

The following letter appeared in the Globe and Mail on May 3, 2004, and was written by Prof. John Polanyi, Past Chair and current member, Canadian Pugwash Group.

Poor Defence

Following his recent meeting with President George Bush, the Prime Minister is taken to task (Martin and The Politics of Missile Defence – editorial, May 1) for his failure to sign up for ballistic missile-defence (BMD). Paul Martin should, instead, be congratulated.

The issue is not our partnership in NORAD, which has taken on new importance in an age of aerial terrorism. It is whether NORAD (and through NORAD, Canada) should participate in BMD.

The House of Commons, as stated in the editorial, proposed last spring that we give NORAD command of “any system to defend North America against ballistic missiles.” The government has, however, repeatedly said that it construes “any system” to exclude any space-based system. The U.S. administration, far from agreeing to this, gives evidence of planning for an unlimited, multi-layered BMD. It is unclear what we are being asked endorse.

The only system cited as working by the editorial is the Patriot missile employed in Iraq. But this is a “theatre” defence, not a defence against intercontinental ballistic missiles. And the Patriot accidentally shot down two coalition aircraft in Iraq, and targeted a third. It is appalling to consider “fine –tuning” such a complex system as BMC in the field, as U.S. Lieutenant-General Ronald Kadish, suggests, and editorial seems to approve.

The “assertion of sovereignty” urged in this editorial as involving acquiescence in BMD, begins, instead, with the willingness of Canadians to think for ourselves.

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