

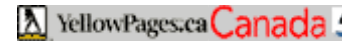


HEADLINE SCAN | E-MAIL UPDATE | NP MOBILE | SUBSCRIPTIONS | SITE MAP | ADVERTISE | CONFERENCES & EVENTS | USER HELP

Truly Canadian! Check out the Travel Channel.

Sunday » Nc

14-DAY SEARCH: National Post



- NATIONAL POST HOME
- NATIONAL NEWS
- WORLD NEWS
- FINANCIAL POST
- FP INVESTING
- COMMENTARY
- COLUMNISTS
- SCIENCE & TECH
- ARTS & LIFE
- SPORTS
- DIVERSIONS

WEEKLY FEATURES

- SATURDAY POST
- POST MOVIES
- REVIEW
- TRAVEL
- DRIVER'S EDGE
- POST HOMES
- WEDDINGS

SPECIALS

- APPOINTMENTS
- SPECIAL REPORTS
- INSIDE ENTERTAINMENT
- NP BUSINESS MAGAZINE
- SOUNDOFF
- CONTESTS



**canada.com**

- TECHNOLOGY
- HEALTH
- CLASSIFIEDS
- AUTOS
- SHOPPING
- PERSONALS

Utilities

SEARCH RESULTS - STORY

## Axworthy's head is still in the clouds

**Mark Proudman**

National Post

Thursday, May 01, 2003

ADVERTISEMENT

The topic of the North Korean nuclear missile threat is once again on the national agenda. Last week, North Korean officials appeared to confirm that they possess at least one nuclear weapon -- to complement their long-range missiles, which are believed capable of hitting California. This week, it was revealed that key Canadian Cabinet ministers support a reversal in Canada's longstanding opposition to U.S. plans for a missile shield to protect North America from nuclear attack. Moreover, Paul Martin, displaying his ability to avoid the Liberal Party's more extreme ideological inclinations, has sensibly declared that Canada should look at joining the U.S. National Missile Defence program.

In keeping with his 90s-era theory of "soft power," Lloyd Axworthy took the opposite line in Tuesday's Globe and Mail. The former foreign minister's article, co-authored by Duke University law professor Michael Byers, claims that missile defence has "little to do with defending our continent ... The primary threat comes from international criminals [with] box cutters, pathogens and primitive 'dirty' bombs." There is, he admits, "perhaps" a threat from North Korea's missiles, but that is "largely a response to the bellicose foreign policy now emanating from Washington." You get the idea: There is no missile threat, and anyway it is George Bush's fault.

That there is a threat from terrorists with box cutters, germs and dirty bombs is obvious, and it is good that the left has finally discovered it: Left-liberals used to write off terrorism as a U.S.-conceived bogeyman. But there is also a threat from rogue state missiles. We face two sets of threats, and we need weapons to deal with both.

Mr. Axworthy holds that the missile threat from North Korea is "largely" the fault of current U.S. policy. But North Korea tested a ballistic missile with intercontinental potential in 1998, during the fondly remembered Clinton administration. Bill Clinton had come to a generous agreement about nuclear weapons with North Korea in 1994, whereby Pyongyang received free food and fuel. We now know -- the North Koreans have admitted it -- that they systematically violated that agreement with a secret uranium enrichment program. We know, in other words, that they are building both bombs and missiles, and that they have been since the early 1990's. It is disingenuous to blame this problem on the Bush administration.



POST VOTE

POST ~~X~~ VOTE

Did the federal government respond quickly enough to the SARS crisis?

[CLICK TO VOTE](#)

The interception of a shipment of North Korean missiles to Yemen last year shows that they are in the business of not just of making but of selling missiles. It has also emerged that North Korea has sold its nuclear expertise abroad. The threats we now face come not only from North Korea's nuclear missiles, but from any rogue state or terrorist group with whom that regime may do business. And the North Koreans, bad as they are, are far from the only state working on ballistic or nuclear missile technology.

As Mr. Axworthy's article shows, the standard left-Liberal response to these obvious facts -- aside from an initial attempt to deny them -- is to point to the possibility of multilateral arms control treaties. The UN is usually dragged into the argument at this point, presumably because it has been so effective in dealing with so many other crises. Arms-control die-hards have trouble accepting the verdict of history: Dictators casually and cynically violate arms control agreements, even as democracies follow each legal nicety.

And since September 11, we should all be aware that some of the West's enemies cannot be deterred by the threat of retaliation. Saddam Hussein and the Taliban both invited invasions -- though it was perfectly obvious to any reasonable observer that each would lose. We now face a class of enemy that is not like old Soviet leadership, which was evil and expansionist, but also cautious and self-interested.

In the face of a threat from potentially undeterrable enemies with nuclear ballistic missiles, there is only one thing to do, and that is to build a defensive system. Claims that the technology is not proven are completely circular: The way to perfect a technology is to build it. And so far most, though not all, tests of the anti-missile interceptor have worked.

But the problem that liberal ideologues have with missile defence is more fundamental than any mere technicality: Ideological liberals have always had trouble recognizing that the West really does have enemies who must be confronted militarily. Political liberalism (with a small 'l') is a philosophy that believes in its heart that all people are rational and that the true interests of rational people are not in fundamental conflict. It is an old and honourable philosophy, but like most philosophic systems it has blind spots. The inability to recognize the existence of enmity -- of fundamental and irreducible hostility -- is the besetting blind spot of the liberal ideologue.

It is a dogma that helps to explain why left-liberals were so angry with President Bush's famous description of the "axis of evil." The same people -- including Mr. Axworthy -- reacted in the same way and for the same reasons to President Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." Moral clarity highlights the unwelcome reality that the West has enemies; it is only too human that the ire of dogmatic liberals should focus on the messenger, rather than the reality.

Mr. Axworthy presents the spectacle of an intelligent person evading an obvious fact: He twists and turns, trying to change the subject to terrorism or human rights or something else, invoking the failed UN, directing his ire at some metaphorical "neoconservative juggernaut," and finally appealing to the worst kind of narrow, anti-American nationalism. The anger and self-righteousness evident in Mr. Axworthy's often infelicitous prose is the reaction of an ideologue to

an obstinate reality.

The Americans have had the bad manners to point to an obvious but unpleasant fact. We Canadians now have a choice between retreating into the tired but self-satisfied rhetoric of multilateralism, comfortable in the knowledge that the U.S. is doing the right thing anyway, or actually -- for a change -- helping our allies, by making a serious investment in a material defence against a real threat.

Mark F. Proudman is writing a doctoral thesis on anti-imperialism and other liberal syndromes at New College, Oxford.  
mark.proudman@new.ox.ac.uk

© Copyright 2003 National Post

[Return to search results](#)



---

Copyright © 2003 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest Global Communications Corp.](#)  
All rights reserved. [Copyright terms & conditions.](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)  
Optimized for browser versions 4.0 and higher.

