

OPINION

CANADA'S ARCTIC & MILITARY



Photograph courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office

Arctic files: Prime Minister Stephen Harper, pictured on Aug. 22, 2012, in the Arctic with Captain Carrey Collinge and the crew of the *Martin Bergmann* research vessel prior to boarding the ship.

Three Arctic ports needed

Arctic ports would attract business and would also improve greatly Canada's ability to deal with SAR and marine pollution and meet its international commitments.



BY PIERRE LEBLANC

OTTAWA—Canada needs three ports in the Arctic: on its West Coast, in the centre of the archipelago, and on the East Coast.

There is near-unanimous agreement that the Arctic is warming at about twice the rate of global warming elsewhere. There is also clear evidence that the arctic polar ice cap is fast disappearing. Human activity in the Arctic is increasing exponentially as the Arctic becomes increasingly accessible. Maritime traffic has grown significantly.

The U.S. Coast Guard has reported that commercial maritime traffic through the Northern Sea Route along the Russian Coast increased tenfold between 2010 and 2012. Canada's Northwest Passage was free of ice in 2007, years ahead of scientific predictions. It has been free of ice every summer since.

There is growing interest in harvesting the natural resources that have been shielded by the permanent polar ice cap. This will naturally lead to further increases in human activity and a greater incidence of search and rescue operations and maritime accidents. Such incidents could lead to an environmental catastrophe, in what is recognised as a very fragile environment with a short vertical food

chain. Almost any major accident in the Arctic will affect the "human security" of its inhabitants.

Canada is a signatory of 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. Our nation is also a signatory of the *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic* which was signed at the Eighth Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna on May 15, 2013, under Canada's chairmanship. In these two agreements, Canada has committed to monitor Arctic activity, to react to any incident or accident in the Arctic within its own area of responsibility, and to provide assistance if called upon by any of the Arctic Council states.

Despite the fact that a significant proportion of air accidents take place in the three northern territories, Canada's ability to provide timely response in air search and rescue incidents in the Arctic is quite limited because there are no dedicated Search and Rescue assets deployed north of the 60th parallel. It takes many hours for resources based in the South to even reach the 60th parallel at the southern boundary of the territories.

There is a program to replace the Search and Rescue fixed wing aircraft. It was initiated in 2002, but like many other federal government procurement programs, it is years late.

In the spring 2013 report of the auditor general, it is stated that the delivery of new SAR aircraft has been delayed to 2017, some 15 years after the project was initiated. It is still unknown if any of those assets will be deployed north of the 60th parallel to reduce their response time.

Similarly, Canada's ability to deal with a maritime incident in the Arctic is also lacking. There are no ports in the Canadian Arctic, and during the shipping season there are only a handful of icebreakers to deal with an area larger than continental Europe. The future looks even bleaker: all the icebreakers are nearing the end of their design life, yet there is only one ship replacement program in effect at this time. Given the track record of the federal government, one can only presume that this replacement ship will also be late in delivery.

One way to increase Canada's capability to deal with either an air or marine accident in the Arctic would be to establish three protected ports in the Arctic: one on its West Coast, one in the center of the Arctic archipelago and one on the East Coast. All three ports could be developed as triple "P" projects: public private partnerships. Just as a comparison, Russia is planning no less than 10 SAR centers along the Northern Sea Route.

For the West Coast port, I suggest Tuktoyaktuk. There are several reasons that could bring governments and the private sector to develop this infrastructure, which could support many government and com-

mercial activities. The territorial and federal governments are presently funding a road from Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk. This means that a future port would be connected by road to the southern part of Canada. The oil and gas industry is considering this area as a potential operating base for oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the Beaufort Sea. The Canadian Forces have a North Warning System radar in Tuktoyaktuk. The Forces could also use the port as a resupply facility for Arctic patrol vessels. The Coast Guard, for its part, could pre-position environmental response equipment there. The port could support SAR activity. It would be a facility that an increasing number of cruise ships plying Arctic waters could use for a variety of purposes: repairs, bilge water management, passenger on/off loading, refuelling, and so on. Cruise ship visits could form the anchor for eco-tourism. It is reported that as many as 60,000 people now visit the Norwegian Svalbard region on cruise ships every year. Something similar could be developed in the Canadian Arctic.

In the central Arctic, the obvious choice for a port is Resolute Bay. It is located in the centre of the Arctic archipelago; it sits right on the classical Northwest Passage at its narrowest point, and it is already developed with significant federal infrastructure. If developed further to include a paved runway, an air traffic control radar and modern-approach instruments, it could become a larger hub of activity for several departments, including the Canadian Forces, the Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans, and Natural Resources Canada. It could support a higher level of scientific research,

which, at present, is so lacking that we fail to understand all the natural factors at play in the disappearance of the Arctic Sea ice. Resolute Bay with a port and a modern airport could support commercial activities, such as mining, cold weather testing, polar satellite data downloading, cruise ship servicing, and eco-tourism, to name a few.

On the East Coast, my choice would be Iqaluit, even though it is not technically on the coast but at the end of a long bay. The port would meet a long-standing request by the Nunavut government to build an appropriate docking facility to support a sizeable Arctic community, which happens to also be the seat of government. It could provide the same services as the other two Arctic ports.

Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak has stated that one of the anchors of sovereignty in the Canadian Arctic is having healthy communities. By investing and developing ports such as those proposed, the federal government could put concrete action behind Minister Leona Aglukkaq's stated desire to develop the Arctic during Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council. It would create a significant number of long term well-paying jobs for the communities in and around those ports. "Build a road and they will come" it is said. In the Canadian Arctic, ports will attract business. In so doing, Canada would also improve greatly its ability to deal with SAR and marine pollution and meet its international commitments.

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