

Future U.S.-Canada Joint Arctic Security and Control

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Global Research, July 01, 2010

[Online Journal](#) 1 July 2010

Region: [Canada](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD](#)

The Arctic has been the subject of dispute between Canada, Denmark, the U.S., Russia and Norway with each country taking steps to expand their scientific research and military presence. Its vast untapped oil, natural gas and mineral resources represent a tremendous economic potential, but control of the region is also important from a strategic standpoint. Increased cooperation and military integration could be used to further secure interests in the area.

Canada and Denmark recently signed an agreement which will promote defence and security collaboration in the Arctic. In August, Canadian Forces' operations in the far North will include Danish and American participation. There are also calls for U.S.-Canada joint security of North America's Arctic waters and skies.

Canada continues to assert its military presence in its northernmost boundaries. [Operation Nunaliut](#) which ran in the Arctic from April 6-26, is one of three sovereignty exercises conducted each year by Canadian Forces (CF). This year's joint maneuvers included, "the first landing and takeoff of an Air Force CC-177 Globemaster III aircraft at CFS Alert, from a gravel and ice covered airfield and the first CF dive in the high Arctic, which was the longest sustained ice dive operation in CF history. In addition, the Arctic Response Company Group conducted concurrent training with the Canadian Rangers for the first time in the Arctic, while a team of nine Regular and Reserve Force Signallers tested a new series of Iridium, high frequency and satellite communication systems." As part of ongoing efforts by Canada-Denmark to strengthen diplomatic and security relations in the Arctic, the operation featured, "combined training with the Danish military's SIRIUS Dog Sledge patrol." An [agreement](#) reached between Russia and Norway over the long-disputed area in the Barents Sea has also prompted Canada to take steps to [resolve](#) conflicting Arctic offshore boundary claims with Denmark and the United States.

In May, Canada and Denmark signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) that will deepen defence and security cooperation in the Arctic, "through enhanced consultation, information exchange, visits, and exercises." The annual joint Canadian Forces [Operation Nanook](#) will take place in the high Arctic from August 6-28. It is significant as it will include ships from the Danish and American navies, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard.

Canada also recently [announced](#) measures designed to further protect and defend its northern sovereignty. "Beginning July 1, the Government of Canada is requiring that foreign and domestic vessels of a certain size report to the Canadian Coast Guard if travelling through Canada's Arctic waters. This new mandatory requirement will ensure vessels report information such as identity, position and destination to the Canadian Coast Guard." There has been much contention over the Northwest Passage. Canada maintains that it is an

internal waterway and thus falls under its control, but the U.S. argues that it is an international strait. There are calls for the U.S and Canada to essentially suspend their disagreement over the northern sea route and assume joint continental management and security of the Arctic.

A new report, titled [Open Canada: A Global Positioning Strategy for a Networked Age](#), put out by the Canadian International Council, contains a section on Arctic issues. One of its key proposals is that, “Canada share responsibility with the U.S. for control of North America’s Arctic waters and skies through an expanded NORAD. This extends to search-and-rescue as well as joint monitoring, air patrols and icebreaker operations.” The policy paper emphasizes, “Canada has a responsibility to beef up its security capabilities in the Arctic, but it is not going to win an arms race, if it comes to that.” It also admits, “closer Canada-U.S. security cooperation in the Arctic could place strains on other members of the Arctic Council. But a bilateral security arrangement between well-established defence partners in their sector of the Arctic is justifiable. It serves our national interest in the North and deepens our relationship with the U.S. and will ultimately be accepted by the others.” Not only does this threaten Canadian sovereignty and expand military integration with the U.S., but it encourages the further militarization of the Arctic.

A recent editorial from the [Globe and Mail](#) warns that, “Inviting the United States to assume responsibility for patrolling Canada’s Arctic waters, as a new report from the Canadian International Council proposes, is a bit like inviting a fox to guard the henhouse.” It goes on to say the recommendation, “is really a call for the U.S. to assume responsibility for the security of Canada’s Arctic, since the might of the superpower would inevitably relegate Canada to the status of junior partner when it tried asserting its sovereignty.” Anyone who doubts U.S. intentions in the Arctic need not look any further than [National Security Directives](#) established under President George W. Bush. It acknowledges that, “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.” Further control of the Arctic is important from a geopolitical, economic, and military standpoint.

In the last number of years, Russia has asserted itself in the high Arctic by sending bomber patrols, as well as warships and submarines into the region. At times, Russian and Canadian rhetoric in regards to Arctic sovereignty, has been reminiscent of the Cold War era. Increasing diplomatic efforts is the key to building the foundation for more multilateral cooperation in the area. Unfortunately, it appears as if the military build-up of the far North will continue. Canada has taken on the role of an Arctic power, but with the assurance of U.S. and NATO support. Enhanced security collaboration between U.S-Canada and other northern allies is an essential part of America’s Arctic strategy. Military expansion could limit attempts by other nations to gain more influence in the region. The scramble for resources and the further militarization of the Arctic make it a potential flashpoint for conflict.

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