

## OPINION

## ARTIC SECURITY

# Is the Arctic focus being lost?

Promised patrol ships seem to be delayed time and again and the Canadian Army has now indicated that it will reduce its tempo of sovereignty operations in the Arctic as a result of budget cuts.



BY PIERRE LEBLANC

OTTAWA—The succession of news that report delays or reduction of Arctic security and sovereignty programs and operations is worrying at a time when there is growing evidence that the opening of the Arctic is accelerating along with human activity. Promised patrol ships seem to be delayed time and again and the Canadian Army has now indicated that it will reduce its tempo of sovereignty operations in the Arctic as a result of budget cuts.

We must make sure that we are not penny wise but pound foolish. It is essential for the government to make sure that we monitor and enforce our sovereignty in the Arctic. Human security of the Canadian Arctic peoples depend in large part with the federal government's ability to properly and effectively regulate human activity in that pristine and very fragile ecosystem.

On March 24, 1989, the Exxon Valdez accident cost in excess of U.S.\$2.2-billion

to do a *superficial* cleanup despite the fact that it was very close to the large port city of Anchorage, Alaska with extensive infrastructure to support the clean-up operations. What would be the cost of a similar accident near Taloyoak in Nunavut which is over a thousand kilometers north from the Exxon Valdez spill? The entire clean-up operation work force and equipment would have to be brought in from the south and established in temporary accommodations.

Logistics would have to be done by air at great cost and by sea with the attendant long lead delays. The cost would eclipse that of the Exxon Valdez and could well exceed \$10-billion especially if the problem is compounded by moving sea ice. To add insult to injury we may very well find that the ship has a flag of convenience based in one of those tax havens leaving the Canadian taxpayers to foot the bill.

A recent Arctic shipping study reported in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Ottawa Citizen* suggests that shipping through the Arctic will be common by mid-century and that the authors have "produced the first maps showing predicted new shipping routes through Canada's Northwest Passage, Russia's Northern Sea Route and even directly across the North Pole." I beg to differ.



A member of HMCS Montreal's naval party guards a ship's crew with an MP5 submachine gun after a boarding during Exercise NARWHAL, in August, 2004, in the Cumberland Peninsula area of the Baffin Island. Pierre Leblanc, a former commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic, argues that it is essential for the government to make sure that Canada monitors and enforces its sovereignty in the Arctic.

The Arctic Institute has been showing such maps for some time already. The Russian Northern Sea Route (NSR) is already being used for commercial shipping. The *Barents Observer* reports "There has been a tenfold increase in the number of vessels using NSR during the last two years. This season 46 vessels have sailed the route, compared to 34 in 2011 and only four in 2010." Shipping through our Northwest Passage will happen sooner than people anticipate. Much of it will be intra-Arctic transport and some of it will be trans-Arctic transport. We must be ready. Given the speed at which the DND procurement process has been moving in recent times we are more than likely late already.

I for one prefer to agree with Canadian Arctic ice expert David Barber that the whole Arctic Ocean may be free of ice in the summer months as early as 2017 allowing for shipping directly over the North Pole which would be the preferred route for large ships. One can clearly see in the following graph from the American National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) that the multi-year ice of the Arctic is quickly disappearing. When all of the Arctic sea ice is first-year ice it follows that summers will see all of it disappearing. This may be a blessing in disguise since across the North Pole routes would reduce maritime traffic through the Northwest Passage and thus reduce the risk of an environmental disaster that would require decades to recover from.

On the other hand an ice-free Arctic may mean that the cruise ships that already visit the Canadian Archipelago might wish to travel to areas where marine charts are non-existent so that their passengers can view "more exotic and pristine areas." The *Hanseatic* ran aground near Gjoa Haven in 1996 and the *MV Clipper Adventurer* ran aground near Kugluktuk in August 2010. Fortunately there was no loss of life or environmental impact. Cruise ship accidents happen every year, witness the grounding of the *Concordia* and the engine fire that crippled the *Carnival cruise ship Triumph* this year. With increasing maritime activity it is only a matter of time when there will be a requirement for a major search and rescue operation in the Arctic for which we are ill-prepared.

We must not reduce our commitment to the Arctic at this crucial time when we need to firmly enforce our position over the Northwest Passage to prevent the creation of a precedent that would establish the passage as an international strait as claimed by many countries.

We must continue to increase our ability to properly monitor the Arctic and develop our capability to progressively react to a sovereignty challenge to include the forcible boarding of a ship to take control of it.

In the past I have recommended providing the Canadian Ranger Patrols along the seven different routes of the Northwest Passage with a maritime role. It is an interim measure that is not costly and could be put in place in a short time span. The construction of vessels similar to the Rosborough Boats of Nova Scotia would provide jobs in Canada. The manning of those boats would provide meaningful employment in the Arctic. The Rangers have been the eyes and ears of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic for decades. Properly equipped they could become our "first responders" in the Arctic in terms of maritime issues such as search and rescue, environmental spills, illegal fishing, etc. When they spot a suspicious activity they would report it so that the appropriate agency can then act on the information be it the Canadian Forces, Fisheries and Oceans or the Canada Border Security Agency. They are there and they have vested interests in protecting the Arctic Archipelago. Who could criticize the Inuit for defending their ancestral fishing and hunting grounds?

In anticipation of the maritime traffic that would be more of a local nature in support of natural resources extraction it would also be wise to create a number of deep sea port facilities in the Western, Central and Eastern Arctic. It would increase the Canadian contribution to support our commitment to the 2011 Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) in the Arctic which Canada signed. It has been reported that the Russians have plans to develop a as many as 10 search and rescue stations along their Northern Sea Route to support the increase in traffic.

The aeronautical dimension of the agreement is not without consequences. In addition to increased aviation traffic in support of increasing natural resources extraction and community support, the number of polar flights over the Canadian Arctic has increased drastically over the last decade. Increased national assets in the Arctic would help us deal more efficiently with air disasters such as the First Air Boeing 737 crash in Resolute Bay in September 2011.

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