

## **Canada must prepare for new Arctic age Huge changes pose challenge for government**

ROB HUEBERT

From Monday's Edmonton Journal  
August 4, 2008

The Canadian North has always been mysterious: northern lights dancing across an endless tundra, sculpture and culture that fascinate the world, and a hearty, non-aboriginal population of bush pilots and miners to dazzle the imagination of any Canadian.

Yet the Arctic, while maintaining a certain magic and mystery, is in the midst of an era of radical change. As we enter a new Arctic century, the problems we face are twofold for Canadians and our decision-makers in Ottawa, Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit: First, the Arctic is changing in a way it never has before and, second, we are not alone "up there" and none of us -- not in Canada nor anywhere in the world -- knows exactly what form these changes will take.

All we know for sure is the Arctic is on the verge of becoming a more complicated and crowded area. As a result, Canadians have to decide what will be required to meet many challenges -- some of which, by the way, are yet to be determined. And, we have to do it now.

Here are some of the challenges we know about: Climate change, resource development, globalization (the South Koreans are entering the market to build ice-capable vessels, the Japanese are investing heavily in the study of Arctic gas hydrates off the coast of Canada, and China is going to become an Arctic player as well), Russia is on the rise again, and laws governing the maritime Arctic are in flux.

The challenge facing Canadian leaders, at its simplest level, is to protect Canadian interests and values in the North as new actors and other changes arrive on the Arctic scene. But what are those values and interests and how should they be determined?

The Canadian government needs to properly control the Arctic region that it claims as its own. We have to ensure that all activities occurring in the North are undertaken in accordance with the protection of all Canadians, but most specifically northern Canadians. The link between Canadian Arctic sovereignty and security, and the Canadian population, is at the heart of any action.

Ultimately whether it is the issue of the Arctic Ocean seabed that is to be divided, or determining the boundaries of Canadian sections of the Beaufort and Lincoln seas, or shipping in the Northwest Passage, the issue is control. What are the Arctic maritime boundaries that Canada can control, and what can it do within these boundaries?

This is where the issue of Arctic security connects with the issue of Arctic sovereignty.

If sovereignty is about control, the question that arises is; control of the Canadian Arctic to what end? If the pursuit of Canadian Arctic sovereignty is only about Canadian decision-makers gaining personal satisfaction from some sense of control, then it is not worth much effort or expense. But if sovereignty is being pursued for the purposes of protecting the security, safety and well-being of Canadians, then not only is it worth the effort, it is an absolute necessity.

As Canadians, we are starting to identify the new range of security threats to our North, but we haven't yet studied them to learn how each can be measured and how they interact. There is also no Canadian understanding of the time frame over which threats are developing. Canada has to address these omissions -- quickly -- to properly understand what our decision-makers must protect against in the rapidly changing Arctic world.

The transformation of the North means Canadian efforts to protect and control the Arctic are a moving target. At this time, it is simply unknown what or who will arrive in the Arctic to stay (a group associated with the Norwegian Hells Angels made it to Cambridge Bay in the summer of 2007) and what they might plan to do. Events in the Arctic are occurring at a rapidly increasing rate in a manner that defies prediction.

Protection and control is further complicated for Canadians by the fact the duration of these changes is not yet known.

The most important question thus emerges: What needs to be done? There are four core steps that need to be taken:

- We must develop the means to know what is happening in the North;
- We must have the ability to understand what is happening in the North;
- We must be able to respond to events in all of the North; and
- We must know what we want the North for.

Recent Canadian governments have taken some steps to improve our ability to know what is happening (e.g. the launching of RadarSat II), and there are promises to improve our ability to act in the region (e.g. the building of 6-8 Arctic Offshore Patrol Vessels and a new large icebreaker). But what remains is a need to have a central body that can continually analyze the changing nature of the Arctic region and provide timely policy advice to the government.

Even more important, the government needs to know what it wants to do in the Arctic. Simply knowing who is there and being able to react while necessary is not sufficient. The government must know what Canadians -- and in particular those who call the North home -- want to happen in the North. Then the government must act to ensure that interests and values are promoted and protected.

As one of the world's principal Arctic nations, Canada and its leaders must immediately prepare for this new Arctic age that is already upon us. New policy frameworks to properly protect Canadian Arctic sovereignty and security are required.

And required now.

Rob Huebert is an associate professor in the department of political science and associate director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary.