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The early 1980s marked a low point in East-West relations during the Cold War. In 1976, the Soviets deployed SS-20 missiles, in response to which NATO made the Dual-Track Decision in December 1979. That decision committed the Alliance to engaging in arms control negotiations with the Soviets to secure the removal of the SS-20s, on the one hand, while deploying cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe (the so-called ‘Euromissiles’) by the end of 1983, on the other. As that date approached, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union worsened, while public opposition to deployment was manifested in massive demonstrations across Western Europe. Faced with such domestic opposition and with some NATO governments seeking to revise the Dual-Track Decision by calling for a delay in deployment, the Euromissile Crisis posed a major challenge to the Western alliance.

While the Euromissile Crisis has been a fruitful area of research in recent years, one NATO member has been almost entirely absent from existing studies: Canada.¹ In her article “‘Cruising Toward Nuclear Danger’: Canadian Anti-Nuclear Activism, Pierre Trudeau’s Peace Mission and the Transatlantic Partnership,” Susan Colbourn provides a fresh perspective by successfully reinserting Canada into the broader narrative of the Euromissile Crisis. She convincingly shows that “there was a Canadian theatre” of the crisis (35) by focusing on two important developments: the Canadian government’s decision to allow the United States to test cruise missiles on Canadian territory—which in turn mobilised large-scale peace movements across the country—and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s high-level peace initiative launched in October 1983, which saw the leader crisscross the globe seeking support for his proposals to reduce East-West tensions.

Until 1982, Trudeau’s anti-nuclear credentials were impressive. In 1963, before entering politics, he had publicly disparaged then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson’s decision to station nuclear-armed BOMARC missiles in Canada; upon succeeding Pearson as leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister in 1968, Trudeau oversaw the de-nuclearisation of the Canadian military. At the first UN Special Session on Disarmament in 1978, Trudeau proposed a ‘strategy of suffocation’ meant to stifle any future nuclear arms race by curbing the development and testing of new nuclear weapons. To many observers, his decision (which was leaked in 1982 and ultimately confirmed publicly only in August 1983) to allow the Americans to test cruise missiles in northern Canada—an area chosen because it closely resembled the terrain of Siberia—smacked of hypocrisy and precipitated large-scale public demonstrations against the decision.

Colbourn provides a convincing argument that explains the Trudeau government’s seemingly inconsistent decisions to allow cruise testing and subsequently to launch a peace initiative aimed at reducing East-West tensions, namely that they reflected Trudeau’s adherence to both tracks of NATO’s 1979 Dual-Track Decision. Although not in power in December 1979 when this NATO policy was adopted (it took place under Joe Clark’s short-lived Progressive Conservative government) Trudeau upheld the decision during his final term as Prime Minister (1980-1984). Colbourn asserts that “Canada’s responsibilities as a member of NATO played a central role in debates over cruise missile testing in 1982-1983 and Pierre Trudeau’s Peace Mission during the winter of 1983-1984” (21). This central argument is well-supported by an impressive array of sources, beginning with newly available official documents from Library and Archives Canada and a selection of English-language Canadian press sources. The discussion of the peace movement in Canada—an understudied topic—is enriched by little-used private collections housed at the University of Toronto, such as the papers of the school’s Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and of pacifist Ursula Franklin. While existing studies of the peace initiative have tended to be based almost exclusively on Canadian sources, this article makes use of international archives—particularly those at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library—to provide a more nuanced and admirably succinct account of Trudeau’s peace mission. In dealing with both the decisions of the Trudeau government and the mobilisation of the Canadian peace movement, Colbourn uses an effective combination of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to provide a robust account of how Canada experienced the Euromissile Crisis.

One of the merits of this article is its exploration of the transnational dimension of Canadian peace activism, with Colbourn examining the influence of American and British peace movements in Canada and even cross-border collaboration, as with the case of a joint march by Canadian and American protesters across the border from Ontario into New York State in July 1983. Colbourn observes that ‘[a] shared language, too, made it easy for many Canadians to read the same anti-nuclear works and watch the same films that shaped the peace movement in the United States or the United Kingdom’ (23) and traces the impact of American, British, and Australian works in Canada. While this provides new insights into the Canadian peace movement, it also raises the interesting question of the extent to which the peace movement in Canada differed along linguistic lines. Virtually all existing studies of peace activism in Canada, including Colbourn’s article, focus on English-language activism; indeed, the peace movement was most prominent in the mostly English-speaking provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, while it was relatively subdued in the mostly French-speaking province of Québec. There are a number of possible explanations for this distinction—the peace movement in France was of a much smaller scale than in either the UK or the U.S., for example, which could explain why the important exchanges between British, American, and English-language Canadian peace activists described by Colbourn were not replicated on the same scale in Québec. This distinction suggests further avenues for future research on the multi-faceted nature of peace activism in Canada during this period.
One of the most significant contributions of this article is Colbourn’s analysis of how both supporters and opponents of cruise missile testing in Canada associated this decision with the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe and with Canada’s obligations as a member of NATO. Trudeau justified the tests as Canada’s necessary contribution to NATO and linked them to the forthcoming Euromissile deployment under the Dual-Track Decision. While Colbourn’s argument is based on Canadian and American documents, it is supported by European archives as well: in the assessment of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for example, testing unarmed missiles in Canada’s sparsely populated north was “one contribution to Western defence which [the Canadians] could not back away from and still be counted as valid members of the Alliance.” For their part, Canadian protesters adopted the slogan ‘refuse the cruise’ which had been used widely by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK, and characterised the cruise tests as yet another manifestation of the nuclear arms race upon which the Reagan Administration had seemingly embarked. For both sides, cruise missile testing in Canada was closely linked with NATO’s deployment of cruise (and Pershing II) missiles in Europe.

While it is understandable why this association of the two sets of cruise missiles appealed to both groups, which Colbourn articulates commendably, there is a technical point which complicates such comparisons. The cruise missile testing that took place in Canada was in fact for air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), which were launched from B-52s, whereas the cruise missiles being deployed in Europe were ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs). This distinction is not a trivial one; the two missiles were categorically different, as GLCMs had to be stationed on a nation’s territory—for example at Greenham Common in the UK—unlike the far more mobile ALCMs, which could remain in American bombers. The conflation of the two suited Trudeau’s government, as it could suggest that it was contributing to the defence of Europe by testing (air-launched) cruise missiles just as Europeans were preparing for the deployment of the (ground-launched) cruise missiles. The confusion between the two also enabled peace activists to adopt much of the literature produced by analogous groups in the UK and elsewhere against GLCMs and to link the Canadian cause to the much broader opposition to Euromissile deployment. This often conscious blurring of the distinction between the two different kinds of cruise missile is not included in the article and this very occasionally results in a lack of clarity; the article features an interesting discussion of the technological capabilities of “the cruise missile” and whether it was “an offensive, first-strike weapon” (23), but it is not always clear whether these assessments refer to the GLCMs being stationed in Europe or to the ALCMs being tested in Canada. While the avoidance of such jargon is understandable, some further clarification would have been helpful to distinguish the Canadian missiles from the ‘Euromissiles.’

In addition to the issues of cruise missile testing and peace activism in Canada, the article also re-evaluates the Trudeau peace initiative, one of the most high-profile (if ultimately unsuccessful) foreign policy ventures launched by Canada during the Cold War. This initiative saw Trudeau make a public appeal for closer East-West dialogue and renewed efforts at arms control talks; the Canadian leader then met dozens of his counterparts around the world, seeking their endorsement for his proposals. When launching the initiative, Trudeau declared that he wanted to add ‘a third rail of high political energy’ to the existing two tracks adopted by NATO in 1979. While this was always an awkward metaphor, Colbourn argues that the peace initiative should instead be understood as the manifestation of Canada’s commitment to the existing diplomatic track of NATO policy, just as the authorisation of cruise testing in Canada represented the

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country’s adherence to the deployment track. The article persuasively presents cruise testing and the peace initiative as two sides of the same coin—or rather, two tracks of the same NATO decision.

Such a reframing of the peace initiative is highly effective, not least because it re-establishes the link between these Canadian policies and the Euromissile Crisis. One result of this explanation of the peace initiative resulting from Canada’s adherence to the 1979 Dual-Track Decision, however, is the sidestepping of the question of how influential the Canadian peace movement was in Trudeau’s decision to develop and launch his peace mission. It seems that his choice to develop a peace initiative dates from August 1983 at the earliest—well over a year after large-scale protests against cruise testing had begun. An often forgotten detail of the launch of Trudeau’s peace initiative at a speech at the University of Guelph, near Toronto, is that when he tried to leave the venue he was accosted by dozens of peace protesters whose opposition to his authorisation of cruise testing was undiminished.3 Some of the more triumphalist accounts of the transnational peace movement argue that sustained peace activism put direct pressure on governments to redouble their efforts to reduce tensions with the Soviets and revive arms control negotiations.4 The historiography of the origins of Trudeau’s peace initiative is less clear on the link between the Canadian peace movement and the peace mission: Trudeau denies any such link in his memoirs, while his biographer John English emphasises Trudeau’s personal relationships with individuals who supported the peace movement—notably the actress Margot Kidder—as being influential.5 Greg Donaghy has also suggested a causal link between the swelling peace movement and Trudeau’s decision to launch his peace initiative in the autumn of 1983.6 While Colbourn argues that authorising cruise testing and launching the peace initiative were both determined by Trudeau’s adherence to the 1979 Dual-Track Decision, this seems to suggest that Trudeau was impervious to the pressure exerted by the peace movement in 1982-83. By not addressing the question of the peace movement’s influence on Trudeau, the article avoids a critical debate concerning the prime minister’s motivations in unveiling his peace initiative and the significance of peace activism in the early 1980s.

Nevertheless, Colbourn’s article is a significant publication. Her excellent study makes an important contribution not only to the literature on Canadian foreign policy and peace activism, but also to the historiography of the Euromissile Crisis. She reveals how the Dual-Track Decision shaped policies in a NATO member state far from where the Euromissiles were being deployed to demonstrate convincingly that there was indeed a ‘Canadian theatre’ of the crisis. Policy decisions in Ottawa were informed by the same commitment to NATO strategy as those taken in other NATO capitals, while peace activists across Canada were motivated by the same anxieties that brought millions of Europeans to the streets in the same period. Colbourn’s lucid study of the manifestation of the Dual-Track Decision in this chronically overlooked NATO member state adds considerable nuance to our understanding of the international history of the


Euromissile Crisis and raises insightful questions that should inform future studies of Canada and NATO during the so-called ‘Second Cold War.’

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