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## Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security: Historical Perspectives

*Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer*



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DR. JOHN FERRIS

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Cover: The Mobile Striking Force, an airportable and airborne brigade group designed as a quick reaction force for northern operations, was an inexpensive solution to the question of how Canada could deal with an enemy lodgement in the Arctic. During training exercises, army personnel from southern Canada learned how to survive and operate in the north. In this image, taken during Exercise Bulldog II in 1954, Inuk Ranger TooToo from Churchill, Manitoba relays information to army personnel in a Penguin. DND photo PC-7066.

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Centre for Military and Strategic Studies  
MacKimmie Library Tower 701  
University of Calgary  
2500 University Drive NW  
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4  
Tel: 403.220.4030 / Fax: 403.282.0594  
[www.cmss.ucalgary.ca](http://www.cmss.ucalgary.ca) / [njmackie@ucalgary.ca](mailto:njmackie@ucalgary.ca)

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# Calgary Papers *in Military and Strategic Studies*

## Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security Historical Perspectives

Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer

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# Introduction

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty in the Arctic; either we use it or we lose it. And make no mistake this government intends to use it. Because Canada's Arctic is central to our national identity as a northern nation. It is part of our history. And it represents the tremendous potential of our future.

— Prime Minister Stephen Harper, 9 July 2007<sup>1</sup>

Climate change is transforming the Arctic. The ice cover on the Arctic Ocean is shrinking in breadth and depth, permafrost is melting, and indigenous flora and fauna is threatened. Questions about what these changes will mean for northern peoples, for transportation routes, for international boundaries, and for stability and security in the circumpolar world.

Prime Minister Harper, in his campaign speeches and announcements of major initiatives delivered in northern communities, has often repeated the message of “use it or lose it.” Canada must respond to present and future challenges, this message intimates, because Canada's north is besieged.<sup>2</sup> The line of argument is predicated on the idea that previous governments have failed to perfect Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, and a more activist approach is necessary to defend Canada's national interests. Is Canada's sovereignty “on thinning ice”? Are new circumpolar threats undermining Canadian security? As debate swirls around these questions, due to an allegedly impending “perfect storm” coalescing around climate change, a so-called “race” for arctic resources, and increased militarism in the Arctic,<sup>3</sup> Canadians should be reminded that scholars and policy-makers have been grappling with these questions for decades. The Arctic is indeed part of our history, as the prime minister noted, and a robust understanding of previous sovereignty and security thinking, policy, and practices should inform our assessment of policy options, probable future scenarios, and the feasibility of proposed courses of action.

The purpose of this volume is to provide an overview of leading historical research on Canadian Arctic security and sovereignty since the Second World War. It is a “hybrid” collection in that it includes both previously

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published scholarship and cutting edge research by new scholars. We hope that it provides students, scholars, and policy makers with access to important scholarship that frames and shapes historiographical and policy debates about sovereignty and security in the Canadian Arctic. In so doing, we hope that it lays a foundation for future research in this important and dynamic field. Although there is some modest overlap in discussions of historical context across some chapters, this has been retained in anticipation that individual chapters may be consulted as stand-alone contributions on specific topics and themes.

The basic organizing framework for this volume is chronological, with each chapter pursuing a distinct theme. Chapters 1-2 introduce military development and sovereignty concerns in the Canadian Northwest during the Second World War. The main emphasis of the volume is on the Cold War, during which strategist Ken Eyre identified three surges of military interest in the Canadian Arctic.<sup>4</sup> He suggested that the first, which treated the Arctic as an “exposed flank” rather than a place of intrinsic value, ran from 1947-64. Chapters 3-10 chart military, diplomatic, and political developments through this phase, which most authors suggest actually began in 1946. The second surge, “Sovereignty and Symbolism,” began in the wake of the *Manhattan* voyages (1969-70) and continued until 1980. Chapters 11-12 analyze political and military responses during the early years of the Trudeau government. Eyre suggested that a third surge, “The Land of Tomorrow,” began with the 1987 White Paper on defence. The point of origin is better placed with the *Polar Sea* controversy and the Mulroney government’s landmark September 1985 statement, which Rob Huebert describes in chapter 13. This final Cold War surge dissipated with the 1988 election, soon after Eyre published his article. The most recent surge of interest in the early twenty-first century does not have an obvious starting point, but the academic debates between Huebert and Franklyn Griffiths (chapters 15-16) began to frame the issues in 2002, and Arctic sovereignty and security issues attracted widespread public attention with the Hans Island debacle in 2004. The conclusion reflects upon how the historical cases analyzed in this volume relate to current debates about sovereignty and security issues.

### *Setting the Stage: From Confederation to the Second World War*

One hundred and thirty years ago, Canada’s sovereignty over the Arctic lands and waters was far from secure. The young Dominion inherited the islands of the High Arctic archipelago from Britain in 1880 not because it asked for them, but because Britain wanted to transfer responsibility for its

nebulous rights after it received “two apparently innocent requests for concessions of arctic territory in 1874.”<sup>5</sup> Canada proceeded to ignore the Arctic for the next quarter century, until the Klondike Gold Rush. In the early twentieth century, the government sent official missions to the Arctic to explore and to collect customs duties and licensing fees from whalers – a modest assertion of Canadian legal authority. In the interwar years, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) posts dotted the northern landscape, suggesting a continuous presence.<sup>6</sup> There was little cause for worry about lands and islands once Canadian negotiators reached agreements with Denmark and Norway to settle terrestrial sovereignty claims by 1930. American explorers complied with Canadian regulations, and geography seemed to preclude any military threat.<sup>7</sup>

Bernd Horn, in the first chapter to this volume, furnishes a sweeping overview of the relationship between sovereignty and security since the interwar period. Although military leaders always acknowledged a certain degree of potential military threat to the Canadian Arctic, they always considered the likelihood of invasion to be remote. Accordingly, Horn argues that Canadian decisions regarding Northern defence were preoccupied with preserving sovereignty against American encroachments. This dynamic, referred to elsewhere as “defence against help,” reflected an inescapable dilemma for a small state bordering on a large neighbour. Geostrategic interdependence meant that the larger power, with security interests related to the territory of its smaller neighbour, actually posed a sovereignty threat to the smaller neighbour. If the larger power perceived an existential threat, it would take whatever actions it deemed necessary to protect its own interests by “helping its neighbour,” with or without the smaller state’s consent. Therefore, acting out of its own self-interest, the small state needed to persuade its larger neighbour that it could defend against larger enemies, thus diminishing the likelihood of unsolicited military assistance on or over its territory and adjacent waters.<sup>8</sup> Reciprocal Canadian-American defence pledges in the late 1930s established that Canadian and American continental defence interests were indeed intertwined. As long as decision-makers considered Canada to be a “fireproof house,” insulated from European and Asian conflagrations by distance and isolation, the issue remained academic rather than practical.

The Second World War brought the Canadian Northwest into new strategic focus. The Americans were worried about overland and air routes to Alaska and once they “decided what was necessary, they took prompt action with little regard for Canadian sensitivities,” Horn suggests. Canada

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had little choice but to agree, and entered into agreements with Canada to build airfields, a highway and an oil pipeline in the northwest. When American personnel swept into the Canadian North to complete these tasks, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King became paranoid that American developments, taken in the name of military security, would undermine Canadian sovereignty. American plans proceeded ahead of Canadian permissions, and a lack of sensitivity to Canadian concerns prompted the King government to take political steps to “re-Canadianize” the Arctic. The rationale was not defence, but safeguarding sovereignty from infringements by its wartime ally and closest neighbour. At war’s end, the Americans pulled out of Canada and, at Ottawa’s request, the ownership of permanent facilities in the North passed into Canadian hands. As a result, Canada emerged unscathed in terms of territorial ownership, but senior officials certainly took note of the interdependency between security and sovereignty throughout the Cold War. The war also started an enduring pattern: once American security interests and activities in the Arctic declined, so too did Canada’s efforts to assert its sovereignty and invest in Arctic security.<sup>9</sup>

The impacts of militarism are not confined to high politics, diplomacy, and defence planning. In chapter 2, Ken Coates and William Morrison, the leading historians of the Canadian North, offer a succinct overview of the socio-economic impacts that the American “army of occupation” had in the Canadian Northwest. The influx of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and civilian workers “almost instantly transformed” communities along the route of the wartime development projects, reconfiguring physical and cultural geographies. Small villages grew into administrative, transportation, and construction hubs, while others off the new transportation routes – like Dawson – were fated to decline. Furthermore, although the western subarctic looked “unoccupied” on southerners’ maps, the Northwest has been the homeland to Native people since time immemorial. Most practiced a mixed economy, blending traditional subsistence lifestyles with fur trade opportunities. Despite their relative isolation, these cultures had already adapted to the presence of traders, miners, whalers, policemen, and the occasional bureaucrat. The sudden flood of newcomers contracted to undertake wartime construction projects was unprecedented (at least since the Klondike Gold Rush), however, and the Alaska Highway left a mixed legacy that is richly described in the chapter – spanning employment, to sexual assaults, to disease, to environmental degradation. Most significantly over the long-term, Coates and Morrison argue, the wartime projects “awakened the Canadian



government to its responsibilities toward the Northwest” and drew the region and its peoples into the web of the state.

### *The First Surge: Northern Approaches, 1947-64*

The onset of the Cold War renewed pressures on Canada to balance sovereignty concerns with continental security imperatives. Polar projection maps revealed how Canada’s strategic situation had changed when the United States and the Soviet Union became rivals. Arctic defences were inextricably linked to American security, and the United States pushed for access to Canada’s Far North to build airfields and weather stations. Canadian officials grew apprehensive and cautious in authorizing new installations, whereas the Americans were anxious to proceed. Journalists began to talk about a looming sovereignty crisis, and scholars cite this era as further evidence that the Americans were willing to encroach on Canadian sovereignty to achieve their ends.<sup>10</sup>

A main debate over the sovereignty-security equilibrium in immediate postwar Canada has led scholars like Shelagh Grant to track popular media statements and political activists concerned about allegedly sinister American intentions for Canada’s Arctic. According to this line of thinking, Canadian apathy in the face of American security interests threatened our sovereignty in the late 1940s.<sup>11</sup> Other historians have painted a more benign portrait of bilateral cooperation.<sup>12</sup> They suggest that Canadian interests were not undermined by American security imperatives, and sovereignty and security interests were balanced in and even strengthened by postwar negotiations.

In chapter 3, Peter Kikkert supports the argument that the Canadian government succeeded in securing its interests and its sovereignty in its postwar negotiations with Washington. Given its geopolitical position, it was necessary for Canada to cooperate with the United States in the Arctic. The necessity of a more intense and enduring relationship to meet the emerging Soviet threat was apparent by 1946. In the negotiations that followed, Ottawa feared for Canadian sovereignty, but did not give into the barrage of American requests for new activity in the Canadian arctic. Although the United States government harboured no malevolent designs for the Canadian arctic, international events in Antarctica and elsewhere prevented it from explicitly recognizing Canada’s sector claim. Recognizing American limitations, the Canadian government decided against making sovereignty claims that would have guaranteed a critical American response. Instead, Canadian and American officials engaged in quiet diplomacy through es-

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established diplomatic and military channels during 1946, and ultimately set a course that would satisfy both countries' concerns. Indeed, Canada secured greater American recognition of its Arctic sovereignty than previously, and Kikkert's intricate description of bilateral discussions confirms his earlier observation that "informal networks and mutual accommodation of interests solidified a relationship that was built on cooperation, respect, and open dialogue."<sup>13</sup>

In chapter 4, David Bercuson assesses bilateral relations over how to manage publicity related to Arctic defence projects from 1946-48. Newspaper and magazine stories on sensitive joint defence projects pushed the subject onto the agenda of high level bilateral meetings, and encouraged senior diplomats and military officials to sort out their defence partnership and public statements about defence plans for the Arctic. Canadian officials acknowledged that they could not maintain complete secrecy, and decided to emphasize the "civilian benefits" of the various projects while downplaying US activities. This "subterfuge," Bercuson explains, did not allay the worries of journalists like Leslie Roberts (or members of the Opposition in parliament) that American pressures to occupy the Canadian Arctic would undermine Canadian sovereignty. Press leaks and unfavourable publicity encouraged both governments to develop principles guiding the release of information regarding continental defence projects, which ensured that Ottawa and Washington would approve in advance any public announcements. Although "press stories that had no basis in fact or which implied that Canada was compromising its sovereignty in the Arctic and elsewhere would continue to appear through the years," Bercuson observed, bilateral arrangements ensured that the release of information would not be wielded against Canada's interests. Canada set the agenda and led the way in this episode, challenging "the long-standing myth ... that the US consistently bullied, bludgeoned, and blasted Canada to do its bidding."

American security considerations also intersected with Canada's maritime domain. Although Canada is a coastal state bordered by three oceans, its official motto *a mari usque ad mare* only refers to two. The Canadian navy has traditionally mirrored this national emphasis on the Atlantic and the Pacific. The Royal Navy was at the forefront of the epic search for a Northwest Passage (NWP) in the mid-nineteenth century which, after great cost and frustration, led to the "discovery" of one-half of the Arctic and three northwest passages.<sup>14</sup> By the end of that century, however, the viability of the route as a passage to the Orient was dismissed. Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen's 1903-6 transit of the Passage was not repeated until Henry Larsen's transits in

the RCMP schooner *St Roch* in 1940 and 1942,<sup>15</sup> and for the first four decades of its existence no Canadian government or admiral dispatched any element of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to Canada's Arctic seas.

After the Second World War, Elizabeth Elliot-Meisel explains in chapter 5, the RCN was downsized dramatically and had to choose between concentrating its resources in either the Atlantic or the Arctic Ocean. It chose the former, and while Canada pondered its needs and options in the early postwar period the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard sailed into the far north on a series of exercises designed to increase military knowledge and operating capabilities in the Arctic. The emotional appeal of the region – and attempts to draw attention to its dwindling numbers and budget – eventually drove the RCN to conduct a Northern Cruise in September 1948, which saw the aircraft carrier *Magnificent* and two destroyers venture into Hudson Strait and then the destroyers into Hudson Bay. Although the Canadian media made much of this cruise and a subsequent voyage by the frigate HMCS *Swansea* the following year, these operations demonstrated the futility of spreading the RCN's resources too thinly. Although the Minister of National Defence announced Canada's intention to build a naval patrol vessel (eventually commissioned as the icebreaker HMCS *Labrador*), the RCN's Arctic foray was brief. The RCN had little operational interest in the North, and the *Labrador* was an anomaly in an anti-submarine navy. Thus the RCN focused on the Atlantic theatre, and opted out of an Arctic role by 1957 when it transferred the *Labrador* to the coast guard.<sup>16</sup>

Several chapters explain how the resupply of Arctic military installations prompted intense bilateral discussions after the Second World War. The Joint Arctic Weather Stations – which were designed, built, and operated by the Americans in the early postwar years – were a prime example. Gordon Smith, for example, traced bilateral negotiations wherein Canada went from reluctance and caution to assume growing responsibility for the stations, eventually taking the lead in maintenance and resupply. "So far as the JAWS enterprise itself is concerned, it clearly ranks as one of the most important and successful examples of U.S.-Canadian joint endeavour in northern regions during the World War II and postwar years," Smith concluded. "In sum, it was a striking illustration of successful international cooperation and collaboration."<sup>17</sup> Legal scholar Nigel Bankes notes that the Joint Arctic Weather Station Agreement "thus ended the last potential legal threat to Canadian sovereignty over its Arctic lands."<sup>18</sup>

In chapter 6, "Clenched in the JAWS of America," Daniel Heidt integrates this traditional focus on diplomacy but also analyzes what happened "on the

ground.” The Second World War demonstrated that greater meteorological knowledge of Canada’s arctic was necessary, but Canada did not have the resources to mount a proper program itself. Instead, Canada and the United States jointly constructed and operated five stations in the Canadian arctic. While American officials sometimes ignored Canadian wishes, such actions only occurred in the early years and were quickly rectified by Canadian officials in Ottawa. It was the press, rather than the conduct of American officials, that most worried the Canadian government. On the whole, Heidt’s research confirms that the program epitomized a successful bilateral relationship: it buttressed Canada’s Arctic sovereignty while satisfying the scientific requirements of the United States.

As the Cold War heated up in the 1950s, the Americans sought extensive air defence systems extending to the northernmost reaches of the continent, launching yet another round of “crisis” rhetoric. The first radar networks – the Pinetree Line, built across the northern United States and southern Canada at about the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel, and Mid-Canada Line (or McGill Fence), which Canada built and operated along the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel – did not raise concerns about Arctic sovereignty. By contrast, the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, built across the 70<sup>th</sup> parallel, was the boldest mega-project in Arctic history. In chapter 7, Alexander Herd’s careful assessment of the primary evidence reveals that the Canadian government did not passively subordinate its continental defence policy to that of the United States when it negotiated joint arrangements to construct the DEW Line. Although the United States designed and paid for the radar network, Canadian political and military officials withstood American pressure and protected their national interests. American plans had to secure Canadian consent, and the terms and conditions read, in Herd’s assessment, “read like a litany of Canadian sovereignty sensitivities and desire for control.” The United States granted Canadian contractors, commercial air carriers, and shippers equal opportunity to participate in the construction phase, “to the fullest extent practicable.” This idea of *practicability* served as a guiding principle for Canadian participation in the DEW Line project more generally.

The complete story of the DEW Line remains to be written. Its construction, completed in just over two years, “was an extraordinary feat of geographical engineering, planned and sequenced in minute detail,” historical geographer Matthew Farish observed.<sup>19</sup> The project dramatically altered the military, logistic and demographic characteristics of the North American Arctic. Although Canadian officials negotiated a favourable agreement that protected Canada’s sovereignty and secured economic benefits for Canadian

companies, journalists and opposition politicians suggested throughout the construction and operational phases that Canada lacked practical control over its northland. The DEW Line, in the words of *Maclean's* editor Ralph Allen, was "the charter under which a tenth of Canada may very well become the world's most northerly banana republic."<sup>20</sup> This dire forecast proved erroneous, but there is debate on whether Canada protected its interests effectively. Historian Adam Lajeunesse, for example, cites a 1964 report by defence liaison officer J.C. Brown that Canada's sovereignty on the Line was like "the Cheshire cat's smile from Alice in Wonderland; it had become little more than an illusion which gradually disappeared if you looked hard enough."<sup>21</sup> Another reading of the evidence suggests that the countries effectively managed bilateral problems related to the DEW Line.<sup>22</sup> After visiting the Line in 1969, Eric Wang of the Department of National Defence's (DND) legal department noted that journalists who had taken "masochistic pleasure" in decrying American control and dwelling on potential sovereignty encroachments were both misleading and unfounded in the evidence. "Indeed we might be tempted to congratulate ourselves [...] for enjoying a 'free ride' at least in this area of our defense activities on our own soil, without any unpleasant side effects," Wang noted in his report.<sup>23</sup> While there were no side effects in terms of sovereignty, there certainly were lasting cultural and environmental impacts.<sup>24</sup>

The DEW Line and previous military development projects reshaped the socio-economic and cultural geographies of Arctic Canada. "The outlook of the Eskimos ... has been changing since the construction of the northern airfields, the weather and radar stations, and the D.E.W. Line, opened their eyes to the advantages of wage-employment," anthropologist Diamond Jenness observed in 1964.<sup>25</sup> Although planners had intended to protect the Inuit so that military activities did not disrupt their lives, this proved impossible once airplanes and ships began shipping southern materiel into the Arctic. "Every place a box landed became a beach-head for industrialized society," documentary filmmaker Kevin McMahon later observed. "The boxes soon became the foundation for the Canadian government, which the military had given cause to worry about its sovereignty. Boxes were added, and more of our society – with its various virtues and vices, machines and organizations, ideals, morals, values and goals – were shipped north."<sup>26</sup> By-products of military development (airfields, beach landing sites, improved charts and maps, and navigation aids) all significantly improved access to what had been a virtually inaccessible area. Indeed, promoters of northern development in the late 1950s anticipated a flood of mineral exploration now that the military had "opened up" the Arctic.

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In chapter 8, Ken Eyre describes how a wide variety of Cold War military projects contributed to general knowledge about the North and to social infrastructure. While some activities were purely military (and thus development spin-offs were accidental), most defence projects were designed and implemented to maximize northern development. Eyre illuminates these contributions through a series of case studies. He begins with the largely unknown role of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals in the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System, first established in the interwar years, which supported industrial development and humanitarian efforts. In 1946, the Canadian Army took over the responsibility for the maintenance of the Canadian portion of the Alaska Highway. Improvements in the road network “fostered a modest amount of economic development and resource exploitation in northern British Columbia and the Yukon,” Eyre observed, “but there was no great boom of development as some optimists had forecast when the road was built.” Nevertheless, the military’s responsibilities in running the highway had a major social impact, particularly in Whitehorse which hosted the Northwest Highway System headquarters, a military communications research facility, and an airbase. It developed into the first, substantial garrison town in the North. The military even devised Native training programs to contribute to national development “beyond the frontier.” When the military withdrew from the North in the early 1960s, however, these military development projects were cancelled and communities like Whitehorse, Churchill, and Frobisher Bay were hit hard socially and economically.

The early postwar surge of military interest in the Arctic lasted just over a decade. Eyre, in his groundbreaking thesis on the military in the Canadian North, observed:

Military interest in the North peaked in the late 1950s and diminished rapidly thereafter, as the world entered the missile era. The Navy gradually stopped its northern summer cruises. Army exercises ceased. The radio system and the Alaska Highway were turned over to civil departments of government. The Canadian Rangers were left to wither on the vine. Aerial surveillance flights were curtailed. In the later part of the Diefenbaker years, Canadian defence policy was dominated by the three “Ns” of NORAD, NATO and nuclear weapons. Lester Pearson’s Liberal administration during the following five years completed the process of withdrawal. By 1965, only the DEW Line stations remained.<sup>27</sup>

With the decline of American security interest in its Northern lands, Canada lost the imperative to “defend against help.” Now that technological advances shifted the continental defence emphasis from static radar lines to satellites and ballistic missile submarines, Canada could safely reduce its military *presence* in the region without concern that this would undermine its *de facto* sovereignty over its Arctic lands.

The legal status of the Arctic waters posed a more intractable dilemma than questions of terrestrial sovereignty, and questions about the Northwest Passage persisted through the 1960s. In his chapter on Canadian policy regarding Arctic waters from the late 1940s to the *Manhattan* voyages, Adam Lajeunesse suggests that the government’s inconsistent, hesitant, and *ad hoc* approach was less effective than recent scholars have suggested. The gradualist or “‘wait and see’ approach which successive Canadian governments hoped would strengthen their position in fact accomplished the opposite,” Lajeunesse argues, “and the policy of carefully building a precedent of Canadian sovereignty was in fact no policy at all but rather the *ad hoc* reactions of a government with no consistent direction” or clear political will. Rather than implementing its undeclared policy to draw straight baselines around the Arctic archipelago, politicians sent contradictory signals about Canada’s claims and thus weakened their foundation. The opaque approach to maritime sovereignty only worked as long as the United States remained disinterested in the NWP. When an American challenge did come, Lajeunesse argues, Canada was unprepared.

### *The Second Surge: Sovereignty and Symbolism, 1970–80*

The issue came to a head at the end of the decade. In 1969, American-owned Humble Oil sent the *Manhattan* icebreaker through the NWP to determine if it was a viable commercial shipping route for oil and gas from the Beaufort Sea. The Canadian media reported the voyage as a direct challenge to Canada’s Arctic sovereignty. “The legal status of the waters of Canada’s Arctic archipelago is not at issue in the proposed transit of the Northwest Passage by the ships involved in the Manhattan project,” Prime Minister Trudeau reassured the House of Commons on 15 May 1969. His government “welcomed the *Manhattan* exercise, has concurred in it and will participate in it.”<sup>28</sup> After all, Humble Oil’s request for Canadian cooperation seemed to imply that the passage was Canadian, but the US State Department would not say so specifically.<sup>29</sup> A crisis mentality developed; according to Maxwell Cohen in 1970, the *Manhattan* voyages “made Canadians feel that they were on the edge of another American [... theft] of Canadian resources and rights which had to be dealt with at once by firm governmental action.”<sup>30</sup>



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In chapter 10, Matthew Willis critically analyzes the Liberal government's response to the *Manhattan* voyages. He argues that its decision to cast the Arctic in environmentalist terms – Canada needed to extend its jurisdiction northward to ensure that foreign vessels did not pollute this delicate ecosystem – reflected the views and values of Prime Minister Trudeau and his closest advisors. In turn, the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act* (AWPPA) allowed Canada to regulate and control future tanker traffic through the NWP by creating a pollution prevention zone one hundred nautical miles outside the archipelago as well as the waters between the islands. The *Territorial Sea and Fishing Zone Act* extended Canada's territorial sea to 12 miles, subjecting the waters leading into the Passage to Canadian control. Although Trudeau considered this to be a show of "legal moderation," the Americans were furious and announced that Canada's unilateral actions were unjustified in international law. Canadian critics suggested that Ottawa's refusal to declare outright that the archipelagic waters are "internal" showed indecisiveness and weakness. In his careful reappraisal of the evidence, Willis observes that the federal response "was the product of a shrewd and reasoned assessment of the available options, and a creative and original conceptualization of the national interest." Politics is the art of the possible, and Ottawa's "soft-peddalling" blunted a *potential* American sovereignty challenge while affording it room to manoeuvre. "The decision to use pollution-control measures and an extended territorial sea as the vehicle embodied the Trudeauvian conviction that foreign policy be guided first and foremost by domestic policy," Willis concludes, "with the exercise of sovereignty being the means of advancing a country's interests, not an end in itself."

If exercising sovereignty was a means rather than an end, what was the role of the military in the Arctic? In chapter 11, Whitney Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert draw upon recently declassified correspondence between National Defence and the Legal Division at External Affairs from 1968-72 to explore the relationship between military activities, presence, and Arctic sovereignty. During this period, defence planners emphasized the need for a persistent presence in the North and argued that surveillance was integral to the affirmation of Canada's legal claims. External Affairs officials took a different view, suggesting that defence planners confused issues of control, enforcement, and protection of Canada's jurisdiction in Arctic waters with the legal basis for Canada's claims. Despite political statements suggesting that a military presence and surveillance were necessary to assert Canadian sovereignty, legal officers insisted that they were not a basis for sovereignty.



Erik Wang, for example, questioned what an expanded Canadian Forces role meant for sovereignty. His careful analyses emphasized the legal, economic and political dimensions of sovereignty, while questioning its articulation as “a military problem.” Accordingly, surveillance and patrolling did not perfect Canada’s sovereignty position, and Wang and his colleagues suggested that a “presence for the sake of presence” – merely to satisfy the “optical demands” of political sovereignty – was not sustainable. Instead, External Affairs emphasized that the military’s role in support of sovereignty had to be grounded in functional contributions. Increased levels of defence activity had to be based upon a clear sense of purpose, developed with attentiveness to probable threats, our allies, and other government departments with operational responsibilities in the Arctic. In the end, Lackenbauer and Kikkert suggest, “National Defence proceeded to develop a role for the [Canadian Forces] around the protection of sovereignty, predicated on a short-term sovereignty crisis that soon dissipated.”

While Canada increased its tempo of military activities in the North during the 1970s to “show the flag,” the “shifting sands” of political sovereignty did not sustain them into the next decade. Ken Eyre has shown that the government not only avoided stationing regular forces in the north, it did not obtain any new equipment for the Forces. “In the 1920s, Canada established sovereignty in the Arctic with a symbolic presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,” he observed. “In the 1970s, Canada prepared to protect that same sovereignty with a symbolic presence of the Canadian Armed Forces.” An important difference, however, was that the southern military units that operated in the north were transient and did not enjoy the focused, functional tasks that the RCMP had earlier. Nevertheless, by 1975, “the Canadian Forces had re-established themselves in the North to an unprecedented degree,” and for the first time, the Department of National Defence was prepared to admit that the North had an intrinsic value to the country as a whole.<sup>31</sup> When the NWP proved unfeasible for commercial transit, national interest in Arctic sovereignty abated. The military’s symbolic presence was no longer a priority, and its activities began to slacken by the early 1980s. Indeed, although initially opposed to the AWPPA, the United States supported Canadian-sponsored article 234 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which gave coastal states “the right to adopt and enforce non-discriminatory laws and regulations for the prevention, reduction and control of marine pollution from vessels in ice-covered areas within the limits of the exclusive economic zone.”<sup>32</sup> Although Canada did not ratify the convention until 2003 (and the United States has not yet done so),

both countries considered it customary international law on the subject. This vindicated Canada's *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act* and gave it "the *de facto* right to legislate control over the type of commercial vessels that enter the Passage."<sup>33</sup>

### *The Third Surge: The Land of Tomorrow, 1985-1988*

The August 1985 voyage of the United States Coast Guard icebreaker *Polar Sea*, for reasonable operational reasons relating to the resupply of the American base at Thule, Greenland, launched another Canadian "crisis" over the NWP. The Americans refused to seek official permission from Canada, recognizing that this would prejudice their own legal position. In response, the Mulroney government announced that Canada was officially implementing straight baselines around the Arctic Archipelago effective 1 January 1986, thus claiming full sovereignty over the NWP as "historic, internal waters." Concurrently, it outlined an aggressive plan to exercise control over its waters and assert its Arctic sovereignty, including a "Polar 8" icebreaker, new maritime patrol aircraft, a new northern training centre, improved northern airfields, a dozen nuclear-powered attack submarines and a fixed sonar detection system at the entrances to the Passage. It also promised to negotiate with the United States – a prudent move that, owing to Mulroney's close relationship with President Ronald Reagan, yielded the 1988 Arctic Cooperation Agreement requiring Canadian consent for US icebreaker transits. By "agreeing to disagree" on the legal status of the Passage, the two countries reached "a pragmatic solution based on our special bilateral relationship, our common interest in cooperating on Arctic matters, and the nature of the area" that did not prejudice either country's legal position nor set a precedent for other areas of the world.<sup>34</sup>

In chapter 12, political scientist Rob Huebert critically examines the formulation of Canadian maritime Arctic policy after the *Polar Sea* controversy. He concludes that while initiatives intended to establish the legal regime for Canadian waters, apply Canadian law over these waters, formalize bilateral relations regarding the Passage, and develop means to protect the waters and enforce Canadian laws and regulations *appeared* to represent a coherent suite of policy, they were actually the typical result of an *ad hoc* and reactive process to a specific event initiated by a non-Canadian actor in the Canadian Arctic. Minister of External Affairs Joe Clark's 10 September 1985 announcement of six policy initiatives formed the core elements of Canadian maritime Arctic policy for the remainder of the decade, but they were largely being developed for other reasons and were packaged together in a "crisis environment." As a result, they were implemented with varying degrees of success.

The Polar 8 icebreaker project, for example, which would have given Canada the most powerful icebreaker in the world and a capability to operate in most of its waters throughout the year, was cancelled for budgetary reasons.

The 1988 federal election campaign, fought over free trade and deficit reduction, foretold the demise of these sweeping commitments to investments in defence. The Mulroney government announced on 27 April 1989 that it would not proceed with acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. The fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Eastern Bloc prompted Western governments to re-evaluate their security assumptions. One by one, its other planned military acquisitions announced to support Arctic sovereignty were cut. More pressing national priorities – particularly a growing national debt – seemed to trump Arctic issues. Post-Cold War promises of a “peace dividend,” and few military threats on the northern horizon, meant that Canadian Forces’ capabilities in the North were allowed to atrophy in the 1990s.<sup>35</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union, Huebert observed, shifted attention from traditional to new security concerns, particularly the protection of the Arctic environment and its indigenous populations.<sup>36</sup> Aboriginal land claim settlements, court decisions, and increasing international attention to indigenous issues gave Arctic residents increasingly powerful political platforms upon which to voice their priorities. Inuit and Dene leaders complained that military activities, undertaken in the name of national security and sovereignty, had historically harmed their communities. Mary Simon, president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), tried to broaden concepts of Arctic security, asserting that it included “environmental, economic and cultural, as well as defence, aspects.” She insisted that “Inuit have a legitimate, extensive and varied role to fulfill in international matters. In light of the increasing impact of the actions of the international community on Inuit rights, our culture and northern homeland, we have a compelling responsibility to become increasingly involved.”<sup>37</sup> By contrast, military projects tended to be “centralized undertakings that are unilaterally imposed on indigenous peoples and their territories.” Simon noted that these practices were “inconsistent with the basic principles of aboriginal self-government.”<sup>38</sup>

The one exception was the Canadian Rangers, an unorthodox component of the Canadian Forces with high rates of Aboriginal participation that not only survived the budget cuts but grew in the 1990s. In chapter 13, Whitney Lackenbauer traces the history of Aboriginal involvement in this part-time, unpaid volunteer force from 1947-2005. Armed with only a .303

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rifle, an annual allotment of ammunition and an armband, the Rangers acted as “the eyes and ears” of the Canadian Forces in remote regions throughout the Cold War. The military benefited from having Rangers with an intimate knowledge of the local environment and cultures who guided and advised regular forces on exercises in the north, and provided a permanent presence in support of Canadian sovereignty and security. Members of the Rangers attracted renewed attention in the early-1970s when Arctic sovereignty became a resurgent issue and the military launched initiatives to increase Aboriginal peoples’ representation in the armed forces. Northern Aboriginal persons who served in the Rangers could remain in and serve their communities while at the same time contributing to national defence. The Rangers provide a visible assertion of sovereignty at minimal cost, and have flourished in the post-Cold War era. By the turn of the new millennium, patrols spanned the breadth of the Arctic and represented every Aboriginal group in the territorial north. The Rangers’ interactions with regular and reserve force units also contribute to greater cross-cultural awareness and the sharing of invaluable survival skills. Lackenbauer portrays the Canadian Rangers as a genuine success story on the local and national levels, bridging the civilian and military realms.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, however, Ottawa’s attention turned away from prospective military conflict towards prospects for circumpolar cooperation. In 1989, Mulroney had formally proposed the idea of a regional forum for Arctic cooperation with Russian authorities. Two years later, eight Arctic countries signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), creating a forum to work on Arctic-wide environmental regulation and management.<sup>40</sup> Canada played a significant role in pushing the international community toward a broader and more influential Arctic Council, which was created in 1996.<sup>41</sup> “A true partnership has emerged where Arctic states and Indigenous peoples have, together, developed a vision for the Arctic where national agendas can be harmonized and cultural diversity encouraged,” Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy proclaimed at its inaugural meeting in September 1998. “This has allowed us to work effectively on the substantive challenge of achieving equitable development in the Arctic while protecting and promoting its environmental integrity.”<sup>42</sup> At the Americans’ insistence the Council did not discuss military matters, but this did not worry the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. It reported in April 1997 that “the new agenda for security cooperation” was “inextricably linked to the aims of environmentally sustainable human development.” Circumpolar security would now prioritize “the well-being

of Arctic peoples and to safeguarding northern habitants from intrusions which have impinged aggressively on them."<sup>43</sup> These safeguards included cleaning up the environmental legacies of the Cold War, in Canada and abroad.<sup>44</sup> Although Ottawa did not act on recommendations to push to make the Arctic a nuclear-free zone, and even to demilitarize the region,<sup>45</sup> few commentators anticipated armed conflict in the region. Officials clearly believed that constructive engagement, not confrontation, would mark the twenty-first century.

### *The New Millennium: Debating Sovereignty, Security and Stewardship*

Growing concerns about climate change, the opening of the NWP, global demands for Arctic resources and security in the post-911 world have conspired to put the Arctic back on the national and international agenda. The key debate in the last decade revolves around two basic positions. "Purveyors of polar peril"<sup>46</sup> suggest that Canadian sovereignty and security was imperiled by climate change and concomitant interest in the Arctic. Their arguments, generally characterized as alarmist, emphasize that urgent action is necessary because Canada's Arctic capabilities are insufficient to project control over its Arctic lands and waters at a time when our sovereignty is likely to be challenged. In a break with past practice, this latest sovereignty crisis is in anticipation of what may lie ahead: an Arctic future marked by friction over unclear maritime boundaries, increasing competition for resources, and military posturing. On the other side, more optimistic scholars point to the legal framework provided by UNCLOS, downplay the probability of military and commercial threats to Canadian sovereignty, and point to stable alliances and multilateral organizations (like the Arctic Council and the International Maritime Organization) which promote constructive international engagement and cooperative management. The final two chapters in this volume, by the leading proponents of these positions, launched the debate about the nature of the threats to Canadian sovereignty and security in the region, and which policy options are most likely to yield an appropriate and sustainable Arctic strategy.

Chapter 14 reproduces Rob Huebert's influential article (first published in 2002) which boldly argued that climate change in the Arctic is a serious challenge to Canadian Arctic sovereignty and security. Continued thinning of the ice cover in the Northwest Passage would make commercial shipping and other forms of international activity more viable in the region, he suggested, which would challenge Canadian of its Arctic in two main respects.

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First, current efforts by the Canadian government to maintain Canadian sovereignty over the NWP were unlikely to succeed in the face of external challenges to its legal position. Second, Canada would need to substantially rethink its enforcement and surveillance capabilities in the Arctic, and required significant investments in these areas to enhance control over its Arctic domain. These ideas underpinned the “sovereignty on thinning ice” thesis that Huebert further developed in subsequent articles, which suggested that Canada needed to take unilateral action to assert its control and defend its sovereignty or its claims would be overwhelmed by rival interests.<sup>47</sup>

Political scientist Franklyn Griffiths’ rebuttal (chapter 15) contests the widespread belief that climate change and Arctic sea-ice reduction are likely to produce a commercial-shipping challenge to Canadian sovereignty over the NWP. In his careful assessment, ice-condition variability and container-ship economics will not make Canadian Arctic waters a viable alternative to the Suez Canal much before mid-century, by which time the more attractive option of Arctic transpolar navigation may also be available. Griffiths shows that the potential for occasional voyages of rogue, tramp, and non-cargo ships in the Archipelago could give rise to new Canadian security and law-enforcement requirements, but not to any great sovereignty challenge. Indeed, he suggests that the United States is not eager to undermine Canada’s position on the NWP, and he urges Canada to approach the United States to work out a new Arctic-waters regime based in part on the recognition that, from a homeland-security perspective, Canadian law and law enforcement are preferable to international straits status for the Passage. (In subsequent writing, he would emphasize that a bilateral “agree to disagree” approach remains the most viable option.) Finally, Griffiths urges a reinterpretation of Arctic sovereignty to focus on *stewardship* and Inuit leadership at a time of increased accessibility and geopolitical change.

Huebert and Griffiths’s ongoing debate has framed much of the ongoing scholarly, political and media discussion. Griffiths, after decades of studying the issue (and, ironically, authoring the *Globe and Mail* commentary that broke the *Polar Sea* controversy to the public in 1985), observed that:

Hand wringing about loss of the Arctic is part of the Canadian way. Somehow we never get beyond it to collective action that works. In part, this is because good judgement and a fixation on sovereignty do not sit well together.... A predisposition to immoderate and unjustified fear for Arctic sovereignty requires us to exaggerate the threats we face. It chokes the consideration of

alternative courses of action. In its small way it stifles ambition and adds unwarranted apprehension to life in this country. If we cannot leave it fully behind, we should at least reduce its hold on us.

Reducing this hold requires a better awareness of what has transpired historically. How we perceive the present, and how we anticipate the future, is framed by our understandings of the past. The conclusions to this volume reflect upon the themes and questions raised in the chapters in light of current sovereignty and security discussions. We hope that a stronger awareness of historical relationships, and more sober appraisal of Canadian requirements in light of past experiences, will help policy-makers frame coherent sovereignty and security strategies which are grounded in "lessons learned," deal with uncertainty, and seize opportunities in an evolving circumpolar world.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer  
Otterville, Ontario, Canada  
July 2010

## Notes

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  - 9 See also Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?: Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Right and Honourable: Mackenzie King, Canadian-American Bilateral Relations, and Canadian Sovereignty in the Northwest, 1943-1948," in *Mackenzie King: Citizenship and Community*, ed. John English, Kenneth McLaughlin and P.W. Lackenbauer (Toronto: Robin Brass Studios, 2002): 151-68.
  - 10 For example, Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*
  - 11 Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?* For a general critique of this historiography, see Lackenbauer, "Right and Honourable," and Peter Kikkert, "Pragmatism and Cooperation: Canadian-American Defence Activities in the Arctic, 1945-1951," M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 2009.
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**ABSTRACT:** Climate change is transforming the Arctic. Questions abound about what this will mean for the Canadian Forces, for Canada's sovereignty position, for northern peoples, and for stability and security in the circumpolar world. Fortunately, Canadians have encountered and debated similar issues in the past. This volume, featuring chapters by established and emerging scholars, offers essential historical analysis on Canadian Arctic security and sovereignty policies and practices since the Second World War. The "lessons learned" lay a solid foundation for future research and historiographical debate in this dynamic field, and should inform Canadian thinking on what is necessary to protect national interests in the twenty-first-century Arctic.

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