

Loose Cannon And Nuclear Submarines: West Prepares For Arctic Warfare

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That Canada has advanced to the front rank of Western nations confronting and challenging a disproportionately stronger Russia in the Arctic strongly suggests that it has been put up to the task. Being a smaller and weaker nation allows it to be cast in the role of a sympathetic victim of "Russian aggression," much like Estonia two years ago with alleged cyber attacks and Georgia last year after its invasion of South Ossetia. Leading Western elected officials were champing at the bit to activate NATO's Article 5 in the last two cases (even though Georgia is not yet a full member of the bloc), and Canada could provide a casus belli impossible to resist.

This year is ending as it began, with heightened U.S. interest in the Arctic Ocean. For energy, transportation and military purposes. Especially the third.

An American website has scanned and posted a 36-page document released by the U.S. Department of the Navy on November 10, 2009 called Navy Arctic Roadmap [1]

The paper states that "The primary policy guidance statements influencing this roadmap are the National Security Presidential Directive 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25 (NSPD 66/HSPD 25) and the Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (CS21)." [2] The second policy document was issued by the U.S. Navy on October of 2007 and the first, the National Security Directive, was written on January 9 of this year. A previous article in this series examined the second in detail shortly after it was made public. [3]

The key components of January's National Security Directive are these, the first reproduced verbatim:

"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 document also speaks unapologetically of the intent to "Preserve the global mobility of United States military and civilian vessels and aircraft throughout the Arctic region" and

stipulates in its fourth point that “The Senate should act favorably on U.S. accession to the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea promptly, to protect and advance U.S. interests, including with respect to the Arctic. Joining will serve the national security interests of the United States, including the maritime mobility of our Armed Forces worldwide. It will secure U.S. sovereign rights over extensive marine areas, including the valuable natural resources they contain.” [4]

A Russian news source commented four days after the directive’s release as follows: “In his final days in power, President George W. Bush asserted U.S. military ‘sea power’ over the oil-rich Arctic in a fresh effort to ensure permanent American presence in the region and the deployment of missile defense facilities there.

“According to the text of a sweeping new directive on the Arctic released just eight days before Barack Obama is to be sworn in, the United States declares the territories within the Arctic Circle a zone of its strategic interests and the new Administration is advised to expand the US foothold in the Arctic.” [5]

Indeed the new American administration has here as in most every other instance proven a faithful enforcer of its predecessor’s geopolitical blueprints.

Less than three weeks after the Bush White House unveiled its new Arctic strategy, NATO held a hastily convened two-day meeting in Iceland attended by its secretary general and its top military commanders. The get-together, called a Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North, dutifully followed the American Arctic initiative and proclaimed that “the High North is going to require even more of the Alliance’s attention in the coming years.” [6]

Four of the five official Arctic claimants – the U.S., Canada, Denmark and Norway – were represented as founding members of the military bloc; Russia was not invited to send even an observer.

Another Russian news report wrote of the inescapable logic of the meeting: “NATO is seriously thinking of [establishing] military presence in the Arctic. It considers global warming and consequently an Arctic thaw as an occasion for this. NATO sees this as a possibility for its Arctic expansion.

“When taking into account the fact that all Arctic littoral nations but Russia are NATO member countries, it is quite clear who the alliance considers its rival in this region.” [7]

In the intervening months the four NATO members with longstanding territorial claims in the region – Canada, Denmark, Norway and the United States – have made military moves into the Arctic Circle in fulfillment of the Alliance’s pledge in January.

Norway has moved its Operational Command Headquarters into the Arctic and purchased 48 Lockheed F-35 fighter jets for Arctic patrols, and Denmark announced plans to establish an all-service Arctic Command, an Arctic Response Force and a military buildup at the Thule airbase in Greenland, to be shared with its NATO allies. [8]

Great Britain, Finland and Sweden have been conscripted into the common effort, the latter two nations having been surreptitiously integrated into NATO behind the backs of their peoples. [9]

But it is Canada that has been appointed the role of vanguard in the impending showdown

with Russia over the Arctic. Specifically, over the Lomonosov Ridge which runs 1,800 kilometers from Russia's New Siberian Islands through the center of the Arctic Ocean to Canada's Ellesmere Island in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. [10]

Ottawa has conducted its largest-ever military exercises, established new bases and exhibited increasing truculence and saber rattling toward Russia in the region.

Washington, although it along with Brussels is employing Canada to confront Russia at the top of the world, is not shy in asserting its own military presence and pursuing its own geostrategic objectives in the Arctic.

The Navy Arctic Roadmap - a curious choice of nouns when speaking of a part of the globe without land - as the document itself takes pains to point out, proceeds from the National Security Directive of the beginning of the year and reaffirms most of the latter's major goals.

It highlights these strategic components for the intensified application of military deployments in the Arctic region:

Strategy, policy, mission and plans

Operations and training

Investments in weapons, platforms, sensors, command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) installations, and facilities

Strategic communications and outreach

In another section of the document these are the four operations mentioned first:

Undersea Warfare

Expeditionary Warfare

Strike Warfare

Strategic Sealift

The Navy Arctic Roadmap also states that "the naval services must be prepared to prevent or limit regional conflict when required," giving particular emphasis to strategic deterrence and ballistic missile defense. [11]

A reiteration of the priorities itemized in the National Security Presidential Directive 66 ten months earlier.

What the practical implementation of this policy means is the expanded penetration of the Arctic Circle by the U.S. Navy's submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) third of the American nuclear triad, as will be examined later, and the extension of plans for a U.S.-NATO-Asian NATO worldwide interceptor missile system already being put into place near Russia's western, southern and eastern borders. U.S. and NATO radar, submarine and missile deployments in the so-called High North will complete the encirclement.

The U.S. and Britain have conducted joint submarine warfare exercises under the polar ice cap twice in the last two years, Operation Ice Exercise 2007 and Operation Ice Exercise 2009. A U.S. Navy website said during the first exercise that “The submarine force continues to use the Arctic Ocean as an alternate route for shifting submarines between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans....Submarines can reach the western Pacific directly by transiting through international waters of the Arctic rather than through the Panama Canal.” [12]

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Earlier this month the American attack submarine the USS Texas “completed an Arctic mission, with some U.S. media outlets noting the nuclear-powered submarine broke through the ice near the North Pole and stayed on the surface for 24 hours.” [13]

A Canadian news agency reported that the government’s Foreign Affairs spokesman Alain Cacchione “said information about submarine operations is considered secret. He noted...that Canada permits shipping through its Arctic waters....” [14]

A rather broad definition of shipping, to be sure, but Cacchione’s attempt at evasiveness wore thin when he added “There are safety protocols in place under NATO that provide for the exchange of information on allied submarine movements....” [15] That is, the U.S. submarine was off the Canadian coast with Ottawa’s full knowledge. And blessings. “The U.S. navy did not release details on what, if any, weapons tests were performed by the Texas.” Nor did the Canadian government ask, even though January’s U.S. National Security Directive explicitly challenges Canada’s claim to exclusive rights over the legendary Northwest Passage, now navigable for the first time in recorded history.

Instead, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon “have taken a hard line in regard to excursions by the Russians into the Arctic. Earlier this year, [Defence Minister Peter] MacKay accused the Russians of sending military aircraft too close to Canadian northern airspace. He vowed that Canadian Forces CF-18 fighter aircraft would intercept Russian aircraft each and every time they came near the country.”

By excursions are meant routine patrols over neutral, international waters conducted according to the terms of the relevant treaties.

“In March, Cannon said Canada ‘will not be bullied’ by a Russian plan to create a new security force for the Arctic.” [16]

If loose lips could sink ships, Harper, Cannon and McKay would have sent the entire Russian navy to the bottom of the Arctic and the North Atlantic. All three have delivered a steady stream of exhortations, bluster and downright threats to Russia throughout the year.

This blunt, eminently non-diplomatic, and incessant saber rattling by a relatively minor military and international political player would not persist for as long as it has – questionable domestic gains notwithstanding – if the three ministers were not assured of support from the United States and NATO. In the second case, the Article 5 mutual obligation to engage in armed intervention if any member state requests it. In fact Canada has nothing to back it up except for its military ties with Washington and the Alliance.

That Canada has advanced to the front rank of Western nations confronting and challenging a disproportionately stronger Russia in the Arctic strongly suggests that it has been put up to the task. Being a smaller and weaker nation allows it to be cast in the role of a sympathetic victim of “Russian aggression,” much like Estonia two years ago with alleged cyber attacks and Georgia last year after its invasion of South Ossetia. Leading Western elected officials were champing at the bit to activate NATO’s Article 5 in the last two cases (even though Georgia is not yet a full member of the bloc), and Canada could provide a *casus belli* impossible to resist.

In line with that scenario, the Canadian foreign affairs minister, the self-styled Lawrence of the Arctic, was back on the warpath on November 23, warning “the world...that this country will respond ‘firmly’ when other nations ‘push the envelope’ with military exercises or other provocative actions anywhere along Canada’s northern frontier.” [17]

He was not, of course, referring to the United States or Great Britain or Denmark, who as NATO allies are allowed to parade their military presence off Canada’s coast as they choose to do. He singled out Russia.

Cannon spoke three days after U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates addressed the Halifax International Security Forum in Nova Scotia. “The future of NATO and international claims on untapped Arctic oil [also] dominated discussions, largely behind closed doors, between Gates and top officials from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Japan, Germany, India, New Zealand, and the Netherlands.

“Gates announced...that Washington planned to boost cooperation with Canada in the Arctic, as Russia and others eye its vast energy and mineral resources.” [18]

Cannon’s – laughable except for the broader context – comments were made at the Economic Club of Canada in Toronto where he retrieved a chestnut from the archives (“Arctic superpower” and “energy superpower” from last August) and “said the country’s future as an ‘energy superpower’ is closely tied to potentially rich deposits of Arctic oil and gas on land and seabed.” [19]

This year’s study by the U.S. Geological Survey “assessed the area north of the Arctic Circle and concluded that about 30% of the world’s undiscovered gas and 13% of the world’s undiscovered oil may be found there, mostly offshore under less than 500 meters of water. Undiscovered natural gas is three times more abundant than oil in the Arctic and is largely concentrated in Russia.” [20]

Hence Cannon’s assertion that “This is why we react so strongly when other nations, like Russia, engage in exercises and other activities that appear to challenge our security in the North....” [21]

Three North American news sources, one Canadian and two U.S., all not unsympathetic to the initiative, recently wrote about the new Navy Arctic Roadmap.

The National Post recently published this:

“The U.S. Navy is planning a massive push into the Arctic to defend national security, potential undersea riches and other maritime interests.

“An ‘Arctic road map’ released by the Department of the Navy details a five-year strategic

plan to expand fleet operations into the North in the expectation the frozen Arctic Ocean will be open water in summer by 2030.

“[I]t is clear the United States is intent on seriously retooling its military presence and naval combat capabilities in a region increasingly seen as a potential flashpoint as receding polar ice allows easier access.” [22]

An American source which linked the online version of the Roadmap added of it in relation to U.S.-Canadian collaboration in the Arctic:

“It includes a comprehensive, three-phase outline of measures the Navy hopes to undertake in the Arctic region within four years: develop new, resilient vessels and weaponry; map the seabed floor for potential resources and geological information; and innovate diagnostic tools to more accurately predict when the cap will thaw.

“Even as the ratification process lurches through the Senate, the U.S. Navy is launching the first phases of its program. In August, Navy service-members and administrators took part in a Canadian training program, Nanook, where they learned tactical strategy for rugged climates and underwent disaster-relief training. In October, the United States Naval War College hosted the 19th biennial Seapower Symposium, where American and Canadian Naval administrators discussed their 6,500-nautical-mile dispute over waterway boundaries.” [23]

Third, with the unabashed title of “U.S. Navy Prepares for Militarization of the Arctic,” another report revealed that “the U.S. Navy is...planning for potential combat situations that may arise once global warming has melted the Arctic Ocean’s summer ice within two decades. A 35-page memo from the Department of the Navy spells out a five-year plan expressing the need to develop new technology and strategies in the event things become contentious in the open waters of the Arctic Circle by 2030.” [24]

As the U.S. and NATO campaign in Afghanistan is being intensified to an all-time high level of fighting (with more foreign troops in that nation than at any previous period in its history), with the Pentagon expanding into Colombia in a move that could trigger a regional and even continental war, and with Western proxies in the South Caucasus eager to launch new armed hostilities on Russia’s southern border, even the top of the world, the remote Arctic Circle, is not being spared the threat of war.

Notes

1)

http://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2009/11/us-navy-arctic-roadmap-nov-2009.pdf

2) Ibid

3) NATO’s, Pentagon’s New Strategic Battleground: The Arctic
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/08/26/natos-pentagons-new-strategic-battleground-the-arctic>

4) National Security Presidential Directive 66

<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm>

5) Voice of Russia, January 16, 2009

6) NATO, January 29, 2009

7) Voice of Russia, January 30, 2009

8) Encroachment From All Compass Points: Canada Leads NATO Confrontation With Russia In North

Stop NATO, August 5, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/encroachment-from-all-compass-points-canada-leads-nato-confrontation-with-russia-in-north>

9) End of Scandinavian Neutrality: NATO's Militarization Of Europe

Stop NATO, April 10, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/end-of-scandinavian-neutrality-natos-militarization-of-europe>

10) Canada: Battle Line In East-West Conflict Over The Arctic

Stop NATO, June 3, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/08/31/canada-battle-line-in-east-west-conflict-over-the-arctic>

11) Navy Arctic Roadmap, November 10, 2009

12) Navy NewsStand, March 20, 2007

13) Canwest News Service, November 16, 2009

14) Ibid

15) Ibid

16) Ibid

17) Canwest News Service, November 24, 2009

18) Agence France-Presse, November 22, 2009

19) Ibid

20) Science, May 29, 2009

21) Canwest News Service, November 24, 2009

22) National Post, November 27

23) World Politics Review, November 30, 2009

24) AllGov, November 30, 2009

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