

Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87

KENNETH C. EYRE¹

(Received 16 July 1987; accepted in revised form 29 September 1987)

ABSTRACT. Military and strategic perceptions of the North have changed several times during the 20th century. Initially, the North was simply ignored; later — by the mid-1930s — it was perceived as a strategic barrier more formidable than either the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. During the Second World War and the Cold War, with the views of the United States in the dominance, the area was seen as an approach, initially to Europe and Asia, and later to the heartland of North America. In contemporary Canada, the North is seen as having intrinsic value and as such is deserving to be watched over, protected and, if necessary, defended.

Military forces have been involved periodically in the North since the days of the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898. The intensity and degree of this involvement has reflected the changing perceptions of the North. Military presence can be analyzed as relating to defence, protection of sovereignty and national development, although naturally many specific programs have overlapped. American involvement, starting with the United States' entry into World War II and continuing into the present, has been extensive but primarily concerned with defence.

Military activity has been a significant factor in the development of northern infrastructure both as deliberate national development programs and as the by-product of defence-related construction activities. While the military has had a considerable impact on the North, the northern fact has had surprisingly little impact upon the Canadian military. The Canadian Forces are just beginning to comprehend the unique aspects of the North and to develop policies and programs appropriate to contemporary northern realities and the assigned military responsibility to be *Custos Borealis* — Keeper of the North.

Key words: Arctic, Canada, defence, development, North, strategy, sovereignty

RÉSUMÉ. Notre conception du Nord du point de vue militaire et stratégique a souvent changée au cours du vingtième siècle. Au début du siècle, le Nord n'avait guère d'importance sur le plan militaire; plus tard — vers le milieu des années trente — on y voyait une barrière stratégique plus difficile à franchir que les deux océans. A l'époque de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, les Américains voyaient le Nord comme un pont à travers lequel on pourrait atteindre l'Europe et l'Asie. Mais plus tard, lors de la guerre froide, on craignait que les Russes n'attingent par ce même chemin le coeur de l'Amérique. Actuellement, au Canada, nous affirmons que le Nord a sa valeur intrinsèque, et qu'il doit être surveillé, protégé si nécessaire.

Les forces militaires s'engagent de temps en temps au Nord depuis l'époque de la ruée vers l'or du Klondike en 1898. L'évolution qu'a subi notre conception du Nord trouve son reflet dans l'intensité et le degré de cet engagement. La présence militaire peut s'analyser en raison de la défense, de la protection de notre souveraineté et du développement national, bien que, naturellement, beaucoup de programmes individuels se chevauchent. Le rôle des Etats-Unis au Nord, débutant lors de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale pour continuer jusqu'au présent, fut important surtout en ce qui concerne la défense.

L'engagement militaire dans le Nord canadien a beaucoup contribué au développement de cette région, par des programmes de développement national, ainsi que par ses activités de construction ne visant pas nécessairement le développement régional. Tandis que le militaire a beaucoup apporté au développement du Nord, le Nord n'a eu que très peu d'effet sur les activités du militaire. Les Forces canadiennes ne font que commencer à comprendre que le Nord présente des aspects uniques qui méritent le développement de politiques et programmes appropriés, et que le militaire doit se charger des responsabilités du *Custos Borealis* — le Gardien du Nord.

Mots clés: L'Arctique, Canada, défense, développement, le Nord, stratégie, souveraineté

ОБОБЩЕНИЕ

Военное и стратегическое понимание Севера изменилось много раз в течение двадцатого века. Сначала Север был просто незамечен; позднее — к середине 30-ых годов — он стал рассматриваться как стратегический барьер более важный чем Атлантический или Тихий океан. Во время второй мировой войны, и также во время холодной войны, под сильным влиянием взглядов Соединенных Штатов, северный ареал рассматривался как подход, сначала к Европе и Азии, потом к самой сердцевине Северной Америки. В современной Канаде, Север рассматривается как обладающий подлинной ценностью, и поэтому заслуживающий исключительного внимания и, если необходимо, защиты.

Вооруженные силы были периодически вовлечены на Севере, начиная со времен золотой лихорадки на Клондайке в 1898 году. Уровень и степень этой вовлеченности всегда отражала изменение оценки Севера. Военное присутствие может быть проанализировано в связи с проблемой безопасности, охраны суверенитета и национального развития, хотя, конечно, много специфических программ пересекались и совпадали одна с другой. Американское участие, начиная со вступления Соединенных

¹33 Acorn Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3P 1G7
©The Arctic Institute of North America

Штатов во вторую мировую войну и продолжаясь до настоящего времени, было значительно, но главным образом касалась безопасности.

Военная деятельность являлась важным фактором в развитии северной инфраструктуры одновременно как намеренные программы национального развития и как естественный результат деятельности, направленной на развитие структур оборонного значения. В то время как вооруженные силы внесли значительный вклад в развитие Севера, северный фактор возымел удивительно малое влияние на состояние канадских вооруженных сил. Канадские вооруженные силы только начинают осмысливать уникальные аспекты Севера и развивать программы и политику в соответствии с современной реальностью на Севере и со своими военными обязанностями — быть *Custos Borealis* — Стража Севера.

INTRODUCTION

The "North" to Canadians is more of an idea than a place. Starting in pre-Confederation days and extending in an unbroken thread to today, the concept of North relates to those lands and seas beyond the frontier, beyond the national transportation grid. If one can drive or take a ship or a train to a place twelve months a year, then it's not North.

There is a tendency on the part of many North Americans, including members of the defence establishment, to equate North to cold and snow. While winter is certainly the longest and most dominant of the northern seasons, spring and fall in the form of break-up and freeze-up also occur, as does a brief summer. North does not mean winter — it means isolation.

This notion is worth restating, for it is fundamental to understanding the military in the North (Eyre, 1981): *the most significant military characteristic of the Canadian North is not the climate; it is isolation!*

This paper will focus on military activity in the North over the last 40 years, in keeping with the theme of this issue of *Arctic*. In order to put these years in perspective, however, it is necessary to take a brief overview of the total historical involvement of the military in the area.

BEGINNINGS

The Canadian North has seen war only once in the period of recorded history, when during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, France and Britain struggled for mastery of a continent and the conflict occasionally spilled over into the settlements clinging precariously to the shores of Hudson Bay. Fort Prince of Wales, north of Churchill, sits remote and abandoned today, a mute testimony to those bygone years.

Military men penetrated into the North in the 19th century, not as warriors, but as explorers. They explored the upper reaches of the boreal forest and the barrens of Keewatin. The search for the Northwest Passage and the quest for the Pole intrigued Victorian era British and Americans. A by-product of the search for the lost Franklin expedition was the preliminary mapping and charting of the High North. The gazetteer of the Arctic Archipelago reads like the nominal role of the mid-Victorian Royal Navy. For the military men of Canada, however, the North remained *terra incognita* until the turn of the century.

In 1870, Canada expanded from sea to sea when British

Columbia joined the Confederation and the Hudson Bay Company tracts were added to the new dominion. Ten years later, the islands of the High Arctic were transferred to Canada by Great Britain. Canada had a literal embarrassment of territorial riches. As Prime Minister Mackenzie King was to say almost a century later, "Some countries have too much history; Canada has too much geography."

From the dawn of nationhood, the North has been "the land of tomorrow" — a region to be developed, if not today, then at some time in the future. There has never been a northern imperative in Canada.

At the start of the 20th century, no Canadian soldier had ever been into the North. Neither had any Canadian sailor, for Canada, with the longest coastline of any nation on earth, had no navy. Unlike many other nations, Canada had not elected to station soldiers on its frontiers and beyond but had raised the Mounted Police to fulfil that role. The dozens of "fort" place names that dot the Canadian North started not as military garrisons but as fur trading posts. Canada's miniscule regular army and small reserve force — the militia — thought exclusively in terms of imperial defence and the perceived American threat. The North, when it was thought of at all, was seen as a barrier more formidable than the Atlantic or the Pacific oceans.

The next half century saw sporadic involvement of the military in the North. Three themes emerged that continue into the present: defence, protection of sovereignty and national development. In the later stages, a new factor — the strategic needs of the United States — arose, with major implications to all of the above concepts. The analytic model employed in this paper uses these three themes contrasted against the often differing strategic perceptions of Canada and the United States.

Canadian soldiers first came into the North at the turn of the century when, as a quasi-police auxiliary, the Yukon Field Force deployed to Fort Selkirk and Dawson City during the Klondike gold rush. Inasmuch as their purpose was to ensure, if necessary, the rule of Canadian law, this was a clear exercise in the protection of sovereignty role that was to become so important three-quarters of a century later. Within a few years, the Yukon Field Force was gone, its presence as ephemeral as the event that caused its creation in the first place. In a way, this has become the classic pattern of military involvement in the North — activity has been sporadic and keyed to a particular set of circumstances.

After the departure of the Yukon Field Force, no soldiers appeared in the North until 1923, when communicators of the

Royal Canadian Corps of Signals opened the first stations of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System. The event is of interest for it marks the first occasion when a Canadian government turned to the military to support national development activities in the North. The radio system remained in operation throughout World War II, expanding and contracting in response to commercial and industrial development in the Yukon and the Mackenzie Valley and the needs of American-sponsored defence projects.

The Royal Canadian Air Force also came into the North in the interwar years as an agent of national development. In 1927 six aircraft were deployed into the Hudson Strait area to conduct an aerial survey in support of plans to open Churchill as an ocean shipping port. Throughout the 1930s the RCAF undertook sporadic "civil government air operations" into the North reaching the top of the continent, but never venturing out over the Arctic Archipelago.

The Royal Canadian Navy ignored the North.

In the early months after the entry of the United States into World War II, threats to the integrity of the continental United States were seen everywhere: from the Japanese via Alaska to the industrial heartland of the country via submarine-launched aircraft flying out of the lower reaches of Hudson Bay! A world power girding itself for war is an awesome thing. The Alaska Highway and the Northwest Staging Route were almost off-handedly thrown across the Mackenzie Valley and the Yukon. The Canol Pipeline was laid from the oil fields at Norman Wells to a refinery built in Whitehorse. Later, the Crimson Route saw a chain of airbases being built to provide an air bridge via the northeast to Europe. The Canadian North was used as an approach during World War II not by the Axis powers, as was initially feared, but by the United States projecting its power in the global conflict (see Dziuban, 1959; Stacey, 1970).

Since the end of World War II, there have been three surges of military interest in the North that have involved both Canada and the United States. The American interest has been almost exclusively driven by perceptions of a transpolar strategic threat posed by the Soviet Union. American-sponsored defence projects in the Canadian North have waxed and waned in harmony with changes in military technology in the nuclear age. It is virtually impossible to separate strategic threats to the United States from strategic threats to Canada. The two are inextricably interwoven — a fact recognized by the multiplicity of joint defence arrangements between the two countries.

For Canada, however, the issue is more complicated. The disparate military strengths of the two nations inevitably raises issues of Canadian sovereignty, which are acute in the North. Canada's armed forces have been required not only to defend the country from its enemies, but in some strange way, to protect its sovereignty from its friends.

THE FIRST SURGE

Northern Approaches, 1947-64

Both Canada and the United States "discovered" the polar projection map in the immediate postwar years. As the super-powers and their allies drifted into cold war, the importance of the northern approach to North America came to the fore with a vengeance. The ghastly one aircraft, one bomb, one city algebra of the nuclear age made it inevitable. No longer was the North a strategic barrier. It is significant that neither the United States

nor Canada looked on the North as a *place* to be protected because of some intrinsic value. Rather it was seen as a *direction*, as an exposed flank.

In 1947, these strategic perceptions, coupled with the emerging technology of the intercontinental manned bomber, were being considered throughout the defence communities of both nations. The initial notions were to post lines of aerial defence as far north as possible. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* written in early 1947 discussed the intention of the United States to construct a radar picket line and "interceptor rocket and fighter bases roughly along the arctic coast of Canada" (*Chicago Tribune*, 1947).

Prime Minister Mackenzie King denied this and took pains to emphasize to the Canadian public that the government was not considering major defence works in the Arctic, nor was the United States pressing for access to such facilities. Ultimately, the Americans were able to make the necessary arrangements with Denmark to build the great airbase at Thule, Greenland, in 1954. This site, coupled with the interceptor forces stationed in Alaska, satisfied American requirements. Had the Danes not been accommodating, however, the issue of a major American facility in the eastern Canadian Arctic would almost certainly have arisen (Sutherland, 1966).

The upshot of these preliminary discussions led by the late 1950s to the construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) radar line, running roughly along the top of the continental land mass. The DEW Line project is interesting in that it has woven through it the three themes of defence, sovereignty and national development.

Rather than push the first line of defence into the Far North, defence planners elected to use the North to provide strategic depth. Radar chains were used to provide early warning and to identify attack lines. Active defence facilities — interceptors and anti-aircraft missiles — were deployed in the South well within the grid of social infrastructure.

The implications of the DEW Line project to Canadian sovereignty were significant. The project was paid for and operated by the United States. The DEW Line agreement between the two countries contains several clauses relating to the protection of the ecology and the culture of the North. Many thoughtful Canadians, however, felt that Canada had ceded *de facto* control of the Arctic to the United States.

Writing in *Macleans*' magazine in 1956, Ralph Allen saw a "U.S. military base 2,500 miles long within Canada's geographical limits" (Allen, 1956:72). This issue remained politically sensitive for the remainder of the decade, leading Canada to take over operational control of the DEW Line in early 1959. The stationing of a handful of Royal Canadian Air Force personnel at the four DEW Line main sites was essentially a symbolic gesture by the Canadian Government to reduce internal political pressure. The system continued to be operated and paid for by the United States. Canada historically had been given to symbolic gestures in the North; assuming operational control of the DEW Line was within the pattern that exists to this day.

Within the domain of national development, Canada fell heir to the by-products of the DEW Line construction. Airfields were built, beach landing sites were developed, charts and maps were improved, aids to navigation were installed. These developments significantly improved access to what had hitherto been a virtually inaccessible area. There was some initial anticipation that a flood of mineral exploration would follow in

their wake. This notion proved to be as chimerical as Frobisher's search for gold.

For 25 years the DEW Line kept its long, lonely polar watch in the age of the ICBM and its seaborne equivalent, the SLBM. The Soviet strategic bomber fleet never developed into a significant force when compared to the other weapons systems. Technological improvements permitted the closing of the intermediate stations. While dismantling the system was contemplated on several occasions, its very existence served to prevent what came to be known as the "Soviet Free Ride" strategic option.

For the first four decades of its existence, the Royal Canadian Navy studiously ignored the seas that surround Canada's North. Until the end of World War II, no Canadian government or admiral ever found reason to dispatch any element of the fleet to far northern waters. In 1945, however, the Royal Canadian Navy was swept up in the "polar passion" that was to grip the Canadian and U.S. governments and defence establishments for about a decade.

While Canada, typically, studied its options and needs, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard sailed into the arctic seas on a series of exercises designed to increase military knowledge and operating capabilities in the region. It was not until 1948 that the RCN was ordered into northern waters. In the summer of that year, the aircraft carrier *Magnificent*, with two destroyers in company, ventured into Hudson Strait. The destroyers continued on into the bay itself, calling at Churchill.

Much was made in the Canadian press of this cruise and a similar voyage made the following year by the frigate HMCS *Swansea*. In reality, the accomplishment was minimal. None of the vessels in question was ice capable; they sailed at the height of the ice-free shipping season on sea lanes that had been established by the Hudson Bay Company for centuries. Compared to the rigours of winter patrols in the Northern Atlantic, these voyages were pleasure cruises.

In a 1948 speech, the then minister of national defence had announced Canada's intention to build an arctic patrol vessel for the RCN. Six years later, the Navy commissioned HMCS *Labrador*, a 6790-ton icebreaker modelled on the American *Wind* class icebreakers.

During its brief naval career, *Labrador* ranged far and wide throughout the Arctic, becoming the first warship ever to transit the Northwest Passage. *Labrador* was an anomaly in the anti-submarine navy. In essence, she was yet another symbolic gesture of sovereignty through presence. In the unpublished history of the ship it is written:

[1954] marked the first incursion of a Canadian naval vessel into waters which the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard might well be excused for considering *mare nostrum*. For a good many years . . . the only ships seen in the waters of the Canadian Archipelago, apart from a few government supply ships, were those flying the Stars and Stripes. In 1954 for the first time Canada had a ship patrolling her northern waters. [Department of National Defence, 1960:1.]

While Canada may have had a ship patrolling its northern waters, there was no particular imperative that the ship wear naval colours. The RCN had no operational interest in the North and cheerfully transferred the ship to the Canadian Coast Guard in 1957. Again, the Navy vanished from the North, not to reappear in any major way until the Trudeau government ordered it back in 1970.

The development of nuclear submarines in the mid-1950s

produced the quintessential arctic vessel. Rather than going through the ice — as man had been trying to do for centuries — the ultimate solution was now at hand: go under it. Through the 1960s the nuclear navies of the United States, the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, Britain challenged the Arctic Ocean (Anderson, 1959; Calvert, 1961; Steele, 1962). Canada remained a mute spectator throughout the period.

Canadian soldiers also came into the North in unprecedented numbers in the immediate postwar years. There were two thrusts to their presence: national development roles, which brought troops and their families into the territories on a residential basis; and defence-related exercises, with combat soldiers deployed north on training exercises.

The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals' role with the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System continued as it had in the past, expanding and contracting in conjunction with the modest industrial developments in the Northwest. In the Yukon the Canadian Army took over the responsibility for the maintenance of the Canadian portion of the Alaska Highway. Whitehorse, also the site of a military communications research facility and an airbase, developed into a substantial "garrison town" — a first for the North.

The other side of the coin, defence of the North, presented some interesting complexities to Canada. As the Cold War developed, soldiers also looked at the North as an approach. There were a few extremists who posited the notion of "slavic hordes" invading North America via the Yukon-Mackenzie Valley route; their voices soon vanished once the geographic realities of the concept were examined. What came to be known as the "lodgement scenario," however, refused to go away.

American-sponsored activities during the war and after had led to the series of airfields being built throughout the North. Field Marshall Alexander, the governor general, had observed to Mackenzie King that the sites had the potential to become "bases from which the enemy himself may operate, but would not operate were they not there" (Pickersgill, 1970:370). Lester Pearson held similar views. While he accepted the view that eventually commercial and military needs would dictate the requirement for the construction of northern airfields and hence a capability to defend them, he favoured delaying such development as long as possible — the "scorched ice" theory of defence.

Given the plethora of bases that had already been developed and the immensity of the area, the cost in both dollars and manpower to emplace fixed defences at all of these facilities would have been staggering. Canada elected to develop forces with the capability of recapturing a Soviet-occupied airfield in the North. This approach was in sharp contrast to the American deployment of almost a division's worth of combat troops in Alaska.

While most of the northern airfields were not sufficiently large to accept heavy bombers, a few of them were. In particular, Whitehorse, Churchill, Frobisher Bay and Goose Bay were potential targets. It must be remembered that in the late 1940s and early 1950s aviation technology, despite the tremendous strides during wartime, still had some very important limitations. There were no truly intercontinental bombers, and mid-air refuelling techniques were still to be perfected. Intercontinental missiles were a technological generation in the future.

The popular war scenario as it related to the Canadian North was that Soviet bombers would strike over the Pole at the heart of the United States. In the wake of these bombers would come

airborne troops, who would seize a number of bases in the Canadian North where the bombers could land, refuel and return to the main Soviet bases to rearm.

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Canadian troops, sometimes alone and sometimes in conjunction with their American counterparts, trained in the North. Mobility remained the principal problem to be overcome. In order to capture an objective, adequate combat power had to be concentrated in time and space. The isolation factor — the absence of a road grid — dominated training exercises, the vast majority of which were carried out in winter *when movement in the North is at its easiest*. Then, as now, there was an unfortunate tendency to equate northern operations to winter operations, a serious logical fallacy. However, significant experience base was created in the 1950s. In addition, a Supplementary Reserve group styled the Canadian Rangers was raised in communities throughout the North to provide a cadre of potential guides and observers to support military activities.

Military interest in the North peaked in the late 1950s and diminished rapidly thereafter, as the world entered the missile era. The Navy gradually stopped its northern summer cruises. Army exercises ceased. The radio system and the Alaska Highway were turned over to civil departments of government. The Canadian Rangers were left to wither on the vine. Aerial surveillance flights were curtailed. In the later part of the Diefenbaker years, Canadian defence policy was dominated by the three "Ns" of NORAD, NATO and nuclear weapons. Lester Pearson's Liberal administration during the following five years completed the process of withdrawal. By 1965, only the DEW Line stations remained (I have arbitrarily excluded discussion of the northern military communications research facilities from this study). The 1964 *White Paper on Defence* does not contain a single reference to the Canadian North.

THE SECOND SURGE

Sovereignty and Symbolism, 1970-80

The 1968 federal election returned the Liberals, now led by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, to power with a substantial majority. The Canada Trudeau was to lead was a nation with a buoyant economy and an enthusiastic sense of nationalism flowing from the centennial celebrations of the previous year. Trudeau himself had a strong sense of national priorities and led a generally supportive country into new areas of concern and in new directions. Nowhere was this more true than in the Canadian North.

Trudeau was keenly interested in northern development. *Canada's North: 1970-1980*, produced by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) (1969) was issued as the cornerstone of the government's integrated northern policy. The document posited four northern goals: the provision of a higher standard of living for northern residents, the maintenance and enhancement of the northern environment, the encouragement of economic development and the maintenance of Canadian sovereignty and security in the North. No thoughtful Canadian was likely to argue with these goals as stated. They were generally well received, but Canadians as a whole reserved final judgement until the government revealed specific programs to meet these goals. For the Department of National Defence, the last goal — maintenance of sovereignty and security — had strong overtones of possible military involvement. Even the first three goals could have been extended to

encompass military effort were the government to decide to revive the dormant nation-building role of the Canadian forces.

At the same time as the government was developing its northern policy, a major review of defence policy was initiated. Although a white paper on the subject was not issued until the summer of 1971, the prime minister had indicated as early as April 1969 that he intended major revisions in defence policy. He ranked Canadian defence priorities as the protection of sovereignty, the defence of North America, fulfilment of NATO commitments and international peacekeeping roles. In a sense, this did not represent a major departure from the previous (1964) white paper. However, it was clear that it was Trudeau's intention to change the emphasis. During the Pearson years, NATO and UN peacekeeping had received the lion's share of Canadian defence attention and resource allocation despite their second and third places in the ranking of priorities. The direct protection of Canada consisted of forces assigned to NORAD. The threat of invasion, however small, distant or short lived, was assessed as being so low as to warrant being ignored.

The notion of protection of sovereignty as a military role was the key to the Trudeau thesis. The prime minister indicated that it was his intention to reduce substantially the Canadian contribution to Western European defence in NATO. What was not immediately apparent was whether or not there was a direct link between the need to protect sovereignty and the NATO force reduction. Equally unclear were the specific nature of the role to be played by the Canadian Forces in protecting sovereignty and the extent to which the government was prepared to commit men and money to meet sovereign challenges. The underlying question, which was frequently raised in the House of Commons and in public discussion during 1968 and 1969, was just what specifically was Canada sovereign of in the North, who was challenging this sovereignty and in what ways.

Much of the public concern, which bordered on near hysteria in some cases, over northern sovereignty between 1969 and 1971 focused on the two voyages of the American supertanker *Manhattan* into the Arctic to study the feasibility of transporting crude oil from the Alaskan North Slope in icebreaking tankers operating year round through the Northwest Passage. Canada supported both voyages by providing Coast Guard icebreakers as escorts for the *Manhattan* but was clearly unhappy over the prospect of actual oil-transporting activities being developed without a Canadian input of pollution controls and safety standards. The issue centered around the status of the Northwest Passage. Canada thought of the passage as internal waters. The American view was that the passage was an international strait. Agreement between the North American allies was never reached, and to a large extent the matter remains in limbo. The imperative for resolution diminished considerably when Humble Oil abandoned the tanker project and decided, for a number of reasons, to build a trans-Alaskan pipeline to move the oil to market. Maxwell Cohen has produced probably the best short analysis on the impact of the "*Manhattan incident*" on Canadian public opinion. He wrote:

Manhattan's two voyages made Canadians feel that they were on the edge of another American "steal" of Canadian resources and "rights" which had to be dealt with at once by firm governmental action. In a sense . . . the kind of "panic" atmosphere in Canada in 1969 and 1970 on the Arctic question was unfortunate. To a large extent, it was part of the near paranoia that was infecting much of the Canadian view of its continental prospects in Canadian-American relations. [Cohen, 1971:72.]

By 1970 Canadian northern perspectives were terribly confused. The government's position was that there was no challenge to Canadian sovereignty over northern lands, either continental or archipelagic. Similarly, territorial waters and the arctic seabed were seen as being firmly within Canada's sovereignty. Certainly no nation had challenged that position in at least two generations. The only possible area where Canada could be challenged was in the matter of the commercial and peaceful use of the Northwest Passage. At the same time, Canada's Armed Forces had been given the primary mission of protecting sovereignty, with particular emphasis on the North. Yet, by the government's own admission, the only possible challenge to Canadian claims — and that in a very specific and restricted area — was mounted not by an international rival or threat, but by the United States, Canada's closest ally and major trading partner. Given this perplexing set of circumstances, it is little wonder that the Canadian public at large and the Canadian Forces in particular had some considerable difficulty in coming to grips with the role of the military in the "new North."

The 1971 White Paper on Defence, *Defence in the 70s*, stated that "defence policy must, however, also take into account the possibility that other challenges to Canada's sovereignty and independence, *mainly non-military in character* [emphasis added], may be more likely to arise during the 1970s" (Department of National Defence, 1971:8). The crux of the matter lies in the appropriateness of a military response to a non-military challenge. Implicit in the logic of *Defence in the 70s* is the signalling of the intention to use military forces in an operational role below the threshold of violence, while still retaining the option to use force in extreme situations.

Although the white paper provided few details, it stated that the main task for the forces in the protection of sovereignty would be surveillance. It was admitted, however, that such surveillance would of necessity be extremely limited. Operations by existing long-range patrol aircraft, configured as they were for anti-submarine warfare, were limited by light and weather and the absence of suitable northern airfields. Surveillance by the ships of Maritime Command was limited to the few ice-free months of the year, and then only in certain waters. Ground surveillance by soldiers was seen as simply impracticable because of the huge size of the area involved.

The implication here was of great significance to the Canadian Forces. While Canadian force levels in Europe were being halved, the withdrawn troops were not to be committed to the protection of sovereignty; the forces were to be reduced. Similarly, the new role, it was implied, would have to be fulfilled with equipment and facilities then in the Forces' inventory. No new "northern-sovereignty" equipment was to be obtained, such as special reconnaissance aircraft or surveillance equipment for existing aircraft for the Air Force; no ice-capable or under-ice ships for the Navy; no all-terrain vehicles for the Army.

In summary of the sovereign threats to Canada's North, the prime minister said:

There is not now, nor is it conceivable that there ever will be from any source, challenges to Canadian Sovereignty on the mainland, in the islands, in the minerals lying in the continental shelf below the Arctic waters, or in our territorial seas. [Debates, House of Commons, 1970:2713.]

In the government's view, while protection of sovereignty was the first military priority, the threat to that sovereignty was

minimal and, under existing conditions, did not warrant a major commitment of men, resources and money. To protect sovereignty in the North, the government adopted a policy strikingly analogous to the situation that existed in Canada at the time of the 1922 Eastern Arctic Expedition. In the 1920s, Canada established sovereignty in the Arctic with a symbolic presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In the 1970s, Canada prepared to protect that same sovereignty with a symbolic presence of the Canadian Armed Forces.

In a simplistic manner, presence was equated to protection of sovereignty. To this end, a number of programs and projects were initiated, some of them quite innovative in their approach. Land, air and sea components of the Armed Forces were all involved in this return to the North. With a few notable exceptions, however, the number of Canadian troops stationed permanently in the North was not increased. The Department of National Defence argued that "it is felt that our operational units can most economically and effectively be stationed at southern bases and moved to the North when required for a particular operation" (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970:94).

In 1970 Maritime Command sent its ships into northern waters for the first time since 1962 "to provide a tangible presence in the Canadian North" (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970:94). In addition to NORPLOY, as the naval northern deployments have come to be called, Maritime Command also began to take its first tentative steps in regaining expertise in ice-filled waters. Not having an icebreaker of its own, the Navy made arrangements to have several officers, cadets and ratings attached to icebreakers of the Canadian Coast Guard for "arctic indoctrination."

Maritime Command's patrol aircraft were even more involved in northern operations, for theirs was a year-round task. On the average, four long-range surveillance patrols were undertaken each month by aircraft flying out of bases in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia, while the smaller Tracker aircraft accounted for an additional 300 hours along the coasts of northern Quebec and Baffin Island.

Mobile Command (the "army" of the Canadian Forces) initiated a continuing series of arctic indoctrination patrols in April of the same year. Named Exercise New Viking, the project took Canadian combat soldiers to places in the North where troops had never exercised before. The headquarters for the project was permanently established at Churchill in facilities loaned to DND by the Department of Public Works. A small staff of instructors handled a new group of candidates every two weeks on a year-round basis.

In addition to the New Viking program, Mobile Command repeatedly exercised the newly formed Canadian Airborne Regiment in parachute assault exercises in the North. In quick succession the regiment dropped at Coral Harbour, Inuvik, Watson Lake and in Alaska in a joint Canadian-American exercise. While the New Viking program emphasized arctic indoctrination, the Airborne Regiment clearly was developing and practising combat techniques in the North. Should the "unthinkable" ever happen and Canadian troops be obliged to fight to regain northern territory, the isolation of the area made it inevitable that any operation would have to begin with the establishment of an airhead: hence the origins and training of the Airborne Regiment.

During 1971 and the early winter of 1972 the extent of military presence continued to grow, the programs of 1970

being continued and expanded. Argus aircraft flew 43 missions during the year for a total of over 2000 flying hours. In August three ships from Maritime Command cruised and showed the flag in Davis and Hudson straits. New Viking serials continued; at year's end, over 2200 troops had received arctic indoctrination. Mobile Command exercises saw the entire Airborne Regiment dropping at Resolute Bay in December. A few months later, a major exercise (by Canadian standards) was attempted at Frobisher Bay. In all, over 1500 troops were deployed into the Eastern Arctic. In subsequent years, the same pattern continued. The Air Force flew its periodic surveillance missions with the ancient Argus aircraft. An operational support ship of the Navy cruised in northern waters during ice-free months, and the Army continued to exercise sub-units and the Canadian Airborne Regiment in both summer and winter throughout the North.

It is evident that the vast majority of those military forces that were providing a presence in the North were transients. The operational units of the sea, land and air element that periodically exercised in the North were not exclusively concerned with the area. In point of fact, all these southern-based units were multitasked and the northern commitment formed only a relatively small part of their operational role. In this respect, Canada maintained its traditional posture of using multipurpose units based in southern Canada to perform specific northern-related tasks of relatively short duration. Those few military elements stationed permanently in the North were "in the North," not "of the North." The Supplementary Radio System stations at Inuvik and Alert were primarily concerned with communications research. The DEW Line main sites were primarily concerned with continental air defence.

While the Department of National Defence continued in its time-honoured pattern with respect to the employment of operational forces in the North, a significant departure from tradition was signalled by the formation of a headquarters specifically devoted to the coordination of military activities in the North.

By 1975 the Canadian Forces had re-established themselves in the North to an unprecedented degree. While there were fewer troops permanently stationed in the region than there had been in the late 1950s, Canadian servicemen from all three services were continually being exposed to the northern environment. The establishment of a Northern Region in the Forces' organization underlined the fact that, for the first time, the Department of National Defence was prepared to admit that the North had an intrinsic value to the country as a whole and that a military presence was required in the area. The Canadian Forces recognized and accepted the uniqueness of the North, which is the first step in understanding the area. Within the limits imposed by available equipment and funding, they learned how to live and to a limited extent operate "north of 60" and found the challenge of doing so an interesting one.

The national interest in the North did not remain unabated. Other issues caught political attention — constitutional reform and economic policies. The symbolic presence maintained by various elements of the Canadian Forces had begun to slacken by the beginning of the 1980s. Faced with reduced budgets, an aging inventory of equipment and a multiplicity of missions, Canada's military leaders cut where they could. One of the areas to suffer was the North. The North, the land of tomorrow, could wait.

THE THIRD SURGE

The Land of Tomorrow, 1987 and Beyond

Challenge and Commitment, the 1987 White Paper on Defence, when viewed from a "northern" perspective is a striking document: it contains not one but three polar projection maps to illustrate various defence-related realities and perceptions. Clearly, the Canadian North is about to receive another pulse.

Defence and protection of sovereignty remain the predominant themes. The northern approach will remain guarded. The updating of the DEW Line, now styled the North Warning System, is most easily understood in terms of the Reagan administration's concern with defence matters and the advent of aircraft-launched cruise missile technology. Again, the strategic defence of North America cannot be divided into specific threats to the northern nations.

The decision to build forward-operating bases for CF18 interceptor aircraft at five locations north of 60 at first glance appears related more to the now traditional sovereignty-presence concept than to defence needs. The sheer size of the area, the relative paucity of actual aircraft, the tremendous support infrastructure modern fighters require and the vulnerability of the sites to a "corridor clearing" pre-emptive strike lead one to question the tactical validity of the program. Symbolically, however, it is important for a nation to be able to project its air power over its entire territory.

The most controversial aspect of the white paper is the decision to acquire a fleet of nuclear submarines in order to permit Canada to project sea power on three oceans. The repeated emphasis on three oceans has led many casual observers to assume that the main reason for acquiring the nuclear fleet is to patrol the Arctic Ocean. It is most unlikely that this will be the main operating area of the vessels. Having them, however, provides Canada with a significant range of options not previously available.

The white paper also acknowledges the requirement for land forces to be able to operate in the North. The notion of the coupling of the Airborne Regiment to provide access and new air portable reserve brigades to provide response is partially developed. What remains to be seen is if the government has the resolution to acquire the technology and techniques to support tactical movement *within* the North as opposed to strategic movement *into* the North. The lodgement scenario still remains, now cloaked in the mantle of a diversion. Given the Canadian commitment to deploy the majority of its land forces to Europe in time of crisis, it is important that the country have the capability to handle hostile incursions within its own territory at the same time.

The white paper also expresses the intent to strengthen the Canadian Rangers and to build a northern training center. These same projects were mooted in the 1971 white paper. Old northern hands must be permitted to be skeptical and adopt an "I'll believe it when I see it" attitude.

The protection of sovereignty role as discussed within the white paper clearly has a focus on the North. Within the section on sovereignty, the concept of "the military role in sovereignty is that of the ultimate coercive force available. . . ." (Department of National Defence, 1987:24). The analysis then goes

on to note that monitoring or surveillance in itself is inadequate and that "to exercise effective control, there must also be a capability to respond with force against incursions." Here abstract concepts come up against hard political and economic realities. Sovereignty violations within the context of the white paper are only likely to be mounted by public (or private) elements of the United States. One must seriously question whether or not in these circumstances the threat of military force has any credibility whatsoever — in the air, on the land, on the seas or under the seas. Many would say it does not. Perhaps the ultimate symbol and tool of Canadian sovereignty in the North remains the same as it has throughout this century: a constable of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police armed with nothing more than an arrest warrant.

CONCLUSION

Isolation perhaps best explains why there has in reality been such little change in the overall pattern of military activity in the North during the period covered in this article. The sheer size of the area coupled with the absence of a road/rail grid and the ice-covered seas creates isolation. Isolation compounds the difficulties attendant upon any military activity.

The complex intertwining of Canadian and American interests in the North has been frequently mentioned here. It is important, however, to distinguish between the fundamental differences of perception of the two North American allies. The United States has traditionally, now and in the foreseeable future thought of "north" as a direction of strategic approach. Canada, on the other hand, has historically viewed the North as a place that, however remote and unknown, is still an inherent part of the nation.

Canada has in the past accommodated the strategic northern perceptions of the United States and has permitted access and development as well as providing a modicum of financial and/or physical support. Only a major change in defence policy is likely to interrupt that pattern, although concepts currently being espoused by the New Democratic Party would appear to advocate just such a change.

Canadian military concern with the North remains firmly anchored in the concept of protection of sovereignty — usually translated as presence. That this presence is often created to offset some American enterprise is almost fundamental to the Canadian way of thinking. Throughout the century Canadian statesmen, politicians and soldiers, to the degree that they were concerned with military activity in the North, were focused on the implicit threat to sovereignty by the American presence. The North is likely to remain an uneasy aspect of the defence alliance.

Activities in the North undertaken by the military for the specific purpose of national development are probably things of the past. The civilian infrastructure now exists to build and operate the type of facilities originally pioneered by the military. National development "spinoffs" from defence-related activities will continue to occur. To the degree that development, as equated to the "southern" way of life, is seen as a positive force, the North will continue to benefit from these enterprises. The negative aspect of these spinoffs is the counter-productive impacts they may have on traditional lifestyles and the ecology of the area.

As the Canadian military gears for yet another spate of activity in the North — the third in the 40 years covered by this paper — one fact remains, the image created by Captain W.F. Butler over a century ago when travelling in what was then "the North" still holds true: the North remains "the great lone land."

REFERENCES

- ALLEN, R. 1956. Will Dewline cost Canada its northland? *Maclean's* 26 May 1956:72.
- ANDERSON, W.R. 1959. *Nautilus 90 North*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- CALVERT, J. 1961. *Surface at the Pole*. London: Hutchison & Co.
- CHICAGO TRIBUNE. 1947. Editorial. 19 January.
- COHEN, M. 1971. The Arctic and the National Interest. *International Journal: Canadian Institute of International Affairs* 26(1):72.
- DEBATES, HOUSE OF COMMONS, CANADA. 1970. Mitchell Sharp, on 20 January 1970, quoting from a speech by Prime Minister Trudeau delivered 24 October 1969. P. 2713.
- DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT, CANADA. 1969. *Canada's North: 1970-1980*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- . 1970. *Government Activities in the North*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer. P. 94.
- DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE, CANADA. 1960. *History of HMCS Labrador*. Unpubl. ms. Ottawa: Naval Historical Section. P. 1. Available at the Department of National Defence, Directorate of History, Ottawa.
- . 1966, 1971. *White Paper(s) on Defence*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- . 1987. *Challenge and Commitment 1987*. White Paper on Defence. Ottawa: Queen's Printer. P. 24.
- DZIUBAN, S.W. 1959. *Military Relations between the United States and Canada 1939-1945*. Washington: Department of the Army.
- EYRE, K.C. 1981. *Custos Borealis, The Military in the Canadian North*. Ph.D. thesis, Department of War Studies, Kings College, University of London.
- PICKERSGILL, J.W. 1970. *The Mackenzie King Record*. Vol. 3. 1945-1946. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- STACEY, C.P. 1970. *Arms, Men and Governments, The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- STEELE, G.P. 1962. *Seadragon: Northwest under the Ice*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- SUTHERLAND, R.J. 1966. *The Strategic Significance of the Canadian Arctic*. In: MacDonald, R. St. J., ed. *The Arctic Frontier*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.