

# **Missile Defence: new debate, same old song**

*A presentation to the  
Citizens Inquiry on US-Canada Relations*

**on behalf of the  
Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG)**

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## ***Introduction***

In the Summer of 1999 there were hearings in BC on the Expropriation of Nanoose Bay. The federal government was required to hold these hearings prior to expropriating the Bay, which they were doing to stop the BC government from ceasing the use of the bay as a testing range for US nuclear submarines. The provincial government had threatened to end the lease that allows the Federal government to host the US tests in order to force the US and federal Canadian government back to the table during an ongoing trade dispute about salmon fishing.

I see several parallels between the current debate about missile defence, and the issue of federal expropriation of Nanoose Bay. These parallels tell an important story about Canada's militarism, the relation of our militarism to trade, and our relationship with the USA.

When we presented our brief to the public hearings on the expropriation of Nanoose Bay, we made several key points. First, we felt that Canadian Forces Maritime Experimental Testing Range (CFMETR), as part of Canada's NATO commitment, was due for reassessment, as NATO was actively pursuing a non-defensive stance in a post-cold war era. We argued that the military and the military corporations operate outside of the laws that governs citizens of Canada, and that this, combined with their clout as a lobby, undermines the power and efficacy of Canadian democracy. And finally, we argued that the interests served by the testing range were not those of the citizens and the communities it was supposedly meant to protect.

I feel that the arguments we made about Nanoose bear an eerie resonance with what I am coming to present to you today, 5 years later, as Canada faces another question about our military, our arms industry, and our relationship with the USA. Further, I think it is significant that we are facing another similar struggle between public interest, military and corporate interests, and the ability of our federal government to take action as a sovereign country when the USA is involved.

Clearly, there is a deep and dangerous pattern in our military choices as a nation. We need to make a significant change to this cycle if we are to be a nation that is a peace builder, and that is truly democratic and responsive to the public interest.

## ***A Cold War Mentality***

Like Nanoose, Missile Defence raises concerns about a perpetuation of a Cold War mentality in our military policy. In fact, missile defence can be seen as an effective means to reignite the Cold War. We are already seeing the beginnings of this shift after the demise of the

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, as Russia recently announced plans for a new series of nuclear weapons<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, China has stepped up their weapons production in response to the program. And, just as in the cold war era, we can enter into the endless loop of nuclear logic: missile defence encourages Russian nuclear build up which encourages missile defence and et cetera, creating an endless justification for the program by fuelling the problem that supports the program in the first place. This is a destructive process. It undermines the real avenues to peace and security: diplomacy and disarmament.

### ***Missile Defence and Trade***

A cold war mentality only benefits one group, and that is the arms industry. Certainly, ordinary people don't feel safer as the nuclear weapons stockpile around the globe. Those in the business of selling the bombs that make the stockpiles, however, can look forward to steady profits for as long as the cold war policy endures.

It is no wonder, then, that missile defence has received the unequivocal support of Canada's big business lobby--the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE). The CCCE has prepared a brief and even met with decision makers in the US about their vision of integrating security with the US and getting Canada into the US missile defence program. They state that Canadian citizen's arguments about whether missile defence would spur a new arms race are "moot" because the US was going ahead with the program regardless<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, peace is not a prime concern for them, but CCCE members Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, and CAE, certainly could benefit from contracts with the missile defence program.

Similarly, the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC) has weighed in to support missile defence. According to their website, a key demand of the Canadian Aerospace industry is that the government "[e]liminate barriers that prevent Canadian firms from being considered partners and suppliers of choice in commercial and defence aerospace programs in North America, Europe and Asia". They argue,

"Canada must pay close attention to managing our complex relationship with key allies and trade partners. A closer alignment between our foreign and defence

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1 "Russia working on new nuclear weapons." <http://www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2004/11/17/russia-missiles-041117.htm>. Nov 18, 2004.

2 New Frontiers (HTML Version) Building a 21st Century Canada-United States Partnership in North America, April 2004. [http://www.ceocouncil.ca/en/view/?document\\_id=365&area\\_id=7](http://www.ceocouncil.ca/en/view/?document_id=365&area_id=7)

policies and our trade interests, will enable and facilitate international industrial collaboration, program & project partnering and technology transfer."<sup>3</sup>

In the view of the industry lobbyists, citizen concerns about an escalating arms race may be moot, but note that the goal of aligning defence and trade interests is not security for Canadians but contracts for Aerospace corporations. So we can take the missile defence lobbyists at their word when they say that a key reason for signing onto missile defence is that refusing to sign could have trade repercussions. While Paul Celucci tell us there will not be an impact on issues such as softwood lumber, there very well may be an impact for those who hope to win some of the billions of R&D funds that missile defence could involve.

Over the years the Council of Canadians has argued that the linking of policy decisions to corporate interests and the corporate lobby has hurt Canadian democracy. Nowhere is this linking more sinister than in the linking of the military hegemony of the USA with the Canadian defence trade lobby. In the free trade agreements that the Council of Canadians has so strongly opposed, the rights of each country to direct its own security is exempted from the terms of the agreement. On the surface, this protects national sovereignty. Less visible is the fact that this also guarantees military industries a special role in the Canadian economy as the only industry that can receive unfettered subsidies.

### ***Operating outside the law***

The military is not just exempted in trade agreements. The US Navy has been exempted from Canadian environmental laws when they use Nanoose Bay as a testing range. They are not required to report oil spills, nor do they need to compensate or clean up the environmental damage caused by their tests<sup>4</sup>. What environmental exemptions will the US missile defence program gain for its use of Canada's North?

In BC we became a nuclear free zone by act of legislation. Only one MLA voted against bringing in the policy. And yet, the provincial government has proved incapable of enforcing the policy when it comes to Nanoose Bay, or the US nuclear ships that visit Victoria's harbour.

In the case of missile defence, we face the stark reality that, though we may have won the hearts of the people, we cannot seem to convince the government to listen. So while 70% of

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<sup>3</sup> Aerospace Industries Association of Canada website "current issues" Summary. <http://www.aiac.ca/current.asp#>. December 1, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Abbey, Norm. "Just Say No to Nukes." *British Columbia Environmental Report*. Vol. 10 #2. (Summer 1999). pp 4-6.

Canadians oppose joining the US missile defence program, and 52% of Canadians are passionately opposed, the Liberal government attempts to avoid a debate in the House. Even as the public pressure mounted last September, MP Bill Graham was arguing that the vote about missile defence would properly come after the pact was already signed with the US<sup>5</sup>.

Again and again we are told that the purpose of our military is to protect our democracy. We are told that US interventions and invasions are going to help spread democracy. And yet, when it comes to taking decisions about Canadian foreign and military policy, we are told that we have said "no" too often to the US because we didn't wholeheartedly join their invasion of Iraq. We are told that BC cannot be nuclear free because the federal government wants to allow US nuclear subs to do tests in our waters. We are told that we must agree to missile defence or face trade repercussions.

How do such approaches to military policies protect our democracy? Quite simply, they do not. Instead, they undermine democracy by basing decisions on fear, and the will of the powerful.

### ***Conclusion***

Looked at independently, missile defence can simply be seen as a clash of interests. The US wants the program, powerful industry lobbies hoping for contracts want the program. Popular opinion is opposed, and the government must choose between the two sides.

Look at missile defence in the context of Canada-US relations, the relationship of the arms industry to the trade lobby, and we have deeper questions to face. Has our trade policy compromised our military sovereignty? What does it mean when the people building weapons in Canada are trying to pressure the government to align more closely with another nation? Who does our government listen to? Canadian citizens? Industry lobbyists? Or the USA?

Canadians must refuse to be rendered "moot". Citizens must refuse to be irrelevant. Democracy is not preserved by force. It is preserved by ordinary citizens who take seriously the idea that our views are important, that our country's future is important, that peace is important, and that we have more to give to our neighbours and our children than an occasional vote. In short, democracy is safeguarded by active citizen involvement.

I hope that by participating in this citizens inquiry today, we have all taken up this challenge.

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<sup>5</sup> Rana, F. Abbas. "Graham's missile defence remarks cause a stir in House." The Hill Times, November 8th, 2004