Canada–US Defence Relations Post-11 September

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If William Lyon Mackenzie King were to magically reappear in the nation's capital today, he would no doubt be shocked at the extent to which the armed forces of Canada and the United States operate together and the extent to which Canada's defence has been so thoroughly integrated into the larger context of US defence concerns. King would be staggered by the range and number of treaty-level agreements and memorandums of understanding that tie the Canadian Forces to the US military structure. He would disapprove of the Canadian navy's now standard practice of integrating a Canadian warship into every US carrier battle group that goes to the Arabian Gulf to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq. He would be mortified by Canada's 29 August 2002 announcement of a pending agreement with the US to allow US troops onto Canadian soil in response to a terrorist attack. He would undoubtedly reject the notion that in matters of security and defence, the already close working relationship

between Canada and the US ought to be tightened even further, or that a Canadian government ought to think seriously of a significant expansion of its defence budget in order to soothe rising US concerns about Canadian defence 'freeloading'.

In general, it still remains that the Canada–US defence relationship is one of the closest of any two sovereign countries on the face of the earth. As of January 2002, there were close to 90 bilateral treaty-level agreements governing the Canada–US defence relationship, some dating as far back as the early nineteenth century. Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, further close arrangements have been entered into, including the establishment of the Canada–US Bi-National Planning Group. The Group will prepare 'contingency plans to ensure a cooperative and well coordinated response to national requests for military assistance' on land and at sea, essentially to supplement NORAD (DND, 2002). Outside of the purview of strictly defence matters, the two nations have moved very close together on sharing cross-border intelligence, providing for border security, smoothing the flow of cross-border traffic, and generally in starting to shore up the continental perimeters to ward off attack.

Offshore, active Canadian military co-operation with the US, as well as with Canada's other NATO allies, predated the events of 11 September, with the Canadian air force contributing to the bombing of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis of 1999 and a Canadian ground contingent being sent to Kosovo for two rotations in 1999 and 2000 to help KFOR pacify that nominally Yugoslav province. Most notably, Canada sent a large naval contingent to aid the US-led campaign against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, followed by a Canadian ground contingent sent to participate in a shooting war in the early spring of 2002. Close operational cooperation continues between the Canadian and US navies and air forces while Canadian defence contractors supply a myriad of military equipment to the US armed forces.

At one level, then, the Canada–US defence relationship continues much as it has evolved since the first post-World War II affirmation in February 1947 (Permanent Joint Board on Defence Resolution No. 36) that the close wartime continental defence relationship, initiated at Ogdensburg, New York, in August 1940, would continue into peacetime. And yet the post-11 September period saw an immediate upswing in US pressure—in public by the US Ambassador to Canada and in private by a wide range of government officials, political

leaders, and influential private citizens—on Canada to beef up the Canadian military for both continental defence and offshore operations. Dwight Mason's essay in this volume accurately reflects the growing frustration that the US feels over Canada's shoddy treatment of its own armed forces because of the hard reality that the US's longest border, and perhaps its most vulnerable, is with Canada.

It is still too early to know whether all the forecasts that the terrorist attacks would 'change the world' were correct. As with all such sweeping generalizations, no one will really know until many years have passed. But one thing is certain: those attacks revealed just how vulnerable the US is to acts of planned mass mayhem. Thus the defence of the continental United States is now, once again, at the top of the US priority list, ahead of virtually every other American foreign policy concern. This has not been true since the end of the Cold War and not even since the era of the massive buildup of ICBMs in the USSR and the US, which began in earnest in the early 1960s. In many respects, then, Canada today is in virtually the same position it was during the 10 years immediately after World War II; due to geography alone, Canada is once again vital for the defence of the United States itself, whether Canadians are aware of that reality. whether they like it, or even whether they are prepared to pay for it. In that sense, 11 September returned Canada to a past that should not be forgotten.

Canadians remained wary neighbours of the US for more than six decades after the establishment of Canada in 1867. It is a continuing source of amusement to Canadian military historians that the first interwar defence plan put together by Canada's tiny interwar military had at its heart a Canadian cavalry attack into the US Midwest. It was not until 1938, when Hitler was well on the road to launching World War II, that the first very tentative but tangible steps towards Canada-US defence co-operation began after Franklin D. Roosevelt told a Queen's University audience in 1938 that the US would not stand idly by if Canada were threatened by a hostile power. King responded in kind a few days after (Thompson and Randall, 1994: 147). Two years later, as France lay in defeat, Canada initiated the first military-to-military talks ever between the two countries—but in secret, of course. Canadian officers soon began to pay secret visits to Washington, always going in mufti, to begin exploring concrete steps that the two countries might take in view of the growing threats overseas (Eayrs, 1965: 203).

Thus the fundamental pattern of the Canada–US defence relationship was set from the very beginning of that relationship: the US initiates, Canada responds (because it usually must), but generally reluctantly and often with great hesitation. The dynamic—as true today as in 1938—is rooted in the reality that the US has harboured global interests and ambitions since the late nineteenth century and Canada has not. Thus, with the exception of the 20 years between 1919 and 1939, the US has generally understood that global interests must be protected by global power, manifest in its many forms but especially military power, and that at a minimum, America's real security borders must be established far from its shores and its land boundaries with Canada and Mexico.

Almost none of that is true for Canada. When Canada's mandarins first awoke in the 1930s to the importance of reaching out for international markets—particularly but not exclusively in the United States—their strategy rested primarily on the power of reason and the pull of economic self-interest to tie Canada to the US and eventually the rest of the trading world (Granatstein, 1981: 66). Canada had economic interests in the Caribbean, for example, but no military capacity to force the peoples of that region to do its bidding. Besides, the US was perfectly capable of policing that area and shouldering the full costs of maintaining marines and naval units at the ready there.

The pattern of Canada–US defence relationships almost always has involved Canada responding to American initiatives; the pattern of Canadian-American trade relationships is almost exactly the opposite. From the first days of Confederation, Canada initiated contacts aimed at easing the cross-border trade flow, with the US responding. On three occasions—in 1910, 1947, and 1985—Canada initiated free trade discussions with the US, only to back away on the first two occasions and almost on the third.

The explanation for this peculiar train of events is simple. In matters of defence Canadians have long believed that the US needs strong Canadian defences far more than Canada does, while no one has to convince Canadians that in matters of trade, Canada badly needs US markets. In other words, when Canadians look south, they see jobs; when Americans look north, they see defence. This Canadian view of things is quite wrong, but most Canadians still seem to believe, as Senator Raoul Dandurand proclaimed at the League of Nations in 1924, that Canada lives in 'a fireproof house far from inflammable materials' and is thus unaffected by the onset of

world crises and has no need to maintain a credible military between wars (Granatstein and Hillmer, 1994: 76).

The historical evolution of the Canada-US defence partnership in the post-World War II era was established early. In 1946 the Military Co-operation Committee (MCC) attempted to convince both governments that the air-atomic threat from the USSR was so grave and so imminent that both countries ought to move quickly to establish vast networks of radar stations and fighter fields to counter the threat (Jockel, 1987: 6-29). In fact, the MCC's view reflected the worst-case scenario held by some high-ranking generals in the US Air Force far more than it did official thinking in either US military or diplomatic circles. The Canadian government was not at first aware of that and feared that the MCC report was but the opening stage of a new campaign to pressure Canada to fortify its north. William Lyon Mackenzie King's misgivings were fed by news leaks emanating from Washington relating that Canada was being pressed to establish some sort of aerial 'Maginot Line' in the Far North. Some historians took Canadian reticence as a sign that Canada's view of the Soviet threat in that period was more moderate than could be found in Washington (Page and Munton, 1997). In fact, as closer examination of Department of External Affairs and Department of National Defence documents have since revealed, Canadian policy-makers on the whole were of the same mindset as those in the US. The difference in outlook between the two countries was that the Canadian defence budget was so much smaller that Canada's policy-makers were forced to subordinate their mistrusts of the USSR to the spending priorities of the Department of Finance. That department, under Douglas Abbott, took its cue directly from the Prime Minister, who was determined to shrink the military budget and shift financial priorities to paying down Canada's massive war debt and initiating the welfare state measures the government had promised in the June 1945 federal election. Not for the first time, Canada's defence planning was cut to fit the Finance Department's cloth (Bercuson, 1993a).

Although the US also made massive cuts to its defence budget after 1945, those cuts still left enough money for the US military to be more expansive in its planning than was the case in Canada. Besides, the US was forging ahead with the expansion of its nuclear attack capabilities and the design and building of new intercontinental bombers such as the B-47 and the development of air-to-air refuelling, which, it was believed, would provide the ultimate

protection for the US and would be its ultimate guarantor against attack from the USSR (Conant, 1962: 16).

In almost every case in the late 1940s, Canadian ties to the US defence establishment developed out of US requests to Canada to map the Canadian North by air, or establish LORAN and weather stations, or allow cold-weather testing, or give access to US naval vessels and military personnel to practise joint land-sea exercises in the Arctic Archipelago. The US wanted the transcontinental radar station chains, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) lease of Goose Bay, the possible use of an emergency landing strip at Resolute, permission for its fighters to cross into Canadian airspace in hot pursuit of unknown radar contacts, the ability to overfly Canada with bombers armed with nuclear weapons, and the right to use Goose Bay to launch atomic attacks by air against the USSR without Canadian permission. Being the larger power, with a greater military and a far more sweeping list of potential threats, it was natural that the US would be the perpetual supplicant, Canada the perpetual respondent. And it was natural also that US defence requirements would so often distort Canadian budget priorities.

In the first 15 years or so of the Cold War, Canadian policy vis-àvis defence relations with the Americans evolved from initial great reluctance, to a realistic appraisal of what measures would have to be taken to accommodate US requirements, to a renewed reluctance to be perceived as a mere cockboat following in the wake of the US man-of-war. From roughly 1945 through late 1949, the Canadian government's main strategy for dealing with US requests for defence cooperation was deceit of the Canadian people and delay in agreeing to the requirements of the Americans. When Canada agreed to the construction of LORAN and weather stations in the Far North, for example, the public never learned the military nature of the building program and US aircraft and ships detailed to carry construction supplies to the North were instructed to avoid Canadian population centres (Bercuson, 1993b: 158). To some degree the government's effort to mislead Canadians over the US presence in the Far North was rooted in the fear that the Anglophile Tory Official Opposition in Parliament would raise embarrassing questions over why Canada was tying itself ever more closely to the US in defence matters. The other main factor was King's reluctance to be seen as too activist in the Cold War and too close to the US line on the USSR. King officially retired from office in late 1948 and his successor, Louis St Laurent, was far less reticent to throw Canada's lot in with the US.

In these early years of the Cold War, Canada evolved a policy that amounted to defending its own sovereignty against possible US incursions by ensuring that it be seen by Washington to be doing as much as time and Canada's financial resources would allow in regard to defending the continent (Bercuson, 1990). The greatest fear among Canadian policy-makers was that failure to act at all, or to act sufficiently to give the US comfort, would prompt the US to shove Canadian sovereignty concerns aside and act in its own self-defence. There was an almost irrational fear, for example, that the US might challenge Canadian claims to sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago, especially since Canada had no tangible presence on many of the Arctic islands and claimed sovereignty on the 'sector principle', which the US did not recognize (Smith, 1966: 214). Even if the US was not interested in formally challenging Canadian sovereignty over any Canadian soil, the danger persisted that heavy US presence in any concentrated area of Canada would have the practical result of the US assuming de facto control over parts of Canada, even if de jure control was not sought. That had appeared to happen in large areas of British Columbia and the Yukon in the lands contiguous to the Alaska Highway and the North West Staging Route during the war and could not be allowed to happen again.

Thus a set of principles was worked out in Ottawa that was subsequently applied to almost all Canada–US defence projects on Canadian soil, with the notable exception of the Goose Bay SAC base, which was governed by a special lease negotiated by both countries. Included in that set of principles were provision for at least a symbolic Canadian presence on all joint bases and projects, ultimate Canadian ownership of any facility built, and applicability of Canadian law to US personnel (Bercuson, 1993b: 158).

Canada's reluctance to spend money on defence projects that appeared to be short-sighted and more beneficial to the US than to Canada melted away in the 12 to 14 months between the explosion by the USSR of its first nuclear weapon in late 1949 and the initial spectacular successes of the Chinese 'volunteers' in Korea beginning in November 1950. By the first months of 1951 Canada was as ready as the other Western powers (all affiliated to NATO) to spend massively on defence. An atmosphere of panic pervaded Washington, London, Paris, Bonn, and even Ottawa as the UN forces in Korea were pushed back from near the Korean border with China to south of the thirty-eighth parallel. Deep fear gripped these capitals that a

Communist victory over the UN forces in Korea would prompt the Communists to launch World War III with either an atomic attack on North America or an attack into West Germany, or both.

Canada's defence budget ballooned in early 1951 and kept climbing for the next half-decade; suddenly, Canada's hesitation over matters of continental defence faded away. From the early winter of 1951, Canada-US military co-operation grew apace as the Cold War deepened. Agreements were concluded that solved a host of minor issues arising out of the American presence at the leased bases in Newfoundland, a renewable 20-year lease was signed for a SAC base at Goose Bay, and provision was made for backup SAC facilities elsewhere. Canada undertook to build the Mid-Canada Line (or McGill Fence) and gave the US permission to build the DEW line. Canadian air defence resources expanded rapidly, with major increases in fighter forces deployed, bases maintained, and radar and ground control stations operated. A series of agreements deepened interoperability in air defence and led to the signing of NORAD in 1957 (Jockel, 1987: 91-117). At the same time a North American defence production agreement was concluded in October 1956, while cooperation in research on chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons increased. By the time John Diefenbaker received his massive 208seat majority in the 1958 election, Canada had become a willing partner not only in Canada-US continental defence matters but also in NATO, where the previous St Laurent government had been a leader in the nuclearization of the alliance.

The Canadian defence effort, and Canada's commitment to an enthusiastic defence partnership with the United States, began to slip during Diefenbaker's five years in office. There were four main factors underlying this renewed lack of Canadian enthusiasm for defence in general and defence of North America in particular.

The first was the rapid slowing down of the Canadian economy in the first years of Diefenbaker's administration as the nation slid into its first serious post-war recession. Rising unemployment along-side Canada's first post-war devaluation of the Canadian dollar ush-ered in a period of severe federal restraint marked, for example, by the cancellation of the Avro CF-105, which was emerging as one of the most expensive defence undertakings in Canadian history.

The second factor was Diefenbaker's own mindset and his view that the Liberals had allowed Canada to slip much too far down the road of Americanization. Dief the Chief was determined to swim

against the inexorable tide of continental economic history by thrusting Canada back into US markets and ensuring that Canada reemphasize its ties with Britain and the British Commonwealth of nations (Robinson, 1989: 10). Diefenbaker gave his approval, almost automatically, to the NORAD agreement not long after he was first elected with a minority government in 1957, but this lack of any resistance was almost certainly due to the wiles of the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Charles Folukes, who presented it to the Prime Minister as a done deal and one that only capped a series of agreements that were already in place—which was partly true. As Diefenbaker grew more comfortable in his unexpected interregnum, he questioned Canada-US defence relations more closely until eventually he balked completely over the matter of nuclear warheads for the newly acquired BOMARC-SAGE ground-to-air anti-aircraft defence systems. Diefenbaker also refused to fulfill commitments made to NATO about acquiring tactical nuclear warheads for the Honest John short-range missiles that the Canadian army was operating in Europe or for the CF-104 Starfighters that had been acquired to replace the aging RCAF Sabres.

Diefenbaker was not only suspicious of the 'Americanization' of the Canadian defence effort, he was also suspicious of the new President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. The poor personal relations between Diefenbaker and Kennedy are well known and need not be detailed here, but there can be little doubt that the two men were as intense in their dislike of each other as Lyndon Johnson and Lester Pearson or George W. Bush and Jean Chrétien. In part that dislike was based on sheer age and personality differences. But Kennedy was also determined to conduct an active, vigorous, and, where necessary, armed US foreign policy where his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had seemed to rely more on diplomacy. Whenever there is great activity in defence and foreign affairs in Washington, Canadian governments find themselves challenged to help lead, to follow, or to get out of the way—a source of perpetual discomfort for most Canadian governments, which are by their nature hesitant and cautious, either for reasons of conviction or because of sheer politics. Thus when Kennedy announced the presence of Soviet intermediaterange ballistic missiles in Cuba in October 1962 and brought US military forces to the second highest state of readiness in anticipation of an invasion of Cuba and a war with the USSR, Diefenbaker refused to go along. As a consequence, the Canadian military itself took the

unprecedented step of following the US lead in the absence of a lawful order from the Prime Minister, a clear violation of the principle of civilian control of the military (Granatstein, 1986: 114–16).

The final factor that led the Canadian government to distance itself from the Americans in matters of continental defence was the growing realization that the threat of the manned bomber was passing as the USSR and the US deployed increasing numbers of ICBMs and the age of the SLBM (submarine-launched ballistic missile) dawned. Since there was no effective defence against either of these two weapons systems, there was less need for Canada to continue devoting resources to anti-aircraft defence systems. US reliance on detection for purposes of defence shifted to detection for purposes of warning, with the first steps being towards the establishment of the BMEWS (Ballistic Missile Early Warning System) in 1959. By 1964 much of the continental radar warning system put in place after 1950 was destined to be closed and dismantled. Canada would thenceforth have a much smaller part to play in continental defence than it had had during the manned bomber era; in the age of MAD (mutually assured destruction) the US would defend itself by deterrence, a role in which Canada could play only a peripheral and unimportant part.

In 1963 John Diefenbaker lost power in the first election since 1911 that had an important defence issue to be decided. His refusal to agree to acquire the nuclear warheads that were vital for the effective operation of the BOMARC missiles (and the rocket warheads and tactical nukes designed for the Starfighters) gave Lester B. Pearson a winning election issue. Previously, while Leader of the Opposition, Pearson had opposed Canada's nuclearization. But that had been mere politics; he had been a willing proponent of NATO acquiring tactical nukes when he was still Secretary of State for External Affairs. In a calculated move to distance themselves from the Tories, the Liberals switched sides and won the 1963 election by campaigning that Canada had made commitments to the US and NATO and must now fulfill those commitments.

Once the Liberals were elected the nukes were acquired, but the government made it clear that it would abandon Canada's nuclear role as soon as possible. Pearson's main occupation in his five years as a minority Prime Minister was the completion of the welfare state and the laying of foundations for national bilingualism. The war in Vietnam reached fever pitch as Canadians welcomed American draft dodgers and demonstrated in increasing numbers against the 'war on

Vietnam'. Pearson's attempt to give Lyndon Johnson advice about that war stoked Johnson's anger and the Canada–US defence relationship cooled considerably, at least at official levels (Martin, 1982: 223–30). Pearson's successor, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, publicly distanced himself from closer defence ties with the US. He courted the Third World, was a leader in the start of the so-called North-South dialogue, and even tried to cultivate Canada–USSR ties in a vain attempt to make multilaterism actually work for Canada. He also cut Canada's military presence in NATO. And although he eventually gave his blessing to the acquisition of new Leopard tanks and the CF-18 fighter jets, he left the navy and much of the rest of the military in a dilapidated state. He trod a fine line when he gave the US permission to test cruise missiles in the Canadian Arctic while launching his round-the-world peace mission in the last year of his prime ministership (Granatstein and Bothwell, 1990: 377–83).

If Trudeau's pirouette around traditional Canada-US defence ties and long-standing Canadian defence commitments to NATO left the Americans unimpressed, Brian Mulroney tried to restore Canadian credibility in Washington by pulling Canada closer to the US in trade and on major foreign policy questions. Mulroney was determined to restore the credibility that Canada had once had in NATO and with the Americans, participating in the Gulf War of 1990-1 and slightly increasing the defence budget. His government set the Halifax-class frigate construction program in motion, began to plan for the acquisition of marine helicopters to replace the already-aging Sea Kings, and at one point even proposed that Canada acquire nuclear submarines and a Polar 8 icebreaker to guard Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. The subs died when Canada's growing budget deficit and debt crisis dictated new cuts in defence expenditures. There can be no doubt, however, that Canada-US defence relations reached a new high point during his administration (Davis, 1989: 215-38).

Canada–US relations began to slide once again under Jean Chrétien and, more particularly, his longest-serving Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy. Axworthy was determined to show the world that Canada was not simply a pale reflection of the United States and used the greater freedom that the end of the Cold War seemed to allow Canada to encourage ties with Communist Cuba, to use the UN, multilateralism, and 'soft power' to achieve Canadian goals and to pursue goals—such as the anti-landmines treaty—that the US found diplomatically embarrassing. For the most part the Clinton administration

more than tolerated Axworthy's ingenuous spin on Canadian foreign relations, possibly because it projected the image that it was itself more likely to act within a multilateral framework than its Republican predecessors were. But when George W. Bush was elected in 2000, the tone of the American administration quickly changed.

The new President made it very clear that the US would rebuild its military, that it would unilaterally withdraw from the Kyoto Accord, and that it did not trust international inspection regimes covering chemical and biological weapons. Ottawa was immediately challenged to either get on side with the new administration or keep its distance and await developments. The choice was complicated by the knowledge that President Bush had a long history of involvement with Mexico and was close to the new Mexican President, reformer Vicente Fox. One way to forestall a US-shift towards Mexico, several experts suggested, was to rebuild the Canadian military and strengthen the Canada-US defence relationship, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair was strengthening UK-US defence ties. The Chrétien government, as was its wont, chose caution, and even appeared to make a practice of denouncing alleged US unilateralism, becoming once again the 'stern daughter of the voice of God', as Dean Acheson had once described Canadian foreign policy (Granatstein and Hillmer, 1991: 183).

Almost immediately after the terror attacks of 11 September, Canada was once again in the Washington spotlight as a country that was suddenly very important for continental defence and the security of the United States. The closing of cross-border trade and the grounding of all air traffic in North America after the attacks grabbed the attention of the Canadian government almost immediately. The direct impact on the economy was devastating in its own right, but the ripples were felt right across Canada. One burgeoning young airline closed its doors permanently; the rest required bailouts. In companies large and small, retail, wholesale, and manufacturing, plants shut down—or nearly did—for lack of parts or lack of access to US markets. Border security leaped to the top of the Canadian government agenda.

From the very beginning of the war on terror, the Canadian government was an active and willing partner with the US in tightening border controls and increasing border security. Tough new internal security measures were adopted and billions in new resources were directed to perimeter and national security in the December 2001 budget. With \$1.7 billion in daily cross-border trade at issue, it

mattered much to Canada that the US was once again very concerned about its northern border.

That firmness was missing, however, when it came to beefing up the only Canadian agency capable of patrolling the littoral waters and the air over Canada, or of making any significant contribution not only to the war on terrorism at home but to the attack on terrorism abroad. Canada's Operation Apollo, heavy on naval forces, extremely light on air assets, and with a battle group insertion only in late February 2002 and incapable of a tour longer than six months, was the best Ottawa could do with the nation's badly depleted military. No matter what pressure was placed on the government by various domestic agencies, private and public, including the Senate Security and Defence Committee, the federal Auditor General, and the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans' Affairs, the Prime Minister dug in his heels and refused to consider any significant increases in the national defence budget. It was then that the US Ambassador to Canada, Paul Celluci, began to openly disparage Canada's defence readiness and urged that Canada's military be bolstered (Gatehouse, 2002). Celluci's entreaties merely widened the rift that Trudeau, Chrétien, and Axworthy had already worked hard to create. One poll taken in mid-December 2002 showed that an astonishing 38 per cent of Canadians thought George Bush was more of a threat to world peace than Saddam Hussein.¹

It is ironic that a nation so dependent on international trade, and so securely tied to the US economy, should have emerged early in the twenty-first century as so cool to the US, so isolationist in its foreign policy outlook, and so self-deluded as to believe that it matters much in world councils any longer. Tepid government leadership in foreign affairs, the gutting of the military, and the felt need of some Liberal ministers to cater to the illusions of the otherwise tattered Canadian left have produced a growing impasse with the United States. As in the early days of the Cold War, the US is looking to Canada for help; unlike those days, Ottawa is spurning Canada's only true neighbour and friend. If this policy trend is not reversed, the long-term implications for Canada will be devastating.

NOTE

 See http://www.ekos.com. Fifty-six per cent thought Saddam Hussein was more of a threat than Bush; 6 per cent could not make up their minds.

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