

The air defence forces of Canada and the United States are also assigned the operational task of protecting national sovereignty in peacetime. At the political level, some commentators have argued that close association with the United States in continental air defence diminishes Canada's independence by aligning this country with American policies and providing arrangements for U.S. military aircraft and other forces to enter Canadian territory. In general, though, Canadians apparently feel that they can live quite comfortably with an occasional and limited U.S. military presence in peacetime, as well as with the understanding that larger U.S. forces would enter Canadian airspace when needed to participate in the joint defence in crisis periods or wartime.

Canada is also concerned about the broader international situation and participates in NATO and the United Nations in order to promote its own security, contribute to the collective security of the Alliance, and preserve world peace. Canada's contribution to NATO in particular aims at ensuring that vital countries or regions such as Norway or continental Western Europe will maintain their stability and independence; and this contribution has been substantial over the years partly because the cost of protecting Canadian airspace and carrying out other defence duties at home has so far been relatively modest. In fact, as the Soviet threat changed with the construction of a major missile force in the 1960s and 1970s, the burden of North American air defence actually diminished and Canada phased out the Mid-Canada Line, reduced the number of radars and interceptors, and concentrated on surveillance and identification rather than on active anti-bomber defence.

Today, the Soviet bomber threat is increasing again, and Canada and the United States are discussing plans for air defence upgrading that could require substantial expenditures. Consequently, there is a strong argument for this country carrying out a major reappraisal of its defence policies, designed among other things to see whether any increases in expenditure on North American air defence are likely to involve a major shift in the focus of national defence spending. This reappraisal should also consider whether the defence budget needs to be increased and whether present defence commitments ought to be maintained, altered, or diminished.

In its reports on armed forces manpower and maritime defence, the committee on two separate occasions called for a defence white paper. Holding the firm conviction that this can be achieved without delaying or hampering current defence improvement programmes, the committee remains strongly committed to a white paper and notes with satisfaction the government's declared intention to proceed in this direction.

3. Outline

In this report, the committee focuses on one specific question: the approach that Canada should adopt towards the modernization of North American air defence. It concentrates on the transitional period between 1985 and the turn of the century.

In Chapter II, the committee reviews the development of North American air defence. It considers the early focus on the bomber threat, the later concentration