

CANADA AND THE NORTH

INSUFFICIENT SECURITY RESOURCES

THEN AND NOW

BACKGROUND

In the late 1990's I was the Commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic. During my tenure I became increasingly concerned with the fact that following the end of the Cold War human activity in the Arctic was increasing at the same time when global warming was making access to the Arctic Archipelago easier. In early 2000 I gave a presentation to the Canadian Defence Management Council alerting senior management that we were reducing our limited security assets at a time when asymmetric threats to human security were increasing. Because our major equipment procurement process takes 10-15 years, I raised a concern that if some of the global warming predictions came to pass that we would not have the required assets to properly guard the Canadian Arctic. In 2001 I wrote a paper entitled *Canada and the North Insufficient Security Resources*. Many things have changed since.

Threats

The traditional state-to-state threat to the Canadian Arctic has receded further. The most important threat to the larger concept of "human security" is to the environment. Pollution in the Arctic would take decades to be absorbed by nature as shown by the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. The short and vertical nature of the food chain in the Arctic also means that any pollution will quickly affect the health of the inhabitants.

A number of countries still view the Northwest Passage as an international strait. Canada's position is that those waters are internal waters and not part of an international strait. Canada must be in a position to enforce its position. This requires the ability to monitor Arctic activity and respond to any situation accordingly.

Global Warming

The most important change that took place is that global warming has accelerated and the most pessimistic predictions of the 1990s surpassed. Some predicted that the Northwest Passage would be free of ice in the summer of 2035 and beyond. It was free of ice for the first time in 2007. On August 2nd 2011, the US National Snow and Ice Data Center posted the following on its web site:

“Arctic sea ice extent declined at a rapid pace through the first half of July, and is now tracking below the year 2007, which saw the record minimum September extent.”¹

Because we did not invest sufficiently in research in the Arctic we do not have a clear understanding of the various forces at play.

Extension of the Continental Shelves

The extension of the continental shelves of the five countries surrounding the Arctic Ocean has received a lot of media attention. The media has used inflammatory language to make it look

¹ <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/> August 2nd 2011

like a race to Arctic resources. Some politicians have also made public statements aimed at their constituents. However there is a clear path ahead through the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

At the Ilulissat meeting of May 2008, the five Arctic nations have publicly stated that they will abide by the framework of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea:

“We remain committed to this legal framework and to the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims.”²

At the working level there is a high degree of cooperation to facilitate work in a remote, challenging and expensive environment. A good example is the US Coast Guard ice breaker clearing a path for the Canadian ice breaker towing instruments to map the sea bed in an area of overlapping claims. Another is Danish scientists operating from a Canadian Coast Guard vessel.

The Northwest Passage

In 2000 there was a genuine concern that the Northwest Passage could become the shorter route between the Asian and European markets. Since then two alternatives have emerged stronger: the Northeast Passage and transit directly over the North Pole therefore avoiding the restrictions posed by islands in the other two passages. We have heard arguments to the effect that major shipping companies may not be interested in the Northwest Passage because of the cost of insurance and the problems related with ice and the slow speeds required to navigate around islands with large vessels. Some predict only a small increase in trans-ocean traffic but a larger increase in local traffic in support of economic activity such as mining and logistical support to Arctic communities.

My concern is not with the responsible shipping companies that may consider the Northwest Passage an economically viable route for such firms will likely have purpose designed reinforced hull vessels, qualified pilots, suitable equipment, appropriate charts, insurance and so on. Rather my concern is with the fly-by-night, uninsured or unscrupulous operators who may have little regard for the environment, criminal elements or the activities of rogue nations who may for example attempt to move illicit goods or weapons through this area in the hope of being undetected.

Search and Rescue Agreement

One of the elements affecting “human security” is the ability of a nation to provide search and rescue services in its area of responsibility. In Canada’s Arctic, marine and air search and rescue are the responsibility of the Canadian Forces and the Coast Guard. Their assets are still very limited despite recommendations to locate some of their dedicated SAR assets further north.

² http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf

On May 12th 2011 the Arctic Council signed the *Agreement On cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic*. This agreement will facilitate the delivery of SAR services in a challenging environment where it is essential that nations mutually support each other. The agreement will also serve to improve the climate of cooperation in other areas between the Arctic nations.

Unresolved Matters

Canada still has a number of other unresolved sovereignty matters in the Arctic. They are:

- Hans Island
- The maritime boundary with Denmark in the Lincoln Sea
- The maritime boundary at the junction of Alaska and Yukon

Although Canada has agreed to resolve those matters peacefully and in a cooperative manner, it must be able to negotiate from a position of strength and be in a position to buttress its claims and meet its international responsibilities regarding those contested areas.

International interest

The interest of the international community has grown significantly. Many non-Arctic countries are trying to play an active role in this ocean which is opening up. Some have suggested the need for a special regime to manage the resources of the Arctic. Some almost imply directly that the five Arctic nations would not be capable to manage their affairs without the help of the international community. The Arctic Ocean is like any other ocean and should be managed in the context of the present international instruments and more importantly by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

NORDREG

Northern Canada Vessel Traffic Services Zone (NORDREG) describe the ship reporting procedures to be followed by vessels when within or intending to enter the waters of Arctic Canada³. Until 2010 ships entering the Arctic did not have to report. Making compulsory reporting for vessels of 300 gross tonnage or more filled a long standing security gap. In my view NORDREG reporting should be made compulsory for most ships entering Canadian Arctic waters regardless of size. The NORDREG reports can be cross-referenced with surveillance information to identify intruders and suspicious activity.

Canadian Government Actions and Commitments

In recent years the Canadian Government has show increased interest and commitment to the protection of the Arctic. Over the last five years the Prime Minister spent considerable amounts of time every year visiting the Arctic. Defense Ministers have also visited on a number of occasions. This has shown a clear political commitment to that region.

³ <http://www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca/e0001440>

Many studies have taken place to examine our security and sovereignty posture such as:

- *The Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans: Controlling Canada's Arctic Waters: Role of the Canadian Coast Guard, December 2009*⁴
- *The Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence: Sovereignty and Security in Canada's Arctic, March 2011*⁵

In 2007 the government published its Northern strategy. It has also published a pamphlet and statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy⁶.

The Government has taken a number of actions to improve its control such as:

- It made NORDREG compulsory for vessels of 300 gross tonnage or more and extended the reporting zone to include the waters of the Exclusive Economy Zone.

It has announced a number of measures to improve our security assets in the Arctic:

- The establishment of a docking and refueling facility in Nanisivik.
- The establishment of a Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre in Resolute Bay.
- The establishment of a Canadian High Arctic Research Station in Cambridge Bay.
- The construction of six to eight Arctic Patrol Vessels.
- The funding for the successor of RADARSAT II to support Arctic surveillance from space.

Canadian Forces Actions

The Canadian Forces established a study in 2000 to identify threats and shortfalls in security assets. The Defence Department published its Canada First Defence Strategy in June of 2008. The Canadian Forces have taken many actions to improve our security and sovereignty posture in the Arctic such as:

- They have enhanced the connectivity and capacity of the Headquarters of the Joint Task Force North in Yellowknife.
- They have increased their representation in Yukon and Nunavut.
- They have increased the Canadian Ranger patrols in size and numbers.
- They have created three Arctic Response Companies Groups.
- They have established an Army reserve company in Yellowknife.
- They have increased the frequency of long range maritime patrols by Aurora aircraft.
- They are developing a sub-surface surveillance capability along the Northwest Passage.
- They are using RADARSAT II to enhance its surveillance capabilities from space.
- They have increased the frequency and size of its joint exercises.

⁴ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/402/fish/rep/rep07dec09-e.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/403/defe/rep/rep07mar11-e.pdf>

⁶ http://www.international.gc.ca/polar-polaire/canada_arctic_foreign_policy-la_politique_etrangere_du_canada_pour_arctique.aspx?lang=eng&view=d

- They are considering the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) for surveillance and Search and Rescue.

Other Departments

Other departments are now more actively engaged in the Arctic. The commitment of the Prime Minister has encouraged other departments to invest additional resources towards the Arctic. One of the clear signs of this commitment is their active participation in military exercises in the Arctic. The ‘whole of government’ approach now seems to be embraced. It is the responsible way of doing business in this unforgiving and challenging environment.

The *Arctic Security Working Group* which I instituted in 2000 has grown in size and impact. It is even seen by many as a model of how the whole of government approach should be applied to deal with issues in the Arctic.

Security Situation

The actions of the Government of Canada and the Canadian Forces over the last 11 years have increased the Canadian Government presence, its capability to monitor activity in the Arctic and its ability to take the necessary actions to address issues arising.

The Arctic is recognized as a very fragile environment with a short vertical food chain. It is therefore important for the government to take the necessary actions to be able to monitor and guard this area.

More stakeholders are coming to the realization that the Canadian Arctic is the size of Continental Europe. The new security resources are still in my view insufficient to properly monitor and protect such a vast area.

Constabulary function

The security situation and the threats in the Canadian Arctic require more of a constabulary rather than military presence. Nevertheless the Canadian Forces is that asset of the Canadian Government best suited at present to look after the security of the Arctic and exercise sovereignty. There is a realization that a “whole of government” approach is required in the Arctic to effectively monitor activities there and take the necessary actions required in our national interest.

Conclusion

Since my original paper in 2001 much has changed. Global warming has accelerated, human activity has increased, the international community has shown a greater interest in the Arctic and the Canadian Government has taken many actions and has committed to many projects that will increase the Canadian security and sovereignty posture in the Arctic. Although the situation has improved significantly, in my view, the capabilities of the Canadian Forces and other security

agencies are still too limited to provide an adequate level of security given the size of the area that needs to be protected.