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# **Stephen Harper's Arctic Paradox**

by Joël Plouffe  
December, 2014



# POLICY UPDATE

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by Joël Plouffe  
CDFAI Fellow

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Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)

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ISBN: 978-1-927573-05-1



The Harper government's foreign policy approach has often been described as “transformative” because it represents a great shift with Canada's traditional liberal internationalism. Writing earlier this year in the *Globe and Mail*, John Ibbitson called Harper's policies a “Big Break,” arguing that it represents “a rupture from everything that had come before.”<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars have called this a “rebranding” of Canada's foreign policy,<sup>2</sup> driven by a new set of neoconservative ideas, where all foreign policy objectives are dominated by economic interests and trade policy priorities.<sup>3</sup>

Others have argued that Harper's foreign policy reflects *neocontinentalist* objectives in the way it tries to cement national security, defence and economic priorities with those of Washington as a strategy to bolster Canada's influence globally through a process of *rapprochement* with the United States.

Indeed, Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel argue that neocontinentalism – a concept they coined in 2012 – is an “emerging dominant idea in Canadian foreign policy” mainly “driven by a shifting political and ideological landscape in Canada” embodied by neoconservatism.<sup>4</sup> One of the core elements of a Canadian neocontinentalist foreign policy suggests that Canada “should nurture its “special” relationship with the United States outside its traditional continental setting” and also remain a “strong, reliable partner” to Washington,<sup>5</sup> “both in North America and abroad.”<sup>6</sup>

Harper's foreign policy in the Arctic region is not only rhetorically different than anything we've seen before – a narrative based on fear of external threats to Canada's sovereignty and security that produces ideologically driven policy objectives – but its aspiration to break with Canadian internationalism is also paradoxically colliding with U.S. objectives in the North.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See John Ibbitson. (2014, 31 January). How Harper transformed Canada's foreign policy. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from : <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/how-harper-transformed-canadas-foreign-policy/article16626348/>.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Staring. (2013, February). Harper's History. *Policy Options*. p. 42-48. Also see Ian McKay and Jamie Swift. *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

<sup>3</sup> Economic dimensions and their implications still remain understudied and less conceptualized in Canadian foreign policy studies and debates.

<sup>4</sup> Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel. (2012). The Twilight of Internationalism? Neocontinentalism as an Emerging Dominant Idea in Canadian Foreign Policy. In H.A. Smith and C. Turenne Sjolander (ed.). *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy* (pp. 36-52). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Canada. (2008). *Canada First Defence Strategy*. Ottawa: Department of National Defence.

<sup>7</sup> On breaking with internationalism, see Roland Paris. (2014, September). Are Canadians still liberal internationalists? Foreign policy and public opinion in the Harper era. *International Journal*. 69(3): 274-307.



## AMERICAN PRAGMATISM

Washington's approach to the Arctic region has increasingly become closer to the Canadian approach (*pearsonian* liberal internationalism) over the years.<sup>8</sup> Priorities have also broadened.

In 2011, Hillary Clinton was the first U.S. Secretary of State to attend one of the Arctic Council's ministerial meetings. Founded in 1996 by the Ottawa Declaration, the Arctic Council is a multilateral forum that addresses common sustainable development and environmental issues in the North. The current U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, followed Clinton's approach in 2013 at the Swedish ministerial meeting held in Kiruna, Sweden, where he stated that "the United States is committed to being a productive and engaged partner" in the Arctic.<sup>9</sup>

In a short period of time, both Clinton and Kerry's presence respectively at the Danish and Swedish ministerial meetings gave much anticipated high-level endorsement by Americans to the importance of the Arctic Council as a key multilateral institution to advance U.S. international interests. They also embodied a new "American (Arctic) internationalist" approach.

President Obama's *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* is a prime example. In it, the President states that the "Arctic region is peaceful, stable, and free of conflict." Arctic region foreign policy under the Obama administration seeks to sustain the "spirit of trust, cooperation and collaboration, both internationally and domestically."<sup>10</sup>

Current pragmatism refines President G.W. Bush's 2009 *Arctic Region Policy* which had a very broad and classic definition of national security and homeland security interests in the Arctic which were described primarily as "missile defense and early warning, deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the tone and scope have changed.

Today, the Americans are looking at the Arctic region – not just Alaska, but also the waters and states beyond America's North – as a more specific zone of interest that should be approached pragmatically with policies to address non-traditional security issues that affect both the U.S. and other nations in the circumpolar world. President Obama, policymakers, academics and

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<sup>8</sup> Idem. Also see Manuel Dorion-Soulié et Stéphane Roussel. (2014). 'Oui' à l'Irak? Le baptême du feu de Stephen Harper et l'émergence du néoncontingentalisme (2002-2003). *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*. 20(1): 9-18.

<sup>9</sup> United States. U.S. (2013, May 15). Department of State. Remarks at the Arctic Council Ministerial Session. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/05/209403.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> United States. (2013, May). The White House. President of the United States. *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*. Retrieved from: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> United States. (2009, January 9). The White House. President of the United States. *National Security Directive and Homeland Security Presidential Directive*. Arctic Region Policy. Retrieved from: [file:///Users/joelplouffe/Documents/08\\_National%20Security%20Presidential%20Directive%20and%20Homeland%20Security%20Presidential%20Directive.pdf](file:///Users/joelplouffe/Documents/08_National%20Security%20Presidential%20Directive%20and%20Homeland%20Security%20Presidential%20Directive.pdf).



media have therefore drawn greater attention toward the Arctic Council as an institution that will serve the U.S. national interests regionally and with a global perspective.

In November 2014, Admiral Robert Papp, the recently appointed U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic, reiterated that since the U.S. has only two years to chair the Arctic Council, “we have set a rather aggressive agenda.”<sup>12</sup> Released last month, the U.S. Arctic Council chairmanship agenda proposes three organizational thematic areas: “addressing the impacts of climate change in the Arctic, advocating stewardship of the Arctic Ocean, and improving economic and living conditions.”<sup>13</sup>

The agenda differs with the Canadian chairmanship priorities of (since 2013) “development for people of the North,” with three focus areas: “responsible Arctic resource development, safe Arctic shipping and sustainable circumpolar communities.” Canada does however co-chair with Sweden the Arctic Council *Task Force on Black Carbon and Methane* that could serve as a way to develop “a comprehensive strategy to address climate change” and enhance health conditions in the North.<sup>14</sup>

At this early stage, whereas the U.S. still needs to negotiate the proposed pillars of its agenda with the other members of the Arctic Council, continuity with Canada’s chairmanship appears to be mostly found at the level of the economic theme (although work on black carbon and methane should continue). The U.S. has announced that it is planning to “leverage” the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) that Canada developed during its chairmanship to “help drive investment” in the North – although appearing to acquiesce to Alaska’s demands to focus on economic development for the Chairmanship, even though the AEC did not emerge as a high priority for Washington.<sup>15</sup>

Six months ahead of the U.S. chairmanship, the Obama administration has already begun to implement new scientific outreach programs as part of its Arctic region foreign policy. For example, the *Fulbright Arctic Initiative*, led by the State Department and launched at the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, seeks to create a circumpolar network “to stimulate international scientific collaboration on Arctic issues [i.e. energy, water, health and infrastructure] while increasing mutual understanding between people of the United States and

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<sup>12</sup> Randy Showstack. (2014, 18 November). U.S. Readies “Aggressive” Arctic Council Agenda. *EOS*. 95(46): 419-420.

<sup>13</sup> See Laura Barron-Lopez. (2014, 24 October). US Outlines strategy for Arctic Council, puts climate on top. *The Hill*. Retrieved from: <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/221816-us-outlines-strategy-for-arctic-council-puts-climate-on-top>, and also Christa Marshall. (2014, 20 October). U.S. takes the helm of council assigned to deal with fast-changing Arctic. *Climate Wire*. Retrieved from E&E Publishing <http://www.eenews.net/stories/1060007544>.

<sup>14</sup> Canada. (2013). Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. *Canada’s Arctic Council Chairmanship*. Retrieved from: <http://www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/chairmanship-presidence.aspx?lang=eng>.

<sup>15</sup> Randy Showstack (2014). *Op Cit*.



the people of other countries.”<sup>16</sup> This soft power instrument seeks to promote American and circumpolar scientific interests through state-funded international collaboration agreements in the Arctic.

Conversely, Canada’s graduate student fellowships, *Canada’s Role in the Circumpolar World*, was limited to Canadian students only and ended in 2012, a year before the start of the Canadian Arctic Council Chairmanship.

The U.S. government’s presence at the Arctic Circle Assembly this fall was another testimony of how Americans are trying to refine their foreign policy strategy in a way to be more engaged and influential in established or new policy networks on various Arctic issues.

The Arctic Circle seeks to foster larger dialogue between policy, people, science and industry in a *new* Arctic, and with the rest of the world. Admiral Robert Papp led the U.S. delegation in Iceland in November and was supported by a U.S. delegation that consisted of (notably) President Obama’s Special Advisor on Arctic Science and Policy, Fran Ulmer, and other elected officials from the State of Alaska. According to Secretary of State John Kerry, Papp’s role as special representative will help elevate circumpolar issues “in America’s foreign policy and national security strategy” because “Arctic policy has never been more important, particularly as we prepare to Chair the Arctic Council in 2015.”<sup>17</sup>

On the Canadian side, Ottawa had dispatched to the Reykjavik meeting its chair of the Arctic Council’s Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs), Vincent Rigby, but did not deem necessary to send its Minister for the Arctic Council, Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq from Nunavut. Canada’s representation was even outnumbered by the government of Québec’s delegation that consisted of approximately twenty government delegates and the Premier himself, Philippe Couillard (who was a keynote speaker at one of the plenary sessions, as well as Mr. Rigby). President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson of Iceland and President Sauli Niinistö of Finland were the two heads of states taking part in the Arctic Circle discussions. Even the U.K., France and Japan were more visible and active at this meeting than was Canada.

Nevertheless, on November 28<sup>th</sup> 2014, almost a month following the Arctic Circle event in Reykjavik, Canada’s Foreign Affairs minister, John Baird, did pay a visit to Iceland to discuss with his counterpart, Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, the “relations with one of Canada’s Arctic neighbors.” According to a news release issued by the department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, the “two ministers discussed responsible resource development, increased international trade and international security.” John Baird believes that “Iceland and Canada continue to share priorities internationally and cooperate fully in international

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<sup>16</sup> United States. Fulbright Arctic Initiative. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Exchange Programs. Retrieved from: <http://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/fulbright-arctic-initiative>.

<sup>17</sup> United States. (2014, 16 July). U.S. Department of State. Retired Admiral Robert Papp to Serve as U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic. Retrieved from: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229317.htm>.



institutions such as NATO and the OSCE.” Both countries, he said, “must continue to work together to stand up to Russian aggression.”<sup>18</sup>

Once the “Reluctant Arctic Power,” as suggested by Rob Huebert from the University of Calgary,<sup>19</sup> the U.S. is now attempting to actively (re)gain influence in the Arctic through a different (regional) Canadian-inspired liberal internationalist strategy. Paradoxically, Canada has been more reluctant and less inclined over the years to engage *multilaterally* with its neighbours in a region it used to lead through a proactive internationalist Arctic region foreign policy. Canada is more focused on domestic and continental issues that legitimize the need for enhanced military capacities in the North since they have been, from a neocontinentalist perspective, neglected under the Liberals.

Indeed, the tables have turned.

### HARPER'S ARCTIC (NEO) CONTINENTALISM

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been attempting to implement a neocontinentalist Arctic region foreign policy that expresses his neoconservative values and ideology.

Since in office, Mr. Harper's response to the impacts of climate change in the Arctic – melting sea ice, increased global interest for northern hydrocarbons and shipping, environmental and human in/security issues domestically and regionally – has been predominantly driven by intentions of beefing-up Canada's military capabilities in the North (e.g. *Canada First Defence Strategy*), attempting to align the U.S.-Canada special relationship in the region, promoting a “rules-based” Arctic with clear boundaries to assure international stability, promoting an assertive economic development strategy, and portraying Canada as an Arctic power because of “our Northern energy and natural resource potential” (e.g. *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy Statement*).

Regionally, Mr. Harper has tried to align his government's foreign policy agenda with that of Washington. However, the preferred strategy clashes with U.S. views.

Indeed, the 2010 Arctic Coastal states summit held in Chelsea, Québec, appears as a failed attempt by Mr. Harper and his colleagues to create a new forum or alliance of coastal states as a way to establish order and stability in a region undergoing dramatic change.

Held prior to the G8 summit in 2010, Canada's then Foreign Affairs minister Lawrence Cannon invited to Chelsea the five Arctic Ocean coastal states (A5) since they “are in a unique position to

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<sup>18</sup> Canada. (2014, November 28). Baird Discusses Arctic and Security Issues in Iceland. *Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada*. Retrieved from: <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/news-communiques/2014/11/28c.aspx?lang=eng>.

<sup>19</sup> Rob Huebert. (2009, May). United States Arctic Policy: The Reluctant Arctic Power. *SPP Briefing Papers. Focus on the United States*. 2(2): 2-27.



set the agenda for responsible management in the region.”<sup>20</sup> Canada excluded from this summit the non-coastal Arctic states (Iceland, Finland and Sweden) and indigenous organizations – the peoples of the North. Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided to leave Cannon’s summit earlier than expected and famously criticized Canada for not inviting to the meeting all Arctic Council members “who have legitimate interest in the region.”<sup>21</sup>

While Canada attempted to take a lead in the Arctic, it rather got a “cold shoulder” from its closest ally.<sup>22</sup>

Harper’s Arctic has also been a narrative charged with language and representations of fear. In the face of what Mr. Harper calls increasing external threats to the country’s sovereignty, he has often warned Canadians that “since the eyes of the world [are] gazing our way, we must remain vigilant” in the Arctic.<sup>23</sup>

Even earlier this year, while Canada chaired the Arctic Council, Mr. Harper warned Canadians of would-be individuals “who are actually trying to turn the Arctic Council into some kind of international governance model that washes away the notion of sovereignty in the Arctic.”<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Harper has seen different threats everywhere.<sup>25</sup> In his first year in power, the Prime Minister often suggested that the most obvious threat to Canada’s sovereignty was its nearest neighbour and closest ally, the United States. Both countries have been managing a fifty-year-

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<sup>20</sup> Canada. (2010, 3 February). Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. *Canada to Host Ministerial Meeting of Arctic Ocean Coastal States*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/news-communications/2010/54.aspx?lang=eng>.

<sup>21</sup> CBC News. (2010, 29 March). Canada will take Arctic lead: Cannon. Retrieved from:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-will-take-arctic-lead-cannon-1.919662>.

<sup>22</sup> Allan Woods. (2010, 29 March). Canada gets cold shoulder at Arctic meeting. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2010/03/29/canada\\_gets\\_cold\\_shoulders\\_at\\_arctic\\_meeting.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2010/03/29/canada_gets_cold_shoulders_at_arctic_meeting.html).

<sup>23</sup> Phred Dvorak. (2010, 31 August). Canada Burnishes Its Position as Arctic Power. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from:

<http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703369704575461832760265748>.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Chase. (2014, 17 January). Q&A with Harper: No previous government has ‘delivered more in the North.’ *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north/qa-with-harper-no-previous-government-has-delivered-more-in-the-north/article16387286/?page=all>.

<sup>25</sup> See Heather Exner-Pirot and Joël Plouffe. (2014, 23 January). PM risks isolation with imaginary Arctic threats. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/pm-risks-isolation-with-imaginary-arctic-threats/article16462766/>; Heather Exner-Pirot and Joël Plouffe.

(2014, February). Prime Minister Harper Risks Isolation with Imaginary Threats. *CDFAI Policy Update*. Retrieved from: <http://cdfai.org/PDF/Prime%20Minister%20Harper%20Risks%20Isolation.pdf>; and also

Joël Plouffe. (2010). L’Arctique de Stephen Harper. *Le Devoir*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/295162/l-arctique-de-stephen-harper>.



old historical dispute over the status of the northern waters of the Northwest Passage. Other Prime Ministers, irrespective of their political allegiance, have held similar discourses before.

Thus, Mr. Harper's fight-picking narrative with the U.S. was nothing new.

But his insistence on using this matter to seduce Canada's conservative electoral base continued to irritate Washington, echoed by past U.S. Ambassador to Canada, David Wilkins, who once said on the issue of the Northwest Passage: "There's no reason to create a problem that doesn't exist."<sup>26</sup> A 2010 U.S. diplomatic cable, published by *Wikileaks* in 2011, revealed that U.S. officials at the Embassy in Ottawa thought that Stephen Harper's "public stance on the Arctic may not reflect his private, perhaps more pragmatic, priorities." The cable continues on by noting that this "was evident in the fact that during several hours together with Ambassador Jacobson" in January 2010, "which featured long and wide-ranging conversations, the PM did not once mention the Arctic."<sup>27</sup>

## RIVALS IN THE ARCTIC

Mr. Harper's Arctic narrative and strategy therefore shifted about a year and a half after being elected. Russia instigated a change in the geopolitical climate with their flag planting stunt at the North Pole in the summer of 2007. Stephen Harper's Arctic neocontinentalism started to take shape at this time, with focus on the U.S. as an ally rather than a rival in the Arctic.

Indeed, in *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy* document of 2010, it is well noted that the "United States is our premier partner in the Arctic and our goal is a more strategic engagement on Arctic issues." Just some years earlier, and as shown by historical documents, U.S. behaviour and policy were the root causes of Canada's Arctic sovereignty discourse.<sup>28</sup>

Following the Russian flag-planting stunt in the Arctic Ocean in 2007, Russia's ambitions in the region – represented by President Putin's renewed economic and military interests, policies and capabilities in this part of the circumpolar world – were treated as suspicious by the Harper government. Being 'vigilant' in the Arctic meant keeping a close eye on Russian activities up North, which also involved stressing the need for new and reinforced military capabilities to defend Canadian sovereignty in the North – a posture consistent with neocontinentalist ideals.

In the place of the U.S., the Harper government decided to pick a low-impact rhetorical fight with Russia to boost its image and try to restore Canada's power relations in the international arena, a goal that previous governments had failed to achieve. With a Manichaeian conception of

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<sup>26</sup> Clifford Krauss. (2006, January 27). Canada's Next Leader Clashes With U.S. Over Arctic Waterways. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/international/americas/27canada.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/international/americas/27canada.html?_r=0).

<sup>27</sup> United States (Confidential, Norfon). (2010, 21 January). Canada's Conservative Government and its Arctic Focus. *Wikileaks*. Retrieved from: [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10OTTAWA29\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10OTTAWA29_a.html).

<sup>28</sup> Canada. (2010). *Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*. Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Retrieved from: [http://www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/arctic\\_policy-canada-politique\\_arctique.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/arctic_policy-canada-politique_arctique.aspx?lang=eng).



world affairs, the Prime Minister identified Russia as the *other* in the Arctic – the bad guy – while the process of reinforcing Canada-U.S. relations was in full force.

Considering the low (but growing) economic relations with the Russian Federation, and despite a longstanding tradition of diplomatic ties between both countries since the Soviet years – notably on Northern/Arctic issues – Stephen Harper unilaterally chose to pursue a strategy that would most likely (and negatively) impact its relations with Russia, but potentially increase Canada's influence in the eyes of Washington. This strategy would also have low impacts on the Canadian economy and trade, and communicate a message to Canadians that Mr. Harper is on top of national security issues.

Mr. Harper also found a way to label Russia's foreign policy, in the face of the Ukrainian crisis, as a potential threat to Canada's territorial integrity. In August 2014, during his annual tour in Canada's North, the Prime Minister cautioned that in the face of President Putin's growing aggressive behaviour, and "because Russia is also Canada's neighbour, we must not be complacent here at home." And in response to "Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine," the Harper government, as Chair of the Arctic Council, decided to boycott a working-group-level meeting in Moscow last April. By not attending, Canada took, what it called, a "principled stand against Russia." It was also the first time an Arctic Council state boycotted a meeting.<sup>29</sup>

While the unilateral decision to boycott the Moscow working-group meeting (a task-force on black carbon and methane that Canada chairs) is consistent with the Prime Minister's neocontinentalist approach to foreign policy, its political impacts regionally in the Arctic may have larger implications for the entire neighbourhood.

On that issue, Robert Papp explained recently that the policy of the White House regarding the Arctic is one that needs to "keep those conversations going because we need consensus of all eight [Arctic Council] countries, and we need to keep Russia engaged there. I believe that there is a willingness on their part to do that."<sup>30</sup>

### THE (CANADIAN) NORTH POLE

But the most striking and recent example of Mr. Harper's attempt to use the Arctic region as a tool to transform Canada's image through its neocontinentalist foreign policy is his recent ambition to claim the North Pole as part of Canada's sovereignty.

A year ago, and at the very last minute, Canada decided to delay its full submission to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) based on the fact that, as revealed by recently

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<sup>29</sup> Canada. (2014). Canada Takes Principled Stand on Arctic Council Meetings. Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/arctic-arctique/news-communications/2014/04/15a.aspx?lang=eng>.

<sup>30</sup> Randy Showstack (2014). *Op Cit*.



released documents by the CBC,<sup>31</sup> the Arctic component of the submission was not complete in the eyes of the Prime Minister. Despite a 10-year effort by scientists to generate *scientific* evidence for Canada's Arctic UNCLOS extended continental shelf claim, it did not provide "data backing up a claim that would include the North Pole," suggest the documents obtained by the CBC.

At a press conference on the day of the announcement, Foreign Affairs minister John Baird explained that the delay was necessary to provide Canadian officials and scientists further time "to do additional work and necessary work to ensure that a submission for the full extent of the continental shelf in the Arctic includes Canada's claim to the North Pole." He also added that claiming the North Pole was a way to "ensure that all Canadians benefit from the tremendous resources that are to be found in Canada's Far North."<sup>32</sup>

Leona Aglukkaq, Canada's Environment Minister and Minister to the Arctic Council, insisted that the Harper government is "defining Canada's last frontier" and by claiming the North Pole, "defending our sovereignty." Her statement clearly differs from a 2006 speech given in Iqaluit by Stephen Harper, stating that "all along the [land] border, our jurisdiction extends outward 200 miles into the surrounding sea... No more. And no less."<sup>33</sup>

Canada, Denmark and Russia are all submitting extended continental shelf claims to the UN beyond their respective 200 miles in the Arctic. But Law Professor Michael Byers from the University of British Columbia, among other lawyers, has repeatedly stated that whereas "Canada has rights over extensive areas of seabed elsewhere in the Arctic Ocean, it has no basis for a claim at the North Pole."<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, by delaying the Canadian Arctic Ocean submission to UNCLOS, Mr. Harper pulled his own political stunt in the Arctic, symbolically familiar to what we saw in 2007 with the Russian flag in the Arctic Ocean.

Not only does it create a false impression that the Arctic region is a conflictual area of the world, its narrative and unilateral intentions are in opposition to the spirit of the *Ilulissat Declaration* of 2008, through which all coastal states agreed to continue to work together to strengthen regional cooperation, "which is based on mutual trust and transparency, inter alia, through timely exchange of data and analyses."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> CBC News. (2014, 9 November). Stephen Harper's North Pole bid caught bureaucrats by surprise. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stephen-harper-s-north-pole-bid-caught-bureaucrats-by-surprise-1.2829243>.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Cheadle. (2013, 9 December). Canada makes territorial claim for North Pole despite not mapping area yet. *Maclean's*. Retrieved from: <http://www.macleans.ca/general/canada-makes-territorial-claim-for-north-pole-despite-not-mapping-area-yet-2/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Michael Byers. (2014, 20 August). The North Pole is a Distraction. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/the-north-pole-is-a-distraction/article20126915/>.

<sup>35</sup> The Ilulissat Declaration. (2008, 27-28 May). Retrieved from: [http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf).



Whatever that Harper/Russia analogy is worth, delaying the submission and sending scientists back to the Arctic Ocean to conduct costly surveys produces powerful images that can serve Stephen Harper's foreign policy agenda. It might also be the first time since acceding to power in 2006 that the Canadian Prime Minister has gotten a step closer to tying the tie of the Arctic to his neocontinentalist project.

### THE LONE CANADIAN

Canada's image as a leader in the Arctic has continued to depress as an outcome of Stephen Harper's "transformative" foreign policy, clearly dominated by unilateral actions that have implications on Canada's international relations, reputation and image in the world.

By focusing primarily on Arctic domestic issues like economic development, and ambitions of beefed-up military capabilities to defend Canada's sovereignty in a region where traditional threats to the country's sovereignty and security are yet to be found (and even downplayed by the *Department of National Defence*), Canada has turned a blind eye on its circumpolar interests.

In the meantime, the U.S. has significantly propelled itself in the Arctic arena guided by foreign policy priorities that *are not* aligned to those of Stephen Harper. The U.S. recognizes that its national interests are better served when aligned to those of the circumpolar world, and globally when dealing with climate change issues that will continue to affect *all* Arctic states and their vulnerable northern and southern regions. It decided to balance economic concerns with scientific priorities. It is pushing forward an "aggressive" agenda on common-circumpolar-global issues such as climate change (as a regional and national priority) followed by maritime stewardship and the improvement of economic and living conditions in the Arctic. These 'soft-power' thematic areas are *not* incompatible with Canadian interests in the Arctic. Rather, they are visibly shared issues and concerns that should be addressed bilaterally *and* multilaterally by both states, with common objectives and aligned implementation strategies.

But that is not where Mr. Harper is heading.

Priorities for his government will continue to be job growth and greater prosperity for Canada through developing Northern/Arctic natural resources. Efforts to increase Canada's military capabilities for emerging national security issues in the Arctic should also continue to drive Harper's policy goals (although challenged by ongoing procurement problems afflicting DND implementation strategies).

Bilaterally with the U.S., common maritime security concerns in the shared Beaufort Sea (tourism, shipping, natural resource exploration and extraction) are also areas where cooperation will continue to grow, like elsewhere in the North American context through military institutions such as NORAD.

Yet, while Mr. Harper continues to pursue his ideologically-driven foreign policy approach – that feeds off global conflicts and a stronger alignment with the U.S. here and abroad to 'restore' Canada's image internationally – it is those same policy decisions based on neocontinentalist principles that seem to be paradoxically undermining the role the circumpolar world plays in the country's national security equation.



Equally important, the improbability (because of ideology) of any type of bandwagoning by Canada on the U.S. Arctic (non-traditional) security agenda means for Canadians that we are missing a unique opportunity in recent history to benefit from American resources and influence in our shared northern neighbourhood, and globally, to actually project Canada's image as an Arctic power in world affairs. That is Stephen Harper's foreign policy paradox.

The Arctic region might just be one of many other examples.

## ► **About the Author**

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