for a party accused by the Liberals of being "pro-Iraq war," the Conservatives have offered no additional assistance of any kind at all to the failing American occupation in Iraq beyond—not even any rhetorical support.

And yet, for all the lack of differentiation in defense policy between Liberals and Conservatives, the differences that have occurred in the Canada-US relationship have been significant. The "atmospherics" of the relationship are completely different, with much of the tension that had marked the relationship between 2001 and 2006 dissipated. Yet some of the issues that were irritants under the Liberals remain, most notably Ballistic Missile Defense, the degree to which Canada supports American initiatives in

²⁶ Ann Denholm Crosby, "The New Conservative Government and Missile Defence," in Cooper and Rowlands, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2006*, 170.

global policy, or differences on defending sovereignty in the Arctic. Indeed, the parallels with the Mulroney era—when the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney was able to cross the administration of Ronald Reagan on the Strategic Defense Initiative or Northwest Passage without causing a deterioration in the relationship—are striking.²⁷ The experience of both Mulroney in the 1980s and Harper in 2006 suggests that in Canada-US relations, defense issues become irritants in the relationship only when the broader context in which these issues arise is fraught with a deeper tension.

Kim Richard Nossal is professor and head, Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Email: nossalk@post.queensu.ca

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²⁷ See Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal, eds., *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984-1993* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001).