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Militarization and Arctic Security

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1. Arctic Exceptionalism

Especially since the famous 1987 Murmansk speech of Gorbachev,¹ international discourse on the Arctic has tended toward an exceptionalist framework. The assumption, or at least hope, has been that geographic isolation also offers political isolation from tensions in other regions of major power engagement.

It’s not surprising that Finns are inclined to challenge that paradigm. In 2015 the Finnish Institute for International Affairs published what it called “critical reflections on Arctic exceptionalism,” arguing that what happens in Ukraine doesn’t stay in Ukraine – that events in other parts of the world do spill over into the Arctic neighborhood.

The viability of Arctic security proposals is inevitably linked to just how much of an exception the Arctic is perceived to be, but for now, and despite the Ukraine, the inclination to cooperate in the Arctic remains stronger than elsewhere.² While some military/security contacts with Russia in the Arctic have certainly been curtailed, the Ilulissat declaration of 2008 still essentially stands, and the Coast Guard Forum and the SAR and oil spill agreements continue to be the focus of implementation efforts.

I refer you briefly to two recent Canadian Senate Defence Committee reports³ because they in effect offer two takes on the exceptionalism. For one, they routinely distinguish the Arctic from the rest of Canada and North America. There is frequent use of phrases like “...Canadian sovereignty, *including in the Arctic*,” or the “defence of Canada, North America *and the Arctic*” – as if Canadian sovereignty or the defence of Canada don’t include the Arctic unless it is specifically mentioned (would they talk about the defence of Canada *and the maritimes*?). One suspects that the Arctic is separately invoked to appeal to the romance of the High North in an effort to bolster their relentless campaigning for increased defence spending.

In any event, Canada clearly needs one national defence policy, not one for Canada, *and the Arctic*. While conditions vary widely from region to region in Canada, the security challenges are remarkably constant – all of Canada enjoys the absence of a direct military threat and Canada has the luxury of deploying armed forces at home primarily in aid of civil authorities in law enforcement and emergency response.

The Senators suggest reverse-exceptionalism inasmuch as they see the Arctic, not as isolated from tensions elsewhere, but as itself a source of tension. There are repeated references to “resurgent Russian military activity close to Canadian airspace in the North,” and an approving quote of one witness claiming that to be “the real menace to Canadian sovereignty in the North” (R, p. 5). Other references are to “increased Russian activity around North America” (MU, p. 7), all supplemented by repeated references to Russian aggression and military activism generally.

That contrasts with the Government's new Defence Policy, which has only three references to Russia. And only one is linked to the Arctic, but unrelated to any threatening posture re the Arctic itself. Instead, it notes a NATO concern that Russia is once again expanding its capacity to project force from the Arctic into the North Atlantic.

On Arctic defence, the Government's policy statement refers to the record of cooperation among Arctic states and places the focus on domain awareness and public safety, not on state-to-state threats or on conventional defence needs.

There are references to security threats that obviously deserve serious attention, but they are related to civilian law enforcement and public safety. Law enforcement challenges derive from Canada's extraordinarily long and complicated three oceans shoreline (StatsCan reports a Canadian coastline that stretches to 243,042 kms)⁴ and all the possibilities for unauthorized entry by sea and air, involving, migration issues, contraband, and terrorism. Public safety challenges include search and rescue, and emergency response capacity (including oil spill mitigation).⁵

Notably, the new policy statement makes no reference to the Russian bomber threat.

2. Arctic and demilitarization

As of now, the Arctic is militarizing – and that should make us wary. [Arctic Military Facilities paper.] But some perspective is in

order – much of Arctic military development is linked to civilian use requirements (building up a military infrastructure to help manage increased civilian activity). Nevertheless, demilitarization remains a long-term vision – and it’s a vision worth nurturing.

For example, for all of known history, climate and geography have combined to ensure the non-militarization of the surface of the Arctic Ocean. Clearly, climate and geography won’t continue that salutary service indefinitely – making this the time for the international community to politically enshrine what has until now come naturally.

You will recall that the University of Toronto’s Franklyn Griffiths (and Pugwash member)⁶ proposed this some time ago. The idea has the great advantage of preserving what already exists, without having to break difficult new political ground.^{7&8}

A feature of Gorbachev’s “zone of peace” speech⁹ was to block Western anti-submarine warfare operations in and near the home waters of the Soviet Northern and Baltic fleets.¹⁰ His term was, “limiting rivalry in anti-submarine weapons,” and undertaking confidence-building measures especially in the Greenland, Norwegian, and Baltic Seas.

And a 2009 paper by Anatoli Diakov and Frank Von Hippel proposed again that Russia agree to confine its northern SSBN fleet to the Arctic and that the US agree to keep its attack submarines out of the Russian side of the Arctic.¹¹

3. The Arctic as a Security Community

While commending those ideas, I want to focus on the broad but foundational objective for Arctic states to build a stable and sustainable security community.¹²

The first characteristic of a regional security community is a “dependable expectation of peaceful change.” And it must be said that conditions for such a community in the Arctic are remarkably advanced. A security community relies on credible assurances from community members that they will not go to war with each other to settle their disputes, and in their 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, the five Arctic Ocean states affirmed as much when they said they would rely on the “extensive international legal framework [that] applies to the Arctic Ocean” for “the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims.”¹³

While Canadian politicians can muster impressive levels of indignation when Russia’s long-range bombers venture near Canadian airspace on their routine training and patrol missions,¹⁴ defence officials and earlier Prime Ministers have nevertheless insisted that “Canada does not anticipate any military challenges in the Arctic,” and that “there is no likelihood of Arctic states going to war.”¹⁵ In August 2012 the Department of National Defence spokesperson put it this way: “Defence issues do not drive Arctic affairs.”¹⁶

A second characteristic of a security community is the absence of an arms race, that is, the absence of a competitive military build-up among the members of the community. That doesn’t necessarily mean the absence of any individual or unilateral national military

expansion, but it does mean that such developments are not regarded as threatening to other members of the community and thus are not destabilizing. Deutsch put it this way: “The attainment of a security community can...be tested operationally in terms of the absence of significant organized preparations for war or large-scale violence among its members.” Strategic nuclear forces in and around the Arctic are certainly prepared for “largescale” violence, but conventional preparations for combat in and about the Arctic can and should be minimized.

So, to reinforce “expectations of peaceful change” and mitigate “organized preparations for war,” the countries of the region need to pursue some key measures:

- by demonstrably configuring military deployments as defensive and, especially, linked to public safety (for Canada, no armed drones, don't arm the Coast Guard);
- by resuming and expanding regular meetings of chiefs of defence staff to heighten understanding of each other's military operations and intentions;
- by exploring the shared use of public safety assets like airlift and helicopters;
- by issuing regular and credible mutual declarations on the absence of military threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity; and
- by the Arctic's five NATO members insisting, as Canada has in the past, on keeping NATO operationally out of the Arctic.

Measures that eschew competitive military expansion and that encourage expectations of peaceful change will serve to entrench the Arctic as a security community, and that in turn will help build

a political/security climate of openness to proposals like an Arctic zone of peace or attack submarine exclusion zones. And, of course, any progress along such will help build a global security architecture that is more amenable to the elimination of nuclear arsenals.

Notes

¹Gorbachev, M., The Speech in Murmansk at the ceremonial meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the city of Murmansk, October 1, 1987 (Novosti Press Agency: Moscow, 1987), pp. 23-31.
https://www.barentsinfo.fi/docs/Gorbachev_speech.pdf

² Whitney Lackenbauer, "Canada and Russia – Toward an Arctic Agenda," September 2, 2016

³ "Military Underfunded: The Walk Must Match the Talk," Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, April 2017.

Reinvesting in the Canadian Armed Forces: A Plan For the Future," Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, May 2017.

⁴<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-402-x/2012000/chap/geo/geo-eng.htm>

⁵ Here is Lackenbauer on Arctic challenges: "The most acute Arctic challenges facing regional actors are not generated by great power competition, resource ownership questions, outstanding (and usually well-managed) boundary disputes, or different applications of international law. Instead, they relate to community-level security and safety, the practical challenges associated with adapting to climate change, assurance that Arctic shipping and resource development will be conducted safely, and outlining what sustainable development looks like across a spectrum of economic sectors." Whitney Lackenbauer, "Canada and Russia – Toward an Arctic Agenda," September 2, 2016

⁶ Franklyn Griffiths, "A Northern Foreign Policy," *Wellesley Papers* 7 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1979), p. 61.

⁷ Just as the Seabed Treaty preserved the status quo in keeping nuclear weapons from the seabed, and just as NWFZs to date have largely preserved the status quo in keeping nuclear weapons out of regions from which they were already absent). This is only largely the case because the Pelindaba Treaty in fact helped to confirm the denuclearization that took place in Africa when South Africa divested itself of nuclear weapons, and in other regions, like Tlatelolco, when states with nuclear weapons programs agreed to halt them and the NWFZ solidified that posture into the future.

⁸ In 1920 the Svalbard Treaty demilitarized that archipelago and all Arctic states have ratified the treaty. Michael Byers, *International Law and the Arctic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 256–57.

⁹ The Murmansk speech included these six proposals:

1. Establish a nuclear-free zone in Northern Europe.

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2. Restrict military activity and scale down naval and air force activities in the Baltic, Northern, Norwegian and Greenland Seas, and promote confidence-building measures in those areas.
 3. Cooperation on resource development, including technology transfer.
 4. Organization of an international conference on Arctic scientific research coordination, leading perhaps to an Arctic Research Council.
 5. Cooperation in environmental protection and management.
 6. Opening of the Northern Sea Route.

¹⁰ Kristian Åtland, "Michail Gorbacheve, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Denuclearization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic." *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies association*, 43:3 (2008), pp. 289-311.

¹¹ Anatoli Diakov and Frank Von Hippel, *Challenges and Opportunities for Russia-U.S. Nuclear Arms Control*, A Century Foundation Report (New York, Washington: The Century Foundation, 2009), pp. 15-16.

¹² Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community at the International Level: Problems of Definition and Measurement* (Aardvark Global Publishing Company, 1954; 2006 edition), p. 42.

¹³ http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf

¹⁴ In 2009, when CF-18s were scrambled to rendezvous with Russian bombers in international air space, the Prime Ministerial warned of the "increasingly aggressive" Russian flights and promised that Canada would fulfill its "obligations to defend our continental airspace." He went on to insist that "we will defend our sovereignty and we will respond every time the Russians make any kind of intrusion on the sovereignty in Canada's Arctic." The Russian bombers did not enter Canadian airspace or "make any kind of intrusion on the sovereignty in Canada's Arctic."

"Russia Denies Bomber Approached Canadian Airspace," CBC News, 27 February 2009. <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/02/27/arctic-russia.html?ref=rss>.

¹⁵ The chief of Defence Staff and the Prime Minister respectively, both commenting in 2010. Quoted in: Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, "Canada's F-35 purchase is a costly mistake," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 17:3, 217-227.

¹⁶ David Pugliese, "Canadian Government Does not see a Military Threat in the Arctic, says DND," *Defence Watch*, 16 August 2012. <http://blogs.ottawacitizen.com/2012/08/16/canadian-government-does-not-see-a-military-threat-in-the-arctic-says-dnd/>