

Canada: In Service To The Pentagon And NATO At Home And Abroad

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Canada is the only nation in the world whose mainland borders three of the world's five oceans: The Arctic, The Atlantic and the Pacific.

The United States only secured access to the Arctic Ocean with the acquisition of non-contiguous Alaska from Russia in 1867 and Russia can only access the Atlantic through the Barents and Norwegian Seas.

The three oceans in question are exactly those in and over which Russia has recently resumed strategic air patrols and naval and submarine deployments starting in late 2007 after a hiatus of almost twenty years.

Should East-West tensions parallel - or exceed - those of the Cold War era Canada will be on several frontlines and is now being actively prepared for just such an eventuality.

The campaign to employ Canada as a spearhead against Russia in the Arctic and generally in furtherance of NATO's plans for the Northwest Hemisphere will have little to do with the word that has become a shibboleth for Canadian Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Liberal opposite numbers alike, sovereignty, and still less with defense.

Instead the nation's role, given its unique geographical location, will be as the West's advance guard in a geostrategic showdown in the northern latitudes.

Not that Canada's service to the United States and NATO collectively is limited to its own coasts and the oceans they abut.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary by two of the country's last three prime ministers, Liberal Jean Chretien and Tory Stephen Harper, aimed at domestic audiences and for votes in parliamentary elections, about the nation's supposed proud tradition of independence, if there has ever been a nation that never truly possessed a foreign policy of its own - particularly in respect to military conflicts - that country is Canada.

From supplying its former colonial master Britain with a disproportionate amount of troops in both world wars to following the lead of Britain and the United States in wars from Korea in 1950 to Yugoslavia in 1999 to Afghanistan at present, Canada has rarely balked at demands for political acquiescence and military complicity from its Anglo-Saxon big brothers and the NATO alliance of which it is a founding member.

If in early 2003 Ottawa refused to supply troops for the invasion of Iraq it aided that effort in other ways beforehand, including supporting NATO's deployment of Patriot missiles to

Turkey on the eve of the war, and afterward by assigning personnel to the NATO Training Mission - Iraq.

Many suspect that then prime minister Jean Chretien's government avoided potential fallout on the home front by reaching a quid pro quo with Washington whereby Canada would avoid the Iraqi quagmire by stepping into the Afghan crevice. It took over the International Security Assistance Force (which had been officially turned over to NATO) mission in the capital of Kabul in 2003 and two years later deployed over 2,000 troops to the southern province of Kandahar, Afghanistan's main battlefield from that time onward. The initial 1,950 troops Canada assigned to ISAF was the largest single contingent at the time.

Canada signed both a Faustian pact and a fool's bargain. Most all non-American troops have been pulled out of Iraq or will be soon, with the majority of the contributing nations focused on increasing deployments to Afghanistan for an expanding South Asian war, while Canadian forces have been bogged down in Afghanistan for almost seven and a half years and notwithstanding claims by Ottawa officials to have them withdrawn by 2011 may well be there indefinitely.

117 Canadian soldiers have been killed in the Afghan war, about 10 per cent of total Western military deaths, the number and ratio out of proportion to Canada's population of a little over 33 million.

The death toll is the highest the country has experienced since the Korean War (when 516 soldiers were killed) and the first combat fatalities in over half a century. The Korean War was the prototype for almost sixty years of US and NATO military campaigns fought far from North America and Europe by self-defined coalitions of the willing. Direct Western military involvement began in July of 1950, fifteen months after the formation of NATO, and Korea was the testing ground for the new alliance with, in addition to US forces, troops from NATO allies Canada, Belgium, Britain, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands participating. All seven nations lost troops, as did Greece and Turkey, themselves having just been first subjected to the sanguinary effects of the Truman Doctrine and for whom participation in the Korean War was the precondition for their induction into NATO in 1952.

The model was replicated in the post-Cold War period with the two wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, the 78-day air war against Yugoslavia in 1999 and the endless war in Afghanistan that commenced in October of 2001.

Canada contributed 4,500 troops to the first Persian Gulf War, including 2,700 stationed in the area, and ran its own national complement to the US-led Operation Desert Storm, Operation Friction.

In 1999 Ottawa, without a parliamentary resolution or declaration of war, provided eighteen warplanes for the merciless terror bombing of Yugoslavia and stationed 800 troops in neighboring Macedonia for a possible land invasion.

(It joined most of its NATO allies in recognizing Kosovo's secession from Serbia in February of last year, a detestable act of duplicity given the Canadian federal government's ruthless use of all means fair and foul to stifle the independence drive in its province of Quebec.)

With the expanding war in Afghanistan, though, Canada has returned to combat in Asia, ground operations and casualties for the first time since Korea.

Late last year it deployed six Mi-8 helicopter gunships, its first combat wing deployment, the significance of which was described by Brig.-Gen. Denis Thompson, commander of Task Force Kandahar: "Now we're not talking about an individual unit which would be the army equivalent of a battalion. This is the equivalent of committing a brigade to overseas operations. I don't think this has occurred since the Korean time (war)." (1)

At the beginning of this year with the addition of "six Chinooks, newly retrofitted with heavy machine guns...eight hefty, even more heavily-armed, Griffons to act as backup" the escalation was "Canada's biggest air force presence in a combat zone since the end of the Second World War." (2)

Attack helicopters weren't the only addition to the deadly arsenal. In the summer of 2007 Canada leased 20 Leopard tanks from Germany for the erstwhile ISAF "peacekeeping mission" in Afghanistan and signed a deal with the Netherlands to purchase 100 more.

In March of this year Canada started flying Israeli-made Heron drones capable of carrying weapons, bombs and guided missiles. The head of the Canadian Air Force, Lt.-Gen. Angus Watt, said on the occasion: "Armed UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] with air to ground weapons are a valuable capability and it's a good option to have." (3)

Drones have been used expensively by the United States over the past year not only in Afghanistan but in Northwest Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of over 500 suspected militants and Pakistani civilians. The estimated 2,800 Canadian troops in Afghanistan are stationed in Kandahar Province which borders Pakistan's Baluchistan Province. Threats of US missile attacks in Baluchistan have been sounded over the past several weeks and the prospect of Canada following up on them is more likely than not.

Military hubris has its limits: Pakistan has a population more than five times that of Canada and nuclear weapons into the bargain.

Not that dangers of that magnitude are likely to deter a government whose recently retired but then just appointed Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier, who a year earlier was in command of NATO's ISAF, referred to his intended targets in Afghanistan as "detestable murderers and scumbags" and who said of the Canadian armed forces he was in charge of: "We're not the public service of Canada. We're not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."

Afghanistan - South and Central Asia in general - is Canada's largest current military operation but hardly its only one. In fact it has forces deployed throughout what Western government officials and their policy think tanks for years have dubbed the Broader Middle East and the arc of instability - from Mauritania on the Atlantic Ocean to Kazakhstan on Russia's and China's borders - and beyond. Far beyond.

Canadian military forces are among those scheduled to be evicted from the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan shortly along with armed forces from the United States, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Denmark, Spain, France, Australia, South Korea, Italy, Turkey and Norway.

Last autumn Minister of National Defence Peter MacKay, in a news dispatch with a title containing an optimistic preposition, "After Afghanistan, Canada will still have military obligations: MacKay," was quoted as follows:

"I hope that we have elevated in the hearts and minds of people in our own country just how

important having a robust military is. That includes peacekeeping but it also includes to do the business when called upon, whether it's been in Afghanistan, or as it has been in past conflicts in Korea or Yugoslavia or in places around the world like Haiti." (4)

As with its American mentor, for the Canadian political establishment one war is never enough.

This February the Canadian frigate HMCS Winnipeg the joined the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) in the Alliance's first penetration of Southeast Asia "through areas such as the Strait of Malacca, Java and the South China sea, an area of the world that is not frequented by NATO fleets." (5)

"[T]he SNMG1, a squadron primarily of destroyers and frigates from Alliance nations, [will enter] the Indian Ocean.

"The warships provide rapid intervention capability for a broad spectrum of NATO operations. However, on this mission they'll operate outside their usual theatre of operation, which is the Mediterranean Sea and east Atlantic Ocean.

The flotilla included destroyers and frigates from Canada, Portugal, Germany, the United States, Spain and the Netherlands and its commander, Portuguese Rear Admiral Jose Domingos Pereira da Cunha, said of the mission that "We will be operating from the Red Sea to the coast of Australia." (6)

In addition to NATO's maiden voyage through the strategic Strait of Malacca, the HMCS Winnipeg's itinerary includes a "six-month deployment to the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean." (7)

NATO spokesman James Appathurai announced in March that "NATO governments - ambassadors - have approved the operational plan for the deployment of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) to conduct counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia." (8)

In early April the HMCS Winnipeg had wended its way to the Somali coast with the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 where it "ward[ed] off suspected pirates" and "dispatched its Sea King helicopter to check out several skiffs."

"Being able to perform a variety of functions for NATO in the Gulf [of Aden] is satisfying," Commander Craig Baines summarized. (9)

The Canadian military action prefigured and preceded by three days the American commando attack on a vessel off the Somali coast which resulted in the deaths of three men holding an American hostage.

Last year the HMCS Ville de Quebec deployed on Operation SEXTANT, Canada's maritime contribution to the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, "to participate with the NATO fleet in a series of naval exercises to maintain a high degree of readiness capability should SNMG1 be tasked to engage in directed operations" and completed "a very successful mission in the Mediterranean Sea with Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) and an anti-piracy escort mission in the Indian Ocean...." (10)

A year before that the Canadian HMCS Toronto joined the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 – “an integral part of the NATO Response Force (NRF), a highly ready and technologically advanced force made up of land, air, sea and Special Forces components that can be deployed quickly” – in a five-month deployment to “conduct operations in the Mediterranean and conduct an historic 12,500 nautical mile circumnavigation of Africa.”

“It is historic in the sense that it’s the first time the task group is going to circumnavigate Africa,” said Cmdr. Stephen Virgin, Toronto’s captain. (11)

When the HMCS Toronto reached Africa’s southern tip it and its fellow NATO warships engaged in exercises with the South African navy. “I don’t think it’s been done before, certainly not a combined NATO-South African exercise,” Cmdr. Virgin said.

At the same time then Defence Minister Gordon O’Connor announced that the Canadian frigate HMCS Toronto and six CF-18 aircraft would be made available to the NATO Response Force until January of 2008.

Earlier in the year Canadian Commodore Denis Rouleau, prefacing his comments with “I speak as a NATO officer,” stated, “Canada is at the top of the heap when it comes to contributions to this NATO [maritime] force.” (12)

Alleged defense of Canadian sovereignty over the past two years, then, has included dispatching warships to the Mediterranean Sea with NATO’s six and a half year long Operation Active Endeavor interdiction efforts, and on other NATO missions to the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, the Strait of Malacca, the Indonesia archipelago, the coast of Australia and along the entire perimeter of Africa.

Patrolling the world’s seas and oceans, and note that none of the deployments listed above were in the Western Hemisphere, with military vessels provided with artillery and combat helicopters for live engagements in pursuit of commercial and geopolitical objectives is the furthest thing in the world from protecting one’s borders and sovereign rights.

Policies and terminology, rationales and contrived crises can be adopted, adjusted and applied as required by imperial powers bent on intruding themselves into and gaining domination over vast tracts of the world. Canada’s integral involvement in naval operations in several seas and all five oceans may be attributed to the supposed exigency of the day, but it is a practice going back centuries and has little to do with whatever officials in Washington, Ottawa and Brussels proclaim it to be.

The US rescue operation in the Gulf of Aden this last Sunday, where Navy snipers killed three abductors of the captain of an American-Danish commercial vessel, is being celebrated in the American press and that of the West in general as a purgative, expiatory and redemptive milestone in undoing the blight of a US military helicopter shot down in the capital of Somalia sixteen years ago and a demonstration of American resolve – even the first blood rite of the new administration (though Pakistan was the location of its initial bloodletting in a zone outside of those charted by its predecessor) – is nothing unprecedented.

“There is but one language which can be held to these people, and this is terror.”

The above is not a threat by al-Qaeda or any other targeted group. It was issued by American General William Eaton in 1799 in reference to the so-called Barbary pirates of North Africa, described in a US journal four years ago as “arguably the first international terrorists the United States ever faced.” (13)

In 1785, only nine years after the founding of the American republic, an American commercial vessel was seized in the Mediterranean Sea by what Washington labeled as pirates, in the words of the same source cited above, “initiating events that would lead to America’s first war on terrorism -the Tripolitan War of 1801.”

The same General Eaton quoted above, at the time US consul in Tripoli, recruited an armed mercenary force of “several hundred Arabs, 24 Greeks, 8 U.S. marines, and a former Army officer (who led the campaign). The force crossed 600 miles of desert to the ‘shores of Tripoli,’ as recited in the Marine Corps hymn, and captured Derna, Tripoli’s second-largest city.” (14)

If the above sounds eerily similar to current demands by US elected officials to expand anti-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden into amphibious and helicopter assaults on the Somalia mainland, it should. The model is the same.

There is nothing new in warships from North America conducting operations in off the coast of northeast Africa or in the Mediterranean. What is novel is their current scope. On October 4, 2001 NATO for the only time in its sixty year history activated its Article 5 mutual military assistance provision and one of eight measures implemented – support for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan being another – was the establishment of Operation Active Endeavor, a comprehensive naval surveillance and interdiction program continuing to this day and one that will never end until NATO itself does.

The bloc’s warships police the entire sea and control access to and from the Mediterranean at all its main choke points: The Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal and the Dardanelles Strait leading into the Atlantic Ocean, the Red Sea and the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea, respectively.

NATO ships have monitored over 100,000 ships and boarded over a hundred. As part of Operation Active Endeavor and related operations Canadian and US military vessels are active in the Mediterranean.

In February of this year Canada participated in NATO’s two week Noble Manta ’09 exercise in the Ionian Sea, the purpose of which was to “demonstrate NATO’s determination to maintain proficiency and improve interoperability in coordinated anti-submarine, anti-surface and coastal surveillance operations using a multinational force of ships, submarines and aircraft. The exercise also provided operational training in potential NATO Response Force (NRF) tasks/roles and missions, exercising the procedures for possible NRF operations....” (15)

Canada also contributes to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) operation, which after Israel’s sustained military assault on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 was expanded to include increased NATO states infantry, armor and naval deployments to secure the country’s border with Israel for the protection of the latter, patrol the border with Syria and enforce a select naval blockade of the nation’s Mediterranean coast.

A Canadian was among four soldiers killed by an Israeli air strike on a UN observation post in July of 2006.

The US has provided over \$400 million in military aid in the interim and Canada, Britain, Germany and Belgium are also instrumental in rebuilding the Lebanese armed forces as a Western proxy institution in the nation and the region.

The European Maritime Force (EUROMARFOR) that effects the blockade of Lebanon's coast has approached more than 22,000 ships and referred 240 to Lebanese authorities.

In February of this year the Danish foreign ministry announced that a two-day meeting had been held with representatives from the US, Canada, Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway "on how to prevent arms smuggling to Gaza." (16)

In March a British diplomat stated that nine NATO members, "The United States, Canada and seven European states" had agreed in a London meeting "to stop alleged weapons smuggling to the Gaza Strip by campaigns of information sharing, diplomatic pressure and interception at sea." (17)

That is, a replication of the naval blockade of Lebanon is being planned for the Gaza Strip's Mediterranean coastline, one which may be presented as a European initiative but, as noted above, as it will include Canadian and US participation will be a NATO operation in all but name.

In the middle of Israel's 22-day onslaught against Gaza early this January new Canadian Liberal Party leader and prospective future prime minister Michael Ignatieff, a "humanitarian bomber" when it came to the Balkans, stated: "Canada has to support the right of a democratic country to defend itself."

Canadian warships have also participated in US-led patrols of the Persian Gulf near Iranian waterways. The frigate HMCS Charlottetown last year deployed with a 50-ship USS Harry Truman aircraft carrier strike group for a seven month Gulf deployment.

In addition, in March it was announced that "The Canadian navy is deploying three war ships to the Persian Gulf, one of the largest single naval contributions to the war against terrorism since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001."

The three warships - the HMCS Calgary, HMCS Protecteur and HMCS Iroquois - met up with counterparts from US, Britain, France, Germany, Pakistan and the Netherlands in Task Force 150, To "run missions in the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Canadians plan to take a Sea King helicopter detachment with them." (18)

Days after Georgia launched an armed assault against South Ossetia last August 7-8, triggering a five-day war with Russia, former New Democrat and current Liberal Party Foreign Affairs critic Bob Rae urged the Conservative minority government of Stephen Harper to open a Canadian embassy in Georgia for the first time, stating:

"Russia's invasion of Georgia clearly demonstrates the strategic importance of the region. We need to make it clear, both to the countries of the region and to Russia, that we take their sovereignty and independence seriously, and that we deeply support their quest for international respect." (19)

The very next day the Russian General Staff revealed that a Canadian warship was entering the Black Sea (with US and Polish ships) for a two-week NATO deployment, as act Russia viewed as a dangerous provocation as it has deployed its own warships off the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia, north of Georgia.

Prime Minister Harper, whose government had pushed Georgia's and Ukraine's full NATO membership at the Alliance's summit in Romania earlier in the year, was in accordance with Rae:

"I think if we had taken a stronger position on the membership of (Georgia and the Ukraine), we would not have had the Russian aggression. I think that showing weakness or hesitation encourages this type of behaviour on the part of Russia." (20)

Slightly afterward Foreign Affairs Minister David Emerson said "the government views the recent actions of Russia in Georgia and in the Far North 'with great concern,' and this is helping drive the Conservatives' Arctic strategy." (21)

In October of last year Canadian military personnel participated in the annual NATO Cooperative Longbow/Lancer-2008 South Caucasus exercises, held in Armenia in 2008.

The yearly exercises aim at building up NATO presence in the Caucasus and integrating the militaries of former Warsaw Pact, Soviet and Yugoslav nations as well as Persian Gulf state and Gulf Cooperation Council/Istanbul Cooperation Initiative member the United Arab Emirates. In addition to Canada, nations involved were the US, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Greece, Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Albania, the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Bosnia.

On May 6 of this year the Cooperative Longbow 09/Cooperative Lancer 09 exercises will be held in Georgia, will again include Canadian forces and will last for almost four weeks. Today the Russian foreign minister and other officials condemned the exercises as a provocation and urged they be cancelled.

In a press report of early October of last year titled "NATO chief seeks defence plan for allies near Russia," NATO Supreme Allied Commander US General John Craddock, speaking after what was characterized as "Russia's invasion of Georgia," affirmed "The foundation of the NATO alliance is a collective defence promise known as Article 5, stating an attack on one is an attack on all. The Article 5 discussion is very much front and centre." In the same report it was noted that "U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates, with Canada and Britain, will try this week in Budapest to mediate among European allies while supporting defence planning that reaffirms the Article 5 pledge." (22)

Article 5 is not only a mutual defense but a potential war clause.

In November the Canadian military attache to Georgia, Colonel S. R. Lescoutre, "visited the Ministry of Defence and the Joint Staff of Georgia" and "expressed the readiness of the Canadian side for further close collaboration in providing military training for Georgian military servicemen." (23)

Employing the Caucasus conflict of late last summer as pretext, the Pentagon and NATO brandished its Article 5 - a dangerous remnant of the Cold War's prospect of armed conflict in and the possible nuclear destruction of Europe - to accelerate already existing plans in

the Northwest Hemisphere.

Following up on last September's 2008 Northern Viking NATO exercise in Iceland staged to "reinforce the resolve of the U.S. and its NATO partners in assisting in the defense of Iceland" (24) - although Iceland is geographically isolated in the North Atlantic and not threatened by any nation - with US, Canadian, Danish and Norwegian air and naval forces, it was announced this February that "NATO members Denmark, Spain and the US will be deploying fighter planes to Iceland. Germany and the US have confirmed that they will deploy aircraft in 2010. Other countries that have shown an interest in taking part in air patrols include Canada, Italy and Poland." (25)

During the January 23, 2006 Canadian federal elections since Conservative Party leader and new Prime Minister Stephen Harper made repeated demagogic vows to defend Canada's Arctic claims and in particular to maintain exclusive control of the Northwest Passage which connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Canadian Arctic region.

The unavoidable implication - on the surface - is that Harper was pledging to prevent the transformation of the Northwest Passage into a recognized international territory, the US position. As the American ambassador to Canada in 2006, David Wilkins, stated, "the U.S. position has not changed and the passage is international territory as far as the Bush administration is concerned." (26)

The image that Harper was projecting - or rather the pose he was adopting - was, much like Jean Chretien in 2003, demonstrating that he was no neutered foreign policy poodle like Britain's Tony Blair but a virile husky able to pull its own weight and mark its territory. In fact he was already planning to prove himself a docile lapdog loyal unto death to his masters: The United Kingdom residually, the United States primarily and NATO for a sixth decade.

The above-quoted statement by the US ambassador, reflective as it was of the greatest threat to Canadian territorial claims and integrity since the pre-independence invasion of its land by the US in 1812, didn't appear to have fazed Harper overly much.

Harper's wasn't, and isn't, concerned about Canada's territorial claims; he's been enlisted to challenge Russia's.

He didn't waste any time in fulfilling his true pledge, the expansion of Canada's military into its northern frontier and into contested waters.

In his second year in office Harper "announced plans to build a new army training centre in the Far North at Resolute Bay and to outfit a deep-water port for both military and civilian use at the northern tip of Baffin Island.

His trip to the Arctic earlier this month was accompanied by the biggest military exercise in the region in years, with 600 soldiers, sailors and air crew participating." (27)

By this time anyone who had gained the impression that Harper's jingoistic fulminations were in any manner directed at his neighbor to the south should have been disabused of that illusion.

The Financial Times reported that "a past land dispute over 12,000 sq km of seabed elsewhere in the Beaufort Sea is being put aside in the name of defending against Russia's

Arctic claims, which clash with those of the US, Canada, Denmark and Norway.” (28)

Shortly after the Caucasus war had ended, while a Canadian warship was only miles away from Abkhazia’s and Russia’s Black Sea borders, Ottawa conducted a week-long military “sovereignty exercise” in the Arctic, a full spectrum affair including “In addition to the army, navy and air force, several federal agencies and departments are participating, including the Coast Guard, RCMP, CSIS, Canada Border Services Agency, Transport Canada and Health Canada.

“Military officials say this year’s exercise involves the most number of departments and agencies ever.”

Invoking recent events in Georgia - half the world away - Defence Minister Peter MacKay “made it clear that asserting Canada’s Arctic sovereignty, and sending a message to circumpolar neighbours such as Russia, is also a key objective of the exercise.”

Harper a week before “accused Russia of reverting to a ‘Soviet-era mentality’....” (29)

Later the same month, August of last year, both Harper and MacKay visited the Northwest Territories to inspect “four CF18 Canadian military jets sent to Inuvik in response to what officials said was an unidentified aircraft that had neared Canadian air space.” (30)

Two weeks later defense chief MacKay outdid himself with swagger and braggadocio in stating, “When we see a Russian Bear [Tupolev Tu-95] approaching Canadian air space, we meet them with an F-18.” (31)

The F-18 is an American multirole fighter jet.

He would never dared to issue such a blunt statement unless, to employ the street vernacular (or underworld argot) appropriate to the circumstances, he could count upon a bully with enough muscle to back him up.

In a further indication of who Canada was not “defending its sovereignty” against, days after MacKay’s comment his ministry launched “Operation NANOOK 2008, a sovereignty operation in Canada’s eastern Arctic. Not only that, but Harper also voiced support for plans to build a military port and a military base beyond the Polar Circle.”

The same reports adds, “The United States has joined the race, too, teaming up with Canada to map the unexplored Arctic sea floor.” (32)

Never relenting, on September 19 Stephen Harper is paraphrased in a news report with the title “Canada boosts frontier troops as Russia eyes Arctic” as saying “Canada is stepping up its military alertness along its northern frontier in response to Russia’s ‘testing’ of its boundaries and recent Arctic grab.”

Harper in his own words:

“We are concerned about not just Russia’s claims through the international process, but Russia’s testing of Canadian airspace and other indications...(of) some desire to work outside of the international framework. That is obviously why we are taking a range of measures, including military measures, to strengthen our sovereignty in the North.” (33)

In a December story with the headline “Tory bid to bolster Arctic presence must get ‘back on track’: MacKay,” Canada’s Minister of National Defence “singled out possible naval encroachments from Russia and China, saying, ‘We have to be diligent.’” (34)

On January 12, 2009 the outgoing Bush White House issued National Security Presidential Directive 66, the first section of which reads:

“The United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests. These interests include such matters as missile defense and early warning; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight.”

The fifth point is just as stark and unequivocal:

“Freedom of the seas is a top national priority. The Northwest Passage is a strait used for international navigation, and the Northern Sea Route includes straits used for international navigation; the regime of transit passage applies to passage through those straits. Preserving the rights and duties relating to navigation and overflight in the Arctic region supports our ability to exercise these rights throughout the world, including through strategic straits.”

Ottawa was, predictably enough, mum.

On January 28-29 NATO held a euphemistically named Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North in the capital of Iceland, attended by “the Secretary General of NATO, its two top military commanders and the Chairman of the Military Committee ‘as well as many other decision-makers and experts from Allied countries.’” (35)

NATO chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer’s address included the reminder that “At our Summit in Bucharest last year, we agreed a number of guiding principles for NATO’s role in energy security....NATO provides a forum where four of the Arctic coastal states can inform, discuss, and share, any concerns that they may have. And this leads me directly onto the next issue, which is military activity in the region.

“Clearly, the High North is a region that is of strategic interest to the Alliance.” (36)

The four states Scheffer alluded to are Canada, the United States, Denmark and Norway, frequently described as being in competition regarding Arctic claims but all subsumed under the NATO banner.

The four countries are partners in any number of projects from the NATO global SeaSparrow naval missile system to the war in Afghanistan.

The four also share air surveillance and defense facilities in the North Atlantic, Denmark through its Greenland island possession, and Norway is already tied into the US European missile shield project and according to Air Force Gen. Victor Renuart Jr., head of both the North American Aerospace Defense Command and the U.S. Northern Command “We are in discussions with the MDA [Missile Defense Agency] on alternatives if the discussions in Europe do not continue,” and the FTG-05 – Ground-based Midcourse [Missile] Defense-05 – “involve[s] both operational commands, Norad and NorthCom, and ‘operationally sound

execution," he added. (37)

NORTHCOM is the United States Northern Command and NORAD is the North American Aerospace Defense Command, run jointly by the US and Canada since 1958.

This March, months after Washington proclaimed its right to use the Arctic region for missile defense and strategic sea and air systems and after NATO rallied its members in pursuit of strategic military objectives there, Russia announced plans to prepare a military force by 2020 to defend its Arctic claims.

The turn for saber rattling passed from Canadian Defense Affairs Minister MacKay to Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon, who said "Let's be perfectly clear here: Canada will not be bullied." (38)

To quote the Canadian military at some length on this April's Operation Nunavut 2009, the first of three "sovereignty operations" scheduled in the Arctic this year:

"In keeping with the Canada First Defence Strategy, we are placing greater emphasis on our northern operations, including in the High Arctic. This operation underscores the value of the Canadian Rangers, our eyes and ears in the North, which at the direction of the Government are growing to 5,000 in strength."

"In addition to air and ground patrols, this operation calls on a range of supporting military capabilities-communications, intelligence, mapping, and satellite imaging.

"[T]his year's operation will involve an exchange visit with the Commander of Greenland Command, Danish Rear-Admiral Henrik Kudsk, to discuss military collaboration in the North.

"The North represents 40 per cent of Canada's land mass and is Canada Command's single biggest region," said Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden, Commander of Canada Command.

"This operation is a golden opportunity to expand our capabilities to operate in Canada's Arctic," said Brigadier-General David Millar, the Commander of Joint Task Force North." (39)

As Operation Nunavut 2009 was underway, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hosted a joint Arctic-Antarctic summit in Washington while Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Cannon was also in Washington "giving a speech about Canada's Arctic strategy amid rising tensions with Russia over its northern military ambitions.

"A Canadian research aircraft is expected to fly over 90 North this month as part of a joint Canada-Denmark mission to strengthen the countries' claims over the potentially oil-rich Lomonosov Ridge." (40)

The Lomonosov Ridge is named after the 18th century Russian scientist Mikhail Lomonosov, which should provide some indication even to US and Canadian government officials as to who first charted and claimed it.

A few days ago Canadian Colonel Greg MacCallum, commander of 37 Brigade Group, in claiming that "should an incident occur in the Arctic...soldiers would be available to respond," was quoted as saying:

“Over the course of the next five years, this capability is going to build right across the country....You do that, at least in part, by being able to project military forces into that region to show a presence and to show a capability and intent to exercise ownership of it.

“[W]ith Afghanistan deployments and the Arctic announcement, reservists are being given chances to apply their talents....’That gives the local unit that extra exciting reason to exist. Basically, before you were at the base training for a war in northwest Europe and kind of going through the motions. But this is something useful, something you can reach out and grasp.” (41)

A sentiment echoed by Canada’s opposition party: “Liberals meeting in Vancouver this month will debate a tough Arctic policy that calls on the government to ‘actively and aggressively’ enforce Canada’s sovereignty in the North, including expanding its military role.” (42)

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In the months before the US-led invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 the cruder type of American war hawk and chauvinist reviled and condemned Canada for its perceived lack of loyalty.

These critics were rank ingrates. The US – and NATO – have never had more blindly, stubbornly obedient allies than Canada’s ruling and governing elites.

Notes

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- (2) Canadian Television, January 10, 2009
- (3) Canwest News Service, March 5, 2009
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- (5) Victoria News, January 30, 2009
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- (8) Xinhua News Agency, March 11, 2009
- (9) Canadian Press, April 6, 2009
- (10) NATO International, December 12, 2008
- (11) Chronicle Herald, July 21, 2007
- (12) The Chronicle Herald, January 27, 2007
- (13) Military Review, November-December, 2005
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- (22) Reuters, October 6, 2008
- (23) Georgia Ministry of Defence, November 3, 2008
- (24) United States Air Forces in Europe, September 4, 2008
- (25) EUobserver, February 9, 2009
- (26) Canadian Press, November 1, 2006
- (27) Canadian Press, August 19, 2007

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- (29) Canwest News Service, August 19, 2008
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- (34) Canwest News Service, December 15, 2008
- (35) NATO International, January 29, 2009
- (36) Ibid
- (37) Aviation Week, December 17, 2008
- (38) Globe and Mail, March 27, 2009
- (39) Department of National Defence, Canada Command, April 2, 2009
- (40) Canwest News Service, April 5, 2009
- (41) Daily Gleaner, April 11, 2009
- (42) Edmonton Sun, April 13, 2009

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