



**CDFAI**

CANADIAN DEFENCE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

# **North Korea, Ballistic Missile Defence And Canada-US Defence Cooperation**

by Frank Harvey  
September, 2013



# POLICY PAPER

---

## **North Korea, Ballistic Missile Defence And Canada-US Defence Cooperation**

by Frank Harvey

CDFAI Senior Fellow

September, 2013



Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)

©2012 Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
ISBN: 978-1-927573-20-4

## ► Executive Summary

---

In December 2012, North Korea launched the Unha-3 rocket – a three-stage, intercontinental ballistic missile with an estimated range of 10,000 kilometres. When combined with North Korea’s latest underground nuclear test in January, these moves represent a concerted effort by the regime to develop and deploy an offensive nuclear capability. When acquired, a nuclear tipped intercontinental ballistic missile will provide Pyongyang with a credible deterrent that will seriously diminish our coercive leverage in subsequent military security crises involving North and South Korea.

The imperative on the part of the international community to move forward with research, development and deployment of ballistic missile defences (BMD) is becoming more pressing each year.

In November 2010, 28 NATO members signed NATO’s new Strategic Concept. The most relevant part of the alliance’s new strategy is the commitment by *all* NATO members to: “Develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defence.” As a NATO member, Canada now officially endorses the logic, strategic utility and security benefits of ballistic missile defence, but, apparently, only in terms of protecting European and American territory and populations.

The most perplexing aspect of Canada’s policy is the ongoing refusal to engage in bilateral discussions with our most important NATO ally to negotiate BMD architecture to protect Canadian territory and populations. Canadian officials have the luxury to sit back and let allies protect our territory, but this is a foreign policy strategy that has reached the point of taking free-riding to a new and somewhat disturbing level.





July 27 was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korean War armistice. To celebrate, the North Korea regime arranged another public display of its military hardware in a massive parade in the center of Pyongyang. Included in the display were the Musudan missiles and launchers the regime actually deployed on its east coast in March during its most recent skirmish with South Korea.

But North Korea mounted a far more serious threat to global security in December 2012 when the regime launched the Unha-3 rocket - a three-stage, intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with an estimated range of 10,000 kilometres. When combined with North Korea's latest underground nuclear test in January, these moves represent a concerted effort by the regime to develop and deploy an offensive nuclear capability that will pose a serious threat to the United States, Canada, and our allies in Asia and Europe.

Of course, without a nuclear device small enough to deploy on the Unha-3, North Korea does not have the capability today to launch a direct nuclear attack against North America, nor does the regime have any rational motivation to do so. However, the inevitable acquisition of this capability at some point is entirely relevant to policy options facing decision makers in the US and Canada right now. When acquired, a nuclear tipped ICBM will provide Pyongyang with a credible deterrent that will seriously diminish our coercive leverage in subsequent military security crises involving North and South Korea. The imperative on the part of the international community to move forward with research, development and deployment of ballistic missile defences (BMD) is becoming more pressing each year. Any reasonably balanced (and honest) assessment of *all* of the facts would confirm that BMD critics have lost the policy debate.

After decades of multilateral and bilateral disarmament negotiations with North Korea, one key lesson is irrefutable – nothing has altered the regime's nuclear ambitions. Clearly, the strategic imperatives, global political capital and regional security guarantees that come with acquiring a nuclear weapon capability far outweigh any offers the international community is prepared to put on the table. Whatever concessions have been proposed and accepted in the past, they have never been sufficient to reverse North Korea's core preferences. "Despite Pyongyang's deceptive ways," notes Jang Jin-Sung (a former North Korea state official who defected in 2004), "many people in the outside world continue to believe in the theoretical North Korea in which dialogue with the regime is seen as the way to effect change." As he explains,

I know from my years inside the government that talking will not get Pyongyang to turn any corners, not even with the North's current leader, Kim Jong-un. Dialogue will never entice the regime to give up its nuclear weapons; the nuclear program is tightly linked to its survival. And talks will not lead to change over the long term; the regime sees them only as a tool for extracting aid.<sup>1</sup>

And there are no plausible reasons to expect any significant adjustments to these calculations, particularly in light of the very clear lessons from recent regime collapses in Iraq and Libya: relinquish your weapons of mass destruction at your own peril. The lessons from more

---

<sup>1</sup> Jang Jin-sung (2004) "The Market Shall Set North Korea Free." *New York Times*, April 27. Translated from Korean by Shirley Lee. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/opinion/global/The-Market-Shall-Set-North-Korea-Free.html?adxnml=1&ref=global&pagewanted=all&adxnml=1369167368-L3Jd3G5aihwwF5LzxbY6w>



successful nuclear programs in India and Pakistan are equally compelling: retain and deploy nuclear weapons capability and, over time, all economic sanctions will be lifted.

In response to the UN Security Council's (UNSC) unanimous support for another round of economic sanctions against his already impoverished country, Kim Jong-un raised the stakes: he declared the Korean War armistice null and void, closed the Kaesong industrial complex (an important source of the regime's hard currency that houses 120 companies and employs 50,000 South and North Korean workers), restarted the nuclear reactor and processing facility in Yongbyon, and issued additional threats of a "pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors and to defend the supreme interests of the country" (Foreign Ministry of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, March 7, 2013). North Korean leaders also warned the UN "not to make another big blunder."

Most observers continue to dismiss these threats as standard fare, describing them as entirely typical reactions by Pyongyang to annual US-South Korea military exercises. These optimists remain convinced that the latest moves are rationally calculated to play to a domestic audience, appease hardliners in the North Korean military, test South Korea's newly elected president, Park Geun-hye, and/or create a sufficiently disturbing military security crisis to persuade the US, China and the UNSC to ease up on sanctions. The strategy has certainly worked in the past, but American and European leaders are running out of options trying to negotiate with a regime they know will never relinquish its only significant source of power and influence.

## **THE DIMINISHING EFFECTS OF CHINA'S COERCIVE LEVERAGE OVER NORTH KOREA**

Officials in Beijing are growing increasingly weary of supporting a regime that does nothing to contribute to China's efforts to build a reputation as a responsible global leader. North Korea's latest nuclear test was the tipping point for Chinese leaders, pushing them to endorse a US sponsored, unanimous UN resolution against one of its closest allies. Several foreign policy analysts repeatedly point to the fact that China is North Korea's primary trading partner and the only real hope Kim Jong-un has to keep his military leaders happy while preventing the regime from becoming even more impoverished and desperate. No need to worry, they argue, because China has more than sufficient coercive bargaining leverage to keep North Korea in check. But that leverage is not absolute.

Consider what we would have expected to see if China did retain sufficient influence to effectively manage their ally. Officials in Beijing would almost certainly have prevented the December launch of the Unha-3 missile and January nuclear tests. Why? Because China's failure to stop these actions provided Washington with the perfect justification they needed to speed up the scheduled deployment of ballistic missile defence (BMD) assets to Guam, South Korea and Japan. Moreover, if North Korea actually launches a Musudan missile on a trajectory that even approaches a US ally or military base, the Pentagon would be handed the perfect opportunity to obtain crucial intelligence from an operational test of US BMD. None of this is consistent with China's regional or global security interests, yet Beijing had no capacity to manage the pace and direction of escalation.

If China's diplomats had their way, they would have prevented the crisis from escalating to the point of having to issue an unprecedented rebuke of North Korean leaders by Chinese President Xi Jinping: no country "should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into



chaos for selfish gain.”<sup>2</sup> Commenting on the “ratcheting up of frustration among Chinese leaders over the last many years”, John Huntsman (former US Ambassador to China) commented, “they’ve probably hit the 212-degree boiling point as it relates to North Korea.”<sup>3</sup>

## **THE DIMINISHING RETURNS OF FABRICATED FEAR, UNPREDICTABILITY AND IRRATIONALITY**

Unfortunately for China, Kim Jong-un is less susceptible to coercive pressure because of his regime’s fundamental weaknesses and, paradoxically, its emerging (and only) strength as a nuclear weapon state. As a consequence, North Korean leaders are becoming increasingly dependent on a strategy that relies almost exclusively on exploiting a fabricated irrationality, anger and unpredictability in hopes of manipulating fears in the US, South Korea, Japan, Europe and China - that strategy encompasses the totality of the coercive leverage the regime has left. But it is a very risky strategy that assumes the US and China will cave at some point, if only to avoid a messier crisis, a collapsed regime, or war. But similar miscalculations were made by Slobodan Milosevic in 1999 (Operation Allied Force), and by Saddam Hussein in both 1998 (Operation Desert Fox) and, of course, in the lead up to the 2003 Iraq War. Leaders of authoritarian regimes are not in the best position to receive balanced intelligence from unbiased advisers regarding appropriate strategies to carefully manage tensions, or avoid the misperceptions that lead to mistakes and wars.

Regardless of how benign the threat is today, escalation will become more difficult to control as North Korea is forced to deal with another round of multilaterally endorsed economic sanctions. Barring any significant movement by the US or China to ease the economic pressures, and no apparent willingness by North Korea to relinquish control of its nuclear program, logic dictates that, over time, the regime will raise the stakes and double down. Not because its leaders are irrational, but because they have no other options for creating a sufficiently costly crisis to extract the concessions on which the regime’s political and military leaders have become so dependent. One obvious route to escalation will involve another North Korean military attack against South Korean forces, similar to the 2010 attack that sunk a South Korean naval ship killing 46 sailors. In light of the very explicit retaliatory threats issued by South Korean leaders to respond to another attack, the domestic political pressure on South Korean leaders to follow through with retaliation will be significant.

## **THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENCE**

There are no straightforward, credible ‘diplomatic’ solutions to this nagging foreign policy dilemma, and no evidence that any of the strategies attempted in the past, across several US administrations, have worked. In light of these diplomatic constraints, *all* NATO allies have rightly concluded that deployment of BMD technology has become an essential component of the global strategy to address emerging threats from North Korea. In essence, BMD is among the only defensive options available to reinforce the West’s commitment, resolve and capability to protect key allies against nuclear blackmail.

In response to North Korea’s latest moves, the Obama administration recently announced expansion of BMD infrastructure with an additional \$1 billion invested to position 14 more ground-based interceptors in Alaska and California, bringing the total to 44. In November 2010, 28 NATO members met in Lisbon to sign NATO’s new Strategic Concept, a document outlining

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/07/us-korea-north-idUSBRE93408020130407>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*



the principles, commitments and obligations of alliance members in relation to their “collective” security and defence.<sup>4</sup> The most relevant part of the alliance’s latest commitment includes a clear obligation by *all* NATO members to:

Develop the capability to defend our populations and territories against ballistic missile attack as a core element of our collective defence, which contributes to the indivisible security of the Alliance. We will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia and other Euro-Atlantic partners.

As President Obama stated in his speech at the end of the NATO conference, “I’m pleased to announce that – for the first time – we’ve agreed to develop missile defense capability that is strong enough to cover *all NATO European territory and populations, as well as the United States*” (emphasis added). About \$270 million was directed to the program over the next ten years.

### **SOLVING CANADA’S BMD POLICY PUZZLE**

By virtue of its membership in NATO, Canada now officially endorses the logic, strategic utility and security benefits of ballistic missile defence; the debate is essentially over, but only in terms of protecting European and American territory and populations. Ottawa has stealthily “tiptoed past philosophical objections”<sup>5</sup> put forward by critics, and surreptitiously embraced BMD as part of Canada’s treaty obligations to help protect NATO allies from ballistic missile threats. Of course, the most perplexing aspect of Canada’s official endorsement of BMD is the fact that Prime Minister Harper is still refusing to engage in bilateral discussions with our most important NATO ally to negotiate BMD architecture to protect Canadian territory and population. The only reasonable explanation for the Conservative government’s silence on continental BMD is an uncharacteristically strong preference for *free-riding* on American and European security measures and related expenditures. Any other explanation for this puzzling approach to Canadian security and defence is less plausible.

Presumably, Canada’s signature on NATO’s new Strategic Concept confirms Ottawa’s rejection of the various opinions put forward by BMD critics – there are very sound reasons why these considerably out-dated arguments should be dismissed.<sup>6</sup> For instance, critics were convinced that ongoing US BMD deployments would compel Russia to launch a new arms race to protect their second-strike capability. Instead, we have witnessed some of the most sweeping bilateral disarmament agreements in history. The most recent US-Russia agreement was motivated by the expiry of START II Treaty in December 2010. The new deal managed to cut deployed strategic warheads from 2,200 to 1,550 – 74% lower than the 1991 START Treaty and 30% lower than the 2002 Moscow Treaty (the latter required a reduction to 1,700-2,200 by 2012). In addition, both sides have agreed to reduce the total number of deployed and non-deployed launchers to 800 from 1,600 (half of START I limits). Sceptics are likely to raise concerns about

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

<sup>5</sup> Campbell Clark (2013) “Conversation about missile defence not dead.” *The Globe and Mail*, Wednesday, April 24 - <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/conversation-about-missile-defence-not-dead/article11540137/>

<sup>6</sup> James Fergusson’s (2011) *Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence, 1954-2009 – Déjà Vu All Over Again* (Vancouver/Toronto: UBC Press). See also Frank P. Harvey (2004) *Smoke and Mirrors: Globalized Terrorism and the Illusion of Multilateral Security* (University of Toronto Press, 2004). For a superb, recent analysis of the weaker positions (myths) on each side of the BMD debate, see David S. McDonough’s excellent CDFAI paper - “Back to the Future: Debating Missile Defence in Canada...Again.” CDFAI Research Paper, June 2013. <http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Debating%20Missile%20Defence%20in%20Canada%20Again.pdf>



the number of warheads on each missile, but this point doesn't come close to addressing the fundamental errors underpinning their mistaken predictions of another arms race and the inevitable deterioration of US-Russia relations. The foreign policy theories critics relied on for those predictions were essentially disconfirmed, because they misunderstood how international politics was so profoundly transformed by the end of the Cold War – improved US-Russia relations became far more important than the strategic balance of nuclear forces.<sup>7</sup> Under these conditions, US BMD deployment to address new and emerging nuclear threats became far less destabilizing, as proponents predicted.

In addition to these substantial cuts, the Global Partnership Program (GPP, a Canadian initiative established at the 2001 G8 summit in Kananaskis, Alberta) continues to facilitate the destruction of former Soviet Union nuclear stockpiles. Among other benefits, the GPP encompasses active participation by American, Canadian and European experts directly involved in dismantling nuclear weapons and materials to minimize opportunities for the black market.

Critics also predicted an increase in China's defence expenditures and nuclear program in response to the threat from US BMD. Yet no such proliferation occurred, for two straightforward reasons: China remains comfortably committed to a strategy of minimum deterrence, and its leaders understand that US BMD is not designed to undermine the credibility of their deterrent threat. What we are seeing instead is unprecedented cooperation between the US and China to address a proliferation problem they both agree is unacceptable (a nuclearized North Korea), and tacit acceptance by Beijing of US BMD deployments to Guam and South Korea in response to a more disturbing missile threat from North Korea.

Finally, critics continue to dismiss BMD technology as worthless, despite the fact that the actual testing records for each component of the US BMD program show measurable progress over time. According to recent updates provided by the congressionally monitored US Missile Defence Agency (MDA), the sea-based Aegis BMD platform (designed to immobilize a missile during its boost and ascent phases) has generated 24 intercepts in 30 at-sea attempts since 2002. This excludes additional successful intercepts during Operation Burnt Frost in February 2008. The Ground-Based (Midcourse) interceptor test program produced 8 successes out of 15 attempts, and 3 of 5 successful intercepts using "operationally configured interceptors" since 1999. Finally, with respect to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (to address a missile threat at the final stage), the MDA reports 10 out of 10 interceptions since 2006. When combined, the 76% success rate, although an admittedly rough estimate, is far more encouraging than the standard narrative repeated by BMD critics. Moreover, in light of the planned "shoot-look-shoot" strategy in which multiple interceptors are likely to be targeted at each incoming missile, these percentages are likely to be much higher over time.

Of course, the current BMD system is incapable of protecting against a full-blown attack by Russia or China, especially if buttressed by the deployment of sophisticated decoys and countermeasures, but that is a *stabilizing* feature of BMD limitations – the system is not designed to threaten the deterrent capabilities of these states. Unfortunately, the logical implication of this obvious point is often missed by many BMD critics. Moreover, the multilateral arms control approach championed by critics has a very long and dismal history of

---

<sup>7</sup> Frank P. Harvey (2004) Smoke and Mirrors: Globalized Terrorism and the Illusion of Multilateral Security (University of Toronto Press, 2004).



missed ‘intercepts’ that repeatedly fail to prevent nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technologies from entering states whose leaders are determined to join the nuclear weapons club. The most recent UN report on Iran’s nuclear program confirms the serious nature of the crisis.<sup>8</sup>

Evaluating BMD without ever acknowledging these comparative deficiencies is not a particularly effective way to make informed, balanced judgements about the best foreign policies or defence strategies.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Honest assessments of the facts reviewed above would confirm that BMD critics have essentially lost the debate, but why would the Canadian government support BMD through NATO to protect European and American territory and populations yet continue to shy away from embracing bilateral negotiations with the US to protect Canadians?

Unfortunately, no clear answers emerge from considerations of Canadian domestic politics. The most significant political impediment to Canada-US cooperation on BMD during Paul Martin’s administration was George W. Bush – a decidedly unpopular president very few Canadians liked or trusted. But these domestic impediments no longer exist. President Barack Obama is perhaps one of the most popular US presidents in Canadian history, with the possible exception of John F. Kennedy.

The US Pentagon is currently relying on environmental impact studies conducted by the National Research Council to assess the utility of deploying new BMD ground-based interceptors on the US east coast (Watertown, NY and northern Maine), within hours of Ottawa and the New Brunswick border. According to US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel, the latest plans for ground-based interceptor sites are designed “to protect the eastern United States *and Canada* against any potential threats that are limited in nature” (emphasis added). There is no evidence Canadian officials were consulted on these placements, although I suspect they would have appreciated the heads-up. In either case, the Canadian government *should be* engaged in high-level consultations with Washington on BMD architecture, precisely because they have already embraced the policy.

The US government will continue to devote part of its defence budget to deploy BMD assets in ways that protect Canadian citizens, and Canadians should thank US taxpayers for the service. Officials in Ottawa certainly have the luxury of sitting back and letting allies share the burden of NATO’s commitment to BMD, but there is no question that this approach takes free-riding to a new and somewhat disturbing level.

If free-riding is not the primary motivation for Ottawa’s reluctance to participate in securing Canadian citizens from ballistic missile threats, then Canada’s BMD policy makes no logical or practical sense. And if Canadian officials are not persuaded by threats from North Korea, then let’s move on to a discussion of Iran’s nuclear program.

---

<sup>8</sup> See “Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1929 (2010): Final Report”:

[http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed\\_code/23124126](http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/23124126). The report was recently covered by Colum Lynch of *Foreign Policy Magazine* (Monday, June 17 2013):

[http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/17/heres\\_how\\_iran\\_dodges\\_nuclear\\_watchdogs\\_from\\_shady\\_front\\_companies\\_to\\_false\\_ids](http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/17/heres_how_iran_dodges_nuclear_watchdogs_from_shady_front_companies_to_false_ids)

## ► About the Author

---

**Frank P. Harvey** was appointed Eric Dennis Memorial Chair of Government and Politics in 2013, and held the position of University Research Professor of International Relations from 2008-2013 (Dalhousie University). He held the 2007 J. William Fulbright Visiting Research Chair in Canadian Studies, is a Senior Research Fellow with the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, and was former Director of the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies at Dalhousie. His book, *Explaining the Iraq War: Counterfactual Theory, Logic and Evidence* (2011, Cambridge University Press), received the 2013 Canadian Political Science Association Book Prize in International Relations.

His other books include *The Homeland Security Dilemma: Fear, Failure and Future of American Insecurity* (2008, Routledge); *Smoke and Mirrors: Globalized Terrorism and the Illusion of Multilateral Security* (University of Toronto Press, 2004) – Runner-up 2004-05 Donner Book Prize, and finalist 2005-2006 Harold Adam Innis book prize; *Millennium Reflections on International Studies* (co-edited with Michael Brecher, University of Michigan Press, 2002); *Using Force to Prevent Ethnic Violence: An Evaluation of Theory and Evidence* (with David Carment, Praeger, 2001); *Conflict in World Politics: Advances in the Study of Crisis, War and Peace* (co-edited with Ben Mor, Macmillan Press 1998); and *The Future's Back: Nuclear Rivalry, Deterrence Theory and Crisis Stability After The Cold War* (McGill-Queen's, 1997). He has published widely on post-9/11 security, the Iraq war, American foreign and security policy, nuclear and conventional deterrence, coercive diplomacy, proliferation, crisis decision-making, protracted ethnic conflict, and national missile defence in *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Politics*, *International Journal*, *International Negotiation*, *Security Studies*, *International Political Science Review*, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, and *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (among others). His commentaries have appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *iPolitics*, *Calgary Herald*, *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Chronicle Herald*.

Professor Harvey received Dalhousie's Alumni Association Award for Excellence in Teaching (2012), Dalhousie's Outstanding Graduate Advisor Award (2009), the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Award for Excellence in Teaching (1998), and the Burgess Research Award (2000). He was a NATO Research Fellow from 1998-2000 and has received several grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.



## ► **Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute**

---

CDFAI is the only think tank focused on Canada's international engagement in all its forms - diplomacy, the military, aid and trade security. Established in 2001, CDFAI's vision is for Canada to have a respected, influential voice in the international arena based on a comprehensive foreign policy, which expresses our national interests, political and social values, military capabilities, economic strength and willingness to be engaged with action that is timely and credible.

CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

In all its activities CDFAI is a charitable, nonpartisan organization, supported financially by the contributions of foundations, corporations and individuals. Conclusions or opinions expressed in CDFAI publications and programs are those of the authors and speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute staff, fellows, directors, advisors, or any individuals or organizations that provide financial support to CDFAI.

