

Summing Up

By John Gellner

NORAD failure boosted war risk

Put to the test for the first time in the Cuban crisis, the U.S.-Canadian agreement for a joint defence of North America (NORAD) revealed itself as a failure.

As far as one can gather from the information available, the Continental Air Command (U.S. component of NORAD) went on an increased state of readiness October 22. The RCAF followed suit two days later.

It might just as well not bothered, for at no time during the next four critical days did it have the means for doing its job.

Without the nuclear weapons required to make its Bomarc surface-to-air missiles and Voodoo interceptor-fighters effective, the RCAF's only contribution, as one reader pointed out in a letter to the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, was to "remain on the ground and leave the skies clear for the Americans."

But we didn't even do this. The Canadian government reportedly went so far as to hamper U.S. action by not giving U.S. fighter aircraft, armed with nuclear air-to-air missiles, permission to move forward onto airfields in the Canadian northland—as provided for in NORAD plans.

The theory is that NORAD is part of an over-all nuclear deterrent. Its function is to persuade any would-be aggressor that bombers sent over North America would not get a "free ride" to their targets. It follows that an air defence system, if not mobilized promptly and weaponless even when mobilized, will invite rather than deter attack.

Thus the risk of war during that hectic week of October 22 to 28 was actually heightened by Canada's refusal and inability to play her assigned task in North American defence.

When the Canadian government signed the NORAD agreement in May, 1958, it obviously believed that a common North American air defence plan was necessary, and recognized quite clearly what was needed to make such a system work. The late Dr. Sidney Smith, former minister of external affairs, told the House of Commons: "The United States and Canada must have in existence in peacetime an organization which, in the face of surprise attack, could immediately take defensive action."

Nor was the government in any doubt that, by relying on such standard weapons systems as the Bomarc and Voodoo, it would have to accept nuclear weapons. After the agreement was signed,

the only decision left was on the modalities of control over nuclear warheads which the U.S. was to put at Canada's disposal. The U.S.-Canadian Ministerial Committee on Joint Defence, in fact, reached "agreement in principle" on that point as far back as November, 1959.

Since then, the government has had second thoughts on the matter and chooses to overcome its doubts by trying to sit on the fence. It retained the NORAD tie, kept acquiring installations and carriers for the proposed systems, but wouldn't make a decision as to whether or not it should acquire nuclear weapons.

In an attempt to explain the inexplicable, Prime Minister Diefenbaker said last February that Canada would have no nuclear armaments in time of peace but, if a nuclear war was launched, "nuclear weapons would be placed in the possession of Canadians."

This is utterly unrealistic. It defeats the purpose of NORAD. How can NORAD deter war with weapons which are not available before there is a war? Nor is it likely that nuclear weapons could be procured after the outbreak of hostilities or that, if they could be procured, they would come in time to serve any purpose.

Nobody believes that North America will be attacked in any other than an all-out nuclear war, which would undoubtedly be over after an exchange of a very few devastating blows and counter-blows. I have heard various estimates of how long it would take for Canadian nuclear systems to become operational, once the decision was made to acquire such arms. These estimates varied from 10 to 20 days, which is entirely unacceptable. The S.A.C. bases or Canadian cities they were supposed to protect would be in ruins before the Bomarcs or Voodoos received armament.

I, for one, have always doubted that active air defence contributes significantly to the nuclear deterrent. I believe little would be lost if we had no Bomarcs and used the Voodoos only for peacetime surveillance of Canada's air space, while continuing to support the U. S. deterrent forces by providing communications, early warning facilities and refueling bases.

We are not keeping our part of the NORAD bargain, and we're wasting money on weaponless weapons systems. Surely the time has come to make a decision: In or out of NORAD; in or out of the nuclear weapons business.