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FLYING CANADA INTO A BI-NATIONAL DEFENCE AGREEMENT: IS NORAD WORTH THE JET FUEL?

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

The North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) may be a bi-national defence agreement and operational command organization, but it can easily be thought of as a modern-day, two-seat military aircraft, with an American commander as the aircraft captain, and a Canadian deputy as the co-pilot. Canada enjoys many benefits associated with the alliance, including physical security and deterrence beyond its own capabilities; and access to the command decision process and intelligence that would otherwise be out of reach. However, that increased protection comes at a cost, and some would argue that the price to pay is a certain degree of sovereignty. The United States will protect North America, or more specifically protect its own territory, regardless of whether Canada takes part in NORAD, or even fields a military force at all. Participation in NORAD is therefore the best-case scenario for Canadians, as it allows Canada, as a middle power, to maintain national sovereignty and a degree of control over its defence.

In proving this thesis, this essay will utilize three linked arguments. First, as a middle power, Canada is predisposed to certain functional and behavioural outcomes, including the ability to act / express itself with greater influence than a small power, and the tendency to seek resolution through multilateral, cooperative means. These attributes, augmented by its soft power approach, have helped to align Canada with the great power to the South.

Second, this paper will briefly examine the history of NORAD, and the delicate nature of its bi-national command structure, which has at times led the “two-seat military

aircraft” into pockets of turbulent air, particularly in regards to the handling of nuclear weapons and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Fortunately, the two nations have largely been able to settle their disagreements, and this argument contends that the current NORAD leadership organization is not unreasonable – instead, it is commensurate with the imbalance of power which exists on the continent.

The final argument to prove that Canada’s place in NORAD is a force-multiplier deals with the concept of defence against help. A northern neighbour who possesses no ability to protect itself would invite, if not oblige, the US to take command of Canadian aerospace in order to protect itself. The best offence is indeed a good defence, and protecting national sovereignty is at the heart of this concept. Canada’s strategic importance through proximity, modern standing military, and exclusive relationship with the US through NORAD have placed the nation in a position of privilege. The key benefit of this privilege is an “enhanced protection from direct military attack,”¹ and this paper will demonstrate that it would be foolish for Canada to deviate from the flight plan at this point in time.

CANADA AS A MIDDLE POWER

In defining Canada’s current position as a middle power, one must look at how this reputation was built. From its inception as a colony, Canada adopted its national

¹ Government of Canada, "NORAD," <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=norad/hjiq6lbn>, (accessed April 21, 2015).

identity from a mélange of Aboriginal, French, and predominantly English, and was quite content to remain a dedicated member of the British Commonwealth. Massie remarked that as the 13 Colonies to the South turned from colonialism towards independence, Canada remained “profoundly attached to the Empire, it sought not independence, but greater sovereignty; thus it demanded responsible government, though not complete autonomy, from the mother country.”² Within the first half of the 20th century, Canada found that its reliance had evolved from a dependence upon the Crown to becoming a “satellite of America, and as a result missed out on being an independent country.”³

What of status, then? States have traditionally been afforded a status based upon size, military capabilities, or international influence. Canada has long been deemed a middle power, but what does that truly mean? Dr Adam Chapnick, professor of defence studies at the Canadian Forces College, brought to light the three-tiered definition of the middle power, encompassing the functional, behavioural and hierarchical models. “A middle power, in its most basic form, is a state which is neither a great power nor a small power. Middle power, is therefore a relative term.”⁴ Great power status is secured through a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and the possession of veto power. Small powers are those which are unable to affect any true influence. Functionally, Canada offers a voice, an interest, an involvement and a capability to act which is distinctly different from that of a great power, and much more than that of a small

² Justin Massie, "Canada's (in)Dependence in the North American Security Community: The Asymmetrical Norm of Common Fate," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007), 498.

³ *Ibid.*, 494.

⁴ Adam Chapnick, "The Middle Power," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 7, no. 2 (1999), 73.

power.⁵ Behaviourally, Canada's "tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems... to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and their tendency to embrace notions of 'good international citizenship' to guide their diplomacy" has established its position as a middle power with special responsibilities and functions in its perpetual roles as peacekeepers, mediators and communicators.⁷ Hierarchically, Canada is certainly not a great power, but then again, Chapnick asserts, no longer are Britain or France, even with their veto power.⁸ Combining the functional and behavioural aspects, former foreign affairs minister Paul Martin Sr compared Canada's reach for increased hierarchical status to other middle powers during the Cold War: "Many nations had an appetite for power without teeth, but Canada had developed both the appetite and the teeth for a new international role."⁹

Nations with middle power status have the ability to affect international situations, but are limited in their capacity. Without the ability, or perhaps the desire, to act unilaterally, these nations often rely on soft power solutions to achieve their objectives. As Joseph Nye defined:

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example, aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. This soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them.¹⁰

⁵ Adam Chapnick, "Middle Power no More? Canada in World Affairs since 2006," *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 14, no. 2 (2013), 105.

⁷ Chapnick, *The Middle Power*, 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Douglas L. Bland, *Canada without Armed Forces?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004),

In embracing its “middlestateness,”¹¹ Canada has employed soft power tactics as it has led the way in international peacekeeping since its inception in 1965. In addition to UN peacekeeping missions, the Canadian Armed Forces have been employed throughout the globe in capacities much beyond those commensurate with a small power, from Korea and the Middle East (1991), to Haiti, Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine and Iraq, and most recently in support of humanitarian operations following the earthquake in Nepal. This willingness to set the example as a co-operator, or a “helpful-fixer,”¹² has not been restricted to the global stage. Canada’s readiness to take responsibility for its place in continental collective defence has added to its obliging reputation, and has certainly done much in terms of Canada’s international credibility.

CANADA IN NORAD

Geographically, continental North America is immense; Canada’s vast land mass alone has been deemed indefensible given the stature of the nation’s forces.¹³ What makes the situation interesting for Canada is that it is essentially the buffer zone between traditional 20th century enemies, America and the Soviet Union. Political and military posturing post-1945 led to nuclear build-up and an eventual Cold War. To counter the Soviet bomber and ICBM missile threats, Canadian and American air defence forces

¹⁰ Joseph Nye, "The Benefits of Soft Power," *Compass: A Journal of Leadership, John F Kennedy School of Government*, Spring (2004).

¹¹ Chapnick, *Middle Power no More? Canada in World Affairs since 2006*.

¹² Chapnick, *The Middle Power*, 75.

¹³ Ann Crosby, "A Middle-Power Military in Alliance: Canada and NORAD," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (1997), 38.

continued to grow “increasingly intertwined, both geographically and operationally.”¹⁴

What began as an agreement between Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940 at Ogdensburg¹⁵ grew into bi-national operational control over all North American air defence forces in the Fall of 1957.¹⁶ NORAD goals have traditionally been to maintain aerospace control over, and to deter, detect and defend against, any airborne threat to the continent. In fact, NORAD air weapons controllers and aircrew were the first responders to the attacks of September 11, 2001.¹⁷

The NORAD command centre at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado Springs, is manned by both American and Canadian staff officers and enlisted members. Moreover, over the years NORAD forces have employed multiple aircraft types, from manned CF-101 Voodoos to unmanned Boeing Bomarc missiles, and drawn situational awareness from the historic Distant Early Warning (DEW) and Pinetree radar lines to today’s most sophisticated satellites.¹⁸

While both nations have their hands on the metaphorical aircraft’s controls, it is important to note that NORAD is bi-national, vice bi-lateral, in its organization, meaning

¹⁴ Joseph T. Jockel, *Canada in NORAD, 1957-2007: A History* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007)., 9.

¹⁵ Richard Evan Goette, "Canada, the United States and the Command and Control of Air Forces for Continental Air Defence from Ogdensburg to NORAD, 1940-1957" (Ph.D., Queen's University (Canada)), . 1.

¹⁶ Joseph T. Jockel, "Five Lessons from the History of North American Aerospace Defence," *International Journal* 65, no. 4 (2010)., 1013.

¹⁷ Government of Canada, *NORAD*

¹⁸ John Gellner, "Canada in NATO and NORAD," *Air University Review*, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1967/mar-apr/gellner.html> (accessed April 26, 2015)., 6.

that both nations' forces are brought together under one commander, who in the case of NORAD will always be an American officer. If the agreement were bi-lateral in nature, the two nations would work cooperatively but remain under their respective chains of command.¹⁹ There can be only one pilot in ultimate command. The American is supported by a Canadian co-pilot, who is ready to take the controls if the commander is absent or incapacitated. The fact that a Canadian acts as second-in-command and that "...Canadian officers are integrated into the combined headquarters offer further guarantees that Canadian interests will be given proper attention."²⁰ Holding the deputy position is not unreasonable, given the imbalance of power which exists in North America due to the super- and middle-power statuses which are at play, however, it has led to some difficulties in what Canadian diplomat John W. Holmes called "atmospherics" between neighbours.²¹ Disagreements are likely to occur in any form of relationship, and NORAD has been no exception.

Fortunately, in NORAD's early days, the leadership was able to push through organizational challenges. While the first Canadian deputy, Air Marshal Royal Slemon, could declare a state of emergency, he was neither made fully aware of the American nuclear capabilities nor authorized to employ nuclear weapons to defend against an

¹⁹ Ernie Regehr, "Retiring NORAD: Time for a New Kind of Continental Security Cooperation," http://ploughshares.ca/pl_publications/retiring-norad-time-for-a-new-kind-of-continental-security-cooperation/ (accessed April 21, 2015).

²⁰ Goette, *Canada, the United States and the Command and Control of Air Forces for Continental Air Defence from Ogdensburg to NORAD, 1940-1957.*, 275.

²¹ Kim Richard Nossal, "Defense Policy and the Atmospherics of Canada-U.S. Relations: The Case of the Harper Conservatives," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007)., 23.

airborne Russian threat.²² Recognising these critical chinks in the command's armour, the NORAD Commander-in-Chief, General Earle Partridge, made the immediate decision to lift the veil and bring his Canadian subordinate into the nuclear age.²³

Unfortunately, some early issues inside NORAD's cockpit were not resolved as smoothly. The most critical example was the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought America and the Soviet Union to the brink of war, and highlighted a massive fissure between two North American governments. Upon discovery, the US was not prepared to sit idle while the Soviets used Fidel Castro's communist nation to build an "impregnable Communist bastion close to the heart of the democratic world"²⁴ only 90 nautical miles south of the Florida Keys. American forces were quickly put on high alert and planned a quarantine of Soviet ships approaching Cuba.

In theory, NORAD was supposed to allow both countries to work in unison; however, from Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's perspective, the Canadian government was not afforded enough warning of the impending military action.²⁵ In a defiant attempt to avoid being seen as a mere "satellite state at the beck and call of an imperial master,"²⁶ his orders to Canada's military services were to "stand fast." Lack of coherence within the Canadian government and building pressure on Canadian officials to act led the

²² Jockel, *Canada in NORAD, 1957-2007: A History.*, 29.

²³ Goette, *Canada, the United States and the Command and Control of Air Forces for Continental Air Defence from Ogdensburg to NORAD, 1940-1957.*, 276.

²⁴ John Hasek, *The Disarming of Canada* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987), 141.

²⁵ Stephen Clarkson and Erin Fitzgerald, "A Special Military Relationship? Canada's Role in Constructing US Military Power." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 12, no. 1 (Fall, 2009), 7.

²⁶ Jockel, *Canada in NORAD, 1957-2007: A History.*, 54.

Minister of National Defence, Douglas Harkness, to place Canadian NORAD assets on increased readiness. While the two nations did finally align threat levels at DEFCON 2 on 24 October, 1962, the political damage had been done. The mistrust and lack of unity over the Cuban crisis went beyond the known mutual distrust between Diefenbaker and US President John F. Kennedy,²⁷ spanning across such important issues as Canada's participation in Operation Skyhawk²⁸ and nuclear weapons procurement and testing, to the dispersal of USAF F-106X interceptor aircraft across Canada.²⁹

While Canadian and American diplomats may not always have agreed on every issue, both realised the importance of collective continental defence. Middle powers are more inclined to seek resolution through non-violent and cooperative means, but if forced into a situation where force becomes necessary, they most often rely on the concept of collective defence to ensure their own protection. As Dominique Guay observed, "were a serious military threat to Canada or its allies to emerge, Canada would, once again, seek its security in collective defence arrangements."³⁰ Canada's participation in NATO has added value to its fundamental concept of collective defence, and is in keeping with its basic principle "whereby each state agreed to come to the aid of any other member state

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸ Operation Skyhawk was a NORAD exercise, slated to take place in October 1959. It had been jointly planned by Canadian and American air defence forces, and was to 'war-game' an intrusion into NORAD airspace by Russian bombers, simulated by Strategic Air Command aircraft. The goal was to test North American airspace control and coordination between military and civilian control agencies, and NORAD response. Under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, the Canadian government made a last minute decision to withdraw from the extensive exercise, which effectively cancelled the entire evolution, much to the confusion and dismay of the American government. For more on Operation Skyhawk, see Joseph Jockel's *Canada in NORAD, 1957-2007: A History*, p51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁰ Dominique Guay, *NORAD - a Good Thing for Canada: Should Canada Increase its Support?* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 1998), 7.

in the event of aggression against that state.”³¹ Michael Lawless has described NATO’s collective defence as follows:

In its most limited interpretation, NATO, as a collective security organization, was founded for urgent and primary reasons of defence. However, NATO’s role as a political and military alliance was to provide for collective defence against any form of aggression, and to maintain a secure environment for the development of democracy and economic growth. Fundamentally, “the North Atlantic Treaty is the framework for a defensive alliance designed to prevent aggression or to repel it, should it occur. It also provides for continuous cooperation and consultation in political, economic, and other non-military fields.” In this regard, the NATO alliance itself has a dual nature that “proclaims the importance of economic and social progress and, at the same time, reaffirms a security policy based on nations’ inherent right to collective self-defence.”³²

In addition to Lawless’s list of NATO’s collective defence benefits, there are many others which apply directly to Canada’s NORAD air defence requirements. These include cost savings associated with the creation, training, equipping and manning of fighter aircraft, command centres, control installations, missile warning and space surveillance, as well as access to an “intelligence advantage far beyond what [Canada] could afford within its own resources.”³³

Post-2001 threats to the bi-national alliance have evolved into Operation Noble Eagle counter-hijack / airspace protection as well as space defence, but still include the traditional Russian bomber and inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) dangers. Russia has made significant gains with financial injections into the defence program, resuming

³¹ Michael J. Lawless, "Canada and NATO: A Starving Fish in an Expanding Pond," *Canadian Military Journal* 7, no. 2 (Summer, 2006).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Harold Aage Skaarup, "An Intelligence Advantage: Collective Security Benefits Gained by Canada through the Sharing of Military Intelligence with the United States of America" (M.A., Royal Military College of Canada (Canada)), . 144.

Arctic training flights, and the development of the next generation “multiple warhead ICBM – the SS-27 Topol - and is developing the multiple warhead Sarmat ICBM and Bulova submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM).”³⁴ To counter these emerging threats, today’s NORAD employs the best of the current fighter inventory available, F-15 Eagles, F-16 Fighting Falcons, CF-18 Hornets, and F-22 Raptors, and are supported by the KC-135 Strato-tanker, among others.³⁵

The sum of this collective security – physically, politically, and in intelligence sharing, is much greater than anything Canada could manage on its own. While there certainly are costs associated with Canada’s participation in NORAD, the product outweighs the price to pay. As John Gellner remarked in 1967, “being the junior partner is not always easy,”³⁶ but it only makes sense that a middle power such as Canada would take advantage of its access to great power assets and protection.

CANADA AND DEFENCE AGAINST HELP

Former Canadian politician and professor Michael Ignatieff defines sovereignty as the ability to protect, or to act as the “master of one’s own house... a situation where nations don’t need to submit to others.”³⁷ In terms of the defence of Canadian

³⁴ Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, "NORAD in Perpetuity: Challenges and Opportunities for Canada" (Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba), . 11.

³⁵ US Department of Defense, "North American Aerospace Defense Command," <http://www.norad.mil/AboutNORAD.aspx> (accessed April 27, 2015).

³⁶ John Gellner, "A Price Canada Will have to Pay to Stay in NORAD," *The Globe & Mail*, 1967.

sovereignty, this mastery is directly linked to NORAD, and the CAF's ability to protect the Canadian house from external threats to North America.

Ignatieff's quote, in referring to the reliance upon or submission to other nations, leads to an important concept defined in 1973 by political studies professor Nils Ørvik. Small states who are neighbours to larger, more powerful states often carry the fear that eventually the latter will decide to envelop the former. While a full-scale military invasion of Canada by the US may seem unthinkable today, it was not always so, as the threat of America's manifest destiny to include the entirety of North American under the Stars and Stripes remained a key concern of Canadian military planners well into the early 20th century.⁴¹

Ørvik's definition of defence against help goes on to describe three specific conditions,⁴² which can be applied to the theory in relation to Canada and the US. First, Canada is of extreme strategic importance to the US by virtue of its geographic location. The concept of defence in depth makes Canada the buffer zone between America and Russia; once an imminent threat to North America has been detected, validated, tracked and engaged, it can be assumed that the wreckage or fallout will likely be over Canadian territory. The second condition is the existence of a traditional standing military force. Although small when compared to the American military machine, the Canadian

³⁷ American Academy, "Sovereignty and Intervention, 1993 - 2013," <http://www.americanacademy.de/home/program/past/sovereignty-and-intervention-1993-2013> (accessed April 21, 2015).

⁴¹ Massie, *Canada's (in)Dependence in the North American Security Community: The Asymmetrical Norm of Common Fate.*, 502.

⁴² Nils Ørvik, "Defence Against Help: A Strategy for Small States?" *Survival* 15, no. 5 (1973), 228.

government has spent an average of 1.3% of its GDP,⁴³ or approximately 20 billion dollars annually,⁴⁴ on the CAF since 2010. Canadian governments have, in the past, cut military spending in order to balance the national budget, and as Massie describes, this has not gone unnoticed by the United States:

Ottawa cut its defense budget by 20 percent between 1994 and 1999, and considerably reduced its military equipment and troop levels. Washington took note, and by the end of the 1990s, its displeasure could no longer be ignored; accordingly, Ottawa announced a \$1.9 billion increase in defense spending over the period 2000 to 2003.⁴⁶

While some may see this as placating a bully, it is suggested that Ørvik would see this as fulfilment of his second condition. An increase in spending was exactly what this situation required, as it allowed the CAF to continue to rebuild itself following the “decade of darkness” and in the face of a long-term deployment to Afghanistan. This growth in spending, and subsequent increase in responsibility which the CAF accepted upon taking over Regional Command South / Kandahar, helped to build the credibility that Ørvik described.⁴⁷ The third condition describes non-alignment with other states. While Canada and the US are both contributors to the UN and NATO, they are also definitively bound together through NORAD, an agreement which effectively cocoons and protects them from outsiders. This clearly meets Ørvik’s requirement that the neighbours see their joint security issues as “being interdependent.”⁴⁸

⁴³ C. Leuprecht and J. J. Sokolsky, "Defense Policy "Walmart Style": Canadian Lessons in "Not-so-Grand" Grand Strategy," *Armed Forces & Society* (2014). 7.

⁴⁴ John Geddes, "Canada’s Federal Budget: The 5 Big Areas to Watch," *Canadian Business*, 20 March, 2013, .

⁴⁶ Massie, *Canada's (in)Dependence in the North American Security Community: The Asymmetrical Norm of Common Fate.*, 505.

⁴⁷ Ørvik, *Defence Against Help: A Strategy for Small States?*, 228.

Ultimately, if the smaller nation is unable to abide by the three conditions described in the concept of defence against help, they would be left vulnerable to attack, annexation, or at least find themselves under the imposed *protection* of the greater power. There is nothing that Canada can do about its territorial position; it will always be sandwiched between Russia and the United States. As Chapnick described, the Harper government has been consistently aggressive when it comes to imposing its “middlepowerhood.”⁴⁹ This has been witnessed in Conservative-directed military acquisitions, contributions to NORAD, NATO operations in Afghanistan and Libya, and in its response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Its credibility is certainly beyond that of a “strong small power,”⁵⁰ and gives the US no reason to impose its own version of protection upon Canada.

OPTIONS

Several options are available to Canada. It can continue with the *status quo*, contributing to NORAD and having a say in its position as co-pilot. Conversely, Canada could decide to cut military and NORAD spending, although that would be contrary to the primary pillar of the Canada First Defence Strategy.⁵¹ The resultant lack of self-defence, of input into continental defence, of access to intelligence and command

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Chapnick, *Middle Power no More? Canada in World Affairs since 2006.*, 101.

⁵⁰ Chapnick, *The Middle Power.*, 78.

⁵¹ Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2008). 8.

decisions at the highest level, however, would leave Canada essentially flying blind in terms of national defence. As Massie suggested, this is one case where an attempt to increase sovereignty may lead to its demise.⁵² As this paper has shown, such a deviation from the flight path would be unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

Canada has established itself as a strong voice for the middle powers. It has met all of the criteria described above in functional capabilities, behavioural characteristics, and hierarchical status. In leading countless UN Peacekeeping missions and contributing to world peace-making through combat roles, it has proven to be America's greatest ally time and again. These attributes have certainly continued to build trust and allowed for American favour.

It is by historical luck alone that Canada shares the continent with the world's only remaining superpower. Since America will forever be targeted by foreign enemies, sharing a continent means that Canada will also feel that threat. Given the world situation, a continental air defence alliance makes sense. The benefits of this collective defence have been reviewed above, and they are extensive. Canada's participation in NORAD gives it a seat at the table, or at least a "seat at the console,"⁵⁴ and allows Canada a voice in how it wants to manage its forces.

⁵² Massie, *Canada's (in)Dependence in the North American Security Community: The Asymmetrical Norm of Common Fate.*, 502.

The third argument has proved that Canada's strategic importance, capable and responsible modern military, and involvement in the NATO and NORAD alliances, have worked to stave off any American interest in fulfilling its manifest destiny. While Canada is not a superpower, its defence against help situation has allowed it to become America's co-pilot on more missions than just NORAD. The Republic of Korea is another close ally to the US, but in times of conflict the US Pacific Command essentially adopts the South Korean air force. Due to the mutual trust built upon Ørvik's criteria, this help is not required in the case of North America.

Certainly, there have been periods of turbulence throughout NORAD's flight, beginning back in 1957. From an aircraft commander's perspective, it may be disappointing that the Canadian co-pilot may not possess the money or assets required to act as a great power. From a co-pilot's point of view, the more powerful American captain can be, at times, demanding and hard to work with. However, the benefits to both sides are undeniable. Canada must maintain the vector. To assure its national sovereignty and protection against outside threat there can be only one answer – *NORAD in perpetuity*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Joel Sokolsky, "A Seat at the Table: Canada and its Alliances," *Armed Forces & Society* 16, no. 1 (1989), 21.

⁵⁵ Charron and Fergusson, *NORAD in Perpetuity: Challenges and Opportunities for Canada*.

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