

CANADA ON RUSSIA'S RADAR?

Some argue that Russia would not invade Canada. In a rational world one could be led to believe so. History teaches us otherwise. In the words of the Economist, "Vladimir Putin uses warfare to make up for Russia's weaknesses. That is why he is so dangerous."

Russia, under the leadership of Putin, is acting irrationally. Putin's logic to invade Ukraine was deeply flawed, nobody has dared tell him that he was wrong to do so and that he should stop immediately. What logic supports the complete destruction of Mariupol if one is to use it after victory? And what about the unprecedented number of war crimes documented in this digital world of smart phone and satellite imagery? What will Putin gain in the end?

The situation in Ukraine has continued to escalate in terms of risks. The West is increasing its provision of offensive weapon systems. Russia has cut off

Poland from natural gas. The situation in Transnistria is evolving. The danger is that the invasion of Ukraine may well escalate to a point where NATO becomes directly involved and tactical nuclear weapons are used by the Russians. At that point all scenarios become possible. Article 5 is invoked, and we are in World War III.

Successive NORAD Commanders have stated that the Canadian Arctic will play a pivotal role in any future conflict. Russia, China and North Korea, the main adversaries of the USA, would possibly attack through the Arctic whether it is with bombers, hypersonic cruise missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles or intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Canada faces two threats in the Arctic. One is through the Arctic as an avenue of approach to the USA and one is physical by a direct land assault. Putin could easily lash out at Canada for its support to Ukraine and order an assault on Canadian

Exercise ARCTIC EDGE. A CH-146 Griffon helicopter flies along the eastern Alaska Mountain Range at Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center 22-02, Fort Wainwright, Alaska on March 14, 2022. Photo: Corporal Angela Gore, Canadian Armed Forces Photo

Forces Station (CFS) Alert. This would be an economy of force “special military operation” that could easily be conducted by Spetsnaz. What would be the impact on Canada? How would Canada react to that assault? Can CFS Alert defend against the attack? Suddenly, Canada’s attention would shift to the immediate threat in the Arctic as opposed to Europe, and a significant allocation of resources would be directed to this incursion. A similar situation happened during the Second World War when a Japanese submarine shelled Estevan Point on the western coast of British Columbia in August 1943. It led to the construction of the Alaska Highway and forced the deployment of troops to that province.

Canada is constantly criticized for not doing enough for its own defence. The invasion of Ukraine seems to have jolted Canada to reassess its posture. In quick succession the Minister of National Defence announced the purchase of the F-35 fifth-generation fighter to replace our aging F-18 fleet after years of dithering. She also announced the construction of an over-the-horizon air defence radar, another surprise. The latter may be part of the replacement of the North Warning System which is not yet funded. The present

system is practically obsolete being based in part on forty plus year old technology. It is doubtful that it could detect hypersonic cruise missiles with small radar cross section. Canada needs to invest heavily in the modernization of NORAD which includes the replacement of the North Warning System. No date has been announced but it will be years before we see the replacement.

Canada needs to increase its strategic infrastructure in the Arctic.

One of those investments should be the development of a more northern forward operation location (FOL) in the High Arctic. There is a gap of 3,000 kilometers between the FOL in Inuvik and the one in Iqaluit. Those FOLs are over 2,000 km from our station in Alert. Russia has the Nagurskoye airbase on Alexandra Land in Arkhangelsk Oblast, which is only 1,527 km away. Resolute Bay, Nunavut, should be developed as a security hub including an FOL, an air defence long range radar, sub-surface monitoring sensors and a deep-sea port. Resolute Bay could support fighter operations of the Canadian Forces, drone surveillance and the long-range maritime patrol of the CP-140 Arcturus and their new suite of sensors. The Canadian Coast

Guard as well as all the federal departments with functions in the Arctic such as the Canadian Border Security Agency could be supported there on a seasonal basis. Such dual-use facilities would also generate commercial opportunities.

Another investment will be to increase our capability to monitor sub-surface activity. It has been said that the Russians probably have better bathymetry of the Arctic Archipelago than we do. It is time to deploy the underwater sonar arrays tested under the Northern Watch program and take advantage of unmanned underwater drones that have increasing autonomous long-range capabilities.

The new Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships and the 1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group contribute to arctic domain awareness. Our ability to monitor activity in the Arctic is critical. The RADARSAT Constellation is an excellent system to monitor surface activity on both the land and at sea. In addition to the all-weather coverage of the Arctic Archipelago, it can also monitor our huge Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the extension of our continental shelves. Given their track record in other oceans, the Chinese fishing fleets would not hesitate to encroach on our arctic EEZ and we know that Russia is already claiming part of our continental shelf extensions. The persistent surveillance of our national interests in such a large area can best be done from space. It behoves the government to invest in the replacement of the RADARSAT Constellation.

Canada should invest in its own strategic satellite communications systems with “the ability to establish and maintain broadband connectivity in remote and hostile areas in an electromagnetic (EM) degraded or denied environment to support mission-critical communications”, as suggested by Defence Research and Development Canada in their latest challenge of their IDEaS program. Canada must have full control of the infrastructure and data flowing over it. This is important not only for the Arctic, but anywhere in the world our forces are deployed.

The Enhanced Satellite Communication



In addition to committing to ESCP-P, Canada should also secure dedicated capacity on Lightspeed, an advanced and highly secure low-earth orbit (LEO) satellite communications system being fielded by Telesat, a Canadian company and a world leader in satellite communications.

ARCTIC

Project – Polar (ESCP-P), which was initiated in 2009 as a high priority program to provide military communications in the Arctic, is still stuck in a procurement process that has issued some three successive Requests for Information from the industry. It has a Full Operational Capability date of “No Later Than 2036”. Some 27 years after the initiation of the project. Technology nowadays evolves very quickly with some systems with half-life of 6 months. Canada needs to deploy this system with a sense of urgency.

In addition to committing to ESCP-P, Canada should also secure dedicated capacity on Lightspeed, an advanced and highly secure low-earth orbit (LEO) satellite communications system being fielded by Telesat, a Canadian company and a world leader in satellite communications. The Lightspeed satellites make use of fast sub-millisecond frequency hopping across narrow beams, providing low probability of interception and detection. They are difficult to interfere with or jam and they are immune to electromagnetic interference

from the Northern Lights. With almost 200 satellites in the initial constellation deployment, the system will have a high degree of redundancy to protect against anti-satellite kinetic attacks recently demonstrated by China and Russia. It will be available a decade prior to ESCP-P. It will complement and extend the capabilities of that system when it is deployed and provide augmentation and redundancy if ESCP-P were to be degraded or rendered inoperable.

Given the increasing aggressive behavior of China, the boosting by North Korea of missiles capable of reaching North America and the irrational and aggressive conduct of Russia, Canada may be wise to revisit its participation in missile defence. Those adversaries are all active in cyber space. Out various technologies need to be cyber and electromagnetic pulse hardened.

The pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have clearly exposed the risks of relying on others for essential infrastructure and capabilities. Canada must maintain national control over its strategic assets, networks and data, while providing our military forces with essential command and control communications anywhere in the world and at all times. It is time to improve our defence posture in the Arctic. The Canadian government would be wise to sort out its broken and politicised procurement system because time is now of the essence. ■



Colonel (Retired) Pierre Leblanc is a former Commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic. He held senior staff appointments in the National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ). In 1995, he took command of Canadian Forces Northern Area, where he served until his retirement in 2000. He was the Commander of the now Joint Task Force North for five years. He spent more than nine years in the Arctic where he travelled extensively including Alaska and Greenland. He has been an advocate for improved security in the Arctic since 1998. Pierre provides independent advice on Arctic security and sovereignty matters and has also provided several defence related companies with support in their pursuit of arctic opportunities.



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