

OPINION

ARCTIC

Arctic Council must look at security dimension

All the stakeholders realize the need for increased security in the Arctic caused by the rapid and unforeseen melting of the ice and the resulting increase in maritime access and human activity. The U.S. Coast Guard has reported that maritime traffic through the Northern Sea Route along the Russian Coast increased ten-fold between 2010 and 2012.



Photograph courtesy: Sgt. Frank Hudec, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

Canadian soldiers pictured on Aug. 19, 2004, in Pagnirtung, Nunavut, from the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment, returning from a tasking during Exercise NARWHAL.



BY PIERRE LEBLANC

OTTAWA—This month Canada assumes the presidency of the Arctic Council. The council includes eight Arctic countries (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States). It also has permanent participants representing various aboriginal groups resident in the Arctic: the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich'in Council International (GGI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and Saami Council (SC). The presidency of the council rotates through the eight members, changing every two years. Canada's turn as president creates an opportunity to improve the protection of the Arctic and to resolve one of the key issues it has faced over the years, that of the security of the Arctic.

The council has evolved significantly since its inception in 1996, in which Canada played a key role. In its original mandate, the council was described as a "high-level forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic states... in particular, with issues of

sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic." It has matured into a body that has generated binding international agreements and is affecting policy in the Arctic. The council has been very successful at including the participation of aboriginal peoples, performing scientific research in the Arctic zone, creating initiatives to protect the environment, and more recently completing the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) in the Arctic, which was signed at the seventh Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Nuuk, Greenland, in 2011.

The council, during Canada's presidency, could contribute to the establishment of a moratorium on fishing in that zone of the Arctic Ocean that is outside of the exclusive economic zones of the coastal states. It is reported that in the 1980s, Chinese, Japanese and South Korean fishing vessels fished the cod stocks of the Bering Sea to extinction. The same could happen to fish stocks in the center of the Arctic Ocean that have so far been protected by a permanent ice cap. The moratorium could stay in place until such time as there is sufficient scientific data to manage the fishery in a sustainable way.

Many stakeholders, including the premier of Nunavut, Eva Aariak, have insisted that the best way to maintain our sovereignty in the Arctic is to have healthy communities. This is certainly part of

the reason that federal Minister Leona Aglukkaq, who will preside over the council on behalf of Canada, wants to focus Canada's presidency on the development of the Arctic. An international agreement could be reached to exchange information on best practices and the latest technologies for extreme cold conditions, such as the results of the testing of wind mills which is presently taking place in Alaska.

The above measures would help to improve the "human security" in the Arctic.

One of the challenges that the council could tackle is Arctic security. When the council was formed in 1996 the United States insisted on excluding security from the mandate of the Council. The Cold War had just ended and the United States, which has always considered its national interests paramount, was reluctant to reduce in any way its independence in decision making. Its inability to deal with this question has been perceived as a weakness of the Arctic Council. The issue of Arctic security should be added to its agenda. Since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s, the classic "state to state" threat has greatly receded. On the other hand, the broader concept of "human security" has grown in importance and includes threats to the environment, human smuggling, illegal fishing, terrorism, and so on. These are areas where the council is already involved.

The council is already involved in "human security" through such measures as the Search and Rescue Agreement, its work on the Polar Code and the prevention of pollution in the Arctic.

There is also a new paradigm. Mother Nature is changing at an unprecedented rate. All of the Arctic stakeholders realize that the protection of the Arctic will have to be a common effort. The leadership of the United States is now starting to come to grips with the massive changes happening in the Arctic. The U.S. has come to the realization that it does not have the necessary resources to protect their national interests on their own. Their present financial situation and priorities in other parts of the world will only restrict their options for action. They have at present only one operational icebreaker, the *USCGC Healy*.

All the stakeholders realize the need for increased security in the Arctic caused by the rapid and unforeseen melting of the ice and the resulting increase in maritime access and human activity. The U.S. Coast Guard has reported that maritime traffic through the Northern Sea Route along the Russian Coast increased ten-fold between 2010 and 2012.

To enforce agreements such as the Polar Code, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and others, there must be adequate surveillance of growing human activity. This is especially true for

rogue countries, such as North Korea, that may be tempted to ship missile components or nuclear weapons through one of the Arctic passages. Another concern is unscrupulous commercial entities that have little care for the environment and are seeking a financial gain by taking a "shortcut" with a vessel unsuitable for the Arctic environment and uninsured.

Enforcing existing agreements requires appropriate resources for surveillance and intervention, should that be necessary. These resources could come from the military in the case of Canada or the Coast Guard in the case of the U.S. Since the state-to-state threat in the Arctic is non-existent (apart from North Korea which is not an Arctic coastal state), the security of the Arctic only requires constabulary policing. However, for the time, the Armed Forces of the Arctic coastal countries are better equipped to meet the security requirement.

It would therefore be useful for the council to develop an agreement on security similar to the one developed for Search and Rescue. A gradual process of development for such an agreement, and one that would possibly be acceptable to the U.S., would be to introduce security on the council's agenda in a gradual manner. Initially it could be done for information purposes only. Member countries could provide a brief on their security assets and activities which could include that of their armed forces in their zone of influence. These presentations would be provided in the context of confidence-building measures similar to the Open Skies Program between the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

The presentations could include reports on the annual meetings of the Chiefs of Defence Staffs (which were initiated by Canada last year at Canadian Forces Base Goose Bay), and reports on the various security forces exercises in terms of lessons learned and indications of future joint exercises. There have already been many joint military exercises that included several of the coastal states, despite competing claims. These exchanges of information would reduce the possibility of miscalculations and improve security.

Eventually there could be an Arctic security agreement, focused on the human security dimension, which would allow a freer flow of information between security forces. Such an agreement would help prevent environmental disasters, criminal activity, illegal fishing, and other problems. For example, since fishing vessels wishing to operate in the central part of the Arctic Ocean have to transit through the exclusive economic zone of one of the coastal states, it would be useful for those states to share information so that appropriate measures are taken when necessary.

The Arctic Council has achieved growing successes. Its authority and influence have also grown over the years to the benefit of the peoples of the Arctic. This enhanced status could allow it to meet many of the challenges facing the Arctic and transform them into opportunities. One of those challenges must be to include security on the agenda.

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