



Bomarc Missile Crisis

In the fall of 1958 Prime Minister Diefenbaker's Conservative government announced an agreement with the US to deploy in Canada 2 squadrons of the American ramjet-powered "Bomarc" antiaircraft missile. This controversial defence decision was one of many flowing from the 1957 [NORAD](#) agreement with the US. It was argued by some that the surface-to-air guided missile, with a range of 640 km, would be an effective replacement for the manned [AVRO ARROW](#), which was also scrapped.

Fifty-six missiles were deployed at North Bay, Ontario, and La Macaza, Québec, under the ultimate control of the commander in chief, NORAD. Unfortunately, the Canadian government did not make it clear that the version to be acquired, the Bomarc-B, was to be fitted with nuclear warheads. When this became known in 1960 it gave rise to a dispute as to whether Canada should adopt nuclear weapons. In the end the government could not bring itself to accept nuclear warheads for the Bomarcs, a reluctance which contributed to poor [CANADIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS](#) in this period.

With the Conservatives' fall in 1963 and the Liberals' return to power under PM Pearson, a decision was finally made to accept nuclear warheads for Canadian nuclear-capable forces, and the Bomarc warheads were delivered to their sites on 31 December 1963. Nevertheless, the decision was made reluctantly, and in 1969 PM Trudeau's new Liberal government announced that Canada would withdraw its [ARMED FORCES](#) from their nuclear roles. As part of this process the Bomarc missile was phased out of service by 1971.

Author PAUL BUTEUX

The Canadian Encyclopedia © 2005 Historica Foundation of Canada