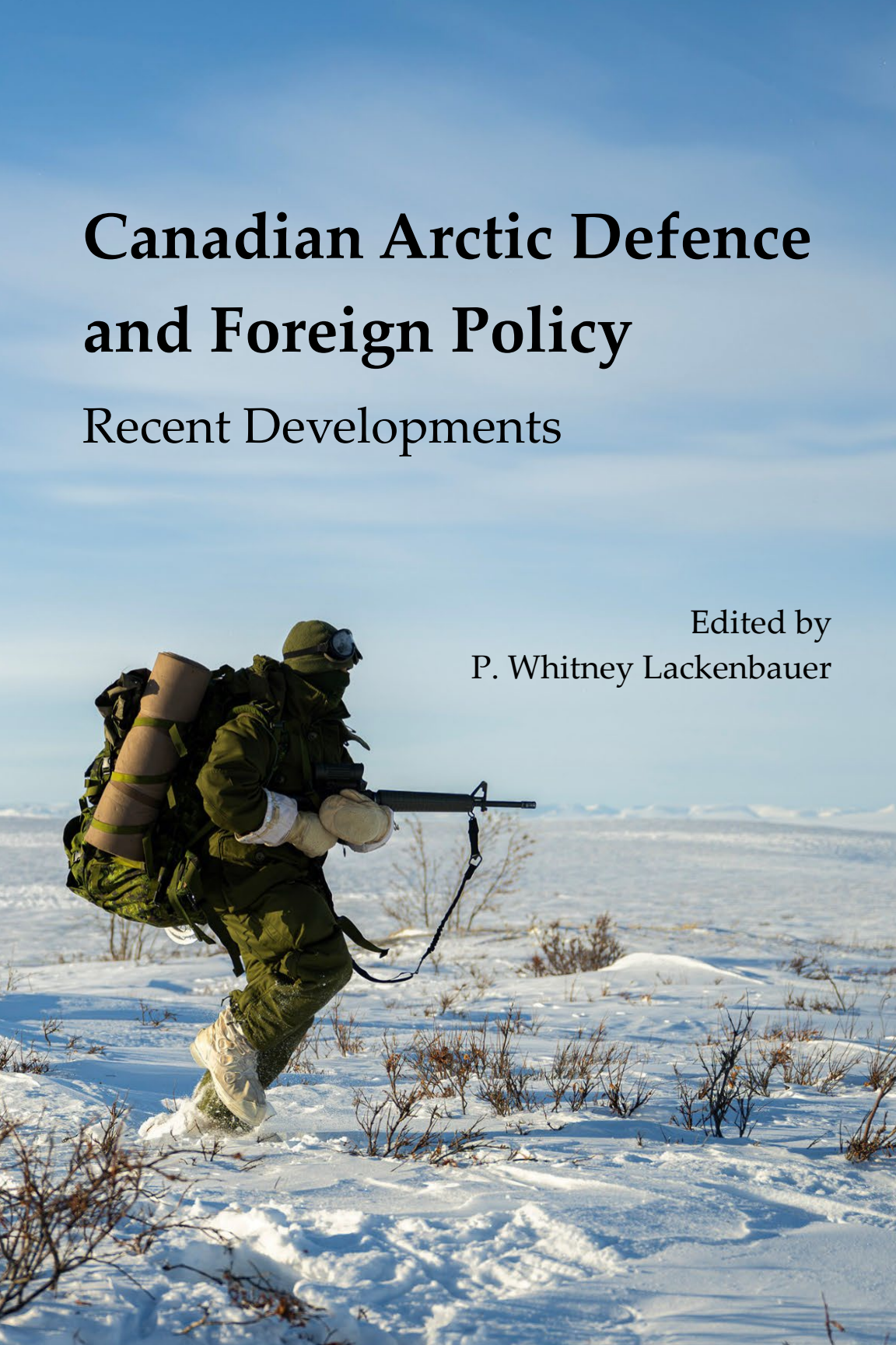
Canadian Arctic Defence and Foreign Policy

Recent Developments

Edited by
P. Whitney Lackenbauer



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Introduction

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Global geopolitical drivers, technological advances, and climate change have propelled Arctic security to the forefront of Canadian and international discussions. According to popular narratives, the melting of Arctic sea ice is opening previously inaccessible areas, offering new opportunities for resource extraction, transpolar shipping routes, and military competition. While the Arctic states continue to assert their sovereignty and control over the region's mineral and energy resources, some non-Arctic state and non-state actors articulate competing narratives about their desired future for the region. Once-prevalent ideas of Arctic exceptionalism[1] – the notion that the circumpolar north has been, or can be, insulated from global geostrategic pressures – have collapsed in the face of growing great power competition spilling over into regional affairs.

Canadian official statements emphasize that sovereignty, security, and stability are essential to sustain peaceful international relations, protect ecosystems, facilitate sustainable development, and avoid military conflict. Our country's vast Arctic territories and maritime jurisdiction form a core part of our identity and strategic position in the world, inviting Canadians to promote peaceful governance and stewardship of this strategically vital region in ways that reflect the priorities of Northern Canadians. Canada is a longstanding proponent of bilateral (and binational, in the case of the North American Aerospace Defense Command or NORAD) and multilateral cooperation to address complex security dynamics, seeking to uphold the rules-based international order and assert its sovereign rights in adherence with international law.

This volume brings together the perspectives of Canadian Arctic foreign and security policy experts to reflect on the Government of Canada's defence policy update *Our North, Strong*

and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence (ONSF), released in April 2024, and its *Arctic Foreign Policy* (*AFP*) released in December 2024. *ONSF* declared that "the most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and northern regions, where the changing physical and geopolitical landscapes have created new threats and vulnerabilities to Canada and Canadians"[2] – a striking statement that elevated the Arctic to the forefront of national defence priorities. The *AFP* highlighted "the need for strong Canadian leadership to respond to the changing reality in the region," rooted in expanded presence and partnerships (both domestic and internation).[3] The intent of this volume is to focus on these two cornerstone documents rather than the entirety of Canada's Arctic and security policy space, with this introduction providing background on the Arctic in Canadian defence and foreign policy statements over the last half century to set the stage for the analysis that follows.

The Arctic in Defence Policy Statements[4]

The Arctic has been an episodic fixture in Canadian defence policy statements over the last half century. In August 1971, Minister of National Defence Donald S. Macdonald released *Defence in the 70s: White Paper on Defence*, which cast attention northward to highlight the importance of surveillance and control over Canadian territory, waters and airspace:

> The North, in a sense the last frontier of Canada, has a unique physical environment presenting special problems of administration and control. Modern industrial technology has in recent years stimulated a growth of commercial interest in the resources potential of the area, and contributed to a major increase in oil and gas exploration in the Territories, especially on the Arctic Islands. These activities, in which foreign as well as Canadian companies are involved, have brought with them a need to ensure that exploitation of the resources is carried out in accordance with Canada's long-term national interests. There is a danger that this increased activity with its inherent danger of oil or other pollution

> might disturb the finely balanced ecology of the region. The Government therefore decided to take special measures to ensure the environmental preservation of this uniquely vulnerable area, and to ensure that these measures are fully respected. Strict regulations governing land use and mineral exploration and exploitation are being brought into effect. Legislation provides for the exercise of pollution control jurisdiction in an area extending generally 100 miles from the mainland and islands of the Canadian Arctic.[5]

The emphasis on defence responsibilities to support government efforts "to regulate the development of the North in a manner compatible with environmental preservation" and to "make a major contribution to the preservation of an unspoiled environment and an improved quality of life by supporting the civil agencies in exercising pollution control on the North and off Canada's coasts" was certainly new. "Canada is a three-ocean maritime nation with one of the longest coastlines in the world, and large portion of the trade vital to our economic strength goes by sea," *Defence in the 70s* observed. "The Government is concerned that Canada's many and varied interests in the waters close to our shores, on the seabed extending from our coasts, and on the high seas beyond, be protected."[6]

The 1971 white paper highlighted that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) had a growing role to play in supporting other federal departments in an "Assistance to the Civil Authorities" capacity, including enforcing Canadian laws and regulations. Accordingly, the government situated the military's responsibilities and relationships in a broader government context. In particular, *Defence in the 70s* noted that "the Government's objective is to continue effective occupation of Canadian territory, and to have a surveillance and control capability to the extent necessary to safeguard national interests in all Canadian territory, and all airspace and waters over which Canada exercises sovereignty or jurisdiction." Given the size of Canada, adverse weather conditions, and the complexity of challenges that "could

arise in more ambiguous circumstances from private entities as well as foreign government agencies," such as a fishing vessel, an oil tanker, or a private aircraft, surveillance and control needed to be "effective and visible." In partnership with civilian departments, exercising control to meet sovereignty and security requirements had to be done "in the most economical way."[7]

In 1987, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government released its defence white paper *Challenge and Commitment* which articulated a significantly different vision of the world and of Canada's defence priorities. The policy statement identified new Soviet submarines, bombers, and air and sub-launched cruise missiles as the principle threat to (and from) the Arctic region. In this new context, "Canadians cannot ignore that what was once a buffer [the Arctic Ocean] could become a battleground." *Challenge and Commitment* explained that the waters of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago offered a transit route for Soviet submarines to pass from the Arctic Ocean into the Atlantic Ocean, as well as channels in which they could intercept Allied submarines passing from the Atlantic to the Arctic Ocean. "In light of these circumstances," the white paper insisted, "the Canadian navy must be able to determine what is happening under the ice in the Canadian Arctic, and to deter hostile or potentially hostile intrusions."[8] To monitor and control the subsurface domain in its Arctic, the government promised to purchase a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs). It also promised to enhance surveillance and defence of Canadian airspace through the North American Air Defence Modernization Program (NAADMP), which updated the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line radar stations and upgraded various northern airfields into Forward Operating Locations for CF-18 fighter aircraft.[9] The white paper also announced that the government would purchase additional surveillance aircraft and would expand the Canadian Rangers – part-time Reservists who provide a military presence in remote, isolated and coastal communities – across the Canadian north.[10]

The end of the Cold War prompted another dramatic realignment of defence priorities. Jean Chrétien's Liberal government released its *1994 White Paper on Defence* in the context of a broader austerity agenda, promising a defence policy which that was "effective, realistic and affordable." Little of the Arctic defence commitment articulated in *Challenge and Commitment* survived in the 1994 white paper, with the only mention of Northern defence promising to "enhance the Canadian Rangers' capability to conduct Arctic and coastal land patrols" and highlighting that the Rangers "reflect an important dimension of Canada's national identity."[11]

In April 2005, Paul Martin's Liberal Government emphasized the Canadian military's domestic responsibilities and called for an expansion of its Arctic capabilities in the defence part of its *International Policy Statement* (IPS). Highlighting the work of Northern Area Headquarters in Yellowknife, the operation of the signals facility at Alert, overflights by our long-range patrol and Twin Otter aircraft, periodic exercises, and the Canadian Rangers, the IPS anticipated that the coming decades would bring major challenges to the region. The high price of oil and gas, coupled with the increasing effects of climate change, had sparked renewed global interest in the region, and:

> the demands of sovereignty and security for the Government could become even more pressing as activity in the North continues to rise. The mining of diamonds, for example, is expanding the region's economy and spurring population growth. Air traffic over the high Arctic is increasing, and climate change could lead to more commercial vessel traffic in our northern waters. These developments will not result in the type of military threat to the North that we saw during the Cold War, but they could have long-term security implications. Although primary responsibility for dealing with issues such as sovereignty and environmental protection, organized crime, and people and drug smuggling rests with other departments, the Canadian Forces will be affected in a number of ways. There will, for example, be a greater

> requirement for surveillance and control, as well as for search and rescue. Adversaries could be tempted to take advantage of new opportunities unless we are prepared to deal with asymmetric threats that are staged through the North.[12]

These eventualities would demand a greater Canadian presence to ensure that the country's laws and regulations were respected.

To achieve this increased level of control, the Government would rely on space surveillance, maritime expeditions, and air force patrols using CP-140 Auroras and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The Air Force would enhance its capabilities in the Arctic by considering basing Search and Rescue (SAR) assets in the region, replacing its Twin Otters with more modern aircraft, and providing airlift to anywhere in Canada – including the North. The army would support sovereignty and security objectives by improving the capabilities of the Canadian Rangers and conducting more Regular Force sovereignty patrols in the Arctic.[13] Accordingly, the Arctic played a larger role in this Defence policy statement than it did in previous statements since the early 1990s – an indication how traditional sovereignty and security concerns were re-emerging as a political priority.

The Conservative Government under Stephen Harper picked up on the Arctic security narrative and adopted a "use it or lose it" approach to "defend" Canadian sovereignty.[14] In highlighting "why we react so strongly when other countries show disrespect for our sovereignty over the Arctic," Harper proclaimed in August 2007 that Canada would face new sovereignty challenges due to the "vast storehouse of energy and mineral resources" in the region and because "climate change is increasing accessibility to its treasures." The previous month, the federal government had announced that, to further "strengthen Canada's Arctic sovereignty," it would procure 6-8 Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships for the navy; expand the size and capabilities of the Canadian Rangers to 5,000 personnel; establish a Canadian forces Arctic training centre; and establish a deep-water docking and refuelling facility

at Nanisivik, Nunavut, near the eastern entrance to the Northwest Passage. Prime Minister Harper's speech concluded that these measures would not only strengthen Canadian sovereignty in the North, but would provide better safety and security for northerners while creating jobs. "Most importantly," he noted, "today's announcements tell the world that Canada has a real, growing, long-term presence in the Arctic."[15]

The following May, Prime Minister Harper and Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay unveiled the *Canada First Defence Strategy* (CFDS), which summarized that "Canadians live in a world characterized by volatility and unpredictability." On the home front, the Arctic factored heavily:

> In Canada's Arctic region, changing weather patterns are altering the environment, making it more accessible to sea traffic and economic activity. Retreating ice cover has opened the way for increased shipping, tourism and resource exploration, and new transportation routes are being considered, including through the Northwest Passage. While this promises substantial economic benefits for Canada, it has also brought new challenges from other shores. These changes in the Arctic could also spark an increase in illegal activity, with important implications for Canadian sovereignty and security and a potential requirement for additional military support.[16]

First and foremost, the CFDS emphasized that "the Canadian Forces must ensure the security of our citizens and help exercise Canada's sovereignty." Accordingly, the CAF had to "work closely with federal government partners to ensure the constant monitoring of Canada's territory and air and maritime approaches, including in the Arctic, in order to detect threats to Canadian security as early as possible." In articulating CAF's Arctic responsibilities, the strategy fell back on the traditional language of a military "presence" necessary to uphold sovereignty:

> Finally, the Canadian Forces must have the capacity to exercise control over and defend Canada's sovereignty in the

> Arctic. New opportunities are emerging across the region, bringing with them new challenges. As activity in northern lands and waters accelerates, the military will play an increasingly vital role in demonstrating a visible Canadian presence in this potentially resource-rich region, and in helping other government agencies such as the Coast Guard respond to any threats that may arise.[17]

Specific procurement commitments reiterated plans to build "Arctic/offshore patrol ships to help the Forces operate in our northern waters" and maritime patrol aircraft to replace the Aurora fleet and serve as "part of a surveillance 'system of systems' that will also comprise sensors, unmanned aerial vehicles and satellites and keep Canada's maritime approaches safe and secure, including in the Arctic."[18] The Harper Government's release of *Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future* in July 2009 reiterated how changes in the region demanded "maintaining a strong presence in the North, enhancing our stewardship of the region, defining our domain and advancing our knowledge of the region," with the CAF featuring prominently in plans to strengthen the country's "Arctic presence."[19]

Canada's 2017 defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, released by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, confirmed that the Arctic remained an area of particular interest and focus, highlighting its cultural and economic importance as well as the rapid environmental, economic, and social changes that present opportunities and generate or amplify security challenges. To meet those challenges and "succeed in an unpredictable and complex security environment," the Government of Canada committed to an ambitious program of naval construction, capacity enhancements, and technological upgrades to improve situational awareness, communications, and the ability of the CAF to operate across the Canadian Arctic. The justifications for these investments included a range of drivers and dynamics compressed into a single narrative, with the Arctic region highlighted as "an important international crossroads where

issues of climate change, international trade, and global security meet."[20]

On 16 December 2021, Minister of National Defence Anita Anand's Ministerial Mandate letter from Prime Minister Trudeau included various Arctic references. A key focus was to "work with the United States to expand cooperation on continental defence and Arctic security, including by modernizing NORAD through: replacing the North Warning System; deploying new technological solutions to improve surveillance and monitoring of northern and maritime approaches; modernizing CAF and NORAD command and control systems to deter and defeat aerospace threats to North America; and investing in infrastructure and capabilities to support operations in the North." She was also directed to work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Northern Affairs, and other partners "to defend Arctic sovereignty and implement the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to create a future where Canada's Northern and Arctic residents, especially Indigenous Peoples, are thriving, strong and safe." Accordingly, Anand was instructed to "ensure that Indigenous and Northern communities are meaningfully consulted on its development and benefit from this work."[21]

The Trudeau Government's 2022 budget (released in April of that year) committed to update *Strong, Secure, Engaged* and pledged more than $8 billion in new funding over five years to better equip the CAF and to strengthen Canada's contributions to our core alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and NORAD. On the basis of these policy foundations, Ottawa stated its intent to acquire a range of maritime, land, air and space capabilities with Arctic applications; to prioritize partnerships, including with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners, to advance shared priorities; to invest in research and development; and to modernize Canada's contribution to continental defence through NORAD.[22] Announcements over the following year affirmed that

these promised investments would have a significant Arctic dimension.

On 20 June 2022 at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Minister Anand made a once-in-a-generation defence announcement, committing to a six-year, $4.9 billion plan to upgrade Canada's continental defence systems.[23] Situating the need for more robust defences to counter "new threats" from strategic competitors like Russia and China, Anand had assessed the previous month that "we do live in a world at the present time that appears to be growing darker." She elaborated that, "in this new world, Canada's geographic position no longer provides the same protection that it once did. And in this new world, the security environment facing Canada is less secure, less predictable and more chaotic."[24] This justified the promise new money over and above the $8-billion increase in Canada's defence spending announced in the latest federal budget.[25] Building on a joint announcement in 2021 to modernize NORAD,[26] the lion's share of the promised investments will upgrade technology in support of enhanced situational awareness in the Arctic, coupled with new "technology-enabled decision-making" capabilities.[27] Minister Anand's comments also reinforced her "resolute" commitment to work with Indigenous Peoples and cooperate "towards meaningful reconciliation" through smart investments that benefit both the Defence Team and Indigenous rightsholders. In the case of continental defence, this includes new infrastructure and economic opportunities that benefit Northern and Indigenous communities. Overall, Anand said that her announcement represented "the most significant upgrade to NORAD from a Canadian perspective in almost four decades." Criticisms focused on when these new capabilities would become operational, where the money was coming from, and when it would be spent.

Previous Arctic Foreign Policy Statements

Recalling previous Arctic foreign policy statements helps to put the current CAFP into context. While the Liberal governments of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Conservative ones under Brian Mulroney grappled with sovereignty and security issues, they did not produce standalone Arctic foreign policy statements. After the end of the Cold War, the Liberal government under Jean Chrétien embraced a vision of international Arctic cooperation through multilateral governance (particularly the Arctic Council) to address pressing "human security" and environmental challenges in the region. In 2000, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) released *The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy* (NDFP) which revealed how environmental and social challenges were now predominant:

> Both the tradition of transnational co-operation and the new emphasis on human security are particularly applicable to the shaping of the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy. The circumpolar world that includes the northern territories and peoples of Canada, Russia, the United States, the Nordic countries plus the vast (and mostly ice-covered) waters in between was long a front line in the Cold War. Now it has become a front line in a different way — facing the challenges and opportunities brought on by new trends and developments. The challenges mostly take the shape of transboundary environmental threats — persistent organic pollutants, climate change, nuclear waste — that are having dangerously increasing impacts on the health and vitality of human beings, northern lands, waters and animal life. The opportunities are driven by increasingly confident northern societies who, drawing on their traditional values, stand poised to take up the challenges presented by globalization. Whereas the politics of the Cold War dictated that the Arctic region be treated as part of a broader strategy of exclusion

> and confrontation, now the politics of globalization and power diffusion highlight the importance of the circumpolar world as an area for inclusion and co-operation.[28]

Framed by principles of Canadian leadership, partnership and ongoing dialogue with Northerners, the NDFP was rooted in four overarching objectives:

1. to enhance the security and prosperity of Canadians, especially Northerners and Aboriginal Peoples;
2. to assert and ensure the preservation of Canada's sovereignty in the North;
3. to establish the Circumpolar region as a vibrant geopolitical entity integrated into a rules-based international system; and
4. to promote the human security of northerners and the sustainable development of the Arctic.[29]

Five years after its release, a DFAIT audit recommended that Canada focus its energies and resources on fewer NDFP initiatives, strengthen departmental and Canadian leadership in circumpolar affairs, "strengthen partnerships with other federal departments and agencies, territorial governments and land claims groups in light of increasing emphasis on horizontal and whole-of-government solutions and the continuing devolution of governance in the North," and strengthen initiatives to engage Canadians, particularly Northerners and Indigenous Peoples.[30]

In 2005, the Liberals' *International Policy Statement* (IPS) identified that the Arctic was now a priority area in light of "increased security threats, a changed distribution of global power, challenges to existing international institutions, and transformation of the global economy." The next two decades were anticipated to bring major challenges requiring investments in new defence capabilities and creative diplomacy. "In addition to growing economic activity in the Arctic region, the effects of

climate change are expected to open up our Arctic waters to commercial traffic by as early as 2015," the IPS noted. "These developments reinforce the need for Canada to monitor and control events in its sovereign territory, through new funding and new tools."[31] Prime Minister Paul Martin's government fell before it could deliver on its 2005 budget promises.

As noted earlier, the early years of the Stephen Harper Conservatives' government were marked by a sovereignty-dominated Arctic agenda framed around the oft-repeated phrase of "use it or lose it" and a focus on military instruments.[32] Arguing that "the North needs new attention," and that "new opportunities are emerging across the Arctic," the 2007 Speech from the Throne marked a transition in its promise to "bring forward an integrated northern strategy focused on strengthening Canada's sovereignty, protecting our environmental heritage, promoting economic and social development, and improving and devolving governance, so that northerners have greater control over their destinies."[33] The following year, Prime Minister Harper reiterated how the four pillars constituted "a comprehensive vision for a new North, a Northern Strategy that will turn potential into prosperity for the benefit of all Northerners and all Canadians."[34]

Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future, released in July 2009, expanded on the four main pillars announced in 2007 and reinforced a message of partnership: between the federal government and Northern Canadians, and between Canada and its circumpolar neighbours. Although it trumpeted the government's commitment to "putting more boots on the Arctic tundra, more ships in the icy water and a better eye-in-the-sky," it also emphasized that Canada's disagreements with its neighbours were "well-managed and pose no sovereignty or defence challenges for Canada."[35] Rather than a "use it or lose it" message, *Canada's Northern Strategy* stressed opportunities for cooperation in

the circumpolar world. The strategy cast the United States as an "exceptionally valuable partner in the Arctic" with which Canada has managed its differences responsibly since the Second World War. It also emphasized opportunities for cooperation with Russia and "common interests" with European Arctic states, as well as a shared commitment to international law.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) released its *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* in August 2010.[36] This document, intended to elaborate on the international dimensions of the *Northern Strategy*, reiterated the importance of the Arctic in Canada's national identity and Canada's role as an "Arctic power" while outlining a vision for the Arctic as "a stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant Northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems." The first and foremost pillar of Canada's foreign policy remained "the exercise of our sovereignty over the Far North," but the "hard security" message of the 2006-08 period was supplemented (if not supplanted) by an amplification in the tone of cooperation with circumpolar neighbours and Northerners. Reaffirming that Canada's Arctic sovereignty is longstanding, well-established and based on historic title (rooted, in part, on the presence of Canadian Inuit and other Indigenous peoples in the region since time immemorial), the statement projects a stable, secure circumpolar world – but one in which Canada will continue to uphold its rights as a sovereign, coastal state.[37]

Other dimensions of the *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* reflected the interaction between domestic and international agendas in *Canada's Northern Strategy*. Canada's North is home to numerous world-class mineral deposits, and the country has a long-standing reputation for welcoming foreign investment in its resource sector. Trade and investment in resource development, a primary catalyst for the surge in international interest in the Arctic, are upheld as main priorities given that the mining and energy sectors are key drivers of northern economies and offer significant

opportunities for economic and social development. Accordingly, the second pillar, "Promoting Economic and Social Development," promotes the idea that creating a dynamic, sustainable northern economy and improving the social well-being of Northerners is essential to unleashing the true potential of Canada's Northern Territories. The statement emphasizes that Canada is actively promoting Northern economic and social development internationally on three key fronts:

1. taking steps to create the appropriate international conditions for sustainable development;
2. seeking trade and investment opportunities that benefit Northerners and all Canadians; and
3. encouraging a greater understanding of the human dimension of the Arctic.

On 19 October 2015, Justin Trudeau's Liberal party won the Canadian federal election, bringing a strong domestic focus on Indigenous rights, conservation, and the health and resiliency of Northern communities, complemented by a renewed commitment to global climate change mitigation. Through bilateral statements with U.S. President Barack Obama in 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau reinforced a model for Arctic leadership that placed a clear priority on "soft security" and safety issues, abandoning the classic sovereignty-focused messaging of his predecessor.[38] Similarly, the Liberal government's commitment to replace the Northern Strategy, introduced by the preceding Conservative government, indicated a renewed emphasis on environmental protection and socio-cultural health of Northern Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, while the Liberal government reframed the political discourse on Arctic affairs that avoided the hard sovereignty and defence rhetoric that marked the early Harper era, Canada's priorities continued to affirm the relevance and importance of a comprehensive approach to Arctic defence and security. For example, the Trudeau government's 2017 defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, balanced investments in defensive capabilities to

deter would-be adversaries with the development of capabilities to support unconventional security and safety missions in the Arctic.

On 10 September 2019, after four years of development, Canada's Liberal government quietly released its long-awaited *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* (ANPF). The "whole-of-government, co-development" process that created the framework involved the three territorial governments, over 25 Indigenous organizations, as well as three provincial governments. This collaborative process represented the "profound change of direction" that the Government of Canada proclaimed in the opening sentence of the ANPF. The sixth and seventh goals highlighted measures to strengthen the rules-based international order in the Arctic. Emphasizing that the region is "well known for its high level of international cooperation on a broad range of issues," and "despite increased interest in the region from both Arctic and non-Arctic states," the ANPF committed to continued multilateral and bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. It confirmed the Arctic Council as the "pre-eminent forum for Arctic cooperation" complemented by the "extensive international legal framework [that] applies to the Arctic Ocean." Muscular language declared how Canada "is firmly asserting its presence in the North" and pledged to "more clearly define Canada's Arctic boundaries." There were also peculiar statements, such as the need to "regularize a bilateral dialogue with the United States on Arctic issues," with no clear explanation of where the bilateral relationship was deficient or what this meant.[39]

The overall tenor of the ANPF "International chapter" was generally optimistic and unabashedly projected Canada's domestic priorities into the international sphere, emphasizing the desire for regional peace and stability so that "Arctic and northern peoples thrive economically, socially and environmentally." It articulated Canada's goals and objectives for the circumpolar Arctic in three key areas:

1. Strengthening the rules-based international order in the Arctic
2. More clearly defining Canada's Arctic boundaries
3. Broadening Canada's international engagement to contribute to the priorities of the Canadian Arctic

Innovative elements included promises to "champion the integration of diversity and gender considerations into projects and initiatives, guided by Canada's feminist foreign policy," and increasing youth engagement in the circumpolar dialogue. Unfortunately, concrete examples of opportunities or new mechanisms to do so were not provided. Similarly, promises to help Arctic and northern businesses to pursue international opportunities "that are aligned with local interests and values" were vague, and the Trudeau government's vision for the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) unclear. Well-established priorities, such as food security, improving health care services, and suicide prevention, were presented with no reference to what had been done to forward these agendas internationally. There were some discernable policy changes, however. NATO was presented as a "key multilateral forum" in the Arctic – a clear shift from the reticence of previous governments who feared unnecessarily antagonizing Russia by having the alliance articulate an Arctic focus. Concurrently, the policy committed to "restart a regular bilateral dialogue on Arctic issues with Russia in key areas related to Indigenous issues, scientific cooperation, environmental protection, shipping and search and rescue." Furthermore, Canada committed to "enhance the reputation and participation of Arctic and northern Canadians, especially Indigenous peoples, in relevant international forums and negotiations," and to promote the "full inclusion of Indigenous knowledge" in polar science and decision making.[40]

Developments since February 2022

Since February 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has sent shockwaves across the Arctic. While Russia has not signalled any similar aspirations for military conquest in neighbouring Arctic countries, the world has witnessed the further spillover of international tensions into circumpolar affairs and the Kremlin has shattered Russia's credibility as a peaceful, law-abiding actor. Although Canada has often adopted language downplaying immediate conventional military risks to its Arctic, Russian aggression in Europe has prompted changes in assessments about the current and future security threat environment. Furthermore, worries about China's growing intent to "play a larger role in the region" and concomitant security risks factor prominently in recent policy statements.[41] While Canada was hesitant about NATO members speaking about Arctic security in an Alliance context over a decade ago, this is no longer the case.

Canada's April 2024 defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free* (*ONSF*) places an unprecedented focus on the Arctic – and particularly on Canada's Arctic. The document seeks to evoke a sense of urgency, alleging that environmental changes have increased regional accessibility and opened new threat vectors for competitors to exploit. As eminent commentators explain in the following chapters in this edited volume, *ONSF* highlights three "powerful, connected trends" that are reshaping global geopolitics: climate change, autocracies and disruptive states (particularly China and Russia) challenging the international order, and new and disruptive technologies that "are rapidly redefining conflict and what it takes to be safe and secure." *ONSF* also commits that "to address new threats through, to and in the Arctic and North, we will prioritize detecting and understanding threats across all military domains, increasing our military's presence, mobility and responsiveness in the Arctic, and robustly responding to threats when and where they materialize." By extension, "this will also

help address challenges to the safety and security of Indigenous and northern communities."[42]

Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, in her foreword to *ONSF*, notes that "Canada must meet these new and emerging threats with resolve," insisting that "vigorous assertion of our sovereignty, particularly in the Canadian Arctic, is a fundamental priority."[43] Her introduction to Canada's *Arctic Foreign Policy* (*AFP*), released in December 2024, affirmed how official narratives had shifted in characterizing the Arctic region not as a natural zone of international cooperation but a site of contestation, uncertainty, and unpredictability. After "months of extensive engagement with territorial and provincial governments and Inuit, First Nations and Métis" as well as consultations the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States – described as "Canada's like-minded Arctic partners" – the statement emphasized how:

> Canada is at an inflection point in the Arctic.
>
> For many years, Canada has aimed to manage the Arctic and northern regions cooperatively with other states as a zone of low tension that is free from military competition.
>
> This approach had significant benefits, uniting the Arctic nations to advance cooperation on issues of common interest, such as sustainable development, environmental protection and scientific collaboration, including through the establishment of the Arctic Council in Ottawa in 1996.
>
> However, the guardrails that we have depended on to prevent and resolve conflict have weakened. Russia's illegal war in Ukraine has made cooperation with it on Arctic issues exceedingly difficult for the foreseeable future. Uncertainty and unpredictability are creating economic consequences that Canadians are facing everyday.
>
> Threats to Canada's security are no longer bound by geography; climate change is accelerating rapidly; and non-Arctic states, including China, are also seeking greater influence in the governance of the Arctic. To respond, Canada must be strong in the North American Arctic, and it requires

> deeper collaboration with its greatest ally, the United States. Canada must also maintain strong ties with its 5 Nordic allies, which are now also all NATO members.
>
> The evolving security and political dynamics in the Arctic have triggered a need for a recalibrated diplomatic approach to advancing Canada's national interests in the region, based on the principles of pragmatic diplomacy.
>
> The Arctic Foreign Policy, a diplomatic strategy, addresses the challenges and opportunities Canada faces today, as well as those it expects to face in the coming decades. It gives Canada the diplomatic tools it needs to continue to assert its sovereignty, advance its national security interests and promote a stable, prosperous and secure Arctic.[44]

Intended as a diplomatic policy that "complements the work and investments outlined in" ONSF,[45] the AFP is built around four main pillars: asserting Canada's sovereignty; advancing Canada's interests through pragmatic diplomacy; leadership on Arctic governance and multilateral challenges; and adopting a more inclusive approach to Arctic diplomacy. It also promises to "advance the priorities of territorial and provincial governments and the First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Modern Treaty and Self-Governing Partners who call the Arctic home."[46]

The chapters in this volume range from general analyses of *ONSF* and Canada's *AFP* to specific engagement on particular topics or themes. The authors bring a diversity of viewpoints which are intended to invite discussion and debate, promote a culture of critical engagement, and encourage further policy development or refinement. While the return of Donald Trump to the US Presidency in January 2025 has sent shockwaves through the Arctic and Canada-US relations, contributors were asked specifically to focus on the Canadian policy statements for the purposes of this collection – with anticipation that we will have many opportunities in subsequent publications to assess how well these policies have fared in the face of unforeseen developments.

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1

"The most urgent and important task we face": Framing the Arctic Focus in Canada's April 2024 Defence Policy Update

P. Whitney Lackenbauer*

> *The most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and northern regions, where the changing physical and geopolitical landscapes have created new threats and vulnerabilities to Canada and Canadians.*
>
> *… Defending the Arctic is asserting Canadian sovereignty. To do so, we must take a new approach that improves and modernizes our defences in the region.*
>
> *This means establishing greater presence, reach, mobility, and responsiveness in the Arctic and North to deal with disasters, threats, and challenges to our sovereignty.*
>
> Department of National Defence,
> *Our North, Strong and Free* (April 2024)[1]

Arctic geopolitics and security continue to rise in profile on the Canadian political agenda. The Conservative government of Stephen Harper, which held office from 2006-15, supplemented its initial, narrow "use it or lose it" sovereignty agenda with a

* Originally published in *Arctic Yearbook 2024*, edited by Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot, and Justin Barnes.

comprehensive Northern Strategy in which national defence was only one component. When Justin Trudeau's Liberal government came to office in 2015, it initially avoided language around sovereignty and security, believing that the Conservatives had managed to "brand" this language in a partisan sense.[2] During public and political consultations, however, Northern Canadians insisted that any Canadian Arctic strategy had to incorporate both components. The Liberal defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, published in 2017, followed by the safety, security, and defence chapter of the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) released two years later, returned to national defence as a key part of Canada's "commitment to a safe, secure, and well-defended Arctic and North, and as a continued expression of Canada's enduring sovereignty over our lands and waters."[3]

The ANPF stated that "while Canada sees no immediate threat in the Arctic and the North, as the region's physical environment changes, the circumpolar North is becoming an area of strategic international importance, with both Arctic and non-Arctic states expressing a variety of economic and military interests in the region," thus necessitating "effective safety and security frameworks, national defence, and deterrence."[4] Then Russia's brutal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 rocked the international order, with heightened geopolitical competition spilling over into Arctic regional affairs. What some commentators called the age of "Arctic exceptionalism," marked by peaceful regional relations since the end of the Cold War, abruptly ended (although many of us question whether it ever existed at all).[5] Consequently, much of the expert debate about the Arctic geopolitical environment has shifted from a conflict-or-cooperation binary to analyzing a continuum of competition involving the seven like-minded Arctic states (all of which are now NATO members), Russia, China, and other non-Arctic state and non-state actors.

Canada's April 2024 defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free* (*ONSF*) places an unprecedented focus on the Arctic – and particularly on Canada's Arctic.[6] Never has Arctic sovereignty and security factored so prominently in a Canadian defence statement. Even *Defence in the '70s*, which shared the overarching idea that the top priority of the Canadian Armed Forces is the defence of Canada and Canadians, did not confer on the Arctic the idea that it was "the most urgent and important task" for the Canadian military. Neither did the 1987 White Paper on defence, with its three polar projection maps and its emphasis on a new Arctic defence imperative to deter the Soviet Union.[7] Like these previous iterations of intensified Arctic security attention, however, the Department of National Defence has again produced a vision that conflates sovereignty, security, and the need for an expanded and enhanced military presence.

Canada's 2017 defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, described the Arctic as "an important international crossroads where issues of climate change, international trade, and global security meet." Reiterating longstanding narratives about the Arctic as a region undergoing massive change in an unpredictable and complex security environment, the federal government committed to "increase [the military's] presence in the Arctic over the long-term and work cooperatively with Arctic partners." Rather than promoting a storyline of inherent competition or impending conflict, however, the policy emphasized that "Arctic states have long cooperated on economic, environmental, and safety issues, particularly through the Arctic Council, the premier body for cooperation in the region. All Arctic states have an enduring interest in continuing this productive collaboration."[8]

Seven years later, Minister of National Defence Bill Blair painted a more alarming picture of a region that adversaries are openly contesting:

> In our North, we need to confront the reality of climate change. Our Arctic is warming at four times the global

> average, opening the region to the world, which was previously protected by the Polar Ice Cap year-round. By 2050, the Arctic Ocean could become the most efficient shipping route between Europe and East Asia. We are seeing greater Russian activity in our air approaches, and a growing number of Chinese vessels and surveillance platforms are mapping and collecting data about the region. Meanwhile, states are rapidly building up their military capabilities in ways that impact our security in the Arctic—including submarines, long-range aircraft and hypersonic missiles that move faster and are harder to detect. As the Arctic becomes more accessible to foreign actors, we need to ensure our military has the tools to assert our sovereignty and protect Canada's interests.[9]

The statement evokes a sense of urgency, alleging that environmental changes have increased regional accessibility and thus open new threat vectors for competitors to exploit. "Canada must meet these new and emerging threats with resolve," Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly added in her opening message in the policy statement. "Vigorous assertion of our sovereignty, particularly in the Canadian Arctic, is a fundamental priority."[10]

Most Canadian sovereignty and security discourse emphasizes how emerging drivers of change create unprecedented challenge and uncertainty. *Our North, Strong and Free* highlights three "powerful, connected trends" that are reshaping global geopolitics: climate change, autocracies and disruptive states (particularly China and Russia) challenging the international order, and new and disruptive technologies that "are rapidly redefining conflict and what it takes to be safe and secure." In highlighting the Arctic as the region of particular concern and priority, the Liberal government has chosen once again to *securitize* ideas around Arctic sovereignty, requiring extraordinary military action beyond the realm of normal politics.[11]

Critically discussing the role of the Canadian Armed Forces in demonstrating or asserting sovereignty is nothing new. While

grandiloquent proclamations about the precarity of Canada's Arctic sovereignty are a staple in national discourse, these are often grounded in superficial understandings of the legal basis for Canada's sovereignty and the nature of what is being contested. Furthermore, they are often ambiguous about why the armed forces should be the preferred method of addressing emergent challenges in sectors of security (political, economic, environmental, and societal) that typically fall outside of the conventional military threat envelope.

What is the nature of the threats facing Canada that imperil our sovereignty and security in the Arctic? Is the military the best instrument to mitigate and counter these threats? In *ONSF,* the Government of Canada insists that "Canada's Northwest Passage and the broader Arctic region are already more accessible, and competitors are not waiting to take advantage—seeking access, transportation routes, natural resources, critical minerals, and energy sources through more frequent and regular presence and activity." Does this heightened maritime activity in Canada's Arctic waters include foreign navies? Which pernicious actors are "exploring Arctic waters and the sea floor, probing our infrastructure and collecting intelligence"? Are these primarily military challenges, or illegal activities that should be countered and prosecuted using law enforcement and diplomatic tools? Because Canada has not updated its national security strategy since 2004,[12] it remains difficult to situate Canadian defence in a whole-of-government security context.

Our North, Strong and Free states that the Government of Canada is "seeing more Russian activity in our air approaches, and a growing number of Chinese dual-purpose research vessels and surveillance platforms collecting data about the Canadian North that is, by Chinese law, made available to China's military."[13] Russian bomber flights that are routinely intercepted by NORAD do not transgress Canadian sovereign airspace[14] and, while they may fly more aggressive patterns than before, climate change does

not make northern air approaches more accessible to competitors. Furthermore, Chinese researchers, icebreakers, buoys, and balloons may serve dual-use agendas, but they do not represent conventional kinetic threats. Why characterize the Canadian Arctic as a region facing new, acute military pressures rather than more general national security ones inviting more deliberate coordination of the military instrument with other instruments of national power?

The *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept*, released in fall 2023, recognizes that "the CAF is currently configured to counter overt military actions in the traditional domains of land, sea, and air by recognizable force elements of an adversary's armed forces."[15] By contrast, Canada's adversaries are more effective in integrating various instruments of national power and employing them effectively. To compete in this context, increasing the military's "presence, reach, mobility and responsiveness across the country, particularly in our changing Arctic and North," can contribute to whole-of-government and whole-of-society preparedness and responses. *ONSF* declares that:

> Our military must be capable of undertaking a wide range of missions, including asserting Canadian sovereignty, conducting search and rescue, and assisting civil authorities when required. The Canadian Armed Forces also needs increased capacity to monitor our vast land mass, airspace and maritime areas, defend against threats to Canada as they arise, and be able to deploy quickly and efficiently across the country, especially in remote environments like our Arctic and North, or to assist Canadians facing wildfires, floods, or other climate-related disasters.
>
> To address new threats through, to and in the Arctic and North, we will prioritize detecting and understanding threats across all military domains, increasing our military's presence, mobility and responsiveness in the Arctic, and robustly responding to threats when and where they materialize. This will also help address challenges to the safety and security of Indigenous and northern communities.

> We will make investments to ensure that Canada remains well-defended. Collectively, these capabilities will address our biggest challenges in the Arctic and North—they will provide a broader footprint and prepositioned supplies and equipment in the region, much better eyes and ears in space, in the air, on the ground and underwater, striking power to deter threats far from our shores, and the ability to get to and deal with incidents faster.
>
> We will broaden our ability to monitor our approaches and detect and deter threats before they reach Canada, and to share that information securely with our allies.[16]

To address this blend of missions and requirements, which include a diverse array of threats through, to, and in the Arctic, the Government of Canada proposes various material solutions. It commits to "explore options" for "renewing and expanding" the Royal Canadian Navy's submarine fleet to enable it to "project a persistent deterrent on all three coasts." It will improve CAF mobility and presence on the land in the Arctic and North by acquiring new all-terrain vehicles "adapted to ice, snow and tundra" that "will allow the military to maintain awareness in remote regions and along Canada's entire coastline, and better respond to unauthorized activity." Furthermore, promises to acquire specialized maritime sensors to monitor Canada's approaches, build a new satellite ground station in the Arctic, and establish northern operational support hubs and other infrastructure. Even if this ambitious plan is funded and realized, synchronizing these instruments in a pan-domain campaigning approach and then coordinating them with whole-of-government efforts will require lucidity and innovation.[17]

Canada's 2017 defence policy noted that "NATO has … increased its attention to Russia's ability to project force from its Arctic territory into the North Atlantic, and its potential to challenge NATO's collective defence posture."[18] Since that time, NATO exercises off the coast of Norway and the stand up of new commands in support of Alliance efforts have reinvigorated

attentiveness to NATO's Northern Flank. The sea lines of communication linking North America to Europe are central to this concept, with the North Atlantic linking the defence of Canada and the Arctic with NATO. While *Strong, Secure, Engaged* specifically framed the North Atlantic as a geostrategic centre of gravity, this is largely missing from *ONSF*. The policy update is rife with concern about "asserting," "defending," "protecting," and "securing" Canada's Arctic sovereignty, but neither the integrity nor security of the European Arctic nor the larger concept of NATO's Northern Flank are emphasized in detail.[19] This sets up the expectation that Canadians' defence priority should be to protect their own Arctic *sovereignty*. Does this mean at the expense of their commitments elsewhere, particularly in the European Arctic? As the size of Canada's armed forces contracts, [20] should its international commitments follow a similar trajectory in favour of basic national security needs such as protecting Arctic sovereignty? Fortunately, reported discussions between Canada, Germany, and Norway about a possible trilateral defence and security partnership covering the North Atlantic and the Arctic point in the other direction.[21]

ONSF received significant criticism for projecting Canada's defence spending that failed to meet the 2% GDP spending threshold to which NATO members – including Canada – have committed. Various NATO Allies expressed concern about promised spending increases spread out over a twenty-year period which, according to the policy update, would reach a projected 1.76% of GDP.[22] In the face of this pressure, Minister Blair's announced at the Washington NATO Summit on 10 July 2024 that Canada is launching a formal process to procure a fleet of up to twelve conventionally-powered, under-ice capable submarines – a purchase that will push Canada over the 2% threshold.[23] The long timelines for major capital procurement programs in Canada means that this will be a protracted process.

ONSF also states that "defending this vast and challenging region, with coastlines and territory larger than the entirety of most other Arctic nations, a harsh climate, and limited physical and communications infrastructure, requires full community engagement and rethinking how we approach the defence of our country." [24] This promise to adopt a new approach – and particularly the focus on collaborating with Northern Indigenous partners and community stakeholders – should invite deliberate reflections on fundamental ideas and assumptions about "sovereignty," "security," and "presence." An "inclusive approach to national defence" that places Arctic rightsholders at the forefront and engages with them more substantively is likely to reveal that Indigenous Peoples envisage these concepts in broader and deeper ways than the Department of National Defence.[25]

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2

Arctic Security in *Our North, Strong and Free*: Canada Needs to Get China and Russia Right Policy

Marc Lanteigne*

The Canadian Department of National Defence's April 2024 defence policy update, *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*, had a strong focus on the Arctic. The region has seen a considerable increase in military activity, and great power political activity, since Canada's defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* appeared in 2017. The human security challenges posed by climate change are reflected in myriad ways across the Canadian Arctic, but the new policy also underlined the strategic challenges of a more accessible Arctic Ocean, with a corresponding need to promote Canadian sovereignty in the country's far northern reaches. Towards this end, the policy update promised that the Canadian government will augment Arctic accessibility and surveillance, announcing new sensor technology, a northern satellite ground station, regional operational support facilities for multifunctional purposes, and vehicles and equipment suited to difficult polar conditions.

The rationale for these policies, it is stressed, is to protect Canadian sovereignty in the face of challenges from adversarial

* Originally published as a NAADSN *Quick Impact*, 10 April 2024.

powers, especially Russia and China. After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago, concerns persist that the broken relations between Moscow and the West will inevitably spill over into the Arctic. With NATO now having added Finland and Sweden into its ranks, the Arctic is no longer a peripheral issue for the alliance. As for China, *Our North, Strong and Free* describes its government as openly challenging international rules and norms and how, by Beijing's own admission, China is seeking to develop a more robust presence in the Arctic for economic and strategic reasons.

While few analysts would argue that China and Russia pose no significant challenges for Arctic security, the defence policy paper also illustrates the need for Ottawa to better understand not only what both powers are seeking in the Arctic, but also to make more effective use of Canadian capabilities and northern allies to reduce the security risks that the two great powers have presented. Moscow, described in the executive summary of the document as a "reckless and hostile adversary willing to undermine peace and stability in pursuit of its goals," has seen a shift in its military priorities towards subjugating Ukraine and threatening other states in Eastern Europe, but that has not meant that Russia has been ignoring the Arctic. In addition to building new icebreakers and opening new northern facilities over the past few years, Russian jets and submarines have been testing Western border security, while Russian Arctic strategies have deepened through traditional means such as simulations like the *Vostok-2022* manoeuvres, as well as through hybrid conflict tactics.

Although normal operations of the Arctic Council have *de facto* resumed since Norway assumed the chairship last year, Moscow has announced that it was suspending its funding for the group to protest it not being able to participate fully in deliberations and has been candid about its interest in seeking out alternative forms of Arctic cooperation with China and other partners, potentially via

the recently-expanded BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

While the new DND document promises stronger Arctic defence and monitoring in North America, including via NORAD, the proposed Canadian roles in assisting NATO in the Arctic are much less defined. The biggest issue there relates to NATO's calls since 2014 for all member states to raise their defence spending to two percent of GDP by 2024. Some countries, including the United Kingdom, the Baltic states, and Poland, having already met that goal. Others, like Norway, promise to reach that level by the end of this year. By comparison, Canada is seen as a laggard. The policy document calls for Canada to increase its defence budget to 1.76% by 2029-30, which may send (at best) mixed signals to other members of the alliance about the degree of Canadian commitment.

Moreover, although the Canadian contribution to Forward Land Forces in Latvia is mentioned in the paper, with plans to increase that commitment, there was little said about how Canada will contribute to assisting Nordic NATO members in deterring Russian Arctic threats there, especially as the alliance is swiftly seeking to develop a unified policy in the far north to reflect both Russian aggression and rapidly changing environmental conditions. A more concrete plan for the Atlantic-Arctic region, to compliment proposals to improve the defence of the North American Arctic, is essential. There is also much opportunity space for Canadian diplomatic initiatives between Ottawa and the Nordic region regarding military and hybrid security concerns.

Furthermore, given the emergence of the Atlantic-Arctic as a frontline region in the contested space between Russia and the West, the Canadian government should consider following the lead of Iceland, the United States, and more recently the European Union in opening up a diplomatic office in Nuuk, reflecting Greenland's growing importance in regional politics and trade, and building on the successful 2022 resolution of the longstanding Tartupaluk / Hans Island dispute.

The defence policy update's addressing of China's Arctic interests is problematic in parts, especially as it does not reflect the significant shifts in Beijing's far northern policies in recent years or China's overall reduced presence in the region. First, the paper cites the timeworn assertion that Beijing is seeking to become a 'polar great power' by 2030, a claim based largely on a 2014 statement from the country's (now defunct) State Oceanic Administration which detailed the need for China to enhance its scientific and research capabilities at both poles. The phrase used in those remarks, and in subsequent government statements, *jidi qiangguo* (极地强国), is vague enough to potentially refer to both polar strength but also skills and capability, given that China's polar programmes are still relatively new compared with many other non-Arctic states.

Moreover, in the past decade China's military presence in the Arctic has been nominal at best, commonly in the form of joint operations with Russia, and primarily as signalling exercises towards the West. While China is indeed seeking to rapidly develop its overall naval capabilities, which will have significant effects on Indo-Pacific security, it remains to be seen whether this will translate into any sort of shift in Arctic military strategy, especially given China's limited power-projection capabilities in the far north, and Russian sensitivity to its own Arctic sovereignty.

The DND paper also curiously notes that Beijing is "expanding its investments, infrastructure and industrial scientific influence throughout the Arctic region." This may have been the case when China and Russia were initially seeking to develop a Polar Silk Road in 2017, and when the Chinese government had ambitious investment plans spanning the Arctic Circle. Since then, however, almost all of China's planned Arctic investments outside of Russia have either stalled or failed. These include railways in the Nordic region, ports in Iceland and Norway, mining in Greenland, natural gas development in Alaska, and the Hope Bay mine purchase in

Nunavut which was blocked by the Trudeau government in late 2020.

Beijing and Moscow continue to discuss joint investments in the Russian Arctic, and China has been an avid buyer of Russian oil and gas, but deeper bilateral cooperation in the Arctic has been halting at best. Chinese firms remain sensitive about tripping Western sanctions, and some projects, such as the *Power of Siberia 2* natural gas pipeline from Siberia to northern China, have been beset by logistical delays and policy disagreements. While the Chinese government has not given up on hopes to expand Arctic investments, the country's own economic slowdown, coupled with a more wary diplomatic environment for Beijing amongst Western Arctic governments, reflects a widening gap between Chinese interests and realities.

This does not mean, however, that China poses no challenge to Canadian Arctic interests, but Ottawa should note the limitations of certain aspects of China's polar strategies, including in hard military power and geo-economics, and focus instead on issues of dual use or 'grey zone' operations, including data collection by civilian actors which could be readily transferred for military purposes. The 'balloon incident' in 2023 was an uncomfortable reminder that strategic data collection could potentially take on many forms beyond the obvious avenues. As well, Beijing has been seeking to develop discourse power in the Arctic, including echoing Russian official views that it has been the 'US-led NATO,' not Moscow, which has been responsible for challenging the peaceful order of the Arctic through militarization and containment of Russian interests. Addressing information weaponization in the Arctic is another area which should be incorporated into Canadian Arctic strategies, as part of the countering of disinformation and influence strategies which the Canadian update describes.

Our North, Strong and Free recognizes the importance of the Arctic for Canadian and North American security, and has sought

to address concerns about gaps in proficiencies and threat assessments. However, in addition to providing capital and logistic support to strengthen Canadian Arctic defences, emerging policies should also focus on deepening contacts with, and learning from, Arctic allies, especially in Northern Europe, to better understand the interests, strengths, and restraints of challenger great powers in the far north.

3

Our North, Strong and Free and NATO's Northern Flank: Insights from Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's 1947 Gray Lecture

Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer*

Canada's 2017 defence white paper *Strong, Secured, Engaged* (*SSE*) noted that "NATO has…increased its attention to Russia's ability to project force from its Arctic territory into the North Atlantic, and its potential to challenge NATO's collective defence posture."[1] Since that time, a series of NATO exercises off the coast of Norway[2] and the standing up of new commands[3] in support of Alliance efforts have reinvigorated attentiveness to NATO's Northern Flank. The sea lines of communication (SLOCs) linking North America to Europe are central to this concept,[4] with the North Atlantic linking the defence of Canada and the Arctic – Our North – with NATO.

While *SSE* specifically framed the North Atlantic as a geostrategic centre of gravity,[5] it is missing from Canada's April 2024 defence policy update, *Our North, Strong and Free* (*ONSF*).[6] The latter instead focuses on the second concept of what constitutes NATO's Northern Flank: the Arctic.[7] The document is rife with concern about "asserting," "defending," "protecting," and

* Originally published as a NAADSN *Strategic Perspectives*, 8 July 2024.

"securing" Canada's Arctic sovereignty, but neither the integrity nor security of the European Arctic nor the larger concept of NATO's Northern Flank are emphasized in any detail.

This sets up the expectation that Canadians' defence priority should be to protect their own Arctic *sovereignty*. Does this mean at the expense of their commitments elsewhere, particularly in the European Arctic?[8] This message, if unintentional, is reinforced by a steady stream of recent think tank analysis and commentary on Canada's flagging defence capability.[9] As Canada's defence capability contracts, should its international commitments follow a similar trajectory in favour of basic national security needs such as protecting Arctic sovereignty?

The reasoning of less capability and thus less commitment is not as straight forward as it seems. Canadian strategy has long adhered to the logic that the defence of Canada is best provided not through a "Fortress Canada" approach but by Canada accepting international responsibilities to protect the larger international order (RBIO). The concept of state sovereignty is the bedrock upon which the RBIO is built, but Canada cannot retreat into thinking that bolstering its home defences and asserting its Arctic sovereignty militarily will substantively improve global stability and collective defence. Language about the need to balance domestic, continental, and global commitments to reinforce the RBIO is present in *ONSF*, but the overall picture is disjointed and missing some key elements. It was articulated in a Canadian context most clearly and eloquently some 77 years ago in the Gray Lecture.

On 13 January 1947, Minister of External Relations (and future prime minister) Louis St. Laurent delivered his famous Gray Lecture at the University of Toronto, arguing how Canada's grand strategy should seek to entrench and reinforce the RBIO borne from the ashes of the Second World War.[10] This could be achieved by following five general principles. The first is a foreign policy that unites Canadians, grounded in the next three principles: political liberty abroad, international law, and the well-being of the

individual. The fifth principle is accepting Canada's international responsibility to contribute to the RBIO from which Canadians derive the most effective defence of their country.

St. Laurent outlined how Canada can practically apply these five general principles, the most important being "Support For Constructive International Organization."[11] Canada cannot defend itself on its own, St. Laurent emphasized, and cannot "prosper if it does not have the support of those who hold the major share of the world's military and economic power."[12] Today, NATO members collectively hold most of the world's military and economic power.

While the Gray Speech predates the North Atlantic political and military alliance established in 1949, St. Laurent and his fellow Ottawa "mandarins" were anticipating and envisioning it. The Department of External Affairs actively joined in the initial talks in in 1948 with the United Kingdom and United States that conceptualized what would become NATO,[13] and then in bringing it into being and helping to guide the alliance during its formative years along the five Gray Speech principles.[14] St. Laurent stated in his lecture that "there is little point in a country of our stature recommending international action if those who must carry the major burden of whatever action is taken are not in sympathy."[15] Canada had contributed to the creation of the RBIO framed by Britain and the United States, leading to enhanced Canadian security. By contributing abroad to the RBIO and deterrence through NATO, Canada was safer at home – including in its Arctic.

ONSF links NATO to the defence of Canada and notes how a more secure Canada, in turn, contributes to the alliance's "deterrence and defence posture." For example, the policy update promises that Canada "will continue playing an important role confronting Russian aggression through a steadfast commitment to NATO assurance and deterrence measures." It also emphasizes that "standing with our allies provides the best guarantee of our security and continued prosperity at home."[16]

The defence policy update also explains that Canada's NATO responsibilities are not limited to deploying forces abroad, but also

require that we do not allow adversaries to launch attacks on our allies through Canada. The Arctic factors prominently in this equation, with the policy statement highlighting "that our Arctic waters, airspace, and territory cannot be vulnerable to intrusion or used as an avenue to harm Canada, our closest ally, the United States, or other NATO allies." [17] *ONSF* explains that "our contributions to securing the Arctic are an important component in the defence of NATO's western and northern flanks, and directly support broader NATO deterrence efforts." Doing so "will enable Canada to engage the world from a position of strength." [18] Ultimately, mixed messaging in *ONSF* falls short of demonstrating a clear understanding of and commitment to the grand strategy that Louis St. Laurent put forth in 1947.

ONSF's major failing is it appears inadequate to secure the sympathy and support of its larger NATO allies. [19] Canada's defence spending continues to fall well below the 2% GDP spending threshold to which NATO members – including Canada – have committed. [20] Allies have expressed concerns about the Trudeau Government's promised spending increases, spread out over a twenty-year period to reach a projected 1.76% GDP. This includes a recent letter from a group of American Senators urging Canada to immediately increase its defence spending.[21] While the planned procurement of a new fleet of Royal Canadian Navy submarines could push Canada over the 2% threshold, the programme is in its early phases and has yet to be costed. Accordingly, has Canada sent the strategic message that it is unreliable in meeting alliance commitments and has transitioned to an inward-facing sovereignty and North American defence focus with neither the intentions nor capability to deter its enemies from aggressive behaviour in other parts of the world?

Given constrained defence contributions and flagging allied support, where can Canada maximize its current contributions to start reversing this trend? *ONSF* elaborates that, "as a priority, Canada will meet our NATO defence commitments as they evolve in response to shifts in the global security landscape." A major

element of these commitments is connecting the defence of North America with the defence of "NATO's western flank." Additionally, the policy update states that with "our Arctic allies we will defend NATO's northern regions."[22] Ideally, this would imply that Canada's contributions to the alliance should focus on these two flanks, particularly where they intersect. The *ONSF* language is telling, however, with the policy referencing NATO's "northern regions," not northern *flank*. Does this suggest Canadian uncertainty about what constitutes NATO's northern flank, how this relates to the *ONSF*'s prioritization of "Canadian sovereignty," and what a meaningful alliance contribution looks like in this respect?

During the Cold War, NATO established the Northern Command of Allied Command Europe (1952 -1994) which addressed the northern flank. The alliance vested this command with responsibilities over Norway, Denmark, and the northern part of Germany.[23] NATO's current northern flank is centred on the Nordic countries, including the new allies of Finland and Sweden, and is commanded out of NATO Joint Forces Command Norfolk. This command states that its responsibilities run from "Florida to Finnmark, the Tropic of Cancer to the North Pole." This includes protecting the SLOC linking North America and Europe.[24] This section of ocean is the crux of Canada's NATO responsibilities, linking the defence of North America with the defence of Europe.

However, NATO's new northern flank does not include Latvia. This is significant given Canada's contribution as a framework nation lead for NATO's Forward Land Forces in Latvia, where the bulk of the Canadian Army is devoted and is scaling up its battle group to a brigade. Latvia and the rest of the Baltics fall into the alliance's eastern flank, running from Estonia south to Bulgaria,[25] thus making Canada's major land force commitment out of alignment with *ONSF*'s focus on the western and northern flanks.[26] This also places a growing logistics burden on the Canadian military, which must support an expanding expeditionary force in Europe while the Canadian Army continues to contract in overall

numbers – and the CAF as a whole is being told that its most urgent and important task is Arctic sovereignty.

The North Atlantic is the missing piece of *ONSF* that connects Canada's NATO commitments together, involving the western, northern, and eastern flanks of the alliance. Canada's alliance commitments to defending this stretch of ocean proved vitally important during the Second World War and the Cold War, and current competition with Russia make the North Atlantic strategically essential once again. The logic behind Russia's "Bastion Strategy" [27] is to protect its Arctic waters and the strategic forces stationed on the Kola Peninsula. Many of these forces are designed to project power into the North Atlantic to threaten the SLOCs and even North America directly, with an eye to disrupting NATO's ability to mobilize along its western flank and deploy resources to Europe.[28] In response, NATO has renewed its defence efforts along the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap to check this Russian power projection.[29] Canada can maximize its international commitments by concentrating more of its defence emphasis on the waters and airspace of the North Atlantic.[30]

Canada currently has a western flank commitment defined primarily as an aerospace threat, a northern flank commitment that is primarily maritime in nature, and a commitment to NATO's eastern flank that is based around the army. Canada's modest military capabilities are spread thin across this huge area. The North Atlantic provides the strategic glue that binds Canada's commitments into a coherent contribution to NATO. The omission of the North Atlantic from *ONSF* must not detract from the larger message in St. Laurent's Gray Lecture: that Canada cannot lose track of its alliance responsibilities. Canada's contribution to NATO's northern regions is not only about "protecting Canadian Arctic sovereignty" but alliance security. In the near term, this responsibility means clarifying Canada's concept of the northern front to align it with NATO's. This connects the two fronts prioritized in *ONSF*, leading to a more coherent picture of how Canada's contributions fit in a NATO construct. In the longer term,

the Gray Lecture reminds us not to neglect our international responsibilities to the point where we lose the support and sympathies of our larger military allies. In the end, upholding our international collective defence responsibilities still provides the strongest protection of Canada – including our Arctic sovereignty.

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4

Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Key Takeaways for Arctic Security Practitioners and Scholars

P. Whitney Lackenbauer*

On 6 December 2024, Canada released its revised statement on *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* (CAFP)[1] which "supplements" its 2019 *Arctic and Foreign Policy Statement* (ANFP) "International chapter"[2] in light of profound geostrategic changes globally that have spilled over into Arctic affairs. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly's foreword paints a dramatic picture lamenting how:

> for many years, Canada has aimed to manage the Arctic and northern regions cooperatively with other states as a zone of low tension that is free from military competition. … However, the guardrails that we have depended on to prevent and resolve conflict have weakened. Russia's illegal war in Ukraine has made cooperation with it on Arctic issues exceedingly difficult for the foreseeable future. Uncertainty and unpredictability are creating economic consequences that Canadians are facing everyday.[3]

Minister Joly was careful neither to cast the CAFP as the culmination of a new full-scale co-development process like the one that yielded the ANPF nor as a full strategy like *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy* released in 2022.[4] Instead, the policy statement

* Excerpts from a NAADSN *Policy Primer*, 16 December 2024.

reiterates that Canada's desired end state is "a stable, prosperous and secure Arctic" with "strong and resilient Arctic and Northern communities," with Canada's foreign policy serving to "advance the interests and priorities of Indigenous Peoples and northerners who call the Arctic home." Similarly, the Conservatives' 2010 *Statement on Arctic Foreign Policy* set its vision for the Arctic as "a stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant Northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems."[5] In this sense, rather than representing "a fundamental change in how we look at the Arctic"[6] one might see the 2024 statement as a logical continuation of Canada's Arctic foreign policy since the late 1990s,[7] albeit with a much stronger emphasis on defence and security, and thus one that should garner support across federal party lines.

Framing the 2024 CAFP

The CAFP focuses on three core areas: "asserting Canada's sovereignty, advancing our interests in the region, and promoting a stable, prosperous, and secure North." The policy asserts that emerging threats since the launch of the 2019 ANPF have "triggered a need for a recalibrated approach to advancing Canada's national interests in the region" at present and in the future. Although the document proposes to follow Joly's concept of "pragmatic diplomacy"[8] – the idea that Canada must "be pragmatic and resist the temptation to divide the world into rigid ideological camps" of "democracies versus autocracies,"[9] thus allowing it to serve as a broker for non-aligned countries – the overall tenor of the CAFP places Canada as firmly in the NATO-US-Western democratic camp. There is no question in this document who Canada considers its core Arctic allies: the United States, Greenland, and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Other partners include non-Arctic European and North Pacific states (with Japan and South Korea singled out for particular attention).

Prospects for truly circumpolar cooperation are also constrained by geopolitical realities. Russia, which was framed as a potential Arctic partner in Canada's 2019 policy framework, is now clearly acknowledged as an adversary or competitor with whom there can be no "business as usual" given its brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine and disregard for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law. The "guard rails" that prevent conflict are "increasingly under strain" when it comes to the Arctic, Joly proclaimed at the launch of the policy on 6 December 2024. "The Arctic is no longer a low-tension region,"[10] suggesting that any lingering notions of "Arctic exceptionalism"[11] – the idea that the region is insulated from global geopolitical dynamics – are now out of date. Furthermore, "threats to Canada's security are no longer bound by geography; change is accelerating rapidly; and non-Arctic states, including China, are also seeking great influence in the governance of the Arctic," Joly asserted in the foreword to the strategy." To respond, Canada must be strong in the North American Arctic, and it requires deeper collaboration with its greatest ally, the United States. Canada must also maintain strong ties with its 5 Nordic allies, which are now also all NATO members."[12]

In the following sections I offer some reflections about what remains the same, what has changed, and what is new in the CAFP. It does not offer analysis of all of the issues and proposals raised, focusing through a security lens on several key points.

What is the same

- "Canada remains deeply committed to the full implementation of the ANPF, to Arctic state primacy and to upholding the rules-based international order in the Arctic." The first part affirms that Canadian Arctic foreign policy remains linked to its domestic Arctic and Northern policy, thus ensuring that the CAFP cannot be misconstrued as trumping the federal government's

domestic agenda. The desire for "Arctic state primacy" is a longstanding priority, insisting that the Arctic states are best positioned and equipped to understand the region and its peoples. Reiterating that Canada remains committed to "ensuring that maritime claims are addressed in a manner that is consistent with international law" also gestures to the legality of Canada's position on the Northwest Passage as historic internal waters as well as its submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in support of its extended continental shelf in the Arctic.

- The promise to "secure [Canada's] national interests and ensure stability and prosperity for the Indigenous Peoples who live in the Arctic and the North." While the Trudeau Government has prioritized reconciliation in its Arctic agenda, [13] it should not overlook how previous governments (including the Martin Liberals and Harper Conservatives) had a similar strategic intent.
- The summary of key Arctic and continental defence and security investments are largely a rehash of *Our North, Strong and Free*, but the narrative frames how promised investments will protect NATO's "Northern and Western flanks" to ensure "that Canada can engage the world and deploy from a secure based in support of NATO allies." How exactly Canada intends to deploy *from* the Arctic, given that it does not base expeditionary forces in its Arctic, is unspecified but may relate to defence against threats *through* the Arctic.
- The United States is framed as Canada's "greatest ally" and "closest partner and ally in the Arctic," which resonates with previous descriptions of the US as Canada's "premier partner" in the region.[14] The CAFP reinforces how "close partnership with the United States is essential to the

maintenance of a secure, strong and well-defended North American homeland, on which the 2 countries' mutual prosperity depends." The re-election of Donald Trump introduces uncertainty into the mix, however, as his criticisms of NATO and unpredictable behaviour with allies may disrupt our countries' "unique relationship shaped by geography, history, shared values, common interests and strong people-to-people connections."

- The CAFP retains language designating the Arctic Council as the "pre-eminent forum for Arctic cooperation," while explaining that the Minister and Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings remain on pause (and presumably will continue to do so until Russia finds a way to restore a trusted place in the international system). It commits to increasing contributions to the Council and to preparing for its third chairship of the forum from 2029-31.
- Climate change remains a central theme, characterized as "both the most pressing and the most proximate threat to Canada's security in the Arctic." The linkages between climate change and security remain vague, however, apart from the common refrain that a reduction in sea ice in the Arctic Ocean opens new paths for encroachment on Canadian sovereignty (perpetuating an overgeneralized misconception about greater regional "accessibility" without attentiveness to domain or heightened uncertainty[15]). Unfortunately, the *CAFP* conflates climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as threats amplified by climate change and those caused by it, leaving vague how the like-minded Arctic states might work together to address this "global problem." Leveraging the expertise of NATO's new Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE), based in Montreal and

created "to promote research and knowledge sharing on climate security threats in the Arctic and elsewhere," may help to articulate clearer, practical pathways forward.

What has changed

- Russia, which was framed as a potential partner in the ANPF, is now a competitor that seeks to fundamentally undermine the rules-based international order and does not respect sovereignty, territorial integrity, or international law. It is referenced 53 times in the policy. "It is clear that Russia has no red lines," Joly insisted at the CAFP launch.[16] While the document shows how Russia poses a threat to North America as a "geographic vector" for weapons systems that would pass through the Arctic, it remains opaque about the threat that Russia poses to or in Canada's Arctic. What "vulnerabilities" is Russia seeking to exploit in the Canadian Arctic, and what exactly are the "increasingly sophisticated" threats that must be "kept in check"?
- China, which is referenced 19 times in the text, is clearly positioned as a non-Arctic state competitor.[17] China's ambitions to be a more influential regional actor are well documented, and the CAFP casts it as a challenger to Arctic state supremacy that "can be expected to use all the tools at its disposal to advance its geopolitical interests, including in the Arctic." The policy raises concern about China's "regular deployment of dual-use—having both research and military application—research vessels and surveillance platforms to collect data," as well as malign economic influence. It also leaves space for "pragmatic diplomacy," asserting that "Canada will challenge China when it ought to and cooperate when its interests align with China's," such as addressing "pressing global

issues—such as climate change—that have impacts on the Arctic."

- Sino-Russian relations in the Arctic also appear to be changing, with Minister Joly stating at the launch event on 6 December that Russia is "reversing its historic posture by facilitating Chinese access" to the region, and particularly the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation." The CAFP notes that the two countries conducted joint military exercises in July, their warships have also participated in joint patrols in the Bering Sea, and their military aircraft were detected, tracked and intercepted by the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) while flying into Alaska's air defence identification zone (but not transgressing US sovereign airspace. "This demonstrates the continued deepening of Chinese-Russian military cooperation, particularly in the North Pacific approaches to the Arctic," the policy statement observes. While China's desire to enter the Arctic and enhance its regional profile and prestige is well established, there is active debate on the Sino-Russian Arctic relationship in the region. Some call it a burgeoning "alliance" and others see as a circumscribed transactional relationship with deep-seated issues of mistrust remaining. The CAFP seems to treat the Sino-Russian partnership as a preordained conclusion at this point, rather than a precarious relationship with friction points that could be exploited.[18]
- "While the risk of military attack in the North American Arctic remains low, the region represents a geographic vector for traditional and emerging weapons systems that threaten broader North American and transatlantic security." This is not new, although the document points to emerging threats such as "increased Russian activity in

Canadian air approaches, China's regular deployment of dual-use … research vessels and surveillance platforms to collect data, and a general increase in Arctic maritime activity." The statement also emphasizes that "adversaries and competitors also employ disinformation and influence campaigns, malicious cyber operations and espionage and foreign interference activities to target Canadians, including northerners."

- NATO is referenced 22 times in the text, reinforcing that Canada accepts the relevance and importance of the Alliance in the region. With Finland and Sweden joining NATO, all five Nordic countries are now allies. The CAFP notes that "Canada remains committed to contributing to NATO and NORAD's awareness of the threat environment across the Arctic region, including in the North American Arctic." It explicitly connects "Arctic security and continental defence investments made in *Our North, Strong and Free* and NORAD Modernization" with support to "NATO's deterrence and defence agenda by protecting the Alliance's Northern and Western flanks." This "ensures that Canada can engage in the world and deploy from a secure base in support of NATO allies, when needed." After astutely noting that "the defence architecture and threat picture differ across the circumpolar north," the Government of Canada commits to "continue to share information on threats in the Arctic with allies and to support NATO operations and presence in the European High North." Details are not provided beyond reiterating that "Canada will continue to be an active participant in NATO exercises and operations."
- The call for a greater Canadian diplomatic presence in the Arctic states could be construed as a reversal of GAC's

decision to closing its Canadian International Arctic Centre (CIAC) office in Oslo, Norway, and repatriating its chief to Canada, with a departmental spokesperson justifying that the move back to Ottawa would "allow the team to better cooperate with other government departments and agencies, enhance our capacity to deliver on the department's international Arctic mandate, and strengthen implementation of the International Chapter of the *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*."[19] Has there been a change of heart?

- The CAFP identifies the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) as a partner in defence and security, emphasizing its role in maritime domain awareness and assistance to Arctic scientific research expeditions. It promises to expand Canadian partnerships with coast guards from like-minded states (which the *Canadian Coast Guard Arctic Strategy*, released in August 2024, says includes non-Arctic states such as the United Kingdom and Germany[20]), but does not provide details. It also references but does not explain the role of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, created in 2015, which aims to strengthen operational collaboration and coordination of activities between the eight member states. Is the latter an example of the "pragmatic diplomacy" where Canadian representatives can interact with their Russian counterparts?
- While ONSF projected military spending to reach 1.76% of GDP by 2029-30, the CAFP updated this figure to reach NATO's target of 2% of GDP spending by 2032. This reflected Minister of National Defence Bill Blair's announcement at the Washington NATO Summit on 10 July 2024 that the Royal Canadian Navy would purchase

of up to 12 conventionally powered, under-ice-capable submarines.[21]

What is "new"

- *Recognizing the North Pacific, through the Bering Strait, as a key approach to the North American Arctic*. Canadian leaders have understood this reality since the Second World War, when Canadians joined their American counterparts in the Aleutian Campaign against the Japanese. Since the Cold War, Canada has traditionally focused on the North Atlantic-Arctic connection, including the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdon (GIUK) gap. By broadening the aperture to include North Pacific-Arctic interconnections, the CAFP connects to Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and also clarifies the extent of NATO's "Western approaches."[22]
- *Open a new consulate in Anchorage, Alaska*. Canada closed its consulate in Anchorage in 2012,[23] after which time consular services have been provided by the Consul General in Seattle, Washington.
- *Open a new consulate in Nuuk, Greenland*. The U.S. opened a consulate in Nuuk in 2010 (having closed its previous one in 1953)[24] and Iceland has a consulate general there.[25] Canada's announcement to open a consulate in Nuuk reciprocates the Government of Greenland's announcement in its February 2024 Arctic strategy that it will establish a diplomatic representation in Ottawa and further develop its cooperation with Canada," when it encouraged Canada to do the same in Greenland.[26]
- *Initiate an Arctic security dialogue with the ministers of foreign affairs of like-minded states in the Arctic*. While Canada participates in the Arctic Chiefs of Heads of Defence

meetings, Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, and other bodies which discuss "hard" Arctic security issues, there is no established dialogue mechanism on Arctic security between the foreign ministers of the seven like-minded Arctic states, all of whom are NATO members. Presumably this group will adopt a broader definition of security than the defence-oriented fora, although the parameters remain unspecified.

- *Appoint an Arctic Ambassador, with an office in Canada's North*. Canada first appointed a Circumpolar Ambassador in 1993. Mary May Simon, now the Governor General of Canada, served in the position from its inception until 2003. The position was abolished under the Harper Conservatives in 2006. Under this new plan, Canada's Arctic ambassador will "work with Arctic allies and domestic partners including Indigenous Peoples and territorial and provincial governments to make linkages between Canada's domestic and foreign policy agenda, advance Canada's polar interests in multilateral forums, and raise awareness internationally of Indigenous rights in the Arctic context." The ambassador will also work with Canada's Chief Science Advisor[27] on issues related to Arctic science and research.
- *Expand information sharing with relevant territorial and provincial governments and Indigenous leaders on emerging and developing international Arctic security trends, including foreign interference threats.* This may seem like an oddly placed announcement coming from Global Affairs Canada to include in a foreign policy document, given that it relates primarily to internal Canadian information sharing, but it points to calls from the Territorial Premiers and Northern

Indigenous leaders to be more engaged in foreign and defence policy decisions.

- *Support science and research coordination initiatives with foreign policy considerations as related to research security and science in the Arctic*. The new focus on Arctic science, and particularly marine scientific research (MSR), through a security lens reveals a burgeoning awareness of how competitors use science as a vector for data collection, intelligence gathering, espionage, and foreign influence. *ONSF* also states that the Government of Canada is seeing "a growing number of Chinese dual-purpose research vessels and surveillance platforms collecting data about the Canadian North that is, by Chinese law, made available to China's military."[28]
- *Launch boundary negotiations with the United States regarding the Beaufort Sea and finalize the implementation of the boundary agreement between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark regarding Tartupaluk (Hans Island)*. On 24 September 2024, Global Affairs Canada and the U.S. State Department announced that they have created a joint task to negotiate the Beaufort Sea boundary, a significant unsettled bilateral maritime dispute. At issue is a 21,197 km^2 wedge of ocean and seabed that both sides claim, as well as an overlapping continental shelf beyond the 200 NM Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Resolving this longstanding dispute which will signal how "common interests in the region have served as the foundation of our bilateral Arctic relations for many decades and will continue to guide our Arctic cooperation in the future."[29] Implementing the Canada-Denmark agreement signed on 14 June 2022 seems straightforward, but provisions to ensure "continued access to and freedom of movement on the entire island for

> Inuit and local people living in Avanersuaq, Kalaallit Nunaat, and in Nunavut, Canada, including for hunting, fishing, and other related cultural, traditional, historic, and future activities" may serve as a precedent for other transnational Indigenous mobility rights.[30]

Final Reflections

"Canada is an Arctic nation, and we are at a critical moment. We live in a tough world, and we need to be tougher in our response," Joly said at a press conference on 6 December 2024. "I don't think the Arctic will be the primary theatre of conflict. I see the Arctic as the result of what is happening elsewhere in the world."[31] Given the discussion about melting ice as a security threat, Russian militarization of its Arctic, and China's ambitions in the region, this emphasis on the "spillover" of conflict from elsewhere might seem quite different than the way that Arctic dynamics are depicted in the policy itself. Unfortunately, the distinction between threats through, to, and in the Arctic remains rather opaque in Canada's strategic messaging.[32] Nevertheless, the CAFP provides helpful language parsing the North American Arctic and the European Arctic, linking NORAD and NATO, and articulating strategic challenges facing the region that require diplomatic, military, and whole-of-government responses.

The challenge remains in trying to situate the CAFP into Canada's broader foreign policy, given that Canada has not produced a comprehensive statement on the topic since issuing its *International Policy Statement* (IPS) under the Paul Martin government in 2005. The Future of Diplomacy initiative discussion paper,[33] which Minister Joly mentions in the foreword to CAFP, is no substitute. There is a similar challenge with respect to national security issues that fall outside of the mandate of the Department of National Defence. *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*,[34] which articulated Canada's core national security interests and how the government intends to address these threats,

was released in 2004. The world has changed a lot since then, as the CAFP highlights. This means that readers have to try to discern for themselves where the CAFP and its various commitments fit in Global Affairs Canada's overall priorities.

In the end, the CAFP suggests that "the diplomatic initiatives in the Arctic foreign policy will complement all of these [national defence] investments by better aligning Canada's strategic approaches and by strengthening its relationships with Arctic allies." Providing foreign policy "top cover" or context for Canada's 2024 defence policy update is timely and important. The question of follow through, particularly with public support for Trudeau's minority Liberal Government facing historic lows according to opinion polls, looms over this regional foreign policy refresh.[35] "Policy is only as good as the action it inspires," Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon noted at the unveiling ceremony of the Conservatives' Northern Strategy in 2009. "Laying out a broad, integrated, and positive strategy is a step in the right direction," I noted in an editorial at the time. "Converting the strategy to deliverables that produce a more constructive and secure circumpolar world will be the real challenge."[36] After the release of the CAFP on 5 December 2025, the *Globe and Mail* passed along information from a senior government official that the new policy would receive $34.7-million in initial funding and $7-million in continuing funding over five years.[37] Presumably, most of this will go to the new ambassador position, consulates, and funding for youth, and Indigenous and Northern participation in various international forums and domestic engagement initiatives. What all of this will mean for Canada's relationships with its Arctic allies and partners, particularly with a new Trump administration on the horizon, remains to be seen.

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5

Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy, Or How to get Past "Vision"

Wesley Wark*

An updated Arctic Foreign Policy was unveiled, with considerable fanfare, on December 6, 2024, to an audience in the Cadieux auditorium at Global Affairs Canada.[1] The event featured a series of earnest presentations from Ministers, Provincial and Territorial premiers, and Indigenous leaders. It was live-streamed to government officials on YouTube and carried on CPAC.[2]

The general mood in the room was one of qualified optimism. Canada, we learned, was finally taking the need to protect the Arctic and its people seriously, amidst a changing geopolitical environment and in the face of profound climate change impacts in the north. Natan Obed, the dynamic leader of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), an organization representing 70,000 Inuit across the Arctic region of Canada, did the best job in his speech of linking Arctic security and human security in the region by reflecting on the past impacts of militarization of the Arctic and the need for a different approach--one that would put greater emphasis on strengthening communities and livelihoods in the north. The key phrase, repeated on several occasions during the speeches, was the need to invest in critical infrastructure: roads, ports, airfields, telecommunications, to ensure more vibrant and sustainable

* Original published as Wesley Wark's National Security and Intelligence Newsletter, 14 December 2024.

communities. The point was made that new defence investments in the Arctic must, wherever possible, be dual-use and take into consideration the needs and lifestyles of the people of the region.

These are extremely worthwhile goals, but they are hardly new ones, are domestic in orientation and, let's face it, stubbornly difficult to implement. It's the Canadian Arctic.

Putting a foreign policy lens to the human security needs of the Indigenous peoples of Canada's north is challenging. It must start with a coherent threat picture that Canadian foreign policy needs to address. A true Arctic foreign policy needs to express clear objectives, identify challenges, and provide concrete deliverables.

How does the Arctic foreign policy stand up to these tests?

The threat assessment that underpins the document is both vague and generic. There is mention of China's ambition to be a "polar great power" by 2030 and its interest in new shipping lanes and resource extraction from the Arctic region. But much of the PRC interest, as the Arctic foreign policy suggests, is focused on its evolving and increasingly dominant partnership with Russia, including access to Russian Arctic shipping lanes (the Northern Sea route—much more developed than the Northwest passage is or will be for decades to come), related economic infrastructure, and resource extraction in the Russian high north. The PRC will appreciate that access to the Canadian Arctic for similar endeavours will be much more challenging and much less attractive.

Russia is credited with a fundamental undermining of the international rules-based order, demonstrated by its illegal invasion of Ukraine. This is said to have caused undefined "spillover effects" or "cascading impacts" in the Arctic. We are told to be "clear-eyed" about Canada's geographic proximity to Russia. The Canadian document takes note of significant Russian efforts to modernize its Arctic infrastructure and military capabilities, but also states that Russia's effort is focused on "its own western region and approaches…it is looking to profit from climate change in the

region and will continue promoting the development of the Northern Sea Route as a major international shipping route."[3] What the document does not make clear for readers is the major driver of Russia's focus on the Arctic region, namely its contribution to the overall Russian economy. Estimates vary but the Arctic is considered to provide between 10-20% of Russian GDP and contribute to over 20% of all Russian exports, especially exports of oil and natural gas.[4] By contrast, the Canadian Arctic is calculated to contribute only about 0.5% of GDP.[5]

The foreign policy paper warns us that the Arctic is a "geographic vector" for traditional and emerging weapons systems, also left undefined. Why not just say ICBMs and manned bombers (traditional) and hypersonic missiles (emerging or emerged).

The threat is "increasingly sophisticated…" Meaning? Competitors are looking to "exploit vulnerabilities" in the Canadian North. How about an example or two? Emerging threats must be "kept in check." But what are they, exactly?

The Arctic foreign policy struggles and ultimately fails provide a substantive picture of the nature of present-day or future hard security threats to the Canadian Arctic. In contrast, it does a better job in painting rising tensions in the European high north, because, well, tensions are rising in that region, notably in the Russian exercise of hybrid warfare—including heightened espionage; sabotage threats; critical infrastructure intrusions, cyber attacks; and weaponized disinformation campaigns.

The Arctic foreign policy even manages to whiff on climate change. The policy paper is surely right that climate change "is both the most pressing and the most proximate threat to Canada's security in the Arctic" but it fails to draw the link beyond well-known generalities about shrinking sea ice. The paper stresses the need to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change in the Arctic to "reduce vulnerabilities." It doesn't have anything to say about how, or the role that an Arctic foreign policy might play in

advancing a climate change mitigation and adaptation agenda among circumpolar states. It just suggests it's a big problem--"climate change is a global problem" we are told. Is it the general view of foreign policy mandarins that Canadians are idiots?

Policy documents like these, love to use the language of "pillars," not because their authors are necessarily fond of classical architecture or devotees of Hercules, just because it's the lingo. So, when it comes to foreign policy objectives we are told there are four pillars.

The first is "leveraging diplomacy to support national security and defence." OK, it just doesn't have much to say about how. The paper instead goes on to rehash defence commitments/promises in the recent defence policy update, "Our North, Strong and Free." More word salad follows: "the diplomatic initiatives in the Arctic foreign policy will complement all of these (defence) investments by better aligning Canada's strategic approaches and by strengthening its relationships with Arctic allies." Got it, I think. Do you mean our strategic approaches were misaligned in the past; our relationship with Arctic allies weak? Speak truth, oh sybil.

The one concrete deliverable here is a suggestion that Canada will initiate an "Arctic security dialogue" at the Ministerial level. OK, when will the first one be? Will it be hosted by Canada? How will it complement other military and security dialogues already in place? While enhanced intelligence sharing is mentioned, most of this will take place through NATO, especially now that Finland and Sweden have become members, and be led by the Department of National Defence.

There is talk of using diplomatic means to support the work of the Canadian Coast Guard in maritime domain awareness by expanding partnerships with regional coast guards from like-minded states. That sounds worthwhile, but it fails to credit the work that has already been done in the Arctic Coast Guard forum, which was stood up in 2015, but gets no mention.[6] Russian participation in the forum has been "paused" since 2022.[7]

On to the second pillar—"Upholding the rules-based international order." Very Canadian. Not much here beyond the assertion that Canada is committed to "ensuring that maritime claims are addressed in a manner that is consistent with international law." No discussion of what this means in practice or any of the challenges involved, for example regarding Russian claims over maritime boundaries and the extent of continental shelves, or the status of the Northwest Passage, disputed (so far gently and quietly) by the United States.

Instead, the foreign policy gives itself a pat on the back for resolving the dispute with NATO- ally Denmark over Hans Island (Tartupaluk in Inuktituk, meaning "kidney shaped") and establishing a maritime boundary stretching from the Lincoln Sea to the Labrador Sea between Canada and Greenland.

The third pillar is the exercise of "pragmatic diplomacy." (What is non-pragmatic diplomacy?) This means working with the United States, with the Nordics (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and with non-Arctic states in the North Atlantic (e.g the Europeans, including the EU) and in the North Pacific (especially Japan and South Korea).

While the push to engage on Arctic-related issues with Japan and South Korea is new, the rest represents long-standing diplomatic networks of cooperation and exchanges.

Canada's desire to work with the United States on Arctic-related environmental protection, species protection and biodiversity will likely face significant challenges from the incoming Trump administration. Watch that space.

Concrete deliverables are few and far between. Canada will create a "new position" (a diplomat) in "one of" Canada's Nordic missions; establish a consulate in Anchorage, Alaska; and one in Nuuk, Greenland. This represents a valuable, but relatively small extension of our diplomatic footprint. There is no indication that any greater priority will be given to Arctic diplomacy over other foreign policy issues. In that sense, there is no foreign policy match

to the top priority given to the Arctic in the updated defence policy. The lack of clear priorities is an inevitable casualty of the production of piece-meal, regional diplomatic strategies (first Indo-Pacific, now Arctic, maybe Africa coming down the pipe).

The fourth and final pillar is "Leadership on Arctic governance and multilateral challenges."

The key to leadership in Arctic diplomacy has long been the Arctic Council, first established in 1996 and initiated by Canada. The Arctic foreign policy calls it the "pre-eminent forum." It was meant to represent all the key Arctic states as well as representatives of northern Indigenous peoples (the "permanent participants"), but has been crippled as a high-level forum by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the necessary decision to exclude Russia from its deliberations at the Minister and senior officials level. Russia, however, is the world's largest Arctic power by land mass. We are number 2. It is hard to remember now, but in the post-Cold War period Canada and Russia worked well together to tackle some significant Arctic issues, including decommissioning of Russian nuclear assets, clean-up of industrial waste, and the status of respective Inuit populations.

The Arctic foreign policy indicates that Canada remains committed to the Arctic Council, including through funding initiatives, and will hold the rotating chair position again in 2029-2031. As for Russia, which held the Arctic Council Chairmanship role when it invaded Ukraine, it will remain excluded from high-level participation until such time as it creates "the conditions that will enable a return to political engagement and cooperation by ending its war in Ukraine and acting in accordance with international law." Who can say when, if ever, that might be? In the meantime, the Arctic foreign policy paints only a very general picture of the ongoing value of the Arctic Council minus Russia.

What the Arctic foreign policy does say is that the renewed appointment of an Arctic ambassador will be key to Canada's leadership contribution to the work of the Arctic Council. But it is

worth noting that an Arctic ambassador is not a new concept. The position was first established, as "Circumpolar Ambassador" in 1994 and held for nine years by Mary Simon, an Inuk leader, born in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik, who is our current Governor-General. Mary Simon was succeeded by a former Nunavut MLA, Jack Anawak, who didn't make much of a success of the job. The appointment was axed as a cost-saving measure by the Harper government in 2006.[8] It could suffer a similar fate again.

The renewed appointment will have an office in Canada's north but the ambassador will need to stay close to the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) mothership in Ottawa. Duties will include "making linkages between domestic issues and those relating to Canada's foreign affairs…" The Arctic ambassador could be a leading voice for addressing climate change impacts in the Canadian Arctic, but this would also make the ambassador a point-person for domestic Canadian policy issues, an uncomfortable fit in the Ottawa governance system.

There is more on efforts in multilateral fora, especially at the UN, to address climate change and environmental protection, especially in the Arctic ocean. The future of commercial fishing (currently subject to a 16-year moratorium), sea-bed mining, and safe shipping all need international regulation.

Don't get me wrong. I don't mean to be the Grinch on the Arctic foreign policy.[9] While I find the foreign policy statement a let-down in terms of its depiction of the threat environment, its unwillingness to address challenges substantively, and the minor key nature of its commitments and deliverables, I am still glad there is one, if only because Canadians need to have their attention drawn to a renewed project to partner with the north and help ensure its peoples' human security. The best that one can say, perhaps, is that the Canadian government's "heart" is in the right place, even if the Arctic foreign policy comes up short on many counts.

The overall objective, to somehow tie the resilience and advancement of Canada's Arctic peoples with foreign policy, is important. Probably the best idea in the foreign policy is to give more international voice and representation to indigenous peoples and governance in the Arctic. I hope plans for greater involvement of Arctic and northern Indigenous peoples in the Global Affairs workforce pans out—a new external recruitment strategy is promised for 2025. I hope its youth internship program comes to fruition. I wish the new Arctic ambassador every success, a bully pulpit, and a big megaphone, especially on climate change impacts in the north. I hope that Canadian trade commissioners, none of whom are actually based in the Canadian far north (a reality not commented on by the foreign policy), can up their game to support greater access for Arctic goods and resources in the global marketplace and help bring much-needed foreign investment to the region. I hope a different Russia, sometime in the future, can come back to the Arctic Council and help tackle all the mutual issues of human security that are key to the sustainability of life in the circumpolar region. I hope we don't get carried away by visions of hard power threats in the Canadian Arctic, to the extent that we lose focus on what really impacts on Arctic communities. I wish more money had been put on the table for Arctic initiatives, especially for research and international partnerships. I wish the new NATO centre of excellence on climate climate and security (CASCOE), based in Montreal, and co-managed by GAC, can really focus its attention on climate change security impacts in the Arctic, including future-oriented threat assessments, innovation in military adaptation to a changing operational environment, and building resilience for critical infrastructure. It got only brief mention in the document.

The Arctic foreign policy begins and ends with a statement about the predecessor "Arctic and Northern Policy Framework" (ANPF), published in 2019. The most significant thing about the ANPF was that it wasn't written purely from Ottawa but co-

developed with over 25 First Nations, Inuit and Metis governments, as well as territorial and provincial governments. It does not appear that the foreign policy was similarly co-developed, despite its clear intent to serve domestic needs and advance the interests of northerners. This seems a step backward. No progress report or metrics about the achievement of the ANPF's stated goals (8 in number), are provided, although the predecessor policy has been in place for five years.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melanie Joly, proudly proclaims that the Arctic foreign policy is "based on a shared vision of the Arctic's future." One can only hope so. And one can only hope that Canada can rapidly move past visions to achievements.

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6

Understanding the Role of the North Pacific in Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy

Marc Lanteigne*

The December 2024 release of an Arctic Foreign Policy document by the Canadian government, the first since 2019, has garnered much attention both for its tonal shift compared with previous statements. This was due to it placing a far stronger emphasis on military security concerns, as well as the inclusion of several new elements, including tying the Arctic more directly with adjacent policies covering Europe and Asia. The importance of the latter region to Canadian Arctic strategies was well illustrated by descriptions of the 'North Pacific' in the new document, marking the first time this region has featured so prominently in Ottawa's formal Arctic discourse. Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly stated in her introduction of the Arctic document that it was partially designed to complement Ottawa's *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, which had been updated in September this year, as well as the June 2023 *Future of Diplomacy* discussion paper which noted the shift in global economic and political power towards the Asia-Pacific.[1]

The rationale behind the inclusion of the North Pacific in the new Arctic Foreign Policy can best be described in two ways. First, Canada, as with other NATO members, has begun to express

* Originally published as a NAADSN *Policy Primer*, 18 December 2024.

concerns that Arctic security will be adversely affected by China, and specifically the Beijing's closer strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation. Arctic security thus cannot be restricted to the far North Atlantic alone. Second, Ottawa is seeking to reach out to Asia-Pacific regional friends who have also developed Arctic policies, namely Japan and South Korea, who share Canada's preferences for a 'rules-based order' in the Arctic. On both fronts, the Canadian government will have its work cut out for it.

For more than a decade, China has been seeking to widen and deepen its Arctic policies to increase its political and economic presence in the far north as well as to be widely accepted as an Arctic stakeholder despite having no territory there. In addition to developing the *de facto* northern wing of the Belt and Road Initiative, with considerable Russian assistance, in the form of the Polar Silk Road after 2017, Beijing has also designated the Polar Regions as a 'strategic new frontier' (*zhanlüe xin jiangyu* 战略新疆域), in keeping with constructing an identity as a 'near Arctic state' (*jin beiji guojia* 近北极国家).[2] Since becoming an observer in the Arctic Council in 2013, the Chinese government had originally sought to walk a fine line between being accepted as a regional partner while also ensuring it would not be pushed out of what it saw as an emerging area of economic importance.[3] However, more recently, and especially since the full Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Beijing has adopted a much more security-oriented approach to the Arctic. The Xi Jinping government has declined to join the Western-led sanctions regime against Russia and has continued to work with Russian interests towards developing the Northern Sea Route as a future trade conduit. Of greater concern in North America is the fact that the Chinese government is becoming less restrained about pursuing greater military cooperation with Russia in the far north.

Although there remain considerable limits to the strategic trust between China and Russia in the Arctic,[4] both powers have engaged in a growing number of controlled regional military and

civilian cooperation in northern waters over the past two years. The April 2023 memorandum of understanding signed between the China Coast Guard and Russia's FSB Border Guard Service led to much debate over whether there would be joint policing patrols in the Arctic Ocean. In October this year, as Beijing was marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, it was reported that two Chinese Coast Guard vessels, the *Meishan* and the *Xiushan*, had accompanied Russian ships to (or near) the Arctic Ocean, amid bilateral calls for closer bilateral 'far seas' (*yuanyang* 远洋) cooperation.[5] In April 2024, the Chinese and Russian navies penned an agreement to develop stronger cooperation in maritime search and rescue operations, although again it was unclear whether this deal would extend to the Arctic.[6]

Far less obscure in nature has been the growing number of joint Sino-Russian military manoeuvres close to the Alaskan coast, which have alarmed North American authorities and have been clearly designed as a loud signal to the US and Canada. Both powers' naval vessels had been encroaching closer to Alaskan waters in recent years, and in July of this year Chinese PLA Navy ships were spotted off the Aleutian Islands, reportedly conducting 'freedom of navigation operations'. Then an escalation of sorts took place the following month when two Chinese H-6 bomber planes, accompanying two Russian bombers, were spotted by American and Canadian fighters, again off Alaska.[7] The result was a considerable volume rise in discussions over whether the North Pacific was fast becoming a new front in Arctic great power rivalries.

In addition to the overall deteriorated state of Sino-Canadian relations during the last half-decade, Chinese policymakers and commentators have frequently sought to portray Canada as complicit in militarizing the Arctic and joining the US and other NATO states in a regressive 'cold war mentality' (*lengzhan siwei* 冷战思维) towards the region at a time when international cooperation to combat local climate change was essential.[8] This has

been in keeping with Chinese discourses which have painted NATO, not Moscow, as ultimately responsible for the deteriorated security situation in the far north. To give another recent example, in a 2024 Chinese academic study of Canadian Arctic security policy, Ottawa was described as having abandoned its venerable policy emphasis on Arctic social development in favour of a hard military agenda, due to the 'Ukraine crisis' (*Wukelan weiji* 乌克兰危机) as well as growing American pressure, and rejecting regional science diplomacy which could act as a needed communications conduit with Russia. The article concluded that Canada's growing zero-sum perceptions of Arctic security, based on a preference for alliances over regional community-building, and deference to American policy, would inevitably contribute to the far north's strategic instability.[9] Thus, when assessing the potential risks China's Arctic policies pose to Canada, it is necessary to also examine the production of alternative narratives regarding Canadian Arctic interests.

China itself was featured prominently in Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy document, which highlighted Beijing's search for resources via the Polar Silk Road, engaging in scientific projects which would be considered 'dual use' with potential military aspects, and deepening strategic cooperation with Moscow, with the Vladimir Putin regime cited as 'opening its Arctic' to China's entry. The Chinese Embassy in Ottawa decried Canada's 'so-called Arctic Foreign Policy' (*suowei de beiji waijiao zhengce* 所谓的"北极外交政策") as a misinterpretation and distortion of Chinese Arctic interests, noting that "Arctic affairs are not only about the Arctic countries," but are the concern of the entire global community.[10] Other Chinese media read the policy paper as further evidence that Western states were seeking to inflate a Sino-Russian Arctic threat in order to further their own strategic agendas in the region and contain China, and also that Canada was seeking to more overtly align with American Arctic militarization to gain favour with the incoming Donald Trump administration in Washington.[11] It is not

an accident that the Canadian Arctic Policy document also included the need to guard against disinformation and interference, including in the digital realm.

In seeking to approach Japan and South Korea for deepened Arctic partnerships, Ottawa is seeking to build upon existing Indo-Pacific relations with the two states and to recognize their governments' own emerging Arctic concerns. Like China, Japan and Korea became observers in the Arctic Council in 2013, and along with India and Singapore are widely viewed as members of an 'Asia-Arctic' bloc with growing economic concerns in the far north. Japan's 2015 Arctic White Paper cited the far north as a national security concern over fears about intensified military and economic competition,[12] which include the potential interdiction of the Northern Sea Route due to Sino-Russian domination. Tokyo has also been interested in being accepted as a research and scientific player in polar affairs. The Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) is overseeing construction of the country's first Arctic research vessel, the *Mirai II* (みらい II) scheduled for completion in late 2026. Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force also operates an icebreaking vessel, the *Shirase* (しらせ).[13] The Japanese government has also expressed specific concerns about maintaining international law in the Arctic and preserving the openness of emerging maritime sea routes in the Arctic, especially out of concerns that military activities in the North Pacific will negatively impact future Japanese sea trade.[14]

South Korea has also sought to become a centre of research on the Arctic, and its northern strategies have reflected interests in economic cooperation and multilateral diplomacy.[15] The country's Arctic Master Plan, published by Seoul in 2013, detailed its interests in the development of the Arctic economy, encouraging regional scientific prowess and participation in relevant regimes including the Arctic Council, in accordance with Seoul's 'middle power' status. These themes were elucidated in the Korean government's follow-up document in 2019, which stressed

environmental cooperation in addition to knowledge sharing. Korea is also a player in maritime shipping, and like Japan is eyeing the financial potential of the Northern Sea Route.[16] Since 2016, there have been halting attempts to develop a Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic between China, Japan, and South Korea,[17] but tangible agreements from this arrangement have been sparse, due mainly to geopolitical strains in Northeast Asia.

Canada's next move will be discerning how to best engage Japan and Korea in Arctic dialogues, addressing mutual concerns about regional environmental threats while ensuring that the North Pacific remains an area of open navigation. This will likely require a multilevel approach, making use of many different areas of expertise from all three states, as well as exploring how Japan and Korea can continue to contribute to Arctic discourses while the future of the Arctic Council remains clouded. Although Ottawa has stressed the importance of Arctic sovereignty for Canada and other Arctic states, there needs to be a continued discussion of how non-Arctic friends can contribute to securing the region, economically, environmentally and strategically.

As the new Arctic Foreign Policy Paper document stated, "the North Pacific as part of Canada's neighbourhood. The North Pacific, through the Bering Strait, is one of the key approaches to the North American Arctic. Canada must not undervalue the strategic importance of these approaches." Now that the North Pacific has been linked more formally to Canadian Arctic policy, there is great potential for Ottawa to expand its diplomacy in Northeast Asia as the Arctic becomes more of an international dilemma.

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7

Dueling Foreign Policies: Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy and the Russian Foreign Policy Consensus

Kari Roberts

Now that Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine has entered its third year, two recent developments are worthy of attention: Vladimir Putin marked 25 years as President of Russia, and Canada released its *Canadian Arctic Foreign Policy (CAFP).* Both present an opportunity to reflect on the transformation in Russian foreign policy under Putin, and to assess Canada's response to this transformation in the context of the Arctic. While Western leaders struggle to grasp Putin's continued domestic popularity in the face of Russia's unprovoked war, his continued grip on power, repression of dissent, and the reorientation of the Russian economy to support the war effort,[1] mean that the aggressive turn in Russian foreign policy toward the West is likely to continue. The launch of *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* reflects a growing awareness of this reality and positions Canada to respond to the challenges that Putin's Russia presents.

This essay reflects on Canadian and Russian foreign policy, specifically Canada's shifting narrative about Russia in the *CAFP*, and the consolidation of a foreign policy consensus in Russia that advances its own narratives about the West. Canada's revised Arctic posture reflects the new reality that Russia is seen as an

adversary, but it remains to be seen whether there is room for normalized relations in the near future.

How Russia Fits into Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy

Foreign policy documents, such as the *CAFP*, are essentially narratives, or stories countries tell themselves and to others about their place in the world and how they plan to maintain it — or, in the case of Russia, their desired place in the world and how they plan to attain it. Both Canada and Russia use narratives to signal to their allies and adversaries what matters most to them, and what they are prepared to do to safeguard it. The *CAFP* is no exception.

Given the adversity that now animates Russia-West relations, it is hardly surprising that Russia features prominently in the *CAFP* as the chief threat to Canada's Arctic security, broadly defined. For example, it points to Russian militarization in the region, indifference to the impact of melting ice, regional economic and military development that disregards the impact on Northern communities, and efforts to derive economic advantage from climate change, all as threats to Canada's Arctic security. As Lackenbauer observes, Canada now names Russia as "a competitor that seeks to fundamentally undermine the rules-based international order and does not respect sovereignty, territorial integrity, or international law," which prompted Minster Joly to comment at the launch of the *CAFP* document that "it is clear that Russia has no red lines."[2] An entire section of the *CAFP* document is dedicated to Russia, and the wider document references Russia a remarkable 53 times.[3] The *CAFP* cites renewed great power conflict and a changed geopolitical landscape, chiefly owing to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The spillover effects have rendered the Canadian Arctic vulnerable to threats of economic coercion, cybercrime, foreign interference, critical infrastructure attacks, and maritime insecurity. The document notes that Russia has "crafted a domestic narrative of a hostile and unfriendly West" which is used "to justify its own militarization of the Arctic."[4] The

CAFP centres the principles of adherence to international law and institutions as well the continued importance of multilateral fora, and notes these values are no longer shared by major powers such as Russia and China, which seek to undermine the liberal order. This means that Canada can no longer rely on institutions alone – bodies such as the Arctic Council, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) – but recommits to the *Ilulissat Declaration's* promise of orderly dispute settlement. Interestingly, the document conveys both a lament for the weakening of multilateral fora (due to Russian intransigence) but also vows to deny Russia its goal of "undermining the pillars of international cooperation in the Arctic." It is not immediately clear in the *CAFP* precisely what Canada will do to prevent this, although it does promise to increase the Canadian Arctic military presence, commitments, and investments.

Appropriately, the *CAFP* advances Canadian Arctic narratives about its own commitments and about Russia's intentions. These narratives include Canada's unwavering commitment to multilateral fora and cooperation (including with China), with little mention of cooperation with Russia beyond "limited engagement," and the onus is placed on Russia to create the conditions under which future engagement is possible (in part by ending the war in Ukraine). The *CAFP* also advances narratives about Russia as an adversary, and accuses Russia of monetizing climate change and welcoming the economic benefits of open ice access. The *CAFP* promises to initiate a security dialogue in the Western Arctic, without Russia, and with the goal of holding Russia accountable in regional and multilateral fora. However, given that the document acknowledges Russia's disrespect for these fora, it is not clear whether this goal is achievable. Nonetheless, the narrative remains that Canada values multilateralism as an end goal, and as a means to hold Russia accountable.

The *CAFP* draws a connection between the war against Ukraine and the potential threat that Russia poses in the Arctic. It also suggests that President Putin's actions in Ukraine are not aligned with the values of the Russian people. This narrative is understandable, but the evidence may not bear this out. A recent piece by Sam Greene points to the disconnect many Russians reportedly feel between their daily lives and the activities of the Russian state, as well as a tendency toward "collective avoidance," in which Russians refrain from expressions of disagreement with the Russian state, for a variety of possible reasons.[5] While the reliability of public opinion measurements in Russia is hotly debated,[6] and characterized by dysfunction within the scholarly community about just what the Russian public believes and whether this even matters, the Levada Centre's monthly polling data about popular support for Putin's regime and war effort are curious.[*] A representative sample of the Russian population, when asked "whether the country is headed in the right direction since Vladimir Putin first became president," saw this indicator's two biggest month-to-month upward spikes occur in February-March 2014 and February March 2022."[7] These dates, of course, align with the 2014 invasion of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which is hardly a coincidence. This sentiment appears to support the Russian foreign policy consensus discussed below.

The narrative conveyed in the *CAFP* about Putin's failure to capture the support of the Russian people for his brutal war is important because it attempts to distance the Russian people from the regime, delegitimize the war, and leave the door open for regime change and subsequent engagement with Russia once Putin is out of power. This narrative's purpose is to generate skepticism about Putin's popular support, rationale for the invasion, and his contention that NATO presents a threat to Russia.

[*] The Levada Centre is an independent research and polling organization based in Russia.

This aligns with wider Western efforts to delegitimize Russia's threat perceptions *vis-a-vis* NATO, suggesting that Putin has fabricated this threat assessment about NATO as a way to drum up anti-Western sentiment and cover for his imperialistic ambitions. It has become commonplace to brush off these "imagined threats;" however, this is not a fair representation of the Russian foreign policy consensus and may not adequately reflect Russian popular opinion.

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same: The Foreign Policy Consensus Under Putin

Putin is often credited with transforming Russian foreign policy in his 25 years in power. While there is some truth to this, the ideas that underpin the foreign policy consensus today were visible in the early post-Cold War period. Kendall-Taylor and Kofman rightly note that where Putin once repudiated ideology, it is now present in Russia's foreign policy narratives, notably the broad elite consensus that the West represents an existential threat to Russia.[8] Tsygankov notes that there used to be debates in Russia between "balancers" and "institutionalists;" however, the debate about whether Russia should work to preserve the international order has yielded to those who have long argued that Russia must balance Western power.[9] The war in Ukraine has seen the former institutionalists pivot to advocate strategic restraint, but only for the purposes of enabling Russia to craft a new global order that advances its interests. Because this view is fueled by China, North Korea, and Iran, this makes rapprochement with the West harder.[10] Through this "axis of upheaval,"[11] Russia has been able to advance its long-standing foreign policy goal of restoring its power and prestige on the world stage.

Relatedly, another aspect of the Russian foreign policy consensus that has remained unchanged is the desire to project Russian power and stoke division among Western allies.[12] While it is tempting to view this consensus about restoring Russian

greatness as emblematic of some wider expansionist goal, it may also be the consequence of Russia's perceived need to protect itself from foreign encroachment in the absence of meaningful international constraints.[13] This interpretation better aligns with decades-long Russian fears about a world order that does not keep Russia safe and in which it perceives the threats to its interests are enabled and emboldened. The Cold War taught Russians to "value power while engaging in institution-building,"[14] but increasingly the post-Cold War era saw Russia's influence in these global institutional structures shrink, alongside a rising Western skepticism about Russia's plans to restore its global prestige. The foreign policy consensus today in Russia is that institution building did not bear fruit for Russia, and so a different strategy is now needed.

NATO expansion as a factor in Russia's threat perceptions runs counter to the Western narrative that delegitimizes Russia's stance on NATO's proximity to its borders. Russia has its own, well-established narratives about NATO, which have helped to consolidate the foreign policy consensus in Moscow that the West is hostile to Russia. A consequence of the West's defense cooperation with Russia's neighbors has been that the former institutionalist voices in Russian foreign policy circles that once called for measured cooperation have become marginalized, and the position of the balancers has strengthened.[15] In the current adversarial climate, it is difficult for any remaining institutionalists to gain traction. Add this to Putin's own views of the West, and NATO, and his dominance of domestic politics, and it is understandable that a foreign policy consensus that favors revising the global order to balance Western power in favor of Russian interests has taken hold. The balancers have won out and share the perception that the West is "waging an existential war on Russia, not to contain it but to destroy it as a great power and independent state."[16] Russia's foreign policy toolkit now contains the language of outright confrontation.[17]

Concluding Thoughts

Canada's Arctic foreign policy posture is a necessary way to signal to Russia, and to Canada's allies, that Canada is prepared to call out Russian behavior and respond if necessary to potential provocations in the Arctic. The *CAFP* promises vigilance, preparedness, and a willingness to meet Russian provocations in Ukraine and in the Arctic. The resolve for collective defence signals that allies are prepared to do what is needed to deter Russia while still holding open the possibility of re-engagement with Russia if and when it exits Ukraine. This is an appropriate response given the realities of the foreign policy consensus in Russia, which may further reinforce its Arctic sovereignty interests once it is no longer bogged down in Ukraine. Whether Canada is serious about leaving the door open to re-engaging Russia in a post-war environment remains to be seen, especially if Putin remains in power.

Russia-West relations are changed, and we may be entering a new kind of exceptionalism in the Arctic — one that demands normalizing relations with an adversary whose interests Western nations have been reluctant to acknowledge. The consolidated foreign policy consensus in Russia, and Canada's revised Arctic posture, both suggest that any effort to re-engage will come against the backdrop of an altered and adversarial Russia-West dynamic. The consensus in Russia that the West is looking to weaken Russia and extinguish its great power aspirations is real, goes beyond Putin himself, and should be acknowledged, no matter how inconvenient or trivial some Western analysis labels it. Russian framing of NATO's activities in the Arctic will likely continue to reflect this consensus, and Western nations will continue to respond to this framing with narratives of their own, which tend to delegitimize Russia's position. This is business as usual in Russia-West relations. What would be exceptional is if we could find a way to normalize relations with an adversarial Russia in the Arctic region - where geography and shared challenges demand a return to some sort of constructive engagement in the future.

The West's framing of Russian interests often presumes that under the current regime "Russia will be Russia," and there is nothing we can do to lower its threat perceptions — we can only respond and react with counter framing. Given Putin's foreign policy style, he will likely continue to "throw (Russia's) weight around in the Arctic."[18] This is what the *CAFP* is responding to. With the consolidation of an anti-Western foreign policy consensus in Russia, there is little reason to expect anything different from Putin's successor. Instead of continuing to wait for regime change in Russia, which has been the West's strategy since 1991, it makes more sense to accept the foreign policy consensus and find a way to normalize relations with our Russian adversary. The *CAFP* leaves the door open for this, but it will require a deliberate willingness to engage with an adversarial regime, and this is no easy task.

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8

The Imperative to Talk with Adversaries Includes the Arctic

Ernie Regehr*

Among its strengths, Canada's new Arctic Foreign Policy (AFP)[1] upholds diplomacy as "a first line of defence for Canada's national security." For now, however, it seems this "line of defence" is to remain somewhat idle when it comes to dealing with the adversary identified as a prime threat to our security. The insistence that a return to political engagement and cooperation with Russia, including in the Arctic, must await the end of its war on Ukraine is a sharp departure from past practice. In the face of similarly egregious transgressions, direct engagement with the Soviet Union persisted throughout the Cold War, in the interests of both accountability and strategic stability. The AFP rightly rejects "business as usual" with Russia, but that should not translate into ignoring critically important business at hand in the Arctic – especially the recovery of strategic stability and addressing the gathering climate catastrophe at the regional level.

The strengths of Ottawa's freshly articulated Arctic foreign policy include:

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* Originally published as a Simons Foundation Canada's Arctic Security Briefing Paper on 14 January 2025, https://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/projects/arctic-security-briefing-papers.

- the promise of invigorated relations with northern Indigenous communities, including on national security matters;
- the clear identification of climate change as "the most pressing and the most proximate threat to Canada's security in the Arctic and the people who live there;" and
- the ambition to assert Canadian "leadership on Arctic governance and multilateral challenges."

Furthermore, the AFP commits to Arctic diplomacy that is informed by and benefits from northern Indigenous Peoples, and in doing so it acknowledges "the damaging impacts of colonialism." It anticipates "a renewed Inuit-Crown and nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples" and promises to uphold them "as active partners in the conduct of international relations in the Arctic."

At the launch of the AFP, Natan Obed, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, reminded Canadians that the Inuit homeland in Canada, Inuit Nunangat, "makes up 40 percent of Canada's land area and all of its Arctic coast line." He said Inuit are "committed to continue work to ensure that Inuit and Canada jointly deliver on the AFP's strong ambitions." The President of Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada, Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk, also committed to working with the federal government to ensure that Canada's Arctic policies "uphold Inuit self-determination, including our full and effective cooperation."

The Diplomacy Imperative

The AFP offers a compelling description of the fundamental objective of international diplomacy:

> Effective diplomacy is critical for shaping the international environment to defend and advance Canadian national interests; it is a first line of defence for Canada's national security. Canada's fundamental defence and security goal is

> to prevent and defuse potential crises before they can develop into conflict.

Defusing strategic crises and tensions to prevent armed conflict really is central to sustainable Arctic defence, and it's not too late. The expert and military consensus is, as the AFP puts it, that "the risk of military attack in the North American Arctic remains low."[2] Keeping that at low and manageable levels is a critical objective of the Arctic foreign policy, but it's also a military objective.

Military preparedness for an armed combat prevention role must include timely emergency response capacity and supportive infrastructure, significant upgrading of which is required due to the increased access driven by climate change. Domain awareness, along with monitoring and controlling air and sea approaches to Canada in the Arctic, is ongoing and upgrading those capabilities is a focus of current NORAD modernization.[3] Threats from new military technologies, like hypersonic missiles, are emerging, but they are aimed more at targets in the Canadian and American heartlands than in the Arctic, although some elements of the envisioned layered defences will inevitably involve the Arctic – also a focus of NORAD modernization.

Inasmuch as preventing military attacks and keeping the threat of attack at a low level requires "effective diplomacy," as the AFP puts it, there is no getting around the need to reach beyond the stated intention of deepening ties with "like-minded states." It has to mean engaging with the states that are deemed central to undermining those objectives. Even if both sides of the current Arctic divide are resigned to ongoing strategic competition, direct political engagement between them remains essential.

Of course, the myriad complications and nuances in dealing with implacable foes will be better appreciated by seasoned practitioners than by external critics, and it is widely understood

that "business as usual" with Russia is currently not available, but finding meaningful engagement opportunities should remain the objective.

As Canada's Ambassador to Russia, Sarah Taylor, makes clear in a *Globe and Mail* report, she and her colleagues in Moscow face "a somewhat hostile atmosphere" and instances of "quite aggressive" surveillance, but she also acknowledges that the policy of "limited engagement" is an additional constraint. She nevertheless affirms the importance of being present in Russia, "because there are contacts you can have," and she indicates there are still academics, analysts, and civil society groups that can be consulted, albeit under challenging circumstances.[4]

The United States, Russia, and China became deeply and inextricably codependent partners in strategic security when they embraced the nuclear weapons driven strategy of deterrence through the promise of mutually assured destruction. Canada and its NATO partners became enmeshed in the same co-dependency trap when they in turn embraced nuclear weapons and began to treat them as if they were "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance," a phrase faithfully repeated in NATO documents, including in para 29 of the Alliance's current (2022) Strategic Concept.[5]

Any failure in deterrence strategy portends annihilation, so until this MAD system is replaced by something more sane than relying on the threat of, and preparations for, global destruction (the point of ongoing nuclear "modernization"), nuclear adversaries can't responsibly avoid dealing with each other. Each needs to understand the other well enough to develop some basic confidence that they can be counted on to avoid the circumstances that could recklessly or inadvertently trigger the arsenals that are capable of destroying the planet. In the Cold War, that meant things like hotlines, some basic information sharing, exploring

confidence building measures, accepting basic verification intrusions, and protracted arms control negotiations.

Indeed, in June 1973 the United States and the Soviet Union reached a formal Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War that "outline[d] the general conduct of both countries toward each other and toward third countries regarding the avoidance of nuclear war."[6] In other words, diplomatic engagement with the enemy was not understood as a moral lapse or as legitimizing the egregious misdeeds of the other, but as a key tool for dealing with adversaries (the nuclear version of holding your friends close and your enemies closer).

Diplomacy was part of the process of seeking to hold each other accountable, and, in the face of myriad obstacles, for pursuing mutually beneficial security measures to reduce tensions and ultimately avert catastrophe. The ongoing arms control negotiations were essential for both sides to step back from the brink of global catastrophe. More than that, diplomatic engagement with an entrenched adversary was also trusted as a means of pursuing important joint achievements, like those of the Helsinki process.

The 1972 SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) agreement was negotiated while the United States was aggressively pressing its controversial war on North Vietnam, with the Soviets arming the North. The follow-up SALT II negotiations had reached agreement by 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. That seriously disruptive event meant the US Senate would (among other reasons) not ratify the agreement, but through ongoing diplomacy both sides agreed to abide by its terms.

During the course of the devastating 10-year Soviet-Afghanistan war, while the Americans armed and assisted the anti-Soviet forces, East/West talks continued. By the mid-1980s, at the

height of the Soviets' illegal war on Afghanistan, Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan met in Iceland, and in 1987, that war still raging, they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Both the Vietnam War and the Afghan War coincided with the Helsinki Process,[7] an extended set of East-West meetings designed to reduce Warsaw Pact/NATO tensions, address a range of human rights and political freedoms, and to foster East-West economic, scientific, and humanitarian cooperation. The Helsinki Accord was signed in 1975, and that led to a series of follow-up meetings. In 1985, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan still in full force, Canada hosted a meeting on human rights with full Soviet participation. All of the negotiations and conferences were fraught and difficult affairs, but the point is, they persisted and constructive results followed.

In the current descent toward another instalment of East/West cold warfare, talking to the "enemy" is rejected by both sides – meanwhile, the dangerous threats of nuclear use and the disintegration of the nuclear arms control and disarmament infrastructure are combining to produce a uniquely dangerous strategic environment. And that environment is made more dangerous by the refusal of the key adversaries to mount proper talks. In the most recent issue of Arms Control Today, the retired American senior diplomat Thomas Countryman, a veteran of talks and negotiations, has challenged "the two biggest nuclear powers…to find a way to discuss all elements that bind them together in nuclear danger."[8]

In today's Arctic, all eight of the region's states are also bound together in mutual danger – notably, in the dangers of an unattended climate crisis in a region of the world egregiously affected, and in the building East/West confrontation in the European Arctic.

Arctic states have actually long affirmed their deep interdependence in the management of the region. In 2008, through the Ilulissat Declaration, the five states with Arctic Ocean shorelines understood that interdependence and declared their commitment to "cooperation," which they described as "a prerequisite for addressing these challenges."[9] They went on to say that they:

> …currently cooperate closely in the Arctic Ocean with each other and with other interested parties. This cooperation includes the collection of scientific data concerning the continental shelf, the protection of the marine environment and other scientific research. We will work to strengthen this cooperation, which is based on mutual trust and transparency, inter alia, through timely exchange of data and analyses.

That "mutual trust" was clearly shattered with Russia's active interference and then full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but that does not mean the Ilulissat Declaration's assertion that some level of cooperation is "a prerequisite for addressing these challenges" is now inoperative. While security cooperation, which remains a prerequisite for addressing the region's challenges, is deemed in the present environment to be out of reach, it remains a moral imperative for Arctic states to at least pursue diplomatic engagement toward rebuilding trust and rekindling cooperation.

A May 2024 analysis by a German think tank, for example, calls for informal dialogue with Russians on the Arctic, including through Track II engagements, to address conditions for security and stability in a post-Ukraine war context.[10] In an environment of heightened military patrols, given the need to reduce misunderstandings and misperceptions that risk unintentional escalation, analyst Michal Paul, also envisions "dialogue between military experts from all eight Arctic states" in a "process in which confidence-building measures are developed." And he points to the OSCE's extensive work on just that.[11]

The AFP emphasizes that "…bilateral cooperation between Canada and Russia, including in the Arctic, will remain exceedingly difficult for the foreseeable future," but that Canada will continue "limited engagement" through multilateral institutions. The distinction between "engagement" and "cooperation" is important, and now is the time for more intense and persistent engagement, a key tool for pursuing accountability, addressing differences/irritants, and for painstakingly building trust and confidence across divides. Pan Arctic cooperation with the current Kremlin is clearly more challenging, but as Amb. Countryman puts it, at this point in the overall strategic relationship, "it is less important to have high level, high visibility events than to begin and sustain regular discussions at middle levels."

The Ukraine war will inevitably end, and signs point to an increasingly consequential mutually-hurting-stalemate that could drive the parties to the table. And inasmuch as the Ukraine war is a key factor in precipitating the Arctic's current and hardened divide, an end to the war will open new opportunities.

Ottawa's declared intention in the AFP, to take on a leadership role and emphasize inclusion, is unlikely to be fully effective in an Arctic with the Russian half of the region absent from the relevant tables. It may be some time before Russia deigns to formally join such tables, but Canada, and its Arctic partners, should actively pursue engagement, at whatever levels possible, towards reconvening Arctic governance, scientific/climate action, and security tables that are inclusive – to face mutual accountability and to demonstrate a willingness to return to the more constructive Arctic relations that were shown to be possible in the recent past.

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9

Evolving Visions of Canada's Arctic Maritime Defence

Adam Lajeunesse

In December 2004, Minister of Global Affairs Mélanie Joly released *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* (AFP). She introduced the document with an obvious statement, yet one with profound implications: "For many years, Canada has aimed to manage the Arctic and northern regions cooperatively with other states as a zone of low tension that is free from military competition … however, the guardrails that we have depended on to prevent and resolve conflict have weakened." [1] Those guardrails were the political, legal, and cultural rules and norms that created what some political scientists called an 'exceptional' Arctic. This Arctic exceptionalism asserted that the region was peaceful and cooperative, divorced from the geopolitical conflicts that drove state behaviour elsewhere. [2] While never a formal Canadian position, this concept had influenced most federal policy documents since the end of the Cold War – even if only as an ideal to strive for.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine strained that concept to the breaking point, while growing great power competition with China added a new and complex security dynamic. As the AFP was being developed in the summer and fall of 2024, joint Russia-Chinese naval exercises were taking place in the North Pacific and Bering Sea. That same season the North Americans watched five Chinese research vessels deploy to the Arctic; meanwhile the US

Coast Guard's designated Arctic icebreaker – USCGC *Healy* – was down for engine repairs.

It was these dramatic shifts in adversaries' intent and capability that led to Canada's reconsideration of its Arctic defence and foreign policy. In May 2024, the Department of National Defence published its long-anticipated update to its 2016 defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE). The update, entitled *Our North Strong and Free* (ONSF), brought a new focus to the Arctic region and stood out, not just for its regional shift, but it's change in tone. The focus of ONSF was great power conflict. It was built on the need to defend against the coercive power of adversaries and protect NATO's northern and western flanks from military aggression. The Minister's message in that documents sums up the thrust of ONSF: "As the Arctic becomes more accessible to foreign actors, we need to ensure our military has the tools to assert our sovereignty and protect Canada's interests." [3] Specifically, Canada's Northwest Passage and the broader Arctic region, are now under threat from "competitors [who] are not waiting to take advantage – seeking access, transportation routes, natural resources, critical minerals, and energy sources through more frequent and regular presence and activity."[4]

The AFP built on that framework and brought a more specific threat analysis, delving into the emerging threats presented by dual-purpose scientific research, hybrid warfare, and information operations.

While the renewed Arctic security focus was holistic, there was an undeniable maritime flavour – a natural consequence of the Arctic's maritime geography. The principal defence and security threats *to* the region[5] have been identified as dual-purpose Chinese marine scientific research and surveillance and other hybrid activity, as well as cruise missile firing Russian attack submarines. Canada's main response to these dangers is an expanded maritime presence: primarily the fleet of eight Navy and Coast Guard Arctic

and Offshore Patrol Vessels (AOPVs), as well as the Canadian Coast Guard's new icebreakers.

On paper, the expression of Canada's requirements has not necessarily changed in their fundamentals. ONSF declares that "the most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic" and that the government must "ensure our military has the tools to assert our sovereignty and protect Canada's interests" [6] This sovereignty language echoes past Canadian policies – conveying a general, if imprecise, desire to 'control' the Northwest Passage. Yet that push to enforce 'sovereignty' has taken a sharper tone. In many ways it echoes the 1987 White Paper on Defence, which balanced legal-political understandings of the concept with real concerns surrounding state-based threats. As was the case twenty years ago, Canada is now worried about submarines and hybrid state-vessels presenting a hostile presence in our waters.

The logic of defence has also forced a reconsideration of how Canada works to defend the region. As was the case during the Cold War, Canada has re-embraced Canada-US cooperation after two decades of preferring to operate unilaterally. Representing this "deeper collaboration", the AFP makes repeated reference to the "North American Arctic." It does so thirteen times, when its predecessor, the *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*, never employed the term. The implication is clear: as a region, the defence of the North American Arctic has to be undertaken in partnership with the US; the Canadian Arctic simply cannot be defended separately from the whole. While the use of the term "North American" generated some nationalistic criticism, it is a logical extension of Canada's new security focus. The AFP makes this explicit, stating: "we expect Canada–United States defence cooperation in the Arctic to continue to grow, as it is fundamental to both countries' national security interests."[7]

While gestures to the Canadian-American partnership are standard in Canadian policy documents, real cooperation has been

growing. In recent years, Operation *Nanook* has expanded to include more US participation – as well as that of other NATO members. Here, the AFP breaks with decades of Canadian foreign policy. Canada has long preferred to keep the Arctic outside of NATO operations, largely owing to political sensitivities on the question of transit rights. The AFP, however, calls for an increase in "information sharing with NATO on circumpolar threats." Canada will also work to "improve interoperability and increase the collective understanding of the evolving security situation in the Arctic and enhance the Alliance's cold- weather capabilities."[8]

More than rhetoric, this is policy cover for what has already been developing. Since 2022, NATO allies have become a regular presence in CAF Arctic exercises. Naval and coast guard ships from Denmark and France have joined Operation *Nanook* (in addition to US Navy and Coast Guard partners), while the Portuguese Navy deployed a submarine to Greenlandic waters in 2024.

Building on these commitments, Canada is forging ahead on under-ice detection systems, with $1.4 billion set aside for "specialized maritime sensors to defend Canada from underwater threats on all 3 coasts."[9] This effort is a continuation of a long defence trend – stretching back to the 1970s. Common sense and historical patterns suggest that this effort will invariably require American support.[10]

New ships are also being brought online to implement Canadian policy. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Canadian Coast Guard will soon have their full compliment of eight AOPV, which will provide increased presence and some armed capability in the region. Discussion of increasing the AOPV's capabilities have also taken place within the RCN. This includes building capacity to operate Cyclone helicopters to "respond to the growing range and sophistication of maritime threats."[11] Experiments are also being undertaken with containerized towed arrays. ONSF discusses "specialized maritime sensors" to enhance AOPV capabilities to track threats and respond to "a growing range and

sophistication of underwater threats including vessel-launched missiles, underwater systems, ships and submarines."[12] This is a departure from the use-case laid out in SSE, which saw the AOPV as tools to "enforce sovereignty"[13] in "an Arctic where all Arctic states are seeking "productive collaboration."[14] While the "safety and security demands" [15] highlighted in SSE remain valid, ONSF has clearly added a new defence mandate. In November 2024, this came through publicly when Vice Admiral Angus Topshee insisted that Canadian Armed Forces could stop Russia or China from sailing through the Northwest Passage without permission.[16]

While traditional state-based threats are now a clear focus, new grey zone threats have catapulted to the fore as well. From a maritime perspective, the clear threat highlighted in both ONSF and AFP is Chinese dual-purpose research activities. These quasi-civilian platforms are surveillance tools and vehicles for testing military technology in the Arctic waters. The potential dangers were brough home in February 2023 when a multi-sensor Chinese buoy was recovered from 'Canadian waters.'[17] While the precise purpose of that buoy remains classified it has generated fear of future Chinese military operations in the area. In comments to the *Globe and Mail*, retired lieutenant-general Michael Day said that this was likely an attempt to monitor US nuclear submarine traffic in the Arctic, and for mapping seabed and ice thickness (a precursor to submarine operations).

These fears manifested in ONSF, which warned that a "growing number of Chinese dual-purpose research vessels and surveillance platforms [are] collecting data about the Canadian North that is, by Chinese law, made available to China's military.[18] The AFP echoes this concern, highlighting "China's regular deployment of dual-use … research vessels and surveillance platforms to collect data."[19] AFP raises these concerns but also provide a healthy dose of nuance. While highlighting the dangers, it also reminds the reader that:

> China, like all states, has rights and responsibilities related to its use of the world's oceans that apply equally in the Arctic. For example, in accordance with UNCLOS, China can only conduct marine scientific research in the exclusive economic zone of another state with the consent of that state.[20]

The value in explicitly reaffirming Canada's recognition of Chinese rights under UNCLOS is to contrast Canada's legitimate concerns with illegal maritime scientific research and legitimate work in the region. Chinese propaganda has for years pushed the notion that the Western Arctic states seek to unfairly exclude it from the region in violation of international law. This exclusion narrative not only supports China's broader metanarratives of Western Sinophobia and hypocrisy, but is also used by China to delegitimize Western naval operations in maritime areas illegally claimed by China, particularly the South China Sea and the Strait of Taiwan.

The AFP offers some constructive nuance by stating that "Canada will carefully review any such [research] requests related to its own exclusive economic zone and provide or withhold consent consistent with the provisions of the convention." Canada is not seeking to exclude China from the Arctic; instead we are differentiating legitimate from malign behaviour – thus strengthening our own legal position on the matter and neutering Chinese attempts to propagandize.

With China now a major security concern, the AFP also breaks new ground by including the North Pacific into Canada's visualization of the Arctic.[21] That region is of critical importance to North American security, given that the Bering Strait is the only maritime access point to the Western Arctic. Historically, Canadian policy has paid little attention to the region, given the distance between the Arctic Archipelago and those Alaskan waters. Yet, as Canadian policy comes to view the security of the Arctic as a 'North American' issue, that region has naturally gains salience.

The shift from previous Canadian policy documents written before the invasion of Ukraine is profound. Great power conflict is now at the heart of Canda's global outlook and the Arctic has been placed at the centre of its defence policy. Flowing from this threat perception is a renewed focus on collaboration with the US and NATO allies. This is a positive step and, in the future may pave the road for more formal operational partnerships and information sharing systems.

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[11] ONSF, 25.

[12] ONSF, 25.

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[14] SSE, 50.

[15] SSE, 51.

[16] Chris Lambie, “Canada's top sailor says he's sure we could stop Russia or China from trespassing in Arctic,” *National Post*, 25 November 2024.

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10

Sovereignty: The Foundational Pillar of Canada's *Arctic Foreign Policy* and of the International Legal Order

Suzanne Lalonde

"The abuse of a thing is no argument against the use of it" wrote Jeremy Collier in 1698.[1] This general truth applies to the concept of State sovereignty which is bandied about whenever Canadian political or media attention turns to the Arctic. Canada's recently updated Arctic Foreign Policy (CAFP) is no exception. However, as the adage posits, the fact that references to "sovereignty" are strewn throughout the CAFP does not negate the importance of the concept for Canada's diplomatic strategy.

As Besson emphasizes, "[s]ince its origins, the content and implications of the concept of sovereignty have constantly evolved."[2] Falk, writing for *The Oxford Companion to Politics in the World*, echoes this assessment, asserting that the history of the concept "is one of conceptual migration".[3] The fact that Falk's discussion of sovereignty appears in a political science volume, underlines McRae's warning in his seminal article "Arctic Sovereignty? What is at Stake?": "The word "sovereignty" … can mean different things to different people. It has political, legal, economic and social dimensions."[4]

In public international law, the concept of State sovereignty has both an internal and an external aspect. Internal sovereignty refers to a State's supreme authority within a bounded territory or its ultimate power within that territory. In this sense, sovereignty refers to the territorial delimitation of a State's authority to govern. In its external aspect, State sovereignty has come to be equated with its independence or freedom. As McRae explains, a "sovereign state is an independent state, one that is not subject to the authority of any other state."[5]

The United Nations Charter and the Organization it created rest on this contemporary legal interpretation of the concept of State sovereignty. Article 1, which identifies the purposes of the UN, lists as its first priority "[t]o maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression and other breaches of the peace…"[6] The second key objective is "[t]o develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples…" As the Charter is directed at States, it is the people - understood as the population - of each State whose equal rights and self-determination must be respected.

Article 2 of the UN Charter identifies Principles to guide the Organization and its Member States in the pursuit of those Purposes. The list in Article 2 includes some of the most fundamental legal rules governing relations among States, chief among them the declaration in paragraph 1 that "[t]he Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members." Paragraph 4 articulates what is now recognized as an imperative norm[7] of international law:

> All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force *against the territorial integrity*

> *or political independence of any state*, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

Thus, since 1945, any State which violates another State's territorial integrity or its authority to govern within its territory commits an unlawful act of aggression.

The language used in the CAFP to describe Russia's actions since 2022 is therefore entirely justified:

> Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine … is an attack not only against Ukraine, but also on the fundamental principles of international relations, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law.

The same section, "Strategic Challenges in the Arctic", also warns that Russia and China are "aligned in their desire to undermine the liberal-rules-based international system". Not surprisingly, the CAFP proclaims Canada's deep commitment to "upholding the rules-based international order" (p. 5).

To achieve its objective of a stable, prosperous and secure Arctic in the face of these and other new geopolitical dynamics, the Policy identifies as its first pillar "Asserting Canada's sovereignty" which is broken down into two sections: (1) "Leveraging diplomacy to support national defence and security"; and (2) "Upholding the rules-based international order".

Canada, the CAFP declares, engages in the Arctic "from a position of strength thanks to the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF's) presence and capabilities" which are stated to play "a critical role in *demonstrating Canadian sovereignty* over the lands, waters and ice of Canada's North and Arctic" (p. 17). This is undoubtedly true but as the CAFP points out under the second section, every day myriad acts and activities by a broad range of Canadian actors attest to the governing authority that Canada, its territorial and provincial governments, Indigenous organizations and other public organs exercise over and in Canada's Arctic territory.

The issue here is that the Canadian Government never feels the need to remind the international community that Canada will continue to assert or to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty over the British Columbia interior, for example, or the greater Toronto area. By linking Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic to the visible presence and capabilities of the CAF, the AFP seems to betray a certain vulnerability where none exists.

As stated at the outset, the raison d'être of the new CAFP, along with the growing threat posed by climate change, is an increasingly chaotic world where the most fundamental international legal rules, like respect for the territorial integrity of sovereign independent States, are being blatantly violated. The real point being made therefore seems to be that the CAF are standing on guard, ready to defend Canada's territory and borders from outside aggression in all its forms. Indeed, the CAFP provides a list of key defence and security investments (p. 18) intended to ensure that Canada can counter any foreign threats to the Canadian homeland. Perhaps the choice was made to express Canada's inherent right to defend its territory in terms of "asserting Canada's sovereignty" so as to diffuse the perception of eminent crises and/or conflict, particularly in a foreign policy strategy as opposed to a defence policy.

However, if the issue is the sovereignty that a State enjoys under international law, then it is legally inaccurate to equate it with military (or any other type of) capacity. This is not to say that the Canadian Armed Forces and other Canadian agencies do not need significant investments to allow them to accomplish their important missions effectively. It is rather a plea not to characterize possible future defence and security threats and Canada's ability to repulse them as dangers to Canada's sovereignty. A recognized, established State under international law is "sovereign" or has

"sovereignty". And this is true no matter how fragile its condition or how diminutive its resources.

Emmerich de Vattel, one of the most influential early writers on the law of nations, insisted on this sovereign equality of States in his 1758 treaties:

> Nations composed of men, and considered as so many free persons living together in a state of nature, are naturally equal, and inherit from nature the same obligations and rights. Power or weakness does not in this respect produce any difference. A dwarf is as much a man as a giant; a small republic is no less a sovereign state than the most powerful kingdom.[8]

Despite all that has changed since 1758, the basic concept remains: sovereignty is a quality inhering in each established State. And it is a quality which each State enjoys irrespective of its size, structure, population, resources and other potential. Thus, Canada's capacity to deploy "specialized maritime sensors" or to construct "a new satellite ground station in the Arctic" (p. 18) or to overcome any other governance challenge in the Arctic does not affect the sovereignty it enjoys under international law.

The second section of the CAFP, "Upholding the rules-based international order," begins with a strong reiteration of Canada's official position in regard to its Arctic waters:

> The waters of Canada's Arctic Archipelago, including the various channels comprising the Northwest Passage, are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title and in accordance with international law. Canada's Arctic sovereignty encompasses land, sea and ice. It extends without interruption to the seaward-facing coasts of the Arctic islands and beyond.

This declaration builds on the references in the first section to "Canadian sovereignty over the lands, waters and ice of Canada's North and Arctic" (p. 17) and Canada's Arctic "maritime domain"

(ibid) and the stated intent of ensuring that "Canada's internal waters in the Arctic are well defended" (ibid).

The importance of this strong stance should not be minimized. Internal waters, along with the territorial sea, are an integral part of a State's territory. Indeed, internal waters are so closely and intimately connected to the land domain that they are equated with the State's terrestrial territory. A State exercises the same exclusive and comprehensive authority over its internal waters as it does in the streets of its capital city. The CAFP sends a clear message that any violation of Canada's sovereign authority over its Arctic waters, including the Northwest Passage,[9] would constitute a violation of its territorial integrity and constitute an illegal act of aggression. It bears repeating that such illegal behaviour would not in any way diminish Canada's sovereignty.

The remainder of the second section largely focuses on internal sovereignty or on Canada's authority to govern its territory. As McRae wrote in 2007,

> …claims about a need to increase Canada's presence in the Arctic, although frequently expressed in terms of protecting Canada's sovereignty are … essentially claims about good governance. A responsible government provides proper policing, surveillance, search and rescue and other services throughout its territory…

The CAFP quite rightly points out that "[e]very day, through a wide range of activities, Arctic and northern Indigenous Peoples and governments, as well as territorial and provincial governments and other northerners, share stewardship over the Arctic lands and waters of Canada" (p. 23). The Canadian Government's determination to "continue to act as a responsible sovereign of its Arctic territories and waters" is to be applauded. The CAFP rightly underscores Canada's leadership role in developing a robust and responsible governance regime in the law of the sea generally, and more particularly in regard to Arctic waters.[10] The Policy must also

be commended for emphasizing that, in light of modern land claims and self-government agreements, Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic is inextricably linked to issues of Indigenous self-government.

Canada is an Arctic nation – as the CAFP confidently declares in its very first line. At a time when the international legal order is under serious threat, Canada's Arctic foreign policy should quite rightly send a clear message of resolve that it will not tolerate any violation of its sovereign territory – be it land, sea or ice - and that it is firmly committed to forging and deepening partnerships with like-minded States.

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11

An Arctic Focus for a Global Vision

Justin Barnes

Introduction

The Arctic has become the focal point of Canada's plan to promote its vision for maintaining the rules-based international order. Canada released two major policy documents in 2024 that outline this global vision and the Arctic's central place in: DND's defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free* and Global Affair's *Arctic Foreign Policy* (CAFP). The CAFP states that it is complementary to ONSF, and both policies indicate that increasing global instability and growing challenges to the international rules-based order are the key concerns for Canada. Both policies make it clear that Canada's past, present, and future prosperity is tied to global stability and maintaining the rules-based order that Canada helped build. Therefore, Canada must be ready and able to respond to all challenges posed to it. But why do Canada's policies approach its major threats through a mostly Arctic lens? The analysis conducted for this paper suggests that it is because Canada's domestic safety and security challenges in the Arctic are inhibiting its ability to fulfill its broader vision for the world, as well as Canada's place within it.

NVIVO Analysis

The CAFP and ONSF were analyzed using NVIVO to identify key emergent themes in both documents. Through a process of

coding and memoing, three key characteristics of the challenges Canada is facing emerged along with their associated threats in each category (see Table 1 below). These three main characteristics underline the context Canada is responding to as it manages domestic needs and fulfills its vision of being a global actor.

Table 1. Key characteristics of challenges and primary threats identified across ONSF and CAFP

Key Characteristics	**Primary Threats Identified**

Strategic competition increasing in the Arctic and around the world	• Challenges to international rules-based order is a threat to Canadian interests and values
	  ○ Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is the embodiment of this challenge
	• Increasing Chinese-Russian cooperation
	• Non-Arctic states seeking greater influence in Arctic governance
	• More frequent and regular presence and activity of strategic competitors, including probing Canada's infrastructure and collecting intelligence
	  ○ China's regular deployment of dual-use research vessels and surveillance platforms
	  ○ China's increase in Arctic maritime activity
	• China's navy shaping the maritime environment (including coercing Canada and its allies when exercising international navigational rights in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait or implementing UN Security Council resolutions)
	• Economic coercion

	• Russia and its geographic proximity
	  ○ Russia's military presence in the Arctic and increasing investment
	  ○ Russia's air and naval platforms equipped with missile systems capable of striking Europe and North America
	  ○ Russia's below-threshold actions, military activities and continued weapons testing in the European High North and the Arctic
	  ○ European High North is a contested region militarily, including threats to critical infrastructure, maritime security, and safety, as well as access concerns

Complexity	• Climate and environmental change
	  ○ Magnifying existing domestic and international security challenges
	  ○ climate-related emergencies and disrupting ecosystems that Arctic communities rely on for their livelihoods (landscape changes, wildfires, etc.)
	  ○ Biodiversity loss and pollution
	• Technological advancements
	  ○ advanced submarines, hypersonic and cruise missiles, surveillance activities
	• Climate Change + Technological advancements
	  ○ Increasing accessibility (shipping routes, North Pacific

	and Atlantic as a strategic approach to Arctic) • Changing Nature of Conflict o Disinformation and influence campaigns o Emerging technological advancements ▪ artificial intelligence, quantum computing, synthetic biology, data analytics, autonomous systems, robotics and advanced cyber and space technologies are frontier technologies with military and non-military uses that create new vulnerabilities and complicate Canada's national security interests o malicious activity by non-state actors exploiting new capabilities and technologies in physical and digital worlds o Cyber-attacks by malicious actors exploiting potential vulnerabilities and impacting Canada's ability to command its forces, understand the battle space, and employ advanced weapon systems
Increasing Global Instability	• Increasing state fragility undermining global stability o competition for scarce resources, such as fish, fresh water, critical minerals, energy

	sources, large-scale human displacement, mass migration and regional tensions in fragile regions • the use of conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war is pervasive • transnational organized crime • non-state terrorist and insurgent groups in Middle East threatening international waterways, commercial and financial centers or critical infrastructure

Strategic Competition and the Rules-Based Order

The opening lines of ONSF's introduction put forward the notion that Canada's Arctic is becoming more accessible, not only because of climate change and technological advancements, but also because of "increasing *global instability"* (ONSF p. 3, emphasis added). This link is central to understanding Canada's broader concerns about its capacity to project a strong Canadian vision for how the world ought to behave in the Arctic and around the globe.

According to both policies, increasing strategic competition in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific are challenging the rules-based international order. This is putting new expectations on Canada to be able to support its allies due to its geographic context:

> Strategic competition over the international norms and rules that will define the future is centred in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. As an Atlantic and Pacific nation that shares a continent with the United States, Canada lies at the geographic middle of this contest—resulting in direct and tangible impacts on our security and prosperity, *generating new expectations about Canada's role in the context of that rivalry* (ONSF, p. 5, emphasis added).

In the Euro-Atlantic context, the ONSF and CAFP emphasize that Russia's cyber, space, information operations, and

conventional and nuclear capabilities – and their willingness to use them, apart from nuclear thus far – is a threat to world order. On the Indo-Pacific front, China is increasing its capabilities, affecting Canada's ability to benefit from international laws including navigational rights or implementing UN Security Council resolutions. Additionally, ONSF describes how the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear weapons program is adding to instability in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the strategic relationship DPRK has developed with Russia is helping North Korea circumvent international sanctions while providing military assistance to Russia in its war in Ukraine. At the same time, broader instability is taking place that includes Iran undermining stability in the Middle East and non-state actors that are "actively threatening Canada and the international order in both the physical and digital worlds by exploiting new capabilities and technologies" (ONSF, p. 8). In response, and beyond its current role in NATO (but consistent with its interests), Canada has made commitments to Euro-Atlantic security (commitments in Latvia and the Canada-Ukraine Agreement on Security Cooperation), the Indo-Pacific (outlined in Indo-Pacific strategy), and has articulated a desire to "continue to make meaningful contributions around the world as part of coalition-based or multilateral initiatives in the Middle East, the Americas, and Africa" (ONSF, p. 14).

Why center the Arctic?

Both policies articulate Canada's desire to be a leader in multilateralism as well as a global security provider. Although the geostrategic issues outlined above are not necessarily Arctic-specific, they are underlining the need for Canada to be able defend NATO's northern and western flanks. This is placing new emphasis on the demand for Canada to improve its ability to defend its North, primarily so that Canada can be better prepared to assist Europe from a position of strength. These goals, however, cannot be fully realized if Canada is preoccupied at home in the Arctic.

The policies underline Canada's responsibilities for defending and promoting Canadian sovereignty, the defence of North America, and contributing to NATO priorities (in that order):

> A more secure North America shores up NATO's western and northern flanks, and strengthens the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture. A secure North America creates strategic dilemmas for adversaries, and enables Canada to reinforce allies in crisis or conflict"(ONSF, p. 13).

Furthermore, the CAFP states that:

> With increased tension and with competitors looking to exploit vulnerabilities in the Canadian North, Canada must take action to build trust in public institutions and deepen ties with like-minded states (CAFP, p.8).

It is within this context that both policies outline a variety of diplomatic, military, security, and safety capabilities that Canada needs, is developing, or investing in to address challenges related to the Arctic.

Domestic Distractions

The emphasis that these policies put on the Arctic indicate that the Canadian government feels a level of vulnerability in this region compared to others. The Arctic is where Canada's gaps are most obvious. As domestic pressures in the Arctic worsen or become more complex, responding to them will present greater challenges for Canada to operate as an ally abroad, respond to threats beyond its borders, and project Canadian values internationally. The challenges for fulfilling Canada's responsibilities as a sovereign state in the Arctic are immense, and are emphasized by the Arctic's vastness, the remoteness of communities and infrastructure across the region, and its harsh operating conditions.

The CAFP states that the challenges northern and Indigenous communities face are intensifying because of climate change (wildfires, flooding, food insecurity, infrastructure, etc.), and that "[s]trong and resilient Arctic and northern communities increase

Canada's defence against threats" (CAFP, p.8). More resilient communities can respond to challenges they face more effectively, allowing resources to be directed elsewhere. ONSF states that defending Canada includes being able to deploy "quickly and efficiently across the country, especially in remote environments like the Arctic and North" to assist in responses to "wildfires, floods, or other climate-related disasters" (ONSF, p. 24). Due to the growing need for CAF's capabilities to respond to domestic challenges, DND resources are being drawn away from international responsibilities and towards domestic needs. The growing need for the CAF to respond to non-traditional threats at home – including climate change and other natural or human disasters – is therefore requiring enhanced domestic capabilities and a broader footprint across the Arctic.

Sovereignty and its wider implications

Upholding Canadian sovereignty over its Arctic territory is a key focus and a guiding theme in both policy documents. Canada's sovereignty is reaffirmed by the international rules-based order, and therefore threats to that order put pressure on the sovereignty of all states. Canada, as a non-great military power, relies on the maintenance and mutual respect of this order to preserve its status as an Arctic state. Although Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic remains unchallenged, gaps in Canada's ability to assert it if needed could prevent Canada from supporting allies and promoting Canadian values abroad. Defending its sovereignty is a priority over all others, and thus to be a good ally to other states, Canada must be able to fulfill its duties as a sovereign state. In other words, Canada must be able to effectively respond to all challenges within Canada's borders while also being able to contribute to maintaining global stability beyond Canada's borders. The CAFP offers a clear articulation of Canada's territorial sovereignty in the Arctic, linked to and underlined by the presence, inclusion, and reciprocal recognition of mutual interests held by Canada and Indigenous Peoples:

> The waters of Canada's Arctic Archipelago, including the various channels comprising the Northwest Passage, are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title and in accordance with international law. Canada's Arctic sovereignty encompasses land, sea and ice. It extends without interruption to the seaward-facing coasts of the Arctic islands and beyond. These islands are joined, not divided, by the waters between them and are bridged for a large part of the year by ice. Indigenous Peoples in Canada have used and occupied the ice and waters as they have used and occupied the lands for thousands of years. Every day, through a wide range of activities, Arctic and northern Indigenous Peoples and governments, as well as territorial and provincial governments and other northerners, share stewardship over the Arctic lands and waters of Canada. It is through the reciprocal recognition of each other's mutual interests in these lands and waters that Canada and Arctic and northern Indigenous Peoples share in the stewardship of them—further codified in modern treaties and self-government agreements. Sovereignty and sovereign rights in the Arctic are inextricably linked to issues of Indigenous self-government. Canada possesses environmental, economic, cultural and historical interests unique to the region, the reality and importance of which are clearly evidenced by long-standing usage (CAFP, p. 23)

Threats to Canada's "Arctic-State Supremacy"

The destabilizing effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Arctic cooperation is articulated as a direct threat to Canada's status in the region. The Arctic is a region in which Canada, backed by its partnership with Indigenous Peoples organizations, has held significant diplomatic weight in ways it has been unable to exercise in other regions and institutions. The emphasis in both policies on Canada's status as an "Arctic state" – and the rights, responsibilities and self-perceived legitimacy to speak on Arctic issues that come with that distinction in relation to other "non-Arctic" states – nods to perceived challenges to the international political narrative upholding that status. The CAFP clearly stresses the distinction

and underlines the need to maintain the status quo backed by the existence of the Arctic Council and the A5 defined under the Ilulissat Declaration. The CAFP articulates threats to this status quo:

> Canada's approach to the Arctic is guided by the fundamental principle that the Arctic should be governed by the Arctic states in collaboration with Arctic and northern Indigenous Peoples. As in other regions, strategic competition in the Arctic is growing, with non-Arctic states and actors increasingly expressing foreign policy or security aspirations, thereby pushing for greater roles in Arctic affairs (CAFP, p. 13).

Both policies indicate concerns regarding the rise of China and its interest in shifting the rules-based order in ways that do not align with Canadian values. This accentuates Canada's concern about China expressing its vision to become a "great polar power" by 2030 (CAFP) and the advancements of China's Arctic capabilities (ONSF). The CAFP articulates how Canada sees this as a threat to both the status quo in the Arctic as well as the international rules-based order:

> Among China's priorities in the Arctic are developing commercial shipping opportunities, including a "Polar Silk Road," as well as natural resource exploitation, including of critical minerals, oil and gas and fish. China is also active in Arctic research, much of which can be considered dual use. China seeks to shape the international order into a more permissive environment for interests and values that increasingly deviate from Canada's commitment to a rules-based international system. China can be expected to use all the tools at its disposal to advance its geopolitical interests, including in the Arctic. Canada will challenge China when it ought to and cooperate when its interests align with China's" (CAFP, p. 14).

At the same time, the CAFP acknowledges China's rights and responsibilities related to the use of the world's oceans, but that UNCLOS applies equally to the Arctic Ocean:

> China, like all states, has rights and responsibilities related to its use of the world's oceans that apply equally in the Arctic. For example, in accordance with UNCLOS, China can only conduct marine scientific research in the exclusive economic zone of another state with the consent of that state. Canada will carefully review any such requests related to its own exclusive economic zone and provide or withhold consent consistent with the provisions of the convention (P. 14).

As part of Canada's response to this challenge to its "Arctic state supremacy," the CAFP states that while cooperation with Arctic states remains a priority, Canada "will be strategic in prioritizing pragmatic cooperation with non-Arctic states and actors that align with Canadian values, interests and objectives" (CAFP, p. 31). These relationships will be guided a set of principles that underline Canada's priorities in the Arctic and indicate its key values more broadly (listed on p. 31):

- Respect for Arctic states' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic.
- Support for the rules-based international order in the Arctic and a demonstrated commitment to regional peace and stability.
- Respect for Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous rights and the values, interests, cultures and traditions of Arctic Indigenous Peoples, including the participation of Indigenous Peoples in Arctic decision making, and other Arctic inhabitants.
- Respect for the extensive legal framework that applies to the Arctic Ocean, including UNCLOS.
- Recognition of interests and expertise that are relevant to, and aligned with, Canada's Arctic and northern priorities, as well as its national defence and security interests.
- Maintaining a commitment to uphold and advance democratic values, human rights and gender equality according to international standards, regulations and principles.

- Openness with regard to scientific data sharing and collaboration with Canadian researchers and local communities, including their representative governments.
- Commitment to sustainable development, conservation, environmental protection and fighting climate change.

Responses

To respond to the traditional and non-traditional threats posed to Canada, and to be able to enhance Canada's ability to meet the needs of its international commitments, ONSF and CAFP lay out a series of initiatives. ONSF describes 9 commitments to improve the defence of Canada, of which 8 have a direct relation to the Arctic or have an Arctic emphasis and have dual-use (defence and domestic) purposes. Related initiatives include:

- acquiring specialized maritime sensors of Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels building a new satellite ground station in Arctic to enable space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities;
- acquiring a modern, mobile, and effective tactical helicopter capability to help respond to natural disasters and emergencies;
- acquiring vehicles that can operate effectively in all Arctic terrains and climate conditions;
- exploring options for Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels to operate maritime helicopters at sea to conduct surveillance, reconnaissance, and search and rescue;
- establishing northern operational support hubs with airstrips, logistics facilities and equipment for a greater year-round presence in the Arctic (commitment to have dual-use infrastructure and work with Indigenous partners); and
- ensuring that infrastructure will contribute to military readiness and resilience to effects of climate change.

The CAFP, on the other hand, highlights the defence investments announced in ONSF, but frames diplomacy in terms of how it can support national defence and security in the Arctic.

CAF exercises and the Canadian Rangers, among other programs and activities, underline Canadian presence in the North. Investments are being made to NORAD and other capabilities to be able to detect, deter, and sustain operations in the Arctic. For example, the CAFP announced that partnering with the Canadian Coast Guard will help to support defence and security by harnessing their operational expertise. The CAFP also identifies key diplomatic initiatives and commitments that serve both domestic and international goals:

- strengthen partnerships with Arctic allies, specifically the USA and Nordic states
- apply a North American Arctic lens that includes improving connections with Alaska and Greenland
- develop pragmatic diplomatic relationships with non-Arctic states and actors, as long as they share Canada's values outlined in the CCAFP
    - including from the North Atlantic (EU, UK) and the North Pacific (Japan, Republic of Korea)
- increase contributions to the Arctic Council to ensure it remains the leading forum, complimented by other regional and international organizations
- continue managing the Arctic Ocean through rules-based approach
- increase participation of Indigenous Peoples and other northerners in decision-making that affects their interests or rights
- increase Indigenous Peoples representation at Global Affairs Canada
- advance Indigenous and northern foreign policy priorities including improving cross-border mobility, market access, increased inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges, advancing international advocacy for Indigenous languages

Conclusion

Read together, the CAFP and ONSF articulate that Canada needs to be secure at home in the Arctic so that it can provide meaningful support abroad. Asserting Canadian sovereignty and upholding the rules-based international order are the two main pillars of both documents, stressing that Canada must be able to respond to all traditional and non-traditional threats with diplomacy, or if needed, through military action. Defending Canada's North, advancing Canadian interests in the region, and "promoting a stable, prosperous, and secure North" are all directed at the desire to maintain, or return to, global stability and the international status quo.

Various commentators have remarked on the domestic emphasis of these Arctic-focused policies when the purpose of foreign and defence policies should express a broader vision for Canada on an international level. This analysis highlights that these policies do in fact articulate Canada's broader interests and values that the country will continue to advocate for at the international level. Instead, the Arctic lens applied to these policies indicate the current government's concern about being able to fulfill its responsibilities in the North while pursuing its broader international goals. What these policies suggest is that Canada must be able to meet its domestic responsibilities at home in the Arctic before it can develop a coherent and legitimate Canadian vision for what it can achieve abroad.

Since these policies were released in 2024, the inauguration of President Trump in 2025 has altered the context of ONSF and CAFP significantly. The challenges and values that Canada articulates in these policies have taken on new meaning, specifically concerning the rules-based order and Canada's relationship with the US. The Trump Administration's apparent disregard for many of these values, indicated through its annexationist rhetoric regarding Panama, Greenland, Gaza, and Canada, is a direct affront to the rules-based order the US has built,

and which Canada seeks to maintain, as articulated through ONSF and CAFP.

It is unknown how far the Trump administration will go to act on this rhetoric, and any move to do so would be a major shock to the western world, but if the international rules-based order is the ground that Canada stands on to maintain recognition of its sovereignty in the Arctic as well as promote Canadian or Western values for how the world ought to be, then this is a serious threat to Canada. In contrast, while China has been working to promote its values and vision for the world – a reasonable concern for Canada and its like-minded partners – it has generally been doing so by harnessing the existing international order. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the US has a growing distaste for supporting the global governance institutions it helped build. Under the Trump administration, the US has been increasingly articulating the notion that this system is not serving US interests like it should and that the world, including its allies and partners, are taking advantage of the US through it.

For Canada, the implications of the US moving away from the international liberal rules-based order are immense. If anything, the Trump Administration's approach to the world has placed even more emphasis on the need to express Canadian sovereignty in the North in the ways ONSF and CAFP have articulated it. Canada needs to demonstrate without a doubt that it can be the security partner Canada claims to be in North America, but also to show that it does not need the US to maintain Canada's territorial integrity. American annexationist rhetoric may not stop with Greenland if the Trump administration becomes of the view that Canada cannot secure its northern border, by whatever definition of "secure" the US might now hold or choose to hold in the future. This puts even greater emphasis on Canada to assert its sovereignty, not only so that it can be active elsewhere in the world, but to deter US attention away from Canada's northern territories. While Canada has sought to maintain its focus on non-traditional

security issues in the North and resist the return of great power competition through mostly diplomatic means, Trump has brought the reality of great power competition to Canada's doorstep. The Trump Administration's vision for the world is still largely unclear, but one thing is certain: Canada must become less dependent on the US and the global stability experienced by western states that the US has helped maintain since 1945.

12

Making Reality Work For Us: Messaging and Framing in Canada's Arctic Defence and Security Future(s)

Thomas Hughes

Nossal's (2018) chapter in *North American Strategic Defense in the 21st Century* is, as one would expect, provocative and insightful. Titled "New Wineskin, Old Wine," Nossal uses the Biblical analogy of the disastrous consequences of filling a brittle old wineskin with unfermented new wine to emphasize the continuity of Canadian defence policy (the wine) despite periodic policy updates (the wineskin) that are, *prima facie*, an indication of a new direction for Canadian defence.[1]

Commentary on Canadian defence is often on the wine and the (dis)connection between the wineskin and the wine. Or, to drag the metaphor back, the focus of academics, commentators, and other policy-makers is on the way in which the new conceptualisation of threats to Canada are prioritised and emphasised, and whether Canada is equipped to meet them. This is an important line of enquiry, albeit tending towards an emphasis on where the policy document diverges from the observers' understanding of the right course of action and potential disconnect between the capability necessary to achieve government objectives and that which is actually fielded by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

However, the time has come to pay more attention to what we might call the shelf labelling of the wineskin: the narrative that sets our expectations and primes our understanding of what it is that we are tasting. Both a purpose and a challenge of forward-looking defence policy documents is that the emphasis rests on a description of the 'new' threat environment and explaining the ways in which defence capabilities will be re-shaped or augmented to make them fit for purpose. This is not unique to Canada, nor is it a criticism – it is the function of a 'strategy' document. As a result, however, they emphasize what is missing or, in other words, the inadequacies. And where such inadequacies are not made overt, commentators are quick to draw attention to their absence. To be sure, the documents usually go on to indicate that these gaps will be filled and that future capability will be ample. Nevertheless, the cat is already out of the bag. Without considerable care the narrative becomes one of trying to scramble to catch up with requirements, sidelining what already exists. For example, Lagassé and Massie's claim that the Canadian Armed Forces are "barely hanging on" puts an appropriate spotlight on shortfalls in Canadian defence funding and the Canadian defence establishment writ large,[2] but does an injustice to the tools at DND's disposal. There is reasonable argument to be made about whether the *Harry de Wolf*-class Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) are well suited to Canada's defence and security needs at the present time. There is, however, far less argument that in fielding the AOPS Canada is deploying a uniquely capable vessel whose flexibility and overall suite of Arctic capabilities are unmatched.[3]

This is compounded in Canada by a seemingly insatiable desire for self-flagellation when it comes to talking about our own defence, a willingness to point to the policy and capability flaws without a counter-narrative to highlight where Canada makes a genuine contribution. As Commodore Armstrong said in the Winter 2025 edition of *Canadian Naval Review* magazine, "we need to do a better

job of getting our message out".[4] This means thinking more carefully about how we articulate Canada's contribution to North American and NATO defence, and re-frame the discussion of Canada's very real capability gaps to ensure that this occurs in the context of an understanding of a similarly real suite of unique and high-level Canadian capabilities. Nowhere is the gap between Canadian expertise and an absence of widespread acknowledgement of this fact greater than in the Arctic.

Canada and Defence: External (and sometimes Internal) Narratives

President Obama's claim in 2016 that "the world needs more Canada" was lauded by Canadians.[5] With hindsight, however, it can also be seen as an admonition and a warning to Canadian policymakers that the U.S. expected an enhancement in Canadian global engagement. The encouragement to ensure that defence spending was at two percent of Gross Domestic Product by 2024, agreed in 2006 and re-affirmed at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 has been a stone in the shoe of Canadian defence policy ever since. The alleged 2023 comment from Prime Minister Trudeau that Canada would "never reach the military spending target" elicited mainly a resigned shrug from those who had been following the national conversation.[6] And it seems deeply unlikely that whichever individual or political party follows him into office will enforce a funding change sufficient to reverse this position, despite Trudeau's claims that Canada will spend two percent of its GDP on defence by 2032.[7]

Not unreasonably, Canada's response to the criticism of the failure to reach the two percent threshold has centred on highlighting the potential mismatch between spending and actual contribution to defence operations.[8] Regardless of the skepticism with which this has been met, Canada sticking to its position that 'practical contribution' is of greater significance than defence spending in isolation raises an important question: what *is*

Canada's contribution? And, in this specific context, why should Canada's contribution be understood to be 'sufficient' to offset the actual shortfall between defence spending and whatever threshold Canada's allies and partners have decided upon, at least until Canadian spending reaches that figure? As a domestic addendum, what is it that Canada's contribution to multilateral and multinational defence operations accomplishes for Canada? In short, Canada needs to ensure that its contribution to defence is framed in such a way as to emphasise Canada's active role. Without this, the 'two percent' criticism will taint Canadian efforts to position itself as a good ally.

There are multiple audiences that need to be addressed through this framing, both domestic and international, and to both partners and potential adversaries. While the messaging needs to be tailored for each audience, at its core this messaging must be internally consistent and coherent, highlighting what Canada 'brings to the table,' rather than allowing the narrative to focus on where Canada is seen to be falling short.

Our North: Strong and Free hints at some of these Canadian capabilities but stops short of providing detail about specifics, and also does not tie these purported capabilities directly to outcomes. Thus, for example, *ONSAF* indicates the need to "maintain and protect our advantage in innovation and advanced technologies. Canada **and its allies** (emphasis added) have long held this advantage."[9] This statement may be factually correct, but it seems like a missed opportunity to highlight the extraordinary contribution that Canadian industry is making to defence capabilities across the globe. Admittedly, *ONSAF* goes on to reference Canada's "world-leading capacity for invention and innovation" and "world-leading talent in cyber and space," while highlighting the need to "keep our technology at the leading edge".[10] However, there is little indication of how this is perceived by allies and partners, how Canadian capability augments and

enhances alliances and partnerships, and how this capability is leveraged to produce positive defence outcomes for Canadians.

The framing of the extent of Canada's existing contribution is also somewhat muddled. On page thirteen, *ONSAF* says that Canada will "**continue playing** (emphasis added) an important role confronting Russian aggression through a steadfast commitment to NATO assurance and deterrence measures."[11] This rings somewhat hollow when Canada is being criticized by certain NATO allies for its lack of commitment to agreed defence spending goals,[12] and is also undercut by the earlier future-leaning statement that Canada "**will make** (emphasis added) valuable contributions to our partnerships in Europe and the Indo-Pacific" by "bringing relevant, robust capabilities to NATO's northern and western flanks".[13]

Does Canada not already bring "relevant, robust capabilities to NATO's northern and western flanks"? If not, what is the purpose of the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia? And what function does Canada's Arctic surveillance capabilities play in NATO's domain awareness? Canada could enhance or improve the capabilities that it deploys, but it would be doing so to add to existing contribution. This highlights a key tension in messaging Canadian capability: the need to demonstrate Canada's capability and contribution to its own and others' security, while avoiding being seen as disingenuous. Nevertheless, it is in Canada's interests that its areas of genuine high-level contribution and capability is broadly recognised.

As a further example of Canada's seeming reticence (or inability) to promote its own contribution, there was a striking lack of coverage of 22 Wing/Canadian Forces Base North Bay participating in the U.S.-led BAMBOO EAGLE 25-1 exercise in February 2025. Canadian participants engaged in the exercise, which has been running since 2012, for the first time. According to Colonel Joseph Oldford, 22 Wing and Canadian Air Defence Sector Commander, Canadian personnel "exercised war-time battle management skills

with coalition partners."[14] This contribution was only one facet of the much larger exercise, but it is still notable that the primary news coverage for Canada's contribution was on the Royal Canadian Air Force's Facebook account[15] and in the *Bay Today* newspaper. The latter also emphasised that the exercise was "led by the United States Air Force Warfare Centre."[16] If Canada is to be perceived as a valuable and valued partner, it is important to ensure that these forms of contribution are broadly understood.

Similarly, Canada has an enviable defence industry. While it is not the role of DND to promote private business, it is nevertheless a shame that the niches occupied by Canadian companies are not better known both within and outside Canada. Companies such as Top Aces, which "provides the most advanced contracted 'adversary air' (ADAIR) and joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) training available to the CAF and NATO allies,"[17] CAE's "Defense and Security… training and mission support solutions,"[18] Kraken Robotics marine technology (whose "mine detection sonar" was used by the Uncrewed Underwater Vehicles of four NATO navies during the REPMUS 2024 exercise,"[19] through to Weatherhaven portable shelters,[20] Canada has produced best-in-class private industry to support defence and security operations. This capacity does not emerge entirely organically; it has been supported by successive Canadian governments, either through business grants and funding opportunities, or more tangentially by ensuring that Canadian students are highly educated and skillful. These successes should be recognised outside the tight circles of defence establishments, highlighting Canada's contribution to collective defence beyond the traditional mission-set.

It is also worth noting that Canada's geography generates an immutable Arctic defence significance. For the United States, Canada's Arctic can be seen as a buffer between the continental U.S. and the north, through which Russian missiles are likely to transit in the event of war. If the North-West Passage becomes more broadly navigable, then leveraging Canadian territory to police

and support traffic is necessary. If concerns within NATO and the U.S. about the possibility of attacks on shipping in the North Atlantic persist, it is Canada, in potential combination with Greenland, that is best positioned (literally) to provide support.

Canadian Contribution and Arctic Defence

This narrative significance is acute in Canada's Arctic. Successive iterations of Canadian policy documents have positioned Canada as a "leader" in the Arctic. The most recent *Arctic Foreign Policy* stated that Canada "remains well-positioned as an Arctic leader," while a 2019 announcement of Arctic funding proclaimed Canada to be "a global Arctic leader".[21] Other documents have been slightly more cautious, pointing to the possibility of Canadian Arctic leadership but stopping short of claiming a leadership position. The 2019 *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*, for example, announced the intent to "restore Canada's place as an international Arctic leader".[22] What this leadership would look like, or how Canada would know that the country has become an "international Arctic leader" is unclear, although from the phrasing in the *Arctic Foreign Policy* we are left with the dubious

assumption that this point was reached at some point between 2019 and 2024, but not addressed directly in the *Arctic Foreign Policy*.

The framing around Operation NANOOK represents a neat example of a disconnect between Canadian official language and that of its U.S. partners, and the potential diminution of Canadian contribution to Arctic exercises. The U.S. National Guard's 109th Airlift Wing made an important contribution to the 2025 iteration of the NANOOK-NUNALIVUT exercise, but the press release from the U.S. National Guard contains intriguing distinction from its official Canadian equivalent. At the outset, the U.S. press release describes NANOOK-NUNALIVUT as a "joint military exercise in the Northwest Territories of Canada." [23] While not technically incorrect, it is more accurate to describe NANOOK-NUNALIVUT as a Canadian exercise to which partners are frequently invited to participate. The weight of the exercise falls squarely on Canadian shoulders. This is compounded by the National Guard's descriptive wording, which states that NANOOK-NUNALIVUT "demonstrates the ability to project and sustain forces in the High Arctic under the harshest conditions and test new capabilities and operational compatibility with allies." [24] This description bears remarkable similarity to the language used by the CAF in the NANOOK-NUNALIVUT information page on, but with one word of difference: "[the exercise] demonstrates **our** (emphasis added) ability to project and sustain forces in the High Arctic under the harshest conditions and test new capabilities and interoperability with Allies". [25] It is a minor change, but again shifts the emphasis away from the Canadian leadership that is a hallmark of the NANOOK series.

The Canadian description of NANOOK also hints at Canada's unique expertise, indicating that "Through the relationships built and maintained during Op NANOOK, the CAF helps to **improve the military readiness of partners** (emphasis added)," including through "the delivery of training". In part, the exercise is "to demonstrate **the CAF's** (emphasis added) ability to project and

sustain forces in the Arctic."[26] It is entirely appropriate that a U.S. National Guard press release concentrates on the National Guard's contribution, and the 109th Airlift Wing were certainly a key player in NANOOK-NUNALIVUT 2025. However, recognising Canada's unique capability and leading role in running NANOOK is an important component of highlighting Canada's contribution to defence operations more broadly, and undermining this by underplaying the leadership role taken by the CAF serves to weaken Canada's status.

This followed a similar pattern to the U.S. Navy's press release the 2024 iteration of Operation NANOOK-TUUGAALIK. The U.S. description states that NANOOK-TUUGAALIK is the "maritime component of [Operation NANOOK], showcases the U.S. and Royal Canadian Navy's ability to operate in extreme Arctic conditions, ensuring readiness and protecting shared interests."[27] The Canadian version contains similar language but again centres Canada, indicating the exercise "showcases **the Royal Canadian Navy's** (emphasis added) ability to demonstrate presence and conduct surveillance in the North in concert with partners and Allies."[28] Intriguingly, this diminution of Canadian contribution

has not always been the case – in 2020 the U.S. Navy's Press Office published a feature titled "U.S. forces participate in **Canadian Operation NANOOK** (emphasis added),"[29] and comments from the U.S. officer commanding the U.S. contribution to the 2024 GUERRIER NORDIQUE exercise highlighted the expertise of Canadian troops.[30]

It is thus probable that the language in U.S. publications is not deliberately aimed at belittling Canada, and these examples may seem like minor, small quirks of wording that have no effect on 'reality'. Nevertheless, accepting them means accepting a framing that diminishes Canadian leadership or minimises the extent of Canada's contribution. In doing so, Canada abrogates its critical points of difference. Given that the NANOOK series is, by definition, a Canadian-led exercise, it does not seem out of the question that Canada could mandate descriptive language for non-Canadian participants as they highlight their own contributions.

Framing Canada's Arctic Contribution

Claiming to be the 'leader' across all facets of Arctic is both unhelpful and unhelpfully antagonistic to Canada's Arctic allies who can also justifiably claim 'leading' positions in different aspects of Arctic politics and capability. Instead, Canadian messaging needs to be more focused on Canada's points of difference. In essence, the central concern must be to demonstrate why Canada represents an impressive and valuable partner across the Arctic. There are two connected features that provide this opportunity. First, due to its geography and history, Canada has unique Arctic expertise and a unique Arctic environment in which both the Canadian Armed Forces and the militaries of its allies and partners are able to train. This expertise is particularly augmented by the knowledge and experience of Canada's Indigenous population in the Arctic, representing a genuinely unmatched capability and form of contribution.[31] This is a powerful combination, and by furthering and highlighting Canada's

leadership in Arctic exercises, messaging around Canada will necessarily emphasise and reinforce the perception of Canada playing a unique role in allies' capability development. Second, a number of Canadian defence and security industries occupy niche but highly-respected positions. Again, by emphasising and framing Canada's place not only in terms of existing capability but as a location for further innovation, contribution is understood outside the traditional war-fighting concept. Such framing is also likely to be self-reinforcing: the greater the awareness of Canadian expertise, the greater the likelihood of investment, resulting in further enhancement of Canadian status.

Conclusion

The need for Canada to have a robust defence infrastructure is more acute, arguably, than at any time since 1945. Both as a direct protective tool and as a means of demonstrating commitment to alliances, it is important to use the defence budget and Canadian capabilities to shape perceptions of Canada's role in the world. As Nossal has outlined, Canadian defence policy cannot be separated from the country's geography, and Canadian political decision-makers have not, historically, been incentivised to support defence spending by public demand. Re-packaging similar capabilities in a marginally different formulation is thus a trope that has dogged successive Canadian Governments.

The world is changing rapidly – highlighted by the seemingly whiplash shift in the tone of U.S. defence and foreign policy. In securing its place in this new environment, it is imperative that Canada does not sell itself short. The simple reality is that, for all of the well-understood shortcomings, equipment deficits, infrastructure challenges, and the myriad further gaps in Canadian capability, Canada, its armed forces, and its defence industry are playing a meaningful role across a broad swathe of global defence considerations. Canada is certainly not the centre of attention for most other countries, and this is not to suggest that Canada should

try to pull the wool over anyone's eyes or to unjustifiably inflate its capacity or capabilities. Instead, it is a reminder that Canada's seat at the decision-making table relies on others' perception of Canadian contribution. Without showcasing that contribution, and in the absence of rapidly enhanced defence spending, Canada risks being further sidelined. The world, and especially the Arctic, already has Canada in it. Now Canada needs to do a better job of showing just how valuable this is.

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Appendix: Deliverables of Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy

From: Global Affairs Canada

Backgrounder

On December 6, 2024, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced the launch of Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy (AFP).

Funding for the Arctic Foreign Policy is $34.7 million over 5 years, and $7 million ongoing. This is in addition to $8 million per year in ongoing funding for the Global Arctic Leadership Initiative under the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.

The Arctic Foreign Policy will allow Global Affairs Canada to:

- **Appoint an Arctic Ambassador, with an office in Canada's North:** The Arctic ambassador will work with Arctic allies and domestic partners including Indigenous Peoples and territorial and provincial governments to make linkages between Canada's domestic and foreign policy agenda, advance Canada's polar interests in multilateral forums, and raise awareness internationally of Indigenous rights in the Arctic context. The Arctic ambassador will also work with Canada's Chief Science Advisor on issues related to Arctic science and research.
- **Open new consulates in Anchorage, Alaska, and Nuuk, Greenland:** The opening of these consulates will contribute to deepening Canada's diplomatic engagement with its neighbours, the United States, including Alaska, and the Kingdom of Denmark, including Greenland. This will make the Canadian and North American Arctic more secure and create new opportunities for economic cooperation, scientific collaboration and cultural exchange.

- **Initiate an Arctic security dialogue with like-minded Arctic states:** Discussions among foreign ministers could focus on sharing information and analyses of issues relating to international Arctic relations and security, discussing national approaches to cross-cutting security challenges, advancing opportunities for collaboration, and increasing collective resilience.
- **Expand domestic information sharing on emerging international Arctic security trends:** This will help ensure that territorial and provincial governments and Indigenous leaders are equipped to make informed decisions about the security of their communities.
- **Support domestic partners in taking into account a national security lens to foreign research in Canada's Arctic** including by holding an annual roundtable meeting.
- **Work toward resolution of Arctic boundaries:** Global Affairs Canada will deliver on Canada's commitments made under the Ilulissat Declaration for the orderly settlement of overlapping maritime claims and delineation of the outer limits of the extended continental shelf, by launching negotiations with the United States to resolve the unsettled Beaufort Sea boundary and continental shelf overlaps in the Arctic Ocean, and by finalizing the implementation of the boundary agreement between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark regarding Tartupaluk (Hans Island).
- **Secure additional funding for the Global Arctic Leadership Initiative:** By increasing funding for the Global Arctic Leadership Initiative, Canada will strengthen its global leadership in the Arctic and continue to support initiatives led by civil society and Indigenous partners. For example, it will allow for more Canadian engagement and leadership in Arctic Council work that integrates environmental protection and sustainable socio-economic development crucial to Northerners livelihoods and ways of life. It will also increase the

representation of Arctic and northern Indigenous Peoples at relevant international forums.

- **Enhance Canada's diplomatic presence in the Nordic region:** A new position will be created in one of Canada's Nordic embassies with regional responsibility for increasing coordination and information sharing, including on security issues, with Nordic partners.
- **Enhance domestic engagement on Canada's Arctic foreign policy:** Global Affairs Canada will continue pursuing early, meaningful and sustained engagement with territorial and provincial governments, Arctic and northern Indigenous governments and organizations and northerners more generally. We will also explore distinctions-based engagements with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Modern Treaty and Self-Governing Partners.
- **Establish an Arctic and northern Indigenous youth internship program:** To support its recruitment efforts and increase Indigenous perspectives in the department, Global Affairs Canada will establish a paid Arctic and northern Indigenous youth internship program that will consider the need of Arctic and northern Indigenous youths to remain close to their families and communities and ensure that appropriate support is in place.
- **Establish principles for cooperation with non-Arctic states and actors:** Given the prospect of growing competition in the Arctic, Canada will be strategic in prioritizing pragmatic cooperation with non-Arctic states and actors that align with Canadian values, interests and objectives.

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Canadian Arctic Defence and Foreign Policy: Recent Developments

Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer

This volume brings together the perspectives of Canadian Arctic foreign and security policy experts to reflect on the Government of Canada's defence policy update *Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence (ONSF)*, released in April 2024, and its *Arctic Foreign Policy* (*AFP*) released in December 2024. *ONSF* declared that "the most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and northern regions, where the changing physical and geopolitical landscapes have created new threats and vulnerabilities to Canada and Canadians" – a striking statement that elevated the Arctic to the forefront of national defence priorities.

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