

Guest Editorial

Is Canada's sovereignty "on thinning ice"? Are new circumpolar threats undermining Canadian security? As debate swirls around these questions, due to an allegedly impending "perfect storm" coalescing around climate change, a so-called "race" for arctic resources, and increased militarism,¹ we might be wise to remember that policy-makers have been grappling with these questions for decades. This special issue of the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* offers four perspectives on historical and contemporary developments, spanning the Second World War to the twenty-first century.

The twentieth-century Arctic does not lack for histories: much is known, for instance, about the American presence in Northwest Canada during the Second World War as well as general concerns about sovereignty.² A main debate over the sovereignty-security equilibrium in immediate postwar Canada has led scholars like Shelagh Grant to track popular media statements and political activists concerned about allegedly sinister American intentions for Canada's Arctic.³ According to this line of thinking, "use it or lose it" considerations should have resonated in the late 1940s;

1 Rob Huebert, "Canada and the Changing International Arctic: At the Crossroads of Cooperation and Conflict," in *Northern Exposure: Peoples, Powers and Prospects for Canada's North*, eds. Frances Abele, Thomas J. Courchene, F. Leslie Seidle and France St-Hilaire (Ottawa: Institute for Research on Public Policy). Available online at www.irpp.org.

² K. Coates and W.R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in World War II* (1992); Coates and Morrison, *Working the North: Labor and the Northwest Defense Projects* (1994); N. Bankes, "Forty Years of Canadian Sovereignty Assertion in the Arctic," *Arctic* (1987): pp. 285-91; Kenneth C. Eyre, "Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87," *Arctic* 40/4 (1987): pp. 292-99; Gordon W. Smith, "Sovereignty in the North: The Canadian Aspect of an International Problem," in *The Arctic Frontier*, ed. R. St. J. MacDonald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966): pp. 194-255; and R.J. Sutherland, "The Strategic Significance of the Canadian Arctic," in *The Arctic Frontier* ed. McDonald: pp. 256-78.

³ S. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?: Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988). For a general critique of this historiography, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Right and Honourable: Mackenzie King, Canadian-American Bilateral Relations, and Canadian Sovereignty in the Northwest, 1943-1948," in *Mackenzie King: Citizenship and Community* eds. John English, Kenneth McLaughlin, and Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2002)

instead, Canadian apathy in the face of American security interests threatened our sovereignty. Others, like William Morrison and David Bercuson, have painted a more benign portrait of bilateral cooperation.⁴ Canadian interests were not undermined by American security imperatives, and Canada's sovereignty and security were strengthened. Which side of the debate one chooses to accept influences the "lessons learned" that might guide future scenario-setting and policy-making.

The literary executors of the late Gordon W. Smith, a careful student of Arctic history and policy for half a century, have allowed me to edit and publish excerpts from his research on Canada-US relations related to weather stations in the North. This is part of his unpublished *magnum opus*, "A Historical and Legal Study of Sovereignty in the Canadian North and Related Law of the Sea Problems," a monumental reference work which I am currently collaborating with Dr. Armand de Mestral, holder of the Jean Monnet Chair in the Law of International Economic Integration and Co-Director of the Institute of European Studies at McGill University/Université de Montréal, to make it accessible to the public. Dr. Smith's original draft of the weather stations chapter (more than one hundred single-spaced pages in length) has been abridged but his language has been retained as much as possible. While the Joint Arctic Weather Stations were designed, built, and operated by the Americans in the early postwar years, Smith's careful research reveals that Canada retained sufficient control to protect and preserve its position relating to sovereignty. "Canada's support for the program, at least in the early stages, was somewhat reluctant, cautious, and qualified," he observed; "and her inclination was to proceed carefully, giving due attention to form and also keeping a

⁴ W.R. Morrison, "Eagle Over the Arctic," *Canadian Review of American Studies* (1987): 61-85. See also D. Bercuson, "Continental Defense and Arctic Security, 1945-50," in *The Cold War and Defense* ed. K. Neilson and R.G. Haycock (New York: Praeger, 1990): pp. 153-70.

watchful eye upon expense.” The Americans shouldered the initial costs, and indiscretions in formalities and protocol that upset Canadian sensibilities were addressed with tolerance and respect, and Canadian worries allayed. “Such ‘sins’ of omission or commission as occurred were usually done without malice aforethought,” Smith demonstrates. Over time, Canada assumed growing responsibility for the stations, eventually taking the lead in maintenance and resupply. As a result, although the weather stations began as an American initiative, they were “predominantly a Canadian show” even before the Americans withdrew in 1972. The overriding theme is one of cooperation. “So far as the JAWS enterprise itself is concerned, it clearly ranks as one of the most important and successful examples of U.S. - Canadian joint endeavour in northern regions during the World War II and postwar years,” Smith concluded. “In sum, it was a striking illustration of successful international cooperation and collaboration.”

Historian Peter Kikkert touches on similar themes of American bullishness and intransigence in his case study of *Operation Polaris*, but he also finds that the Canadian government succeeded in securing its interests and its sovereignty by “go[ing] to the mat with Washington” (a phrase from Lester Pearson). Situating the study in the existing historiography, Kikkert suggests that Canada did not behave as “a weak and compliant ‘satellite’” when it faced unauthorized American air reconnaissance and air photography activities in its Arctic. The Canadian government stood its ground and secured assurance that the Americans were acting “in good faith.” Quiet bilateral diplomacy through established military channels, rather than political grandstanding, maintained sovereignty while allowing Canada to accommodate the defence needs of

its southern neighbour and ally. Kikkert notes that “the Polaris incident highlighted the respect for Canadian sovereignty that had developed at the higher levels of the American government and military.” When the USAF acted out of line, senior American officials forced it to resolve the Canadian complaints, even when Air Force officials insisted that their actions did not violate the agreement. In the end, Kikkert assesses, “informal networks and mutual accommodation of interests solidified a relationship that was built on cooperation, respect, and open dialogue.” This study, like Smith’s, reinforces how historians paying careful attention to process can produce fresh “lessons learned” that might reshape our understanding of Canadian-American Cold War relations in the Arctic from a narrative of conflict to one of mutual understanding and cooperation.

The Northwest Passage, however, has presented Canada and the United States with an intractable dilemma. While Canada sees its archipelagic waters as internal, the US insists that they are an international strait. This continuing legal dispute, coupled with unresolved boundary issues and the prospect of increased international maritime activity owing to climate change, has catapulted Arctic sovereignty and security back on to the political agenda since Stephen Harper took over as prime minister in 2006. His message has been one of “use it or lose it.” The last two articles provide detailed arguments about why the Canadian Forces have a central role to play in sovereignty, the nature of evolving security threats in the region, and which policy options are most likely to yield a robust and sustainable Arctic strategy.

Captain (Navy) James Cotter argues that Canada’s track record “of rhetoric, followed up by ineffective action,” is not sustainable in the twenty-first century. Instead,

he argues that a coordinated, whole-of-government strategy, reflective of domestic and international imperatives, is essential so that the federal government can “allocate resources rationally and to enable the key federal players to act in an orchestrated fashion” to bolster Canadian sovereignty. After laying out the basic legal issues in play, Cotter emphasizes that stewardship requires robust regulations and the capacity to enforce them. His careful analysis of recent government promises supports the current direction, without misinterpreting a “Canada First” defence strategy as a “Canada only” one. “If the goal is sovereignty,” Cotter argues, “erecting ‘Fortress Igloo,’ operated and staffed by the Canadian Forces personnel, over the Northwest Passage is not the way to achieve this objective.” Instead, an integrated strategy built around the suite of capacities offered by various federal stakeholders, with National Defence in the lead, can achieve the *persistent* engagement necessary to realize Canada’s national interests.

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Dittmann concurs that “the inherent characteristics of experience, training, capacity, presence, resources, and timeliness of response” make the Canadian Forces the appropriate federal lead in responding to Arctic security and sovereignty challenges. After categorizing the nature of the military, environmental, economic, and “psychological” threats facing Canada (from a resurgent Russia to international terrorism to climate change to illegal fishing), the author asserts that Canada has not developed a “coherent and consistent security policy towards the region.” Recent investments point to National Defence “leading the charge,” and this is cause for optimism. “Defence-based initiatives are more responsive than diplomatic and developmental programs, which are frequently slow to develop, non-governmentally

driven, and cumbersome within a multi-lateral organizational framework that includes territories, the federal government, and seven other circumpolar nations,” Dittmann asserts. “Just as DND has led the way in the past, it will shape the future because it ideally has the capability, the budgetary funding, and the personnel to identify, assesses, synthesize, and act upon the threats within the framework of Government policy.... Development and diplomatic efforts are no doubt integral components to an overall governance structure of the Arctic, but it seems that a military response may in the future be imposed on Canada by external forces. Canada can choose to be proactive, rather than reactive, and the military is responsive, has the personnel, expertise and training, and represents a visible display of government control.” His insightful policy recommendations on how Canada can improve its domain awareness and enforcement capabilities warrant careful attention by decision-makers.

A stronger awareness of historical relationships and more sober appraisal of Canadian capabilities in light of present and future challenges can help policy-makers deal with uncertainty and seize opportunities in an evolving circumpolar world. This special issue of *The Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* furthers the debate, and contributes to efforts to frame coherent sovereignty and security strategies predicated on Canada having confident control of our Arctic domain.

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