

## **THE POLARIS INCIDENT: “GOING TO THE MAT” WITH THE AMERICANS<sup>1</sup>**

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During the Second World War the defence relationship between the United States and Canada became overwhelmingly close as Canada struggled to assert her will in the suffocating embrace of her partner. In their desire to ensure their security, the Americans often acted before seeking permission. By 1943, they had made an indelible impact on Canada's infrastructure and government. After the war, with Canada situated between two hostile superpowers, the federal government took steps to ensure that its sovereignty and national interests were not threatened by the Americans in this new strategic environment. “If the Second World War forced the nation's leadership to take a direct interest in the North for fear of losing Canadian control and ownership,” historian Bernd Horn has written, “then the post-war era burned the issue of Arctic sovereignty into their very souls.”<sup>2</sup> In 1945 the Arctic became the center of a bi-polar and adversarial world and Canada had to deal with the wide ranging consequences.

Using the controversy surrounding Operation Polaris as its model, this article examines the extent to which the Canadian government actually defended its sovereignty and rights against American intrusions in the early Cold War. By June 1946 the Canadian government had authorized an American operation codenamed Polaris.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Professor Whitney Lackenbauer for all of his research and editorial assistance with this paper, and Richard Goette for generously sharing copies of documents from the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington.

<sup>2</sup> Lt. Colonel Bernd Horn, “Gateway to Invasion or the Curse of Geography? The Canadian Arctic and the Question of Security, 1939-1999,” in *Forging a Nation: Perspectives on the Canadian Military Experience*, ed. Bernd Horn (St. Catharines: Vanwell, 2002), p. 318.

Major General V. Henry, United States Army Member of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), a bilateral consultative body established in 1940, told the Canadian government that Polaris involved the establishment of an air transport service between Meeks Field, Iceland and Ladd Field, Alaska for the purpose of studying issues related to Arctic flying.<sup>3</sup> By November 1947, however, reports began to circulate that the United States Air Force (USAF) had been carrying out regular reconnaissance flights and engaging in aerial photography in the Arctic.<sup>4</sup> The U.S responded to Canadian queries about these reports by claiming that the flights had been conducted under the auspices of the Polaris project; an argument that Canadian officials did not accept. The issue was complex: the Americans were being accused of not only overstepping the approved boundaries of Operation Polaris, but also of acting against the previously accepted provisions established for aerial photography. In the inquiry that followed the Canadians and Americans attempted to resolve the issue using the outlet provided by the PJBD.

Canada had to participate with the United States in the defence of North America and it was a willing ally. Nevertheless, Canada took a number of steps to safeguard its sovereignty and rights. In offering suggestions about how to handle the Canadian-American defence relationship, Lester B. Pearson, then minister-counsellor at the Canadian Legation in Washington, stated that some pivotal Canadian interest must be

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<sup>3</sup> "Senior United States Army Member, PJBD, to Secretary of the Canadian Section PJBD, 30 April 1946," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 19, 1953, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/departement/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed October 1, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> "Secretary of the Canadian Section, PJBD, to Secretary of the American Section, PJBD, 5 December 1947," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1521.

at stake “if we are to go to the mat with Washington.”<sup>5</sup> The Polaris incident was sufficiently serious for the Canadians to “go to the mat” with the Americans over it. It became the first real confrontation in the defence relationship between the two countries in the post war years.

Throughout 1946 and 1947 the United States Air Force was engaged in unauthorized air reconnaissance and air photography in the Canadian North. Rather than ignoring the issue to avoid angering their American counterparts, Canadian officials decided that they had to take a stand against this violation of their sovereignty and national rights. The Canadians viewed the aerial photography and reconnaissance as a direct threat to Canada’s sovereignty over the Arctic because these activities were unauthorized and could potentially reveal undiscovered land. Furthermore, these activities seemed to jeopardize the progress that had been made in the defence relationship since the war. The Canadian members of the PJBD were given the task of investigating and resolving the situation, and what emerged was one of the first successful assertions of Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic and one of the first concessions that the United States made to its smaller ally. The Polaris incident was an American transgression against Canadian sovereignty and against the model for defence negotiations established up to that point. The resolution of the dispute, however, displayed the positive developments that had transformed the Canadian-United States defence relationship in the years following the Second World War. In the end, the incident strengthened Canadian sovereignty and its position in the defence alliance.

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<sup>5</sup> Denis Stairs, “Realists at Work: Canadian Policy Makers and the Politics of Transition from Hot War to Cold War,” in *Canada and the Early Cold War*, ed. Greg Donaghy (Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing, 1998), p. 99.

Emphasizing the positive developments in the Canadian-American defence relationship challenges the traditional scholarly discourse on the subject. The popular view, which Donald Creighton espoused in *The Forked Road*, maintains that the Canadians played a completely subservient role in the relationship and the Americans treated Canada as another state in their empire, without regard for Canadian sovereignty concerns.<sup>6</sup> Shelagh Grant has adopted a slightly more moderate approach and while she “never deliberately accuses the King government of ‘selling out’ to the Americans, she does show it collaborating and corroborating with an inherently dangerous and conniving force.”<sup>7</sup> To these scholars, American forces’ disregard for Canadian sovereignty in the Second World War carried over into the early Cold War.

“Middle ground” historians who refuse to accept the model of complete American dominance, such as J.L. Granatstein and C.P. Stacey, argue that the defence relationship was characterized by cooperation and conflict.<sup>8</sup> Geography placed Canada in between the United States and the Soviet Union, and its only realistic option was to enter into a continental defence relationship with the Americans. In this model, however, Canada still had no choice but full compliance to nearly all American demands. Writing in 1966, R.J Sutherland argued that before the 1955 Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line agreement the Americans paid little heed to Canadian sovereignty concerns. He believed that the agreement achieved “what the United States had up to that time assiduously endeavoured to avoid, namely, an explicit recognition of Canadian

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<sup>6</sup> 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), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable,” p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable,” p. 153.

claims to the exercise of sovereignty in the far North.”<sup>9</sup> Although Sutherland painted a positive portrait, the early Cold War relationship was still cast in a negative light.

Recently, there has been a modest historical challenge to these traditional assessments. Andrew Richter argues that Canadian defence officials had their own strategic vision in 1946, realized continental defence was essential, and worked to promote Canada’s interests.<sup>10</sup> David Bercuson, in a revolutionary chapter, argues that the Canadians managed to elicit an American recognition of de jure and de facto Canadian sovereignty over the North through defence negotiations in the early post war years.<sup>11</sup> Whitney Lackenbauer asserts that the King government appropriately balanced sovereignty and security concerns and strengthened Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. “Those scholars who have most stridently criticized the administration for selling out Canadian sovereignty to the Americans,” Lackenbauer suggests, “have neglected the context of time, missed the essence of the negotiations and failed to comprehend the achievements won by the King government.”<sup>12</sup> The Polaris incident depicts the fruitful essence of Canadian-American defence negotiations and is clear evidence of the Canadian government’s remarkable achievements in the late 1940’s.

Most scholars agree that defence collaboration in the early years of the Second World War was dominated by the Americans and that Canada failed to protect its sovereignty. In describing this period, Lackenbauer observes that “King’s sporadic comments to his colleagues aside, the government had been woefully ignorant of

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<sup>9</sup> David Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty, 1945-1950: Solving the Canadian Dilemma,” in *The Cold War and Defence*, eds. Keith Neilson and Ronald Haycock (New York: Praeger Press, 1990), p. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Richter, *Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons 1950-1963* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty.”

<sup>12</sup> Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable,” p. 151.

American activities in the north and had been rather oblivious to the apparent threat this posed to Canadian sovereignty.”<sup>13</sup> After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Americans immediately began to increase the size of their garrison in Alaska from 21,500 to 40,424 men. To supply this garrison the Americans undertook a number of large scale defence projects in northern Canada. The aerial component, the Northwest Staging Route, included a number of airfields built to accommodate fighters, bombers, and transport aircraft on their way to Alaska. By the end of 1943 the U.S Army completed the Alaska Highway, a 2,451 km supply route to the isolated state that cost a staggering 150 million dollars to build.<sup>14</sup> The third major northern wartime effort, the Canol project, involved the building of a major pipeline and a number of oil processing facilities to supply Alaska and support the highway. Construction of these facilities began in 1942 and ended in 1944 with a final cost of over 140 million dollars.<sup>15</sup> For the most part, the U.S paid for the construction costs of these projects and operated the completed facilities.

By 1943, at the height of the war time projects, nearly 33,000 Americans, both military personnel and civilian workers, operated in the Canadian North. This time of extensive American presence in Canada’s northern regions has been labelled as a period of “occupation.”<sup>16</sup> The attitude of many Americans, especially those in the military, clearly frustrated Pearson throughout the war. At one point Pearson proclaimed that the United States was “perplexed when we show impatience at being ignored and

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<sup>13</sup> Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable,” p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Johnson, “Strategic Necessity of Military Blunder: Another Look at the Decision to Build the Alaska Highway,” in *Three Northern Wartime Projects*, edited by Bob Hesketh (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute and Edmonton and District Historical Society, 1992), pp. 18, 28.

<sup>15</sup> James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada Vol. 3: Peacemaking and Deterrence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 349.

<sup>16</sup> Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada*, p. 349.

an irritation at being treated as something less than an independent state.”<sup>17</sup> The Canadians had allowed the Americans into their territory en masse and did nothing to protect any of their country’s interests.

By late 1943, however, things began to improve. The Canadian government took a more active role in the North and, as the threat of Japanese invasion diminished, the Americans became more attentive to Canadian desires. The government appointed a special commissioner to oversee the various American defence projects in the North and began to set strict parameters on new American proposals. As the war drew to a close, Canada increased its control over the North by securing full ownership of all permanent facilities on its territory (by purchasing them from the Americans). The United States also agreed that, before any project was undertaken on or over Canadian territory, it would have to be approved.<sup>18</sup> By war’s end, Canada’s sovereignty was strengthened by this new infrastructure and recognition, and its defence relationship with the United States was running smoothly.

When the Western alliance with the Soviets quickly evaporated after the Allied victory in 1945, the importance of continental defence increased sharply and the Canadian government immediately took steps to protect its sovereignty. On 19 December 1945, the Cabinet accepted the Advisory Committee on Post-Hostility Problems recommendation that “Canada should accept full responsibility for all such defence measures within Canadian territory as the moderate risk to which we are exposed may indicate to be necessary.”<sup>19</sup> Events during the war, however, had taught the Canadian government to be wary of the American tendency to act swiftly when its

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<sup>17</sup> Stairs, “Realists at Work,” p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable,” p. 154.

<sup>19</sup> Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty,” p. 153.

security was at stake before carefully considering implications for its northern neighbour. Thus, as Bernd Horn points out, from the very beginning “government reports highlighted the necessity of ensuring effective protection of Canadian sovereignty.”<sup>20</sup> Senior officials in Ottawa decided to participate in continental defence and immediately started devising measures to protect Canada's interests.

The government placed much of its hope for the protection of Canadian interests in the Canadian section of the PJBD. Christopher Conliffe argues that the Board had held much prestige as the senior bilateral defence agency during the war, but by 1945 it was in a “rundown maintenance mode.”<sup>21</sup> Even before the end of the war, however, the Canadian government expressed its desire to keep the Board in place. In May 1944 the Advisory Committee on Post-Hostility Problems hailed the PJBD as the best hope for a successful defence relationship between the two countries. The committee's report emphasized that the Board “provides an opportunity to discuss difficult problems frankly and openly in an arena where a tradition of equality has been established...where weight of counsel is dependent on function rather than on net power.”<sup>22</sup>

At the fortieth meeting of the PJBD, held on 4-5 September 1945, its members decided to reassert the permanence of the organization, a move that both governments gladly accepted. As Melvin Conant describes, this reaffirmed “its continued importance ... at a time when almost all other combined and allied groups were being dissolved.”<sup>23</sup> The Board would thus serve as the primary organization for the initiation and coordination of joint defence measures. The Board served not only as a forum for

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<sup>20</sup> Horn, “Gateway to Invasion,” p. 321.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Conliffe, “The Permanent Joint Board on Defence: 1940-1988,” in *The U.S.-Canada Security Relationship*, eds. David Haglund and Joel Sokolsky (London: Westview Press, 1989), p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada*, p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> Melvin Conant, *The Long Polar Watch*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 29.



making joint defence recommendations, but for negotiating, exchanging views, testing ideas -- and ensuring that the Americans recognized their junior partner's interests and problems.<sup>24</sup> Although Conliffe purports that it was ineffective in the years between 1945 and 1950,<sup>25</sup> it served as the central forum for all defence negotiations during this period, including the Polaris project.

Armed with a new will to protect its interests, and with the PJBD available as a means to devise solutions to difficulties that might arise, the Canadian government began to examine American defence initiatives at the end of the war. The Americans were at first divided and indecisive as they attempted to establish a coherent strategic plan for continental defence.<sup>26</sup> Despite this confusion, their output of defence plans was tremendous. As James Eayrs describes, plans "arrived through the U.S embassy, they arrived through service channels, and by the summer of 1946 they were arriving thick and fast."<sup>27</sup> The Canadians were initially overwhelmed by this flow of defence projects and were especially worried by the grand schemes that the Military Cooperation Committee, a group at that point attached to the PJBD, called for in its defence appreciation and Basic Security Plan. The King government quickly showed their resolve to defend Canada's interests when they rejected PJBD Recommendation 35, which called for closer collaboration between the two nations for defence, but did little to protect Canadian sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> Despite the cooperative mechanisms implemented during the war, it seemed that the postwar defence relationship was off to a rocky start.

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<sup>24</sup> David Beatty, *The Canadian-United States Permanent Joint Board on Defence* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1969), pp. i, 88.

<sup>25</sup> Conliffe, "Permanent Joint Board on Defence," p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada*, p. 357.

<sup>28</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 160.

A meeting between top American and Canadian officials on 16-17 December 1946 put many of the Canadian fears to rest and effectively re-oriented the defence measures in the North. David Bercuson observed: "In the all important area of joint defence planning, both sides agreed that all the defence plans were 'somewhat utopian' and that their implementation had to be 'decided step by step,' with the rate of implementation 'under constant review.'" On 17 January 1947 the Cabinet approved the final version of PJBD Recommendation 36 which assured Ottawa that the United States had no desire to violate the sovereignty Canada claimed over the North.<sup>29</sup> In the first stumbling steps of postwar defence planning, the United States had found that the Canadians would not easily grant American requests, nor would they remain silent about their concerns. The United States behaved well in this new defence environment and, as Lackenbauer states, "when Canadian officials confronted the Americans about sovereignty issues, the latter accommodated their northern neighbour's wishes."<sup>30</sup> Canada successfully lobbied to have the United States accept its concerns and fears about continental defence.

A brief survey of the major defence negotiations undertaken in 1946-47 demonstrates Canada's success in strengthening its sovereignty and its role in the defence relationship. The Canadians were very vocal in the long process of revising ABC-22, the Canadian-American wartime Defence Plan, and "insisted that the response to the Soviet threat would reflect Canadian national security interests."<sup>31</sup> Canadian intelligence estimates were respected and even encouraged. When the Americans

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<sup>29</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 161.

<sup>30</sup> Lackenbauer, "Right and Honourable," p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Aronsen, "Preparing for Armageddon: JIC 1 (Final) and the Soviet Attack on Canada," *Intelligence and National Security* 19/3 (2004), p. 491.

pressed to have an additional 500 troops posted at the Joint Services Experimental Station at Churchill, Manitoba in October 1946, the Canadians flatly denied the request because they did not want to be outnumbered on the base.<sup>32</sup> The Americans respected the original terms of their agreement and stationed only a hundred men at the base. In early 1947 the Cabinet approved the construction of a number of Arctic weather stations and three Long Range Aid-to-Navigation (LORAN) sites. The PJBD established the parameters for the projects and the Canadian Section ensured that all permanent rights to any installations were given to Canada, that the majority of personnel would be Canadian, and that the projects would be under Canadian command.<sup>33</sup> These projects and several smaller ones protected Canadian interests and promoted Canada's sovereignty in the North.

Thus, by mid-1947 the defence relationship between Canada and the United States seemed to be functioning smoothly. The relationship was amicable and by mutual preference worked without grand projects or extensive commitments.<sup>34</sup> The 36<sup>th</sup> Recommendation of the PJBD called for the investigation of all new defence projects on a case by case basis and the Board reviewed every initiative, no matter how small. "No blanket approvals were given Washington," Bercuson noted. "The details of each operation were worked out separately."<sup>35</sup> At the 16 August 1947 meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee, Andrew McNaughton, the Canadian chairman of the PJBD, "observed that in discussions in the Joint Defence Board there had been an attitude of

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<sup>32</sup> Ron Purver, "The Arctic in Canadian Security Policy, 1945 to the Present," in *Canada's International Security Policy*, eds. David B. Dewitt and David Leyton Brown (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada, 1995), p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs: Canada, the United States, and the Origins of North American Air Defence, 1945-1958*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 162.

complete propriety regarding Canadian rights.”<sup>36</sup> McNaughton optimistically added that “circumstances are such that our claims in the Arctic Archipelago are being progressively strengthened.”<sup>37</sup> The events surrounding the Polaris program, however, would test McNaughton’s assertions and the ability of the Canadian section of the PJBD to defend Canadian interests. For the first time since the war, the Canadians would have to ‘go to the mat’ with their defence partner.

On 30 April 1946 General Henry wrote to the Canadian secretary of the Board asking permission for the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) to institute a “regular air transport service of three round trips per week” over the Canadian Arctic.<sup>38</sup> The three B-29’s appointed to the mission would travel over Canadian territory as they moved between Meeks Field, Iceland and Ladd Field, Alaska. Henry outlined the five purposes of the Polaris project: “to gain operational experience in the Arctic; to determine navigational difficulties and procedures for overcoming same, to investigate the reliability of communications; to analyze polar air masses; to study air mass circulation in polar regions.”<sup>39</sup> The main mandate of the project was to train in arctic aviation.

The American request was neither extraordinary nor surprising. On 5 December 1945 General H.H Arnold, the Chief of Staff of the USAAF, declared to the public that the Arctic would become the heart of any new conflict.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the USAAF had a pressing need to begin training its men and testing its equipment in the difficult and

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<sup>36</sup> “Minutes of Meeting of Cabinet Defence, 16 August 1947,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1510.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1510.

<sup>38</sup> “Senior United States Army Member, PJBD, to Secretary, Canadian Section, PJBD, 30 April 1946,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 12, 1946, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/departement/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed 10 October 2007).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Beatty, *Canadian-United States Permanent Joint Board on Defence*, p. 117.

unique terrain of the Arctic. If American bombers were ever to cross the Polar Regions on a bombing run against the Soviet Union they needed to have operational experience in the area.

Although the Polaris project seemed rather innocent, from the onset it was a source of substantial worry for the Canadian government. On 6 May 1946, R.M Macdonnell, the Canadian secretary of the PJBD and an official with External Affairs, circulated a report from the American Standing Sub-committee on the Arctic which stated that “the region north of Prince Patrick Island and west of Grant’s Land is largely unexplored, but several Arctic authorities believe that if any undiscovered islands exist north of Canada they lie in this area.”<sup>41</sup> The report claimed that “reconnaissance flights from Alaska to the regions could doubtless settle the question.”<sup>42</sup> The sub-committee also questioned whether the United States recognized Canadian claims to the Arctic archipelago and whether it could claim any newly discovered islands north of the Canadian mainland. The American report echoed fears that had been raised by Canadian General D.C. Spry in a paper on sovereignty in the Arctic in which he claimed, “hitherto unknown islands may be discovered within the Canadian sector by a foreign power, and claim laid to them by right of discovery and primary occupation.”<sup>43</sup> The American report concerned Canadians who were already thinking about potential sovereignty challenges.

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<sup>41</sup> “Memorandum from Head, Third Political Division Legal Division: Sovereignty in the Arctic, 6 May 1946,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 12, 1946, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/department/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed October 10, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> “Memorandum from Head, Third Political Division Legal Division, 1 January 1946,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 12, 1946, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/department/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed October 10, 2007).

The report by the Standing Sub-committee on the Arctic unnerved Macdonnell, who had just received General Henry's request for the Polaris project. He understood that the report questioned the willingness of the American government to accept Canadian claims to undiscovered land in the Arctic. In his analysis, Macdonnell acknowledged that the USAAF had sought permission to regularly fly over the unexplored area west and northwest of Grant's Land, and asked whether Canada's permission should "be qualified in a way to rule out claims based on exploration?"<sup>44</sup> He even raised the possibility of securing American agreement to Canadian sovereignty claims in the Arctic. Although such a drastic measure was never attempted, Macdonnell's report proved that Canadian officials were worried about the Polaris project.

Despite MacDonnell's misgivings, the Cabinet Defence Committee discussed the Polaris proposal. In a memorandum, J.W.C Barclay, the secretary of the committee, stated that:

They [the committee] considered that, since these proposed flights would be primarily concerned with gaining experience in the operation of long range aircraft in the Arctic and the investigation of an analysis of matters relating hereto, the establishment of this air route would prove advantageous.<sup>45</sup>

The committee insisted that publicity about the project be kept to a bare minimum, reflecting the Canadian government's extraordinary sensitivity about public reactions to any disclosure of the American presence in the North.<sup>46</sup> Embracing their own strategic view and interests, the members of the Cabinet Defence Committee saw the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Memorandum from Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Cabinet Defence Committee, 3 June 1946," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 12, 1946, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/departement/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed 10 October 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 162.

development of arctic flying as essential to the security of the continent. The Canadians, like their American counterparts, thought that if war broke out this experience would be essential. Strategic concerns outweighed worries about sovereignty.

Permission was granted for the Polaris operation on 8 June 1946. Macdonnell supported General Spry's assertion that "careful attention should be given to the form in which such permission is granted and to the manner in which such undertakings are carried out."<sup>47</sup> He made it clear in his letter that only the project laid out by General Henry on 30 April was approved. He also mentioned that "it would be appreciated if an opportunity could be provided for the participation of Canadian observers in the flights in order to gain experience of mutual benefit."<sup>48</sup> The Americans accepted the restrictions placed on publicity and the addition of Canadian observers. All was, for the time being, in order.

The Canadian government and military paid little attention to the Polaris project until the fall of 1947, when the RCAF received word that the Americans were performing aerial reconnaissance and photography in the Arctic.<sup>49</sup> General Henry's memorandum to the Commanding General of the Army Air Force, entitled "Photographic Surveys-Canadian Arctic Archipelago," revealed that the Canadian military was asking questions about American operations in the North. In a letter that remains restricted, Air Marshall

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<sup>47</sup> "Memorandum from Head, Third Political Division Legal Division, 1 January 1946."

<sup>48</sup> "Secretary, Canadian Section, PJBD to Senior United States Army Member, PJBD, 8 June 1946," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Vol. 12, 1946, Department of External Affairs, <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/departement/history/dcer/1953/menu-en.asp> (accessed 10 October 2007).

<sup>49</sup> The military was certainly aware of Polaris before this time. The Department of National Defence Report of 1947 records that five men were attached to the project throughout the year. Department of National Defence, *Report of the Department of National Defence for the Fiscal Year Ending 31 March 1947*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1947), p. 45.

Wilf Curtis requested “certain information regarding the work already done and contemplated work to be done” by the USAF in the Arctic.<sup>50</sup> Curtis was the first Canadian official to inquire about the extent of American photographic activities in the Arctic, but he was not the last.

On 17 October 1947, General William McKee, the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the USAF, explained that his service believed that all operations over Canadian territory had been carried out with the full coordination and concurrence of Canadian officials.<sup>51</sup> He also argued that the Polaris project was designed for training, gathering weather information, navigation, and “to do such visual and photo reconnaissance as weather permitted.”<sup>52</sup> According to McKee, the photography was used for identifying shore lines and for locating possible sites for radar and weather stations, and was best described as “photography of opportunity.”<sup>53</sup> Although McKee noted that the photographs would not be used for mapping or charting purposes, he made it clear that the Americans were engaging in air photography and reconnaissance, and asserted that the USAF believed this was an approved part of the Polaris project.

Although General McKee tried to whitewash the additional activities of the USAF, they did not fall within the parameters for the Polaris project that the Canadians had accepted. They had not approved aerial photography and reconnaissance, and these activities violated the newly established model for defence negotiations that Canadian officials had thought firmly in place. The case by case discussion called for in

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<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum for Commanding General Army Air Force from Guy Henry, 16 September 1947,” in *National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Files*, RG 333, PJBD, Entry 17-A, Box 3, File “Top Secret General Correspondence, 1941-1956.”

<sup>51</sup> “Memorandum for Senior U.S Army Member, PJBD from General William McKee, 17 October 1947,” in *NARA Files*, RG 333, PJBD, Entry 17-A, Box 3, File “Top Secret General Correspondence, 1941-1956.”

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



Recommendation 36 of the PJBD had been bypassed, and the respect the Americans had been showing the Canadians in the defence relationship was apparently nowhere to be found. Taking photographs of the Arctic without express Canadian consent violated Canada's sovereignty. The unauthorized American photographic activity in the Arctic also violated the PJBD rule for aerial photography. The 36<sup>th</sup> Recommendation of the Board stated that "subject to any special arrangement which may be entered into, each country will be primarily responsible for the mapping of its own territory and for provisions of maps in accordance with agreed needs."<sup>54</sup> The Canadians were worried about what the Americans would do if their photographs revealed any new islands.

Certain Americans felt that air reconnaissance and photography were important enough aspects of the security plan to risk the fragile harmony created between the two countries. In a 29 May 1946 PJBD memorandum to the U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the completion of mapping and photographic programs was listed as one of the most pressing security requirements.<sup>55</sup> On 25 November 1946 General Henry sent a letter to Major General Lauris Norstad, director of the Plans and Operations Division at the War Department, arguing that if the Air Annex portion of the Basic Security Plan was accepted, extensive mapping of Northern Canada and the Arctic had to start immediately.<sup>56</sup> The Strategic Air Reconnaissance Plan presented on 24 April 1947 stated that reconnaissance to find enemy infiltration and photography to provide geophysical data were essential to the Basic Security Plan. The appendix also stated

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<sup>54</sup> "Memorandum of 20 November 1946," in *NARA Files*, RG 218, Records of the JCS, Entry 943011, Box 019, File CCS 092 (1-10-45), Section 6.

<sup>55</sup> "Memorandum for Joint Chiefs of Staff from PJBD on Canada-United States Military Cooperation," in *NARA Files*, RG 218, Entry 943011, Box 018, File CCS 092 (9-10-45), Section 4.

<sup>56</sup> "Memorandum for Major General Lauris Norstad, Plans and Operations Division from General Guy Henry on the Air Annex and Joint Security Plan, 25 November 1946," in *NARA File*, RG 59, State Department Files, PJBD, Box 2, File Basic Papers, 1946-1947.

that “economy of force in peace time will require that air reconnaissance be combined with meteorological, photographic, transport, or any other mission moving in the areas under consideration.”<sup>57</sup> Attached was a memorandum recommending “that Project Polaris be continued in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the peacetime surveillance of northern areas.”<sup>58</sup> The Polaris project had been unilaterally changed into a reconnaissance and photographic operation.

In previous situations the American military had shown more restraint in its attempt to implement aerial photography operations over Canadian territory. In April 1946, for example, Charles Deerwester, the United States Air Member of the PJBD, had approached the Canadian Joint Staff for approval to photograph Banks, Victoria, Prince of Wales, Bathurst, Prince Patrick, and Borden Islands. Furthermore, he requested Canadian cooperation, but also inquired about the possibility of unilateral action.<sup>59</sup> The Canadian Joint Staff said there would be difficulties and chose not to give an answer, nor did they give the United States permission to act alone. The Americans accepted this and Deerwester chose “to advise the A.A.F not to proceed with the operation until they have obtained Canadian government approval.”<sup>60</sup>

By April 1947, however, the Americans had changed their attitude and decided to act unilaterally. Had the Canadians been completely negligent in their aerial reconnaissance and photography duties, perhaps the American actions would have seemed more acceptable. David Bercuson notes, however, that the RCAF was already

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<sup>57</sup> “Strategic Air Reconnaissance Appendix,” in *NARA Files*, RG 218, Entry 943011, Box 019, File CCS 092 (9-10-45), Section 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> “Memorandum for the Record by Charles Deerwester, 11 April 1946,” in *NARA Files*, RG 233, Files of International Military Agencies – PJBD, Entry 17-A, Box 1, File “Top Secret General Correspondence, 1941-1956” Folder 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

conducting aerial mapping of the arctic at a good pace.<sup>61</sup> The Department of National Defence's annual report claimed that by 31 March 1947, Canada's air force had surveyed 335,000 square km, and planned to complete 550,000 square km in the next fiscal year.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the RCAF had deployed an air reconnaissance squadron to the North and established an air photography school. Thus, unauthorized American photographic activities in the Arctic could not be attributed to RCAF neglect. The USAF was not only violating the informal political rules that had been established for the defence relationship, but were ignoring the work of their Canadian service colleagues.

On 19 November 1947, A.D.P. Heeney, the Secretary of the Cabinet, informed Andrew McNaughton that discussions between RCAF and USAF officials had revealed regular American reconnaissance flights and air photography in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.<sup>63</sup> Heeney believed that the Americans were using this photography to prepare for the weather station programme approved in the spring. Nevertheless, he was worried that the Americans would use these photographs for mapping purposes – despite official denials that the USAF intended to do so.<sup>64</sup> Heeney argued that no regular reconnaissance flights had been authorized<sup>65</sup> and, unlike General McKee, both he and the Cabinet did not believe the American activities fell under any established program. They would not stand for such a clear violation of Canada's sovereignty and rights. After months of inappropriate American activity, the Canadians decided that they could not ignore such improper conduct. The Canadians did not raise a formal inquiry

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<sup>61</sup> Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty," p. 162.

<sup>62</sup> *Report of the Department of National Defence for the Fiscal Year Ending 31 March 1947*, p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> "Secretary to the Cabinet to Chairman, Canadian Section, PJBD, 19 November 1947," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1518.

<sup>64</sup> "Secretary to the Cabinet to Chairman, Canadian Section, PJBD, 19 November 1947," p. 1519.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1519.

about the problem, however, hoping that informal discussions through the PJBD would straighten the matter out. Unlike the Americans, they chose to embrace the system that had been established in the previous year of negotiations.

McNaughton's reply to Heeney on 26 November 1947 relayed the discussions of the PJBD at its meeting a few days previous. In the meeting, McNaughton emphasized that all USAF activity in the Arctic had to be in strict accordance with a program already approved by the Canadian government.<sup>66</sup> He also demanded that the USAF turn over all photographs and other materials in its possession to the Canadian government. The United States members fully agreed with these measures but argued that "any flights which had taken place were either part of the approved Polaris project or were routine training flights which they claimed they thought had been approved in principle."<sup>67</sup> This was a clear attempt by the Americans to diffuse the situation, but their excuses were unconvincing: according to the original terms of the Polaris project, the operation had overstepped its bounds. Furthermore, as members of the PJBD they would have known that defence projects were never 'approved in principle' -- another way of saying that 'blanket approval' had been given. The Canadians had always been unwilling to grant such consent, and every project was discussed slowly and methodically.

Despite their repeated denials, McNaughton insisted that the American section investigate the matter and, true to their word, the Americans inquired about Canadian complaints. On 26 November 1947, Charles Deerwester wrote to O.P. Weyland, the American Director of Plans and Operations, about Polaris, suggesting that the Air Force

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<sup>66</sup> "Chairman, Canadian Section, PJBD to Secretary to the Cabinet, 26 November 1947," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1520.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1520.

submit an official request of all desired flights over the Canadian Archipelago so that he could gain fresh Canadian approval for them.<sup>68</sup> Although not yet admitting any fault, the Americans found that certain activities had not been approved. It was the first step towards an American admission of guilt.

Meanwhile, the Canadians had not been swayed by the American comments expressed in the last PJBD meeting. The Canadian secretary of the Board, D.M. Johnson, wrote a letter to the U.S. secretary, Andrew Foster, asserting that the Canadian section had a problem with the American conclusion that all aerial activities in the Arctic fell under the auspices of Polaris and “that no further authorization was necessary.”<sup>69</sup> Johnson explained that he and his colleagues had investigated all the Canadian records on Polaris and had decided that the project did not include flights such as those undertaken by the USAF. He also noted that “it would be most unfortunate if the Board’s Journal gave the impression that once the Canadian government had authorized a particular operation, permission to undertake a similar operation could be assumed.”<sup>70</sup> Citing the initial purpose of the Polaris project laid out by General Henry in April 1946, Johnson effectively proved that the Americans had strayed from the original agreement. Weak American assertions that U.S activities in the Arctic were proper and acceptable did not placate the Canadians. Canadian officials drew a line in the sand and made it clear that they would not give in to the Americans on this issue.

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<sup>68</sup> “Charles Deerwester to the Director Plans and Operations, Department of the Air, 26 November 1947,” in *NARA Files, Files of International Military Agencies – PJBD, Entry 17-A, Box 3, File “Top Secret General Correspondence, 1941-1956”* Folder 14.

<sup>69</sup> “Secretary, Canadian Section, PJBD to Secretary, U.S Section, PJBD, 5 December 1947,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1521.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1521.

In their investigation of the events surrounding Polaris, Johnson and his colleagues had found more evidence of American transgressions. On 3 July 1946, General Henry had stated that initial experimental flights would start by 1 August.<sup>71</sup> The flights were delayed and the Canadians had been told that they were rescheduled for early October. Johnson, however, had been given an article from the *New York Times* dated 20 October 1947, which revealed that the 46<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron had flown its first mission over the Arctic on 21 July 1946.<sup>72</sup> While the 46<sup>th</sup> operated after Canada granted permission for Polaris, these first missions were flown in advance of the dates that General Henry had given. The Canadians wanted to know if this was considered part of Polaris, or if it was a separate, completely unauthorized project. Either way, the Americans had been caught disregarding protocol and misleading the Canadians.

Two *New York Times* newspaper articles, coupled with Johnston's investigation, proved that the Americans were guilty of violating the terms of the Polaris project, of leaking publicity about the operation and of starting another project before Polaris had even begun. Worst of all, they raised the possibility that the Americans were indeed using photographs of the Arctic for mapping. On 20 October 1947, Anthony Leviero's article "All Arctic is Open to the Air Force" stated that "in the year of experimentation and research, the squadron criss-crossed the Arctic in 5000 hours and 1,000,000 miles of flight." Besides testing men and materials in the Arctic, the journalist claimed that the project had mapped many unknown regions and made many new discoveries.<sup>73</sup> Leviero's next report also hailed the activities of the 46<sup>th</sup> squadron and claimed that

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<sup>71</sup> "Secretary, Canadian Section, PJB to Secretary, U.S Section, PJB, 5 December 1947," p. 1522.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1522.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Leviero, "All Arctic is Open to the Air Force," *New York Times*, sec. A, 20 October 1947.

photos were taken to facilitate the design of new defence installations.<sup>74</sup> These violations added up to a major breach of Canada's sovereignty and rights.

The Americans had to do something to salvage the excellent defence relations that had existed before the Polaris incident came to light. On 12 December, Charles Deerwester resumed his correspondence with O.P. Weyland in an attempt to work through the problems arising from Polaris. Weyland proclaimed that the ultimate objective of the USAF training program was to train the maximum number of air crews in arctic conditions as possible, not to engage in air photography.<sup>75</sup> Air crew needed to learn how to operate in the Arctic where the effects of magnetic variation were strongest. It made sense during these flights to engage in some surveillance and check for signs of enemy infiltration.<sup>76</sup> With these assumptions as a foundation, Weyland laid out a new plan calling for two flights a week over the Arctic for "navigational training and necessary air surveillance."<sup>77</sup> Weyland stated that Canadian observers would be welcome and made no attempt to include aerial photography in the mission's mandate.

Deerwester gave Weyland's new project proposal to Andrew Foster on 19 December so that it could be presented to the Canadian section of the PJBD. The new plan was an admission of American guilt. The Americans knew they had made some mistakes and had conducted unauthorized activities in the Arctic. Rather than simply continuing to practice these activities, the American secretary offered to his Canadian counterpart what amounted to a tentative apology. Foster advised that:

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<sup>74</sup> Anthony Leviero, "Top of the World Open for a New Air Strategy," *New York Times*, sec. E, 26 October, 1947.

<sup>75</sup> "Memorandum for Charles Deerwester from O.P. Weyland on Flights of U.S. Aircraft Over Canadian Archipelago," in *NARA Files*, Files of International Military Agencies – PJBD, Entry 17-A, Box 3, File "Top Secret General Correspondence, 1941-1956" Folder 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

“In view of the doubt which has arisen concerning the precise nature of the authority granted by the Canadian Government for the ‘Polaris’ program and in view of the questions that have come up concerning certain individual flights during recent months, it seems to me that the sensible thing to do, from the point of view of both government’s, would be to adopt Colonel Deerwester’s letter...as the basis for the program in future.”<sup>78</sup>

He also ensured Johnson that he had no intention of evading the Canadian complaints about American aerial activities in the Arctic. He explained that he had “taken some pains to try and find out about these flights and the authority for them.”<sup>79</sup> Foster remarked that General Henry, the man who first presented the project to the Canadians, thought the program, as approved by the Canadian government, was “a continuing one and was of general scope.”<sup>80</sup> Foster also carefully stated that the American section of the PJBD believed that the flights were made in “good faith” and fell within the scope of the Polaris program as “interpreted by the USAF.”<sup>81</sup> Foster agreed that it was “understandable” that the Canadians should have questioned these recent flights. Nevertheless, he suggested that it was better to start fresh with the new American proposal than dwell on the Polaris project and its problems, since the Americans never considered the flights “a serious violation of the original Polaris authority.”<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Foster did state that if the Canadians did not wish to move on so quickly he would institute further inquiries with the USAF. The Americans had not formally apologized for the USAF activities, but they allowed the Canadians to decide whether it was really necessary to launch a more formal inquiry into the situation.

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<sup>78</sup> “Secretary of the American Section, PJBD, to Secretary of the Canadian Section, PJBD, 23 December 1947,” in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1523.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1523.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1523.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1523.

<sup>82</sup> “Secretary of the American Section, PJBD, to Secretary of the Canadian Section, PJBD, 23 December 1947,” p. 1524.



Andrew Foster did, however, apologize for the publicity about Polaris and aerial activities in the Arctic that had been leaked to the press in a breach of protocol. Nonetheless, he attempted to excuse the American actions, saying that the American officer responsible had acted in “good faith.”<sup>83</sup> The officer had talked to two Canadian officers attached to the Joint Staff Mission in Washington, and thought that they had cleared the release. “Subsequent investigation showed that they had not done so,” Foster explained, “but I was satisfied that we could not altogether blame the USAF officer.”<sup>84</sup> Though he presented the American responsibility for the press leak in as good a light as possible, Foster did admit that the Americans had made a mistake.

The Americans had admitted that the aerial flights of the USAF in the Arctic may have fallen outside the scope of the Polaris project and had apologized for the press release on these flights. The Canadians now deliberated on whether to press the issue and continue an inquiry into the actions of the USAF. The Americans had taken steps to correct their mistakes. Furthermore, the Canadian government had never wanted a formal inquiry into this matter; it had chosen to investigate the problems surrounding Polaris informally, using the PJBD. The correspondence concerning this incident was in line with the informal but frank discussions that had characterized the defence relationship since the war. Through these talks, much had been accomplished. The Americans listened to Canadian concerns about sovereignty and national rights. Now the Canadians could gracefully accept the American attempts to fix the situation, or they could push for a formal investigation and inquiry.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 1524.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 1524.

In a letter to Air Vice Marshal A. Morfee on 31 December 1947, David Johnson proposed that a fresh start be made by presenting the new American proposal to the Canadian government.<sup>85</sup> Morfee, the Senior Canadian Air Member on the Board, agreed and the PJBD sent off their informal recommendation to the Canadian government. As in so many other cases the military and government adopted it. A memorandum from the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Cabinet Defence Committee, issued in February 1948, approved the new American project which had nearly identical goals to the one presented by General Henry on 30 April 1946, save for the inclusion of limited surveillance duties.<sup>86</sup> Any photographs taken during the flights would immediately be made available to the Canadian government and Canadian observers were welcomed. The report of the Chiefs of Staff reinforced the need for the Americans to gain the approval of the Canadian government before it engaged in aerial activities over the Arctic, especially if they were to be on a "regular basis."<sup>87</sup> The Canadian government accepted the approval of the Chiefs of Staff, the new project began, and the Polaris incident came to an end.

The Polaris incident and its resolution had a significant impact. The Canadians decided that they needed to do more to ensure that the Americans did not overstep the bounds of their approved projects. Elements of the USAF had exceeded the parameters of Operation Polaris and engaged in aerial photography. The easiest way for the Canadians to ensure that the Americans did not do this in the future was to

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<sup>85</sup> "Secretary, Canadian Section, PJBD to Senior RCAF Member, PJBD, 31 December 1947," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 13, 1947, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1524.

<sup>86</sup> "Memorandum from Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Cabinet Defence Committee, 7 February 1947," in *Documents on Canadian External Relations* Volume 14, 1948, Department of External Affairs, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1967- ), p. 1559.

<sup>87</sup> "Memorandum from Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Cabinet Defence Committee, 7 February 1947," p. 1560.

create a situation in which such unilateral action was unnecessary. Thus, in late June 1948 the Canadian government authorized the immediate establishment of an additional RCAF photography squadron to be posted in the North.<sup>88</sup> Bercuson believes that this “was an indication of the increased urgency being felt in Ottawa to devote more resources to the North.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, this was a trend that was often apparent in Canadian defence activities in the North following the Second World War. Any increase in Canadian activity in the North was usually in reaction to the activities of the Americans or another foreign power.

The Canadians viewed the Polaris incident as a major violation of their country’s sovereignty and rights. Not only did unauthorized American activities create grave sovereignty concerns, they also reinforced fears that Canada was again losing control of its defence relationship with the United States. Seemingly minor American transgressions caused the Canadians to vividly remember their powerless position during World War II when the United States had dominated its small partner in the northern defence projects. History, however, would not be repeated. The Canadians stood their ground against the first major American transgression of the post-war years. Furthermore, while they protected their interests, the Canadians did not completely dismiss the defence needs of the United States. They confronted the Americans on the excesses of the Polaris project, but permitted the USAF to engage in a similar project after it had been properly presented to the Canadian government. Polaris was thus one of the incidents through which “Canada established the policies and procedures by which it safeguarded its interests and protected its sovereignty while still satisfying the

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<sup>88</sup> Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty,” p. 164.

<sup>89</sup> Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty,” p. 165.

defence needs of its superpower partner.”<sup>90</sup> These were formative years in the bilateral defence relationship, and the Polaris incident helped to shape and set precedents for the conduct of both nations during the Cold War.

The episode also proved the effectiveness of the PJBD as the central forum in the Canadian-American defence relationship. The controversy surrounding Polaris was not sorted out by the embassies or key Canadian diplomats, but worked out almost exclusively through the PJBD. The members of the Board were directed by their respective governments, but the discussions were carried out in the informal and non-abrasive manner that characterized Board-level negotiations. These men enjoyed a working relationship and were possibly the best informed group on defence projects during this period. On the Canadian side, McNaughton ensured that his section always defended Canada’s national interests and he was not easily deterred by American intransigence.<sup>91</sup> The American section understood Canadian needs and sensibilities and were accommodating to their demands. Andrew Foster reiterated several times that the Americans did not believe the problems with the Polaris project were very severe, but he took Canadian complaints on the issue seriously. Both sides of the PJBD operated from a position of mutual understanding and compromise, and worked out an acceptable solution. The success of the Board in resolving disputes would be proven again and again, especially in the early warning system negotiations.

Finally, the Polaris incident highlighted the respect for Canadian sovereignty that had developed at the higher levels of the American government and military. Unauthorized American activities in the Arctic were carried out by elements of the USAF

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<sup>90</sup> Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty,” p. 166.

<sup>91</sup> Conliffe, “Permanent Joint Board on Defence,” p. 157.

and were not sanctioned or protected by other members of the American defence community. When the Canadians launched their informal inquiry into the violation of Polaris' parameters, senior officials did not attempt to shut them down. Furthermore, the Air Force was made to act upon the Canadian complaints, even if they denied that their actions violated the agreement. Clearly, the American transgressions were not part of a conspiracy headed by the American government to steal the Canadian Arctic. As Lackenbauer describes, "indiscretions by lower level American officials (usually military) were always met by loud Canadian protests and were not indicative of the regard for Canadian sovereignty among high level U.S decision makers."<sup>92</sup> The American government accepted the Canadian viewpoint and forced its Air Force to fall in line.

In resolving the Polaris incident, the Canadians won a diplomatic victory and strengthened their role in the defence relationship with the United States. The controversy had represented a breach of the bilateral protocols so painstakingly constructed in 1946 and 1947, but the Canadians realized that they could not ignore this violation. Thus, they took a stand, deciding to 'go to the mat' with the Americans. Through the PJBD, a mutually satisfactory solution was worked out. This early postwar episode proves that, in the bilateral defence relationship, Canada was not a weak and compliant 'satellite,' nor was the United States a domineering overlord. Instead, informal networks and mutual accommodation of interests solidified a relationship that was built on cooperation, respect, and open dialogue.

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<sup>92</sup> Lackenbauer, "Right and Honourable," p. 162.