

# ACTIVITY REPORT



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## The Emerging Ideas Series: Celebrating 65 Years of NORAD

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The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) officially celebrated its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 12 May 2023. NORAD is the binational defence command responsible for the aerospace control, aerospace warning, and maritime warning of Canada and the continental United States.

The NAADSN Emerging Leaders' Node (ELN), led by NAADSN Research Fellow Nicole Covey, seeks to contribute to the academic development of emerging scholars. The ELN organized this iteration of The Emerging Ideas Series with the theme of "[Celebrating 65 Years of NORAD.](#)" This 90 minute panel, moderated by NAADSN Research Fellow Gabriella Gricius, featured: Dr. Richard Goette, Associate Professor in the Department of Defence Studies at the Canadian Forces College/Royal Military College of Canada; Dr. Andrea Charron, Professor in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, NAADSN Co-Lead, and Director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies; Dr. James Fergusson, Professor in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, NAADSN Fellow, and Deputy-Director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies; and, Nicholas Glesby, M.A. Candidate in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Manitoba, NAADSN Research Fellow, and Student Fellow at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies.

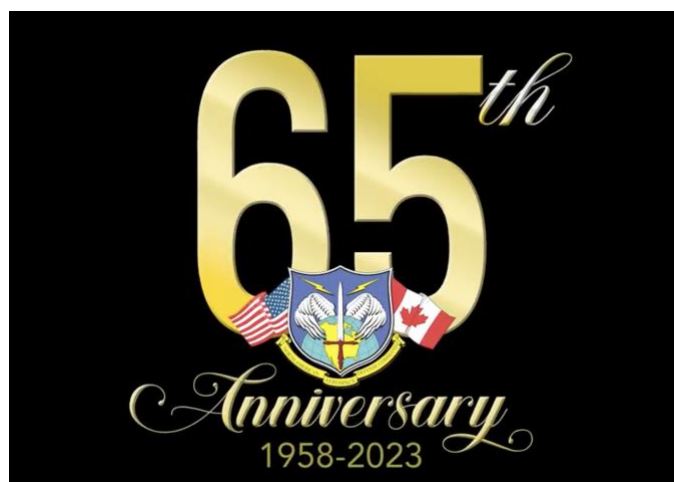


Image courtesy: NORAD via Twitter

## A Brief Overview of NORAD's Past, Present, and Future

Nicholas Glesby provided a brief overview of NORAD's foundation and history, current considerations amidst this current Modernization cycle, and some future thoughts and questions. The [origins of the Canada-US defence relationship date back to 1938](#), when US President Franklin Roosevelt pledged that the US "would not stand idly by" if Canada was to be threatened by another empire. Responding two days later, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King said that "Canada has its obligations, as a good and friendly neighbour [...], that should the occasion ever arise, enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way, either by land, sea, or air to the United States across Canadian territory." Two years later, King and Roosevelt issued a joint press release known as "The Ogdensburg Agreement," which created the "Permanent Joint Board on Defence" (or PJBD). Roosevelt's and King's statements' have been coined "The Kingston Dispensation" and "The Canadian Corollary" by historian David Beatty and political scientist David Haglund. The Dispensation, Corollary, and the Ogdensburg Agreement are the foundations of the Canada-US defence relationship writ large.

The PJBD was instrumental in North America's defence during World War II and was especially active between 1950 and 1953, when geopolitical threats to North America (particularly Soviet nuclear capabilities) reignited North American defence concerns. The PJBD made five recommendations on air defence in 1951 and 1953: Recommendation 51/1 advised on the extension of the Pinetree Line radar system; 51/3 discussed combined air training exercises; 51/4 gave the US limited ability to shoot down hostile aircraft in Canadian airspace, as long as the aircraft was headed towards the United States; 51/6 agreed on mutual wartime reinforcement of each Air Force.

Recommendation 53/1 is perhaps the most consequential recommendation the PJBD made. It reads: "[A]ircraft controlled by the Air Defence System of the United States, or of Canada, engaged in intercepting unidentified aircraft during peacetime, shall be permitted to fly over the territory of either country as may be required to carry out effective interception under the military rules of engagement and civilian regulations regardless of the origin of the interceptor aircraft."<sup>i</sup>

NORAD, in addition to the PJBD and the International Joint Commission (which manages joint Canada-US waterways), also serve as examples of Binationalism: where joint institutions that cooperate with principles of parity and equality supersede national interests. NORAD has continually adapted, evolved, and reorganized over 65 years to address the defence and security challenges facing North America created by adversaries' advancements in weapons technology. Given the all-domain threat environment that goes beyond the traditional concerns of the northern Arctic avenues of approach to North America, are neighbouring states such as Mexico, Greenland (and the Kingdom of Denmark via Greenland's governance structure), and Iceland sufficiently accounted for in integrated Command and Control? Is the current Tri-Command Framework of NORAD, USNORTHCOM (US Northern Command), and CJOC (Canadian Joint Operations Command) still the best way to organize North American defence given their three separate mandates? Relative to the push for deterrence by denial by raising the costs on an adversary who desires to attack North America, are geographic Combatant Commands the best way for the US to protect its homeland?

Many Canadians and Americans know little of NORAD beyond the annual “NORAD Tracks Santa” campaign. After the February 2023 Chinese spy balloon incident, misunderstanding and confusion amongst the public created disinformation over NORAD’s role in continental defence and its foundation of Binationalism. While it would likely be beneficial for greater public understanding of NORAD, there is a calculus of greater public awareness preventing NORAD from “flying under the political radar,” as it relates to its objectives of Modernization and the capability upgrades and purse strings the political elite hold the approval for. Two ideas may be able to address the understanding NORAD discussion: First, continuing to support the transfer of institutional knowledge from renowned and established academics to emerging scholars looking for an interest area; second, is the continual use and increased attention by both Washington and Ottawa to ensure the PJBD’s (and its military twin, the Military Cooperation Committee or MCC) success by buffeting it from media attention and hyper-partisanship by appointing officials of equal rank and its operation in secrecy. This is to ensure that sticky, perhaps controversial, multi-faceted defence issues can be solved cooperatively and without undue influence from unnecessary attention – a longstanding function of the PJBD’s, and NORAD’s, success.

## The History of NORAD’s Foundation

Dr. Goette, author of [Sovereignty and Command in Canada-US Continental Air Defence, 1940-1957](#), discussed the integrated nature of NORAD and the professionalism of its personnel relative to the joint binational aspect of the command. NORAD represents the most vital Canada-United States partnership and is only strengthened by its binational mandate and collegiality of sharing information regardless of nationality. NORAD is predicated on values such as integration for effective and efficient defence and trust and mutual respect of like-minded service members. NORAD has always been twinned with a US Combatant Command: Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD), Aerospace Defense Command (ADCOM), Strategic Air Command (SAC), Space Command (SPACECOM), and now USNORTHCOM. The original [1958 Terms of Reference](#) places great emphasis on the value that the Deputy NORAD Commander (who is always Canadian) is placed in full command when the Commander (always American) is absent. Personnel view in Colorado Springs are also viewed through a binational lens, regardless of whether personnel is American or Canadian. This represents an indivisible view of continental defence and was a hallmark of Air Marshall Roy Slemon and General Earl Partridge’s original visions for the integrated command.

Additionally, some future considerations and questions were raised regarding this current cycle of NORAD Modernization: Is the triple-hatted Commander of 1 Canadian Air Division (1CAD), Canadian NORAD Region (CANR), and Joint Force Air Component (JFAC) overstretched? This question is especially relevant as 1CAD is also home to the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC), which provides command and control for Air Force assets and is likely to see increased use given the rapidly evolving nature of climate change-induced natural disaster response. The second question is: How can both the Canadian and American publics better understand and value NORAD, outside of the annual NORAD Tracks Santa promotional campaign? And finally, Dr. Goette advocated for future research on NORAD’s history as worth of exploration given the current international threat environment.

## Perils, Politics and Purse Strings, and Publics

Dr. Charron, co-author of [\*NORAD: In Perpetuity and Beyond\*](#), began with acknowledging that NORAD is both a supporting and supported command: NORAD is not a force generator or a capability generator. It is reliant on both militaries to support NORAD and these assets can be clawed back. Both Canadian and American militaries are suffering from readiness and reconstitution challenges, and how to best address continental defence. NORAD's attention has shifted as a product of the crisis of the moment and the capabilities of the time to deal with that. NORAD was always outward-facing and was most interested in the Arctic approaches to North America, but changed over time with its drug interdiction role in the 1990s. After 9/11, NORAD's outward focus left it blind to what was happening within the continent, to which the binational command then shifted to its Operation Noble Eagle (ONE) mission. ONE enforced no-fly zones (or combat air patrols) over key city centres where the US President is or where special events (the G7, Olympics, Super Bowl) are being held – key functions of the aerospace warning and aerospace control missions.

Both Canada and the United States have long thought that the best way to protect North America was to [deploy troops and capabilities overseas](#) to address problems located elsewhere. Therefore, NORAD has had a difficult time justifying funding without persistent political attention from Congress and Parliament, stemming from difficulties in explaining complicated technological capabilities to decision-makers (who are not knowledge experts). However, NORAD needs persistent and consistent funding. For [example](#), before 9/11, NORAD had long been requesting direct feeds from the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and NAVCanada into the NORAD Operations Center. A lot of information and intelligence needed for NORAD is housed by other government departments and allies. A vital question is: How to integrate this information while keeping specific intelligence classified or secret? This solution is likely to be best handled by technocrats, as politicians may be reticent to discuss 'no-foreign' classification issues.

There is little understanding in both Canada and the United States of NORAD, even in Colorado Springs (where NORAD is headquartered alongside USNORTHCOM at Peterson Space Force Base). NORAD is essentially a US Combatant Command, but without as much understanding that USNORTHCOM and USINDOPACOM has amongst the American public. Similarly, CJOCC (responsible for all Canada-wide and domestic activities except for special forces and NORAD) is little understood within Canada. An example of this is when US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's [thanked](#) a USNORTHCOM asset for downing the Chinese spy balloon, but only thanked Canada and NORAD for their role in "detecting and warning" of the [spy balloon](#). Most interesting was the media conversations that both Canada and the Americans were accusing one another of malfeasance. For Canadians, it was concerning that the Americans could so-called 'violate' Canadian sovereignty by shooting down an object in Canadian airspace; for Americans, it was the revelation that Canada has a responsibility for the warning and defence of the United States. It has long been difficult to get defence and security issues to the forefront of Canadian political conversation. As NORAD's roles and functions for continental defence continue to go misunderstood with the public, it will be increasingly difficult to have discussions surrounding NORAD Modernization with politicians who control the purse strings and a public with attention elsewhere.

## Looking Ahead: NORAD in 65 Years

Dr. Fergusson, co-author of [\*NORAD: In Perpetuity and Beyond\*](#), states that NORAD is the symbolic institutional centrepiece<sup>ii</sup> of the North American defence relationship – if not the Canada-United States relationship writ large. It is difficult, if not near impossible to imagine under what conditions or what catastrophe would cause NORAD to collapse and force both parties to walk away. The real question for the future is: what will NORAD do? The minimalist option is that NORAD will stay in its box with its current mission suite: aerospace warning, ballistic missile threats, space warning; aerospace control of the atmosphere (not in space); and maritime warning. The maximalist option, as US Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld hypothesized emerging from 9/11, is that NORAD would evolve into an integrated North American defence command, where all domains (land, air, sea, space) will become integrated into a single binational command. Of course, there are many different variables about where NORAD can go with numerous obstacles. The minimalist option is “dangerous” due to the technological changes and the integration of All-Domain Awareness and All-Domain Command and Control. How relevant is NORAD in the continental defence relationship if it is placed at the margins?

One way to understand this situation is by understanding the conditions that founded NORAD in the 1950s: technological transformation and change. In the 1950s, with the history of strategic bombing campaigns in World War II, North America faced a major new threat environment in the air domain. Soviet development of long-range aviation and nuclear weapons created a defence issue that drove the need for Canada and the United States to efficiently manage the issue due to geographic reasons. A similar situation exists today – a new generation of technologies and hypersonic vehicles blur air and space domains. This raises a future question of Canada’s participation in ballistic missile defence (BMD). New surveillance and sensors are needed, the ground-based North Warning System and US Ballistic Missile Early Warning Network (BMEWS) cannot track hypersonic vehicles, leaving North American situational awareness disadvantaged.

The political environment of the 1950s of the Cold War drove cooperation of North American defence forward. Today is similar with Russia and China. During the 1950s, there was mostly a bi-partisan consensus on the need to defend and deter the Soviet Union in both Canada and the US. Today, within the context of Ukraine and growing discourse around China in Canada, Canadian tri-partisan consensus exists regarding defence spending and fostering the Canada-United States relationship writ large. These two conducive political elements, echoing the past, are providing political traffic that will now bear an expanded mission suite for NORAD. The same functional logic that precipitated NORAD’s foundation exists today; as well as (what Dr. Joel Sokolsky calls) the ‘fraternity of the uniform,’ exemplified through USNORTHCOM links with the Navies and Coast Guards for maritime warning, and previous NORTHCOM Commanders having been [chosen](#) from the US Navy and Army. The same basic features that supported NORAD’s operationalization in 1957 and formal foundation in 1958 exist to support an expanded NORAD mission suite today.

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<sup>i</sup> PJBD Recommendation 53/1. Found in: Richard Goette, *Sovereignty and Command in Canada-US Continental Air Defence 1940-57* (British Columbia: UBC Press, 2018), 209. Cited as: DHH 79/35.

<sup>ii</sup> James Fergusson, "The NORAD conundrum: Canada, missile defence, and military space," *International Journal* 70, no. 2. 2015. 197-198.