U.S. NORTHCOM Operationalizes Outside of NORAD, Marking Continual Fragmentation of Alliances

by Morrigan Johnson

Jan. 23—*The following is a guest opinion by Morrigan Johnson, an independent journalist, peace activist, and researcher for the Canada Wide Peace and Justice Network.*

On January 15, 2026 U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) established two new task forces: Joint Task Force Gold (JTF-Gold) and Joint Interagency Task Force–Counter Cartel (JIATF-CC). This signifies the irrelevance of the North American Aerospace Defense Command NORAD.

U.S. Secretary of Defense

NORAD-USNORTHCOM headquarters at the Eberhart-Findley Building on Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

This coincides within 24 hours of Prime Minister of Canada Mark Carney's delegation visit to Beijing signing a new strategic partnership accelerating cooperation in aerospace, digital technology, and public security.

The U.S. National Security Strategy's (NSS) "Donroe Doctrine" specifically gives jurisdiction to respond based upon "terms of our alliances … must be contingent on winding down adversarial outside influence"—referring to either NATO or NORAD in strategic sectors and categories. In this case, all of the above.

The thawing of Canada-China relations came after trade war had paralyzed the World Trade Organization in 2024, and the release of the U.S. National Security Strategy in 2025, where Canada and Europe are "no longer seen as peers." From the WTO to the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade accord (USMCA)—which is also up for review in the Summer of 2026—Canada is seeking stable trade partners.

The Canadian impact of the creation of JTF-Gold is a high threat. This is a direct challenge to Canada's role in NORAD. The mission established at the Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado is Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capabilities for the "Homeland." The impact on Canada in North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is a high threat which creates security ambiguity.

American high threat operations no doubt are an unstated response to Canada's decline on numerous occasions. The most glaring one is that the Prime Minister of Canada went to Beijing, and Washington isn't happy.

The Peterson Space Force Base is the headquarters of NORAD (a bi-national command). By creating a U.S.-only task force (JTF-Gold) for missile defense at the same location, the United States appears to be creating a structure to defend American airspace unilaterally, bypassing the Canadian officers sitting in the same building. Is Canada in danger? Looks very weird.

© 2026 EIR News Service Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission strictly prohibited.

Canada famously opted out of U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) in 2005. JTF-Gold's creation suggests the United States is no longer asking for permission or partnership; they are operationalizing a defense shield that covers the U.S. but potentially leaves Canada exposed or treats it as a passive "buffer zone." For decades, Canada has relied on the "twin-hatted" nature of the Commander of NORAD (who also commands USNORTHCOM) to blur the lines between bi-national defense (Canada-U.S.) and unilateral U.S. defense. JTF-Gold ends this ambiguity by bypassing NORAD. By creating a distinct, U.S.-only task force for Integrated Air and Missile Defense, the United States is physically separating the actual "shield" from the "alliance."

Canada has invested in the NORAD modernization plan estimated at $38.6 billion dollars, including the new (Arctic and Polar) Over-the-Horizon Radar (OTHR) capability scheduled to come online by 2031, Defence Enhanced Surveillance from Space Project (DESSP), Crossbow sensor network scheduled to be online by 2030, and the ASRAAM, AMRAAM and LRASM missile systems from 2030-2035—which is now out of touch with reality. Quick Reaction Alert capabilities support the arrival of the highly criticized procurement of F-35 jets as the Defence of Canada Fighter Infrastructure Project (DCFI) is expected to be online by 2032. This follows the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework of 2019, and Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy document from December 2024, in which then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, had said that the Arctic is no longer a low-tension region.

What is JTF-Gold actually doing in the same location as NORAD, what is NORAD doing in the same location as independent U.S. IAMD capabilities, and what defines red lines for Canada's security needs? The short answer is that new arrangements are needed that meet the development and security needs of all countries.