

THE SENATE OF CANADA
The Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.



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L'Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Ottawa, K1A 0A4
CANADA

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Open Letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin

The Rt. Hon. Paul Martin, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Room 309-S, Centre Block
House of Commons
Ottawa

Dear Prime Minister Martin,

First, congratulations on becoming Prime Minister. I wish you well, and urge you to uphold Canadian values on peace and security, which are centred in the United Nations system. One of your first challenges will be your decision on Canada's possible participation in the U.S. ballistic missile defence system (BMD). I urge you to say no.

You will hear arguments that "the protection of Canadians" requires participation in missile defence and that we must join in with the U.S. to maintain good Canada-U.S. relations. These are false arguments.

Please insist that your officials give you the facts:

- Not one of the 10 key technologies identified by the U.S. General Accounting Office as essential to missile defence has been operationally tested.
- Even if the ground-based system works, it will be designed to address only a tiny fraction of nuclear warheads capable of hitting North American targets. It will have no capacity against short-range ballistic or cruise missiles that could be fired from ships off the coast, and will be completely impotent against warheads smuggled into any one of the thousands of shipping containers that reach North America daily.

- The U.S. Missile Defence Agency plans, by 2008, to test intercepting missiles in space. The Agency intends to link the ground-based system with space capabilities through a “layered system,” which will require weapons in space. It is impossible for Canada to sign on to the initial ground-based phase without opening the door to endorsing weapons in space. This would contravene a Canadian policy of no weapons in space, which our country has upheld for thirty years. It is simply not credible for Canada to claim that signing on to missile defence does not imply support for the space-based elements that it knows Washington is pursuing.

I commend to you the new report, “Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence,” issued by the Liu Institute (www.ligi.ubc.ca). It states clearly: “The U.S. National Security Strategy discussion of nuclear use and pre-emption options belies the claim that BMD is a defensive system. Shields may be protective, but linked to swords they are part of an offensive and provocative system.”

The ballistic missile defence system will be destabilizing even if it does not work. This is because the existence of the system prods opponents, or even potential competitors such as China, to develop stronger offensive nuclear capability. This means new nuclear arms races as well as missile defence counter-measures. More insecurity for all will be the result of a defence program ostensibly intended to provide security for some.

In today’s globalized world, there is no such thing as a “Fortress North America.” This is why the 2000 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty stated emphatically: “... the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.”

Prime Minister, this is a critical moment for your new government to reaffirm nuclear disarmament fundamentals: the delegitimization of nuclear weapons and promotion of ongoing, irreversible reductions in strategic arsenals. The North Korea and Iran nuclear problems are now in the process of being solved by diplomatic means.

So continue to give diplomacy a chance. Instead of opting for the false security of BMD, show that you want to strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty at the 2005 Review Conference by giving solid backing to the 13 Practical Steps for nuclear disarmament that the international community has already agreed on.

This is a moment for you to rise up above the fray and give positive leadership for peace and security. That is what many Canadians want. Canadians want money spent on improving the equipment of Canada’s armed forces and reinforcing security at our borders and coastlines, not wasted on addressing the extremely unlikely possibility of a missile attack. Succumbing to the ill-considered pressure for missile defence will cripple Canada’s ability to truly strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

Some in Canada confuse our ability to say no to the U.S. with the need to say it respectfully. The Americans respect a principled position expressed in a friendly manner. You are to be commended for giving a high priority in your administration to good Canada-U.S. relations. But, as the history books attest, the quality of our relationship is not dependent on constant agreement.

Canadian participation in missile defence is not a requirement of ongoing security cooperation. NORAD is not dependent on it. It is an illusion to think that “a seat at the table” will give Canada any control over the U.S. system.

Canada has every right to seek explicit clarification of U.S. national security doctrine that asserts the prerogative to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. Canada should remind the U.S. of its obligations to the Non-Proliferation Treaty to disavow the pursuit of new nuclear weapons and the need to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Finally, it is possible that a combination of cost overruns and nonperformance of the technology will lessen the current American ardour for missile defence. Why abandon Canada’s steadfast course in nuclear diplomacy to satisfy the momentary desire of a hard-core element in Washington?

Prime Minister, use U.N. values to steer Canada forward.

With best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Roche, O.C.
Senator