

“Canada-US Military Cooperation in the Arctic: Bilateralism or Multilateralism?”

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[Disarming Arctic Security](#)

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Canadian/American military cooperation in North America is hardly a new phenomenon, and it's getting a major boost in the context of expanding military capacity throughout the Arctic. Security cooperation among Arctic neighbours is obviously to be welcomed, but a 2012 agreement does raise important policy questions.

A 2009 agreement on a Canada-US *Tri-Command Framework*, involving the Canadian Joint Operations Command (then Canada Command), the US Northern Command, and the Canada-US North American Aerospace Command (NORAD), sets the context for current efforts toward increased military cooperation in the Arctic. Launched with little public attention, this relatively new tri-command arrangement is nevertheless described by Canada's Department of National Defence (DND) as one of the top five^[i] Canada-US defence agreements^[ii] – among hundreds of such agreements. Inasmuch as the *Tri-Command Framework* is grouped with NORAD and the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, it is obviously regarded as a significant and foundational reference point for the overall, not just Arctic, Canada-US security relationship.

That initial agreement was followed in 2010 by a joint *Tri-Command Vision* statement. It gives prominent attention to what it calls “a dynamic and uncertain security environment,” identifying threats that range from cyber-attacks to the spread of disease, to weapons of mass destruction technologies, to extremism and terrorism.^[iii] In response to these threats, the vision statement emphasizes the development of shared “situational awareness and a common operating picture,” essentially meaning shared surveillance objectives and potentially shared operations, and an improved capacity for working with civilian agencies – or, as the statement puts it, support for “civilian partners.” Also in 2010, a *Tri-Command Strategy* pledged more timely and effective sharing of information on best practices and situational awareness in five environments or domains: land, sea, air, space, and cyber.^[iv]

Then in 2012 the focus shifted to tri-Command arrangements in the Arctic with the December signing of two documents: *Framework for Arctic Cooperation*^[v] and *Tri-Command Training and Exercise: Statement of Intent*.^[vi]

No military threats

A key strategic assumption of the Arctic tri-command framework is that, in the Arctic, the primary issue or requirement is not defence against military threats, but is the need to build up a capacity to monitor civilian commercial activity in the north and support civilian agencies and Government departments in ensuring compliance with laws and regulations and thus to effective governance there. So, while there will be “increases in human activity and resource development” in the Arctic, the framework insists that “the types and level of international activity in the Arctic will not result in armed conflict in the foreseeable future,” and “relationships among Arctic nations will remain stable and cooperative.” The framework goes on to emphasize that Arctic strategies in the three participating commands will be developed “within a whole of government framework” – a reinforcement of the tri-command framework's assertion that “defence issues do not drive Arctic affairs” and that “the Canadian and US militaries will support other departments and agencies in response to threats and hazards in the region when requested and directed.”^[vii]

Timely monitoring and joint exercises

Domain awareness – in other words, reliable and timely monitoring – is identified as a priority, given that “current capabilities for monitoring activities in the Arctic are limited,” and there is agreement between the two countries that maritime surveillance should be the initial focus.^[viii] The safe transit of vessels in Arctic waters, for example, requires a capacity for continuous tracking of vessels in the region. A case in point is the Northern Canada Vessel Traffic Services (NORDREG), which requires all vessels of 300 gross tonnes or more, or 500 gross tonnes of combined weight if involved in a towing or pushing operation, and any vessel or combination of vessels carrying pollutants or dangerous goods sailing in northern waters to submit a sailing plan, provide position updates, report any deviation from the sailing plan, and send in a final report.^[ix] Originally voluntary, since 2010 such reporting has been compulsory,^[x] an important development in Arctic governance that also, as Arctic policy analyst Heather Exner-Pirot points out, draws attention to the lack of enforcement capacity.^[xi]

While the Tri-Command arrangement thus provides for combined operations within either of the countries – in other words, Americans could come to the aid of Canadians or, Canadian forces could go to the aid of the US in US territory – any cross border operation requires the explicit approval of the relevant government. In 2008 Canada and the US signed, and in 2012 renewed, the Canada-US Civil Assistance Plan which facilitates cross border military operations in support of civil authorities responding to a civil emergency.^[xii] It too is described by DND as one of the five “principle bi-lateral defence arrangements” between the US and Canada, although no Canadian announcement of it was made either at the time of the original signing in 2008,^[xiii] or at the time of the 2012 renewal. When the agreement came to public attention through a US announcement, Canadian officials explained that any military aid to a civil authority originates through a request from the civilian government.^[xiv] Hence, neither national nor cross border military aid to civilian authorities can take place without prior approval and request from the Government.

The *Tri-Command Training and Exercise* agreement, the other agreement signed in December 2012, signals the intention to conduct an annual tri-command exercise focused on operations in support of civilian authorities. The exercise is to work through command and control questions for cross border operations, demonstrate operational support for civil authorities, and support other agreements such as the Canada-US Civil Assistance Plan as well as the Arctic Council Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue.

Policy questions

These are all instances of welcome security cooperation between neighbours in the Arctic, but they also raise important policy questions. How do indigenous communities of the Arctic relate to this tri-command arrangement? Do bilateral Canada-US security arrangements bolster or ignore, or even undermine, the pursuit of a cohesive circumpolar security community? What are the implications for Canadian sovereignty or, more to the point, policy independence of further military integration with the US, especially when one of the key objectives of expanding Canada’s military in the Arctic is said to be strengthened Canadian sovereignty?

Engaging northern peoples

The 2009 Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty makes it clear that indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination within the territories of existing states, including, of course, Canada and the United States, means that “Inuit **consent**, expertise and perspectives are critical to progress on international issues involving the Arctic, such as global environmental security, sustainable development, **militarization**, commercial fishing, shipping, human health, and economic and social development” (emphasis added).^[xv] In other words, military developments in the Arctic, no less than economic and environmental initiatives, require the active engagement of the indigenous people. That, of course, does not by definition preclude Canada-US military cooperation in the Arctic, but the more military

activity is absorbed into state-to-state consultation and high-level command coordination, the less the expertise and perspectives, much less the consent, of the indigenous people will come into genuine play. A more formalized means of engaging Arctic indigenous peoples on the development of national and international military arrangements in their region needs to be developed – and followed. In the formal impact review process related to the proposed Nanisivik Naval Facility, the Review Board cites the Department of National Defence for failing to provide information on any efforts to respond to public concerns or to incorporate traditional knowledge in the development of the proposal.^[xvi]

From bilateralism to multilateralism

In one important sense, Canada-US military cooperation and coordination model the kind of international cooperation that is widely recommended for the Arctic region as a whole. As Arctic states move to enhance their “defense, security, and safety operations in the Arctic,” cross border cooperation, not competition, is obviously the model to follow.^[xvii] In another sense, however, Canada-US centric arrangements fall well short of the kinds of multilateral military arrangements needed.

Happily, cooperation is a prominent feature of current Arctic military developments, and it needs reinforcement. Norway and Russia are enhancing maritime cooperation through their annual Exercise POMOR, the US and Norway join Russia in Operation FRUKUS, and in 2012 a Greenland search and rescue exercise involved all Arctic states. In 2010 Denmark joined Canada’s Operation Nunavut in an Ellesmere Island exercise with a search and rescue focus. And Canada and the US have undertaken joint air defence exercises with Russia in which the scenario had the three states working together in response to the hi-jacking of a civilian aircraft.^[xviii]

The Arctic Council’s agreement on search and rescue cooperation^[xix] points to the kind of cooperation that could also apply to multilateral security arrangements. Article 9, for example, refers to the exchange of information among the Arctic states on communications processes, available facilities and equipment, fuel supplies, and training. It promotes collaboration in real-time monitoring and warning, operational exercises, ship reporting, national policy developments, research, and so on. All of these could apply to military systems and operations as well as to search and rescue, given the extent to which military forces are necessarily already at the core of search and rescue capacity.

In 2012 Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff hosted a meeting of Chiefs of Defence and senior military officials from all eight Arctic states in Goose Bay. DND says the primary objective of the meeting “was to build upon Canada’s existing defence relationships in the region by offering attendees an informal opportunity to conduct direct multi- and bilateral discussions focused on Northern issues. Topics discussed included the sharing of knowledge and expertise about dealing with regional operational challenges posed by geography, climate and vast distances; responsible stewardship; and support to civil authorities. The conference also included opportunities to meet with local community leaders and to engage with Canadian Rangers.”^[xx] In other words, a move toward regional – that is, multilateral rather than only bi-national – command arrangements is the model that commends itself to Arctic Council states.

Canadian sovereignty

Bilateral cooperation among neighboring states with shared interests is obviously to be commended, remembering, of course, that Canada has more than one immediate Arctic neighbour. Canada shares a much more extensive Arctic maritime border with Greenland than with the United States, making cooperation with Denmark in maritime and air domain awareness in support of civilian agencies at least as urgent. However, the key to both Arctic security cooperation and to furthering Canadian

sovereignty is to define shared security interests within a regional framework rather than in strictly North American terms.

Multilateralizing circumpolar security cooperation is essential, a process that will also be an important means of protecting Canadian sovereignty and policy independence in the face of the ongoing bilateral integration of Canadian and American military operations. Indeed, Canada's historic impulse has been to try to subsume, where practical, Canada-US security dynamics within multilateral forums such as NATO and the United Nations.

The Arctic Council has led the way in constructing a narrative of Arctic cooperation and mutual confidence building – and thus provides the compelling model for preserving national and aboriginal sovereignties while promoting neighbour-to-neighbour military cooperation throughout the region.

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About the “Disarming Arctic Security” blog: Arctic “security” is ultimately about the safety and well-being of the people of the Arctic – a human security agenda that necessarily engages a broad range of social and economic conditions and policies. Military policies and practices in the Arctic are but one element of this broad human security agenda, but they will be the primary focus of this blog. What are and should be the roles, and limits, of military forces in supporting human security, in strengthening the rule of law nationally and internationally, and in promoting efforts towards a cooperative security regime within the Arctic region?

The challenge is to advance the kinds of national policies and international rules and initiatives that honor, in the context of the Arctic, the UN Charter's Article 26 pledge to “promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources.

[i] The other four are:

Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) – established in 1940 to discuss and advise the Canadian Prime Minister and the U.S. President on defence policy issues related to continental defence and security.

Military Cooperation Committee – established in 1946 as the primary strategic link between Canadian and U.S. joint military staffs.

North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) – established in 1958 to monitor and defend North American airspace. In 2006, a maritime warning function was added.

The Canada-U.S. Civil Assistance Plan – signed February 2008, and renewed in January 2012, to facilitate the support of military members from one nation to the armed forces of the other nation during a civil emergency.

<http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4073>

[ii] “The Canada-United States Military-to-Military Relationship,” DND, BG-12.005, 24 January 2012 (last updated 21 January 2013). <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4073>

[iii] <http://www.northcom.mil/News/Signed%20Vision%20in%20English%2012%20Mar%2010.pdf>

[iv] “The Canada-United States Military-to-Military Relationship,” National Defence and the Canadian Forces, BG-12.005, January 24, 2012. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/mobil/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4073>

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- [v] http://www.cjoc.forces.gc.ca/fs-ev/2012/12/Tri_Command_Arctic_Framework_final_En_29_Nov_2012.pdf
- [vi] http://www.cjoc.forces.gc.ca/fs-ev/2012/12/Tri_Command_Training_Exercise_Statement_of_Intent.pdf
- [vii] "The Canada-United States Military-to-Military Relationship," DND, BG-12.005, 24 January 2012 (last updated 21 January 2013). <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4073>
- [viii] When NORAD was indefinitely extended in 2006, it was amended to make maritime surveillance and warning a NORAD responsibility. The response to such warnings or identified threats remained a national responsibility.
- [ix] http://www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca/eng/MCTS/vtr_Arctic_Canada
- [x] Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, "Sovereignty and Security in Canada's Arctic: Interim Report," The Honourable Pamela Wallin, Chair; The Honourable Romeo Dallaire, Deputy Chair, March 2011. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/403/defe/rep/rep07mar11-e.pdf>
- [xi] Heather Exner-Pirot, "What's In a Name? NORDREG Becomes Mandatory," Eye on the Arctic, 12 July 2010. <http://eyeontheartctic.rcinet.ca/blog/136-heather-exner-pirot/284-whats-in-a-name-nordreg-becomes-mandatory>
- [xii] "The Canada-United States Military-to-Military Relationship," DND, BG-12.005, 24 January 2012 (last updated 21 January 2013). <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4073>
- [xiii] "Canada-US pact allows cross-border military activity," The Vancouver Sun, 24 February 2008. <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=ba99826e-f9b7-42a4-9b0a-f82134b92e7e>
- [xiv] "Canada-US pact allows cross-border military activity," The Vancouver Sun, 24 February 2008. <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=ba99826e-f9b7-42a4-9b0a-f82134b92e7e>
- [xv] A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic, Inuit Circumpolar Council. <http://inuitcircumpolar.com/files/uploads/icc-files/declaration12x18vicechairsigned.pdf>
- [xvi] Nunavut Impact Review Board letter to the Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and National Defence, 14 January 2013, linked to report by Jim Bell, "Nanisivik dock scheme runs aground after Nunavut board gives DND a failing grade," 18 April 2013, http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674nanisivik_naval_dock_scheme_runs_aground_after_nunavut_board_gives_dnd/
- [xvii] The formulation used in the Canada-US *Framework for Arctic Cooperation*, p. 12. http://www.cjoc.forces.gc.ca/fs-ev/2012/12/Tri_Command_Arctic_Framework_final_En_29_Nov_2012.pdf
- [xviii] Further descriptions of joint exercises available at The Simons Foundation: "[Circumpolar Military Facilities of the Arctic Five](#)".
- [xix] Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, Arctic Council, May 2011. <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/environment-and-people/oceans/search-and-rescue/157-sar-agreement>
- [xx] General Natynczyk and fellow northern Chiefs of Defence discuss shared Arctic interests," National Defence and Canadian Forces, 13 April 2012, NR-12.058. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/mobil/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=4151>