

*2013 Ross Ellis Memorial Lecture in
Military and Strategic Studies*

*The Military as Nation Builder:
The Case of the Canadian North*

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The Arctic has taken centre stage in not only Canadian political and security thinking in recent years, but internationally as well. Political scientist Rob Huebert, associate director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, has been leading the sovereignty and security charge in Canada for more than a decade at this point. First he warned us to fend off the Americans over the Northwest Passage, followed by the Danes over Hans Island, then the Russians when they planted flags on the seabed at the North Pole or flew close to our airspace, and now the Chinese and the Indians who are clamouring to get into the Arctic Council, access Arctic resources, and use Arctic shipping routes. Huebert perceptively notes that our Arctic policies tend to be reactive rather than proactive. We have debated our respective positions – Huebert serving, in Franklyn Griffiths’ memorable description, as the “primary purveyor of polar peril,” and me as a prognosticator of polar peace and pragmatic preparedness. I have learned

a lot from our exchanges. But this is neither the narrative nor the debate that I wish to engage here.¹ This paper focuses closer to home, exploring tangible ways that the military has shaped Northern nation-building in Canada – and the peculiar ways that our Northern experience has begun to shape our military.

There is a lot of terrain to cover, like the Arctic itself. Accordingly, I will highlight three themes: communications, transportation, and human infrastructure.

A few quotes help to frame this study. The first is from Prime Minister Stephen Harper. “We believe that Canadians are excited about the government asserting Canada’s control and sovereignty in the Arctic,” Harper told a *Toronto Sun* reporter on 23 February 2007:

We believe that’s one of the big reasons why Canadians are excited and support our plan to rebuild the Canadian Forces. I think it’s practically and symbolically hugely important, much more important than the dollars spent. And I’m hoping that years from now, Canada’s Arctic sovereignty, military and otherwise, will be, frankly, a major legacy of this government.²

What will the military’s legacy be? Simple insurance against the alleged possibility that, if Canada does not demonstrate effective military occupation, we might lose our sovereignty “by dereliction”?³ Some international lawyers (including in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) take umbrage at this notion. Northerners may also be offended. After all, people – now Canadians – have been “using” the Arctic since time immemorial.

Northern ways of life have changed significantly over the last century, and they continue to change today. Given the “perfect storm” that Huebert has forecast for the Arctic over the last decade, he suggests that the stakes are higher than ever. But this perfect storm already arrived -- more than a half century ago. Journalist and

¹ For an outline of the debate over the “polar race” narrative and Canada’s place in the circumpolar world, see Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security and Stewardship* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011).

² Kathleen Harris, “Laying claim to Canada’s internal waters,” *Toronto Sun*, 23 February 2007.

³ Donald M. McRae, “Arctic Sovereignty: Loss by Dereliction?” *CARC – Northern Perspectives* 22, no. 4 (1994-95), available online at <http://www.carc.org/pubs/v22no4/loss.htm>.

documentary filmmaker Kevin McMahon, in his intriguing 1987 book *Arctic Twilight*, noted that:

Historians chronically speak of the military opening up the Arctic, as if it had been a kind of locked and mysterious room before some clever army engineers happened by with the keys. Really, the military swept over the Arctic – first during World War II and more so during the Cold War – like an iron cloud, carpet bombing the place with boxes. Their job was the assertion of sovereignty. Every place a box landed became a beach-head for industrialized society. The boxes soon became the foundation for the Canadian government, which the military had given cause to worry about its sovereignty. Boxes were added, and more of our society – with its various virtues and vices, machines and organizations, ideals, morals, values and goals – were shipped north. What adult Inuit recall when they look back, not always in anger, is decade after decade when the skies rained boxes. The skies rain boxes still.⁴

Northern military sites were beachheads of modernism during the Cold War: sites of wage employment, modern housing, and Western technologies. Defence initiatives – conceived from afar and implemented locally – were not designed to bring Aboriginal peoples under state control, but they had far reaching impacts all the same. Accordingly, Inuit political leader Mary Simon once summarized that “too often, military projects are centralized undertakings that are unilaterally imposed on indigenous peoples and their territories. Such actions are inconsistent with the basic principles of aboriginal self-government.”⁵ Cast in these terms, the so-called “militarization” of the Arctic appears to fit within the framework of a coercive, totalizing⁶ state interested in re-engineering Northern life to conform with modern (and military) priorities.

⁴ Kevin McMahon, *Arctic Twilight: Reflections on the Destiny of Canada's Northern Land and People* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1988), p. 11.

⁵ Mary Simon, “Militarization and the Aboriginal Peoples,” in Franklyn Griffiths, ed., *Arctic Alternatives: Civility or Militarism in the Circumpolar North* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1992), p. 60.

⁶ High modernism, to borrow James C. Scott's framework, sought “a sweeping, rational engineering of all aspects of social life in order to improve the human condition.” *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: 1988), 88. See also Matthew Farish and P. Whitney

Commentators often overlook the positive aspects of military development in the North – the communications and transportation networks that opened the region to development, and the modest but unique ways that the military contributes to resilient *human* infrastructure in the North. Our narratives emphasizing the *reactive* nature of military promises, or the *lack* of continuous military presence, frequently miss the military's salient nation-building role in the North.

In his doctoral thesis on the military in the Canadian North, Kenneth Eyre noted:

Military activity has been a significant factor in the development of northern infrastructure both as deliberate national development programs and as the by-product of defence-related construction activities. While the military has had a considerable impact on the North, the northern fact has had surprisingly little impact upon the Canadian military.⁷

The military shaped the North – but the North did little to shape the military. Dr. Eyre had solid grounds to make this case in the early 1980s. In the twenty-first century, I am not sure that this adequately reflects the evolving relationship between the military and Northern peoples.

* * *

How has the military shaped the Canadian North?

A comprehensive study might begin with the French and English battles for fur trade era supremacy in Hudson Bay at the end of the seventeenth century, or with the Royal Navy officers' search for prestige (and promotion) in the nineteenth century, culminating with the disappearance of John Franklin's expedition and the epic search to discover his fate. But these are not "Canadian" stories *per se*.

The young dominion only acquired its Arctic territory in 1870 and 1880. When it came to the high Arctic islands, Canada only took them because Britain wanted to transfer its nebulous rights after receiving "two apparently innocent requests" for

Lackenbauer, "High modernism in the Arctic: Planning Frobisher Bay and Inuvik," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol.35, no.3 (July 2009), pp. 517-544.

⁷ Kenneth C. Eyre, "Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87," *Arctic* 40, no.4 (December 1987), p. 292.

mining concessions on Baffin Island in 1874.⁸ The colony complied and simply sat on its new holdings without worrying about their extent. Facing no military challenges in the Arctic, and with national interest focused on the Great Plains where the Canadian Pacific Railroad was laying the steel spine of a transcontinental nation, the federal government had no imperative to take action in its Arctic hinterland.

The Klondike Gold Rush showed that frontier resources could generate international excitement. The small Yukon Field Force, formed in Ottawa in 1898 with 203 members of the Canadian Regular Force, went north to Fort Selkirk and Dawson in the Yukon in an “aid to the civil power” capacity, assisting the Northwest Mounted Police in maintaining law and order during the rush. It returned south two years later, and the Dawson Rifles of Canada (a non-permanent militia unit formed in their place) disbanded five years later, leaving the Canadian North without any military presence once again.⁹

In the early twentieth century, official missions explored the Arctic and collected customs duties and licensing fees from whalers – a modest assertion of Canadian legal authority. By the interwar years, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) posts dotted the northern landscape, suggesting a continuous state presence.¹⁰ After Canadian negotiators reached agreements with Denmark and Norway to settle terrestrial sovereignty claims, and American explorers fell into line and complied with Canadian regulations, worries about lands and islands dissipated. More importantly, simple frozen geography seemed to preclude any foreign military threat.¹¹

⁸ Gordon W. Smith, “The Transfer of Arctic Territories from Great Britain to Canada in 1880, and some related matters, as seen in official correspondence,” *Arctic* 14, no.1 (1961): pp. 53-73.

⁹ Edward Lester, Brereton Greenhous, and William Constable, *Guarding the Goldfields: The Story of the Yukon Field Force* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1987).

¹⁰ William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: the Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985).

¹¹ On this era, see D.H. Dinwoodie, “Arctic Controversy: The 1925 Byrd-MacMillan Expedition Example,” *Canadian Historical Review* 53/1 (March 1972): pp. 51-65; Richard Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978); Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration and International Relations, 1900-1932* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992); Thorleif Tobias Thorleifsson, “Norway Must Really Drop Their Absurd Claims Such as That to the Otto Sverdrup Islands’: The Sverdrup Islands Question, 1902-1930” (unpublished MA thesis, Simon Fraser University,

Nevertheless, the Canadian military made its first direct contributions to Northern development following the First World War. The fledgling Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) began the enormous task of taking aerial photographs to support the mapping of the entire North. Military fliers and mapmakers with the Army Survey Establishment (now the Canadian Forces Mapping and Charting Establishment) thus helped to make the North *legible* for development and for the extension of state control.¹² The RCAF also conducted the first aerial ice reconnaissance in Davis and Hudson Straits in 1927-28, studying ice, weather, and navigation conditions along the new grain route from Churchill on Hudson Bay to the ports of Europe, and establishing elementary navigation aids and flying bases. This fit with the RCAF's interwar role as the government's "civil air company," transporting officials into remote regions, blazing new air mail routes, and flying sick and injured trappers, traders, and Aboriginal people from remote outposts to southern hubs where they could get medical attention.¹³

For the army, however, there was little direct role. Certainly there was no thought of sending young soldiers, like Sergeant Ross Ellis of the 15th Alberta Light Horse, to the Arctic to train. Had Ellis been a member of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, however, this might have been different

2006); and Janice Cavell and Jeff Noakes, *Acts of Occupation: Canada and Arctic Sovereignty, 1918-25* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

¹² On the idea of legibility, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: 1988). On this mapping process, see R.C. McNeill, "Putting Canada on the Map," *Sentinel* 6, no.3 (March 1970), pp. 16-19, and B. W. Waugh, "Arctic Mapping," in *Sentinel* 6, no.3 (March 1970), p. 44. Kenneth Eyre observed that "the mapping of the North carried out by the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Engineers between 1947 and 1967 provides a classic example of the military establishment in peacetime undertaking projects of national development that required skills relative to military operations. When the state of the art developed to the point where a civil branch of government could take over, and when future operations could be carried on as profitable, but still reasonably economic ventures, the military gave up the role and moved on to other fields." Kenneth Eyre, "The Military and Nation Building in the Arctic, 1945-1964," in *Canada and Arctic Sovereignty and Security: Historical Perspectives*, ed. P.W. Lackenbauer, Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies (Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies/University of Calgary Press, 2011), p. 218.

¹³ RCAF Air Force History, "Inter-War Years," excerpts from the *Handbook for Air Force Non-Commissioned Members*, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/v2/hst/page-eng.asp?id=551>. The RCAF provided seven aircraft for the expedition and set up three bases at Port Burwell, Wakeham Bay, and Nottingham Island.

In 1923, the federal government turned to the military to directly support national development when the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals opened the first stations of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System (NWT&YRS) in the Yukon: at Dawson, the northern terminus of the Government Telegraph Line, and at Mayo, the mining hub home to the Gold Commissioner, Mining Recorder, and RCMP Commissioner. The Department of the Interior covered the costs, and the Department of National Defence (DND) jumped at the opportunity to have practical roles subsidized in an austere budgetary environment. This radiotelegraphy system, using high and low radio frequency radio communications, allowed northerners to send morse code messages down to Edmonton then into the telegraph system that served all of Canada. "The new outlet provided by radiotelegraph station was immediately utilized by banks, mining and steamship companies and the general public, as well as by Government agencies," the official Signal Corps historian noted. "All were loud in their praise of the rapidity with which they could now transact business with the 'outside' as compared with the weeks and sometimes months it had taken previously."¹⁴ In subsequent years, the system expanded to Herschel Island, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, and points beyond, reaching as far east as Baker Lake after the Second World War.

The signallers who served in these remote outposts played unsung roles as nation-builders – although they would not have seen themselves as such. Their tasks went far beyond what they learned at Vimy Barracks in Kingston. In the unpublished official history, Warrant Officer Cal Vince noted that "Northerners will ... remember Signals primarily as magistrates, Airways and Transportation agents, acting minions of the law and prime movers in community affairs." Their role in apprehending Albert Johnson, the infamous Mad Trapper of Rat River, attracted the most attention. But most of their radio traffic was intertwined with the dramatic rise in mineral prospecting and development in the interwar north, and particularly the air and water transportation companies that supplied and equipped these activities. The System grew in response to industry and government pressures, with new stations popping up wherever mining interests made important discoveries and budgets allowed. Operating out of tents, old

¹⁴ WO1 Cal Vince, *A Short History of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System* (self-published, 1960), now available online at http://www.nwtandy.rcsigs.ca/1923_29.htm#1923. The full story of the NWT&YRS remains to be written.

Indian Agency, RCMP, or traders' buildings, or fledgling mining facilities, the Signalmen provided daily weather reports so that forecasters could support the commercial aircraft operations expanding rapidly all over the north. The System became a communication backbone in remote areas, expanding and contracting in response to commercial and industrial development in the Yukon and the Mackenzie Valley. During the 1930s, the Hudson's Bay Company, RCMP, aircraft companies, sawmill operators, fur traders, and private mining companies at tiny, isolated settlements installed HF equipment to reach the nearest station and thus keep in daily touch with the outside world. By 1936, the Radio System operated 17 stations on a full time basis, plus two sub-stations at Herschel Island and Tuktoyaktuk during the summer navigation season. This served Northern interests and stitched the North more fully into the nation, allowing the federal govt to secure a more immediate grasp of what was going on in the region than ever before.¹⁵

The outbreak of war in 1939 disrupted the system. Although Northern residents had become dependent on it over the previous sixteen years, the army mobilized the communications network to put out the call for volunteers and withdrew experienced Signalmen to fulfill wartime needs in southern Canada and overseas. Stations were scaled back or closed in cases where this would not jeopardize the whole system, but the military recognized that it could not simply abandon northern needs.¹⁶ The Signal corps provided an essential service to the Northern economy and civil society.

The Northwest defence projects that followed the United States entry into the war in December 1941 ushered in the first wave of large-scale Northern military development. It also breathed new life into the NWT&Y Radio System which supplied communications for the Alaska-Canada (ALCAN or Alaska) Highway, the Canadian Oil (Canol) Pipeline, and the airfields along the Northwest Staging Route.¹⁷ Ken Coates

¹⁵ Based on Vince, "A Short History of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System." On their role in the hunt for the Mad Trapper, see Nash Neary, Sergeant Major 'Nash' Neary, "A Northern Adventure," *Canadian Army Journal* 2/3 (1948).

¹⁶ John S. Moir, *History of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals 1903-1961* (Ottawa: Royal Canadian Signal Corps Committee, 1962), p. 282.

¹⁷ The US and Canadian Governments decided in the summer of 1943 that RCCS, given its experience in northern communications and key stations, was best qualified to handle all phases of communications for the Canol project. By the end of that year, it had fourteen NWT&YRS stations in operation, "and the

and Bill Morrison have provided definitive works on how these developments transformed the Northwest. "Almost overnight the isolation and economic depression that had gripped the region were swept away," they wrote. "The first to arrive on the scene were members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who had the responsibility for the construction of the initial pioneer road to Alaska and the preliminary work on the Canol Project. They were soon followed by a large group of civilian workers, mostly American but with a good proportion of Canadians, whose job was to bring the Army's rough road up to civilian standards, to complete the pipeline and the refinery, and to finish the other projects in the region."¹⁸ In the end, 40,000 foreign military and civilian workers smashed their way through the Canadian northwest, changing settlement patterns in the remote region beyond Fort St. John and awakening the federal government to its Northern responsibilities. In the east, the Northeast Staging (Crimson) Route and the massive airfield at Goose Bay, Labrador, had localized but much less sweeping impacts on the region as a whole.¹⁹

Although Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King allowed the Americans onto Canadian soil with few constraints, he was always suspicious of their intentions. Worrisome reports from Malcolm MacDonald, the British high commissioner who visited the defence projects in 1943 and was alarmed at the scale of American activities, spurred the prime minister to reassert Canadian control in the Northwest. The government appointed a special commissioner, Brigadier-General W.W. Foster, to oversee the various American projects.²⁰ Then, as the war drew to a close, Canada paid

system once again was in the process of expansion after a four year lull." Vince, "A Short History of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System."

¹⁸ Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, *Journal of the West* 32/4 (October 1993): pp. 47-53. For a fuller study with detailed citations, see K. S. Coates and W. R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in World War II: The U.S. Army of Occupation in Canada's Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

¹⁹ See, for example, Robert V. Eno, "Crystal Two: The Origin of Iqaluit," *Arctic* 56, no.1 (2003), pp. 63-75; and Melanie Gagnon and Iqaluit Elders, *Inuit Recollections on the Military Presence in Iqaluit* (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2002).

²⁰ Elizabeth B. Elliot-Meisel, *Arctic Diplomacy: Canada and the United States in the Northwest Passage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 43; Stanley Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada 1939-1945* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), p. 138. Several scholars have speculated that the United States Government had a diabolical agenda for the Canadian North. See, for example, Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), p. 185; Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto:

the United States for all of the permanent facilities on its territory, thus ensuring full ownership. The Americans also agreed that before they began any project on or over Canadian territory, it had to be approved by the Canadian government.²¹ By 1945 most Americans had left Canadian territory, and the Northwest was more secure than ever – and more connected to the rest of North America.

Not only had Canada emerged from the war with its sovereignty intact, but American *developmental sovereignty* – to borrow William Morrison’s memorable phrase²² – facilitated more ready access to the outside world. Accordingly, the new transportation hubs built in wartime helped to shape the form and pace of postwar economic and political development. Whitehorse, a small seasonal transportation town until the war, owed its political ascendance to the routing of the military highway through the southern Yukon, shifting the balance of power in the Yukon away from the “City of Gold” (Dawson) to the new transportation and military hub.²³ Similarly, Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit) grew out of the American airbase built there during the war. These hubs would have ongoing importance in the early Cold War, and their political importance continues today.

The Alaska Highway also showed the enduring effects of wartime development. New towns, warehouses, administrative headquarters, barracks, Quonset huts, and garages now dotted the route from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks, which ran through some of the most beautiful and rugged landscape in North America.²⁴ The Canadian

McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 74. The American response to these Canadian initiatives, if one avoids the lure of the “conspiratorial view” of history, was not a cause for concern but cautious optimism.

²¹ Whitney Lackenbauer, “Right and Honourable: Mackenzie King, Canadian-American Bilateral Relations, and Canadian Sovereignty in the Northwest, 1943-1948,” in *Mackenzie King: Citizenship and Community*, ed. J. English, K. McLaughlin, and W. Lackenbauer (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2002), p. 154.

²² William Morrison, “Eagle over the Arctic: Americans in the Canadian North, 1867-1885,” in *Interpreting Canada’s North*, eds. K. Coates and W.R. Morrison (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), p. 177.

²³ Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, “The Federal Government and Urban Development in Northern Canada after World War II,” *BC Studies* 104 (1994): pp. 27-29; Morris Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914-1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), p. 175; and Richard Stuart, “The Impact of the Alaska Highway on Dawson City,” in *The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium*, ed. Kenneth Coates (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), pp. 188-204.

²⁴ Kenneth Coates and William R. Morrison, *Alaska Highway in World War II: The American Army of Occupation in Canada’s Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 179-80. For vivid

Army assumed responsibility for the North West Highway System (as it was renamed) in 1946. Although the general staff did not see the highway as a strategic supply route or gateway to invasion, maintaining the route allowed military engineers to practise road and bridge building at minimal cost. (Strategic planners deduced that Russia, having become a nuclear power, would not squander airborne troops on attacking the Canadian North: an atomic bomb would have far more shock value than paratroopers.)²⁵ In short, the Northwest was a remote *defence* priority – but the Alaska Highway, now a continental transportation artery, was a *national* priority.

The army's ongoing presence continue to shape the region. Morrison has characterized the Alaska Highway as a "linear community" – a 1200 mile village with its residents dispersed along a string of isolated highway camps operated by DND. "Although the distances were, by southern standards, extreme, people regularly traveled from one maintenance yard to the next – fifty miles or more – for casual social events and visits," he notes. "Over the years, after workers had shifted between several camps, they maintained friendships up and down the highway."²⁶ The military and civilian communities were enmeshed, with DND money flowing to help build elementary and high schools, operate the hospital, and run recreational programs.²⁷ The

descriptions of the route, see also Kenneth Coates, *North to Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), p. 10.

²⁵ Although the army transferred an armoured car squadron and reserve force elements to the region, regional commanders pleaded for garrisons and mobile forces. Stephen J. Harris, "Really a Defile throughout Its Length': The Defence of the Alaska Highway in Peacetime," in *The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium*, ed. Ken Coates (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1985), pp. 121, 124-27.

²⁶ William Morrison, "The 1200 Mile Village: The Alaska Highway and Settlement in the Far Northwest," paper delivered to the CHA Annual Meeting, York University, May 2006. See also Coates, *North to Alaska*, pp. 225-32. The phrase "linear community" was first used by Ken Coates and reflects Hugh Devitt's quote in *North to Alaska*, pp. 12, 227. Morrison notes that Native people, however, rarely shared in this highway community, even though they began to abandon their river communities after the riverboats ceased and they moved closer to the highway in search of wage labour to supplement unstable income from fur trading. For impacts on Native peoples, see Kenneth Coates, "The Alaska Highway and the Indians of the Southern Yukon, 1942-50: A Study of Native Adaptation to Northern Development" and Julie Cruikshank, "The Gravel Magnet: Some Social Impacts of the Alaska Highway on Yukon Indians," in *The Alaska Highway* ed. Coates, pp. 151-87.

²⁷ Brigadier J. R. B. Jones, "The Contribution of the Armed Forces to the Economy of the Yukon" (Speech to Whitehorse Board of Trade), 12 January 1960, quoted in Eyre, "The Military and Nation Building in the Arctic," p. 214.

military was integrated into the Northwest, and the Northwest integrated into the nation, through this provision of basic northern services.

The Americans, and thus the Canadians, turned their attention even further northward during the early Cold War. The Second World War – and particularly the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – demonstrated the power and significance of strategic bombing. Thus, soon after the US withdrew from the Canadian North, Washington officials again pounded at Ottawa’s door asking to return to build weather stations and airfields. Most scholarship has approached this subject through the question of whether continental security undermined – or threatened to undermine – Canadian sovereignty.²⁸ The state also used these Arctic security projects to gain a better understanding of the region, to explore it, and to bring it under national influence.

The idea of “civilianizing” Arctic defence projects after the war was not only a political ploy by King’s Liberal government to conceal US influence and avoid alarming the Soviets. It also reflected a deliberate attempt to optimize development benefits where possible. Projects like the Joint Arctic Weather Stations (JAWS) in the Queen Elizabeth Islands, conceived by the US Army Air Forces and the US Weather Bureau, served strategic interests related to transpolar air routes in addition to improved weather forecasting. The JAWS stations were civilian-run by Canadian and American personnel, yet served civilian and defence purposes simultaneously. The US Navy and

²⁸ Scholars such as Shelagh Grant have suggested that Canadian apathy in the face of American security interests threatened our sovereignty in the late 1940s. See, for example, Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); Adam Lajeunesse, “Lock, Stock, and Icebergs? Defining Canadian Sovereignty from Mackenzie King to Stephen Harper,” CMSS Occasional Paper No. 1 (Calgary: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007), pp. 6–7; Adam Lajeunesse, “The True North as Long as It’s Free: The Canadian Policy Deficit 1945–1985” (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2007), pp. 42, 59–60; and Lt. Colonel Bernd Horn, “Gateway to Invasion or the Curse of Geography? The Canadian Arctic and the Question of Security, 1939–1999,” in *Forging a Nation: Perspectives on the Canadian Military Experience*, ed. Bernd Horn (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 307–32. Other historians have painted a more benign portrait of bilateral cooperation. See, for example, Elizabeth Elliot-Meisel, *Arctic Diplomacy: Canada and the United States in the Northwest Passage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); David Bercuson, “Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty, 1945–1950: Solving the Canadian Dilemma,” in *The Cold War and Defence*, ed. Keith Neilson and Ronald Haycock (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 153–70; Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert, “Sovereignty and Security: The Department of External Affairs, the United States, and Arctic Sovereignty, 1945–68,” in *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909–2009*, ed. Greg Donaghy and Michael Carroll (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), pp. 101–20.

Air Force played the central role in constructing these installations and resupplying them until the RCAF, Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), and Department of Transport could take over. Over time, they became hubs for a wide range of scientific and exploration activities in the High Arctic, including the polar continental shelf program.²⁹

As the Cold War heated up in the 1950s, the Americans sought extensive air defence systems to protect the continent's northern frontiers – or, more precisely, to secure advance warning to protect the deterrent and thus the industrial heartland of North America.³⁰ “The ghastly one aircraft, one bomb, one city algebra of the nuclear age made it inevitable” that resources would have to be dedicated in the North,” Kenneth Eyre observed. “No longer was the North a strategic barrier.” He hastened to add, however, that “neither the United States nor Canada looked on the North as a *place* to be protected because of some intrinsic value. Rather it was seen as a *direction*, as an exposed flank.”³¹ From the Pinetree Line along the 50th parallel to the Mid-Canada Line, a Canadian-funded radar “fence” along the 55th parallel (using Canadian technology developed at McGill University),³² the warning network extended progressively northward. The most northern (and the most famous) was the Distant Early Warning or DEW Line, a mega-project staggering in both its scale and the speed with which it was constructed. “Stretching for 2500 miles across the Arctic, it required the biggest task-force of ships since the invasion of Europe and the largest air operation since the Berlin airlift to take in the supplies,” Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources official Charles Marshall trumpeted in a 1957 magazine article. “More than 7000 men laboured through two short Arctic construction seasons to complete the work on schedule. Small wonder that many consider the project one of the most dramatic

²⁹ See, for example, Gordon W. Smith, “Weather Stations in the Canadian North and Sovereignty,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 11, no.3 (Spring 2009), 1-63, and Daniel Heidt, “Clenched in the JAWS of America? Canadian Sovereignty and the Joint Arctic Weather Stations, 1946-1972,” in *Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security*, pp. 145-69.

³⁰ The essential study on this process remains Joseph Jockel, *No Boundaries Upstairs: Canada, the United States, and the Origins of North American Air Defence, 1945-1958* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

³¹ Kenneth C. Eyre, “Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87,” *Arctic* 40, no.4 (1987), p. 294.

³² I will not discuss the Mid Canada Line, although it would be a fitting case study of military development in the Provincial Norths.

engineering achievements of our time and a milestone in the development of the Arctic.”³³

The industrial logistics associated with the DEW Line were unprecedented in the Arctic, and proved a tremendous boost to northern transportation and development. “Support and re-supply vitally affect the continuous, reliable, and economical functioning of the line,” a 1955 report noted. “Because of the geographical location of the stations, all equipment, materiel, supplies, including POL [petroleum, oil and lubricants] and sustenance items must be either flown in, delivered during the very short period of the summer by sea, or hauled laterally to a site by cat train operating in the winter season.”³⁴ Convoys of up to 57 vessels and 15,000 men (in the case of the western sealift during the 1955 season) plied the Arctic waters,³⁵ charting the Arctic coastline and waterways through the southern islands of the Arctic archipelago. Annual sealift operations established new sea routes, improved knowledge of ice conditions, and resupplied Arctic settlements.³⁶

Past journalists and present scholars typically fixate on questions of sovereignty vis-a-vis the United States, overlooking the vast commercial aspects of DEW Line.³⁷ The Canadian government, conscious of nation-building possibilities, secured guarantees from the US that Canadian companies could compete for contracts. Western Electric Corporation (the prime contractor) awarded Canadian companies the major

³³ C.J. Marshall, “North America’s Distant Early Warning Line,” *Geographical Magazine* 29, no. 12

(1957), p. 616.

³⁴ “Basic Philosophy on the Operation of the DEW Line,” c.1955, LAC, RG 24, acc. 1983-84/049, box 105, f.096-100-80/9 pt.4.

³⁵ Marshall, “North America’s Distant Early Warning Line,” p. 626.

³⁶ John W. Harris, “Northern Development and National Defence: The Establishment of the DEW Line on the Canadian North” (unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1981), p. 100. DEW Line work also gave a tremendous boost to the Mackenzie River transportation system, particularly for the Northern Transportation Company (NTCL) which secured longterm control of resupply operations along the western Arctic and eastern Alaska coast as a result. See Robert Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada’s National Uranium Company* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 351-68.

³⁷ A rare exception is Noakes’ doctoral dissertation examination of Defence Construction (1951) Limited, but his discussion of the DEW Line focuses on construction and equipment and provides little analysis of the airlift. Noakes, “Under the Radar,” chapter 4.

construction contracts for the Canadian sections of the line.³⁸ Morris Zaslow, the dean of Canadian Northern history, wrote in his magisterial book *The Northward Expansion of Canada* that the air operations associated with the construction and operation of the DEW Line “represented an unprecedented windfall for the Canadian air industry.” Civilian companies contracted by Western Electric helped with preliminary air surveys, ground support operations, and the construction phase.³⁹ The 1955 agreement with the United States guaranteed that “Canadian commercial carriers will to the fullest extent practicable be afforded the opportunity to participate in the movements of project materials, equipment and personnel within Canada.” This proved to be a herculean task in practice. By the fall 1956, 352,300 short tons of materiel had been delivered to the DEW Line. Aircraft were responsible for 106,000 tons, and 84% of the 24,612 commercial flights (covering 16.5 million miles) were Canadian.⁴⁰ It was the largest cargo airlift in the history of Canadian aviation, and the heavy volumes of air freight facilitated rapid expansion of Canadian aviation companies. Pacific Western Airlines (eventually Canadian Airlines) and Maritime Central Airways (which became the root company for Eastern Provincial Airways) “moved from being small bush lines to large integrated national airline companies.”⁴¹

³⁸ Harris notes that, by the time the DEW Line was operational in 1957, the construction phase had contributed \$180 million to the Canadian economy. Harris, “Northern Development and National Defence,” p. 90.

³⁹ Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada*, 328. For a full discussion of this theme, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Daniel Heidt, “Sovereignty for Hire: Civilian Contractors and the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line,” in *De-Icing Required: The Canadian Air Force’s Experience in the Arctic*, ed. P.W. Lackenbauer and W.A. March, *Sic Itur Ad Astra: Canadian Aerospace Power Studies Series No.4* (Trenton: Canadian Forces Air Warfare Centre, 2012), pp. 95-112.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey David Noakes, “Under the Radar: Defence Construction (1951) Limited and the Military Infrastructure in Canada, 1950-1965 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 2005), pp. 343-44; J.R. Baldwin, Memorandum for File – DEW Line Supply Figures, 5 October 1956, LAC, RG 12, vol. 2407, file 14-13-9-1 pt.5.

⁴¹ David Neufeld, Canadian Parks Service, “BAR-1 Distant Early Warning (DEW) Auxiliary Station, Komakuk Beach, Yukon Territory,” Report on file at the Parks Canada Western Arctic Field Unit, Inuvik, NT, pp. 16-17; Herd, “As Practicable,” pp. 92-3. On the role of Defence Construction Canada in securing these contracts, see Jeffrey Noakes, “Under the Radar: Defence Construction (1951) Limited and the Military Infrastructure in Canada, 1950-1965” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 2005).

The infrastructure on the ground also transformed air travel to, from, and within the Arctic. Thanks to the DEW Line, H. LaFay told readers of *National Geographic*, a pilot could “now fly completely across the North American Arctic without losing sight of the lights of a human habitation, and rarely being more than 25 miles from an airstrip.”⁴² This significantly increased the safety margin for northern air operations generally. J.R.K. Main, in his landmark book *Voyageurs of the Air*, enthusiastically noted:

Prior to the advent of the DEWline, a flight beyond the Arctic Circle was something of an adventure: hazardous, and undertaken with some trepidation even in summer. After the baptism of complete immersion in the worst the Arctic had to offer, endured during the winters of 1955-1956 and '56-'57, catching a plane to the Arctic meant no more than catching a street car. The psychological barrier was down; the snow curtain was dissipated and the Arctic, as far as the rim of the continent, now lies open to such development as the discovery of mineral wealth, favourable world markets, and improved methods of transportation may dictate.⁴³

The perils of Arctic flying did not disappear – as deaths associated with the DEW Line airlift proved -- but a string of manned airfields at 100-mile intervals around the northern neck of the continent, new wide-band communications, and improved meteorological data facilitated Arctic resource exploration in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁴ Although grand prospects for resource development in the High Arctic have generated more hype than production to date, the DEW Line and associated activities laid the groundwork for the Arctic resource “feeding frenzy” that some commentators anticipate this current century.

Perhaps the DEW Line’s most lasting nation-building contribution, however, came in drawing Arctic peoples into the web of Canadian political, economic, and cultural life. Initially, Canadian decision-makers naively believed that they could

⁴² H. LaFay, “Dew Line: Sentry of the Far North,” *National Geographic* 114, no.1 (1958),p. 146.

⁴³ J.R.K. Main, *Voyageurs of the Air* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1967), p. 231.

⁴⁴ Less tangible but equally valuable was access to state-generated information. As MP Frank Enfield told the House of Commons on 16 June 1955, “When private companies go up [in the Arctic] for the purpose of constructing such installations as the D.E.W. Line, all the material collected through careful research by the federal government is available free of charge ... We reap a double reward for the money spent.” Canadians had a chance to “have our cake and eat it too, something we do not encounter too often.” Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 16 June 1955, p. 4894.

insulate Northern indigenous peoples from the impact of this mega-project. Such was the arrogance of military modernism – the notion that the state could control environments and people and the interactions between them. Reality proved differently.⁴⁵ The DEW Line served as sites for cross-cultural interaction in the Arctic, which had a major impact on the northern peoples. Until the 1950s, the vast majority of Inuit still lived as hunters, supplementing this lifestyle with limited trapping income. Now they encountered Western culture in different ways than they had with the HBC, the missionaries, and the sprinkling of government officials who occasionally ventured into the region. The effects of even limited exposure to the 9000 southern workers and their worldview - a number equal to the entire Canadian Inuit population at that time – cannot be overstated. More tangibly, DEW Line construction and a few operational jobs provided Inuit with wage labour for the first time. Unskilled Inuit labourers received relatively low wages by southern standards (about \$3000/year) – but this was still much more than they could earn by trapping or traditional methods. They also received free food, housing, and oil.⁴⁶ This hastened the process of “incipient urbanization,” producing major demographic shifts across the Canadian Arctic. As Inuit moved from remote camps to take up work associated with the DEW Line, new settlements emerged at places like Tuktoyaktuk and Broughton Island (Qiqiktarjuak) while others like Cambridge Bay and Hall Beach grew in size and permanence. In turn, settlement life changed indigenous lifestyles, cultural dynamics, family roles, and forms of social and political leadership. While military and commercial aircraft brought the endless stream of boxes that Kevin McMahon mentioned, new federal officials – Northern Service Officers – arrived to oversee the transition “from the stone age to the atomic age” (as the popular media liked to describe it). In retrospect, it is fair to say that the DEW Line

⁴⁵ The changes were subtle and unopposed by local residents. The idea of a “totalizing state” forcibly relocating indigenous populations to serve a liberal agenda – as Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski depict Canada in their books – is remarkably absent. More benign inducements and relationships sucked people into the vortex of military modernization. This is a theme of my larger reevaluation of Cold War Arctic projects. For a preliminary study, see Lackenbauer and Ryan Shackleton, “Inuit-Air Force Relations in the Qikiqtani Region during the Early Cold War” in *De-Icing Required*, pp. 73-94.

⁴⁶ Harris, “National Defence and Northern Development,” pp. 181, 208. See also R. Quinn Duffy, *The Road to Nunavut: The Progress of the Eastern Arctic Inuit since the Second World War* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).

transformed Northern life irrevocably – or at least served as the major catalyst for the fundamental transformation that occurred from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s.⁴⁷

Like most technological solutions devised to deal with security crises, the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957 changed the strategic equation concurrent with the DEW Line going operational. The space race was on, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) overtook the manned bomber as the most worrisome threat. As James Eayrs quipped, “henceforth the missile was the message.”⁴⁸ Although Inuit and other Northerners continued to work for the DEW line (in far smaller numbers than civilian workers flow up from southern Canada and the US), it is certainly fair to observe that Northerners influenced the military far less than it influenced them. Even Trevor Lloyd, a consummate critic of bilateral defence initiatives in the postwar period, conceded in 1962 that:

Much though one may regret the reasons for its being there, and deplore the enormous cost to the community, it remains true that without the DEW Line and associated developments the hope of effective occupation of the Far North would be even more remote than today it is. Such far-ranging enterprises have made possible elaborate programmes of research and development which have speeded the solution to many problems in logistics, housing, and communication. When the military men eventually evacuate their settlements, as is beginning to happen at some arctic sites,

⁴⁷ For superb discussions of these transformations, see Duffy, *The Road to Nunavut*, and David Damas, *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002). From 1953-62, K.J. Rea noted, “the DEW Line provided twice as much labour income and almost double the amount of employment than the mining industry did” in the Canadian Arctic. K.J. Rea, *The Political Economy of the Canadian North* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 310. The late Robert Williamson, a long-time associate with the Arctic Institute of North America based at the University of Calgary, noted that wage employment at DEW Line sites involved Inuit “firmly in structured patterns of time usage, in new modes of dwelling and consumption, continuous application to the same kind of work, and to the value of our more atomized and competitive society.” This new system also diminished “the technical significance of the women as busy and vital elements in the family economic team.” R.G. Williamson, “The Canadian Arctic: Socio-Cultural Change,” *Archives of Environmental Health* 17 (October 1968), p. 487.

⁴⁸ James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Peacemaking and Deterrence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 372.

they will leave behind them an invaluable group of well-endowed oases in the northern wilderness.⁴⁹

The DEW Line did not cease to operate, but it was scaled back in the mid-1960s⁵⁰ and the military's Northern footprint shrank. The Americans did not need Canadian soil for their Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) (although DEW Line rearward telecommunications provided essential backup), and Canada played no direct role in the cat-and-mouse game of Arctic submarine operations – even when they took place in its waters.⁵¹ After all, the RCN had turned its icebreaker (HMCS *Labrador*) over to the Department of Transport in 1957. The RCAF turned over airfields at places like Resolute Bay, Frobisher Bay, and Cambridge Bay to Transport over the following decade, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals the remaining stations of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System to that same department in 1959, and the Royal Canadian Engineers turned over the Northwest Highway System to Public Works in 1963. When the military withdrew from the northern “garrison towns,” particularly Churchill and Whitehorse, the communities recoiled from “the economic multiplier effect of a reduced population, the loss of military dependants from the work force,

⁴⁹ Trevor Lloyd, quoted in *Canadian Population and Northern Colonization*, ed. W.V. Bladen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 152.

⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as a federal publication noted in 1965, “The DEW Line is ... the biggest single development in the Northwest Territories and its effects have been profound. After the Canadian government it provides the largest single payroll of any Northern activity. In its build-up it has had a direct economic influence on auxiliary industries and services such as construction, food catering, communications, and transportation. However, the DEW Line’s economic impact on the overall economy of the North has been and still is far less than its important position as an employer.” *The Northwest Territories Today* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1965), p. 46. The DEW Line, in its modernized form as the North Warning System, remains a much reduced but ongoing economic force in the North today.

⁵¹ For an important reevaluation of bilateral relations related to submarine operations in Canadian waters, see Adam Lajeunesse, “A Very Practical Requirement: Under-Ice Operations in the Canadian Arctic, 1960-1986,” *Journal of Cold War History* (iFirst article, November 2012), pp. 1-18.

[and] the weakening of local cultural, social and recreational organizations.”⁵² Taking stock of the situation in 1966, an unsigned report observed:

The establishment of military facilities has usually followed much the same pattern. They have been built under conditions of great urgency as “crash” programs. In the construction phase there has been significant local employment but this has been short-term, and once the facilities have become operational they have been staffed predominantly by technically trained personnel brought in from the south, except for casual labour at busy times of the year. They have ceased operations abruptly, with little or no warning.⁵³

In this respect, military development mirrored the “boom and bust” cycles typical of northern development more generally.⁵⁴ The military had laid essential groundwork, however, regardless of its gradual relinquishment of transportation and communication responsibilities to civilian control.

When Humble Oil, an American oil consortium, sent its ice-strengthened oil tanker *Manhattan* on test runs through the Northwest Passage in 1969 and 1970, the sovereignty question returned to the fore. Even if the strategic situation did not warrant operational forces in the North, did sovereignty not demand a military presence – particularly to bolster Canada’s sovereignty position on the waters of the Arctic Archipelago? Defence commentators thought so, but the lawyers at the Department of External Affairs (DEXAF) reached a different conclusion. Canada had to be able to enforce and control activities in its jurisdiction, but symbolic presence was far less important than the functional contributions the military could make to the broad range of government responsibilities in the region. DEXAF emphasized that, before building a role for the armed forces, defence planners had to start with a coherent rationale for an increased level of military activity. Erik Wang warned that to develop any military role merely to satisfy the “optical demands” of political sovereignty “would be to build

⁵² Eyre, “The Military and Nation Building in the Arctic,” p. 229. On the military, modernization, and urban development, see Matthew Farish and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “High modernism in the Arctic: Planning Frobisher Bay and Inuvik,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol.35, no.3 (July 2009), pp. 517-544.

⁵³ “The Local Effects of Decreasing Military Interest in Northern Canada,” circa January 1966, LAC, RG 25, vol. 10364, file 27-14-8 pt.1.

⁵⁴ On this theme, see Ken Coates and William Morrison, *Forgotten North: A History of Canada’s Provincial Norths* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1992).

on shifting sands.... It would not be long before somebody noticed that one visit of the Governor General, accompanied by an enthusiastic press corps, can provide a sovereign presence to a remote area much more effectively and much more cheaply than 100 [Canadian Forces] surveillance overflights." To strike home this message, he explained that "Sovereignty is not a magic word which automatically requires or justifies a certain military set-piece. It is rather the political and territorial framework within which a state exists and functions. It is not made up of, or protected by symbols, tokens or gestures."⁵⁵

Where, then, did the military fit into Northern development more broadly? Naval deployments (NORPLOYs), army exercises, and patrol overflights (NORPATs) were transient. To provide a permanent presence, the Canadian Forces set up a new Northern Region headquarters in Yellowknife in May 1970, which boasted that it was responsible for "the largest single military region in the world." To cover forty percent of Canada's land mass and to "serve as a link between [the Canadian Forces] and the northern settlements in which they operate and exercise,"⁵⁶ the resources at Northern Region's direct disposal in the early 1970s consisted of a small headquarters staff, less than two hundred active Canadian Rangers, and a few hundred personnel at communications research and radar stations.⁵⁷ At best, this was a modest contribution to nation-building.

Northern Region Headquarters recognized that it had to fit within a broader government strategy to remain relevant. The Trudeau government's new integrated northern strategy promised, in addition to maintaining Canadian sovereignty and security, to protect the northern environment "with due consideration to economic and

⁵⁵DEXAF, FLE to OMD, subject: DND Paper On "Canadian Defence Policy in the 1970's," 5 August 1970, and E.B. Wang, "Role of Canadian Armed Forces in Defending Sovereignty," 30 April 1969, LAC, RG 25, vol. 10322, file 27-10-2-2 pt.1. For more on this theme, see Lackenbauer and Kikkert, *The Canadian Forces and Arctic Sovereignty: Debating Roles, Interests, and Requirements, 1968-1974* (Waterloo: Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies / WLU Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ Major-General David Huddleston in *The Arctic: Choice for Peace and Security* ed. Thomas R. Berger (West Vancouver: Gordon Soules Book Publishers, 1989), p. 179. See also G.G. Bell, "The Armed Forces and the Civil Authority: 2 Aiding National Development," *Behind the Headlines* XXXI/7-8 (December 1972).

⁵⁷ Ron Purver, "The Arctic in Canadian Security Policy, 1945 to the Present," in *Canada's International Security Policy* ed. D.B. DeWitt and D. Leyton-Brown (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1995), pp. 87-89; Eyre, "Forty Years of Military Activity," p. 297.

social development.”⁵⁸ This obligated military authorities to balance traditional security needs with socially and environmentally responsible programs. At a special facility near Inuvik, for instance, the military investigated communication difficulties in the Arctic, emphasizing that its technical solutions benefitted remote northern communities. National Defence cooperated with other government departments such as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to build remote airstrips throughout the Arctic and bridges to complete the Dempster Highway to Inuvik, thus facilitating year-round, community access to government administration, health services, and supplies.⁵⁹

These projects continued the military’s long history of contributing to physical infrastructure. But how could the Canadian Forces contribute to the development of *human infrastructure* – social capital in the North – so that Northerners could take their place in modern society? “The outlook of the Eskimos ... has been changing since the construction of the northern airfields, the weather and radar stations, and the D.E.W. [Distant Early Warning] Line, opened their eyes to the advantages of wage-employment,” anthropologist Diamond Jenness had observed in 1964.⁶⁰ As we have discussed, the military did not have some orchestrated scheme to “civilize” the Inuit, but its activities indirectly created or exacerbated dependencies on wage employment and Western goods, encouraged the sedentarization of the Inuit, and set up unsustainable expectations given the “boom and bust” cycles associated with defence work. In the past, it had offered programs to provide vocational training. The partnership between the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources and

⁵⁸ See DIAND, *Northern Canada in the 70’s* (Ottawa, 1970), and *Canada’s North, 1970-1980: Statement of the Government of Canada on Northern Development in the ‘70s* (Ottawa, 1972). The four pillars of this policy bear striking resemblance to those of the current Northern Strategy. For a comprehensive reflection on the overlapping aims between DIAND and DND in this era see James Scott Bryce, “Security Considerations in the Canadian Arctic” (M.A. thesis, Queen’s University, 1975).

⁵⁹ See Lackenbauer and Kikkert, *Canadian Forces and Arctic Sovereignty*, pp. 313-63. In the 1970s, the Royal Canadian Engineers built bridges to span the Oglivie and Eagle Rivers to complete the Dempster Highway connecting Dawson, Yukon, to Inuvik in the NWT – thus forging a year-round link between the communities of the Mackenzie River delta and the Alaska Highway system. The remote airfield project was part of an overall federal program to improve airfields through the North, DND acted as the contractor at Whale Cove, Cape Dorset, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet, Igloodik, Spence Bay, and Eskimo Point, completing all of the projects by 1979.

⁶⁰ Diamond Jenness, *Eskimo Administration : II. Canada* (Montreal: Arctic Institute of North America, 1964), p. 97.

Federal Electric Corporation, the major DEW Line contractor, to offer heavy equipment operator training to young Inuit men in Leduc, Alberta, was a case in point. These skills not only served them in DEW Line employment but also subsequently in the oil industry where they enjoyed the highest paying and status jobs available to Inuit.⁶¹ But the military had not made any efforts to recruit northerners into the Regular Force before the 1970s, and very few northerners displayed any interest.

The defence minister now promised a major effort to increase Inuit participation in the Canadian Forces as a form of nation-building. The ensuing programs revealed an abject failure to appreciate northern realities. In addition to the extreme stresses that young northerners faced “in coping with the often conflicting demands of military and traditional culture,” the broader question remained of whether Inuit communities could afford to lose their best educated youth to military service when political developments required their leadership at home. “Fortunate[ly] for the North as a whole,” Ken Eyre astutely noted, few Inuit pursued a military path into the Regular Force or Primary Reserves.⁶² Initiatives like the Northern Native Entry Program failed to attract many volunteers and most Northerners who did enlist could not overcome the cultural shock and dropped out.⁶³

By contrast, the Canadian Rangers enjoyed strong Aboriginal support in northern communities. This unique organization was created in 1947 to serve the postwar need for some form of defence presence in sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas which could not be conveniently or economically covered by other military forces – a mission that remains today. Most importantly, turning to unpaid volunteers already living in remote regions allowed the military to have a presence on a shoestring budget. To accomplish their mission, the army equipped each Ranger with a .303 Lee Enfield rifle, 200 rounds of ammunition each year, and an armband. The civilian backgrounds of these “ordinary” men (there is no record of any women

⁶¹ Ishmael Alunik, Eddie Kolausok and David Morrison, *Across Time and Tundra: The Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2003), pp. 166-67; Charles W. Hobart and George Kupfer, “Work Adjustment of Inuit Workers to Oil Exploration Employment,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 4, no.3 (1974), p. 85.

⁶² Eyre, “Custos Borealis,” pp. 288-89.

⁶³ LCol J.M.M. Savard, Acting Director of Recruitment and Selection, Recruitment Directive 10/90: Northern Native Entry Program [NNEP], 30 Jan 1990, DND file 5675-4 (DRS).

Rangers until the late 1980s) determined their contributions, whether they were trappers, bush pilots, missionaries, fishermen or miners. In Aboriginal communities, Inuit, First Nations, and Métis men filled the ranks -- although until the 1970s the army usually appointed a token "White" officer to lead them. Largely untrained, the Rangers' local knowledge allowed them to serve as guides and scouts, report suspicious activities, and (if the unthinkable came to pass) defend their communities and delay an enemy advance using guerrilla tactics – at least until professional forces arrived. In practice, they furnished intelligence reports about strange ships and aircraft and participated in training exercises with Canada's Mobile Striking Force. To hone their marksmanship skills, they were expected to hunt and feed their families. They received virtually no training.⁶⁴

After flourishing in the mid-1950s, Ottawa's defence plans overlooked the Rangers a decade later. The organization survived in some areas due to local initiative and its miniscule cost, but the "Shadow Army of the North" received little to no direction or support from military officials. The Rangers, as a national formation, was largely inactive until the early 1970s.

Then the Rangers' basic purpose was linked to the armed forces' role supporting Canada's sovereignty. Staff from the new headquarters in Yellowknife wanted to convert them into a regular force or primary reserve unit, but these plans ran aground on the shoals of austerity in Ottawa. For all the rhetoric of a stronger military presence in the North, Ottawa was clearly unwilling to fund it significantly. The simple fact that these grand plans failed, however, explains why the Rangers took on the unique and incredibly successful grassroots form that they did. Without the resources to do much else, a few non-commissioned officers based in Yellowknife provided low-keyed training to newly resurrected Ranger patrols in Inuit and Dene communities in the 1970s. Soldiers had special appeal, Northerners explained, because most government workers' visits to communities consisted of a brief discussion with the local priest and HBC manager, a shopping trip at the co-op, and an early departure to a community with better accommodations. By contrast, military personnel were self-sufficient, ventured out on the land, ate country foods, spoke with everyone, and treated local

⁶⁴ For a detailed study of the Rangers, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

people with respect.⁶⁵ Land-based training in particular proved highly popular. Rather than seeking to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, the organization was rooted in mutual respect and crosscultural awareness. The Rangers brought skills with them that the military valued – there was no interest in trying to make them conform to typical army culture. Furthermore, Rangers in the north now elected their own leaders -- a form of self-governance over their community-based patrols that fit with the rising tide of Aboriginal political awareness at that time. As momentum built, the Rangers were again active across the Northwest Territories, northern Quebec, and Labrador.

By that point, the Trudeau government's interest in Arctic sovereignty and security had faded. Although resource exploration continued, the theoretical use of the Northwest Passage as a major transit route proved unfeasible in practice. Despite the warnings from External Affairs, National Defence had tried to develop a flag-showing role for the Canadian Forces around the protection of sovereignty, but this role was predicated on a short-term sovereignty crisis that dissipated soon after it began.⁶⁶ The military's symbolic presence was no longer a priority, so the navy stopped going North, air patrols were scaled back, and army exercises became smaller and less frequent.

It took another perceived sovereignty crisis to change this trend. When a US Coast Guard icebreaker, the *Polar Sea*, pushed through the Northwest Passage in 1985, resurrecting sovereignty anxieties, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government took action. It declared straight baselines around Canada's Arctic Archipelago, officially enclosing the waterways as internal historic waters. It also promised a host of big-ticket military investments to improve Canada's control over the Arctic – a reaffirmation that the Canadian Forces' mission to "show the flag" went hand in hand with political nation-building (or nation protecting) efforts. Rob Huebert has documented these

⁶⁵ See, for example, apt. D.C. Jones, "NRHQ Training Report: Ranger Training, Holman, Victoria Island, 31 July 71--14 August 71," 20 September 1971, DND, Canadian Rangers National Authority, file "Canadian Rangers, 1971."

⁶⁶ Eyre has shown that the government not only avoided stationing regular forces in the north, it did not obtain any new equipment for the Forces. "In the 1920s, Canada established sovereignty in the Arctic with a symbolic presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," he observed. "In the 1970s, Canada prepared to protect that same sovereignty with a symbolic presence of the Canadian Armed Forces." An important difference, however, was that the southern military units that operated in the north were transient and did not enjoy the focused, functional tasks that the RCMP had earlier. Eyre, "Forty Years of Military Activity," p. 297.

developments in detail, casting them as an *ad hoc* repackaging of previous activities and policies with some new initiatives thrown in – particularly NORAD forward operating locations and a proposed fleet of Canadian nuclear-powered submarines.⁶⁷ These military projects and activities were not cast in Northern nation-building terms – they were about *defending* sovereignty (a problematic phrase⁶⁸ that fits with the mindset of that time).

Typically, the sovereignty crisis soon passed. We reached practical agreements with the US to modernize the DEW Line into the North Warning System and to cooperate on icebreaker transits (without prejudicing our respective legal positions). Accordingly, most of government's promised investments in Arctic defence evaporated as the economy weakened and the Cold War ended.

The one major exception was the Canadian Rangers. It was cheap, after all, and incredibly popular amongst Northerners. As the number of Ranger patrols (community-based units) spread across the Arctic, from Old Crow to Qikiqtarjuaq, the national media began to recognize the Rangers as an important grassroots example of Northerners contributing directly to sovereignty and security. The military took note. Whereas cruise missile testing and low-level flying seemed to pit Aboriginal groups against the so-called "militarization" of their homelands,⁶⁹ everyone seemed to celebrate the social and political benefits of having the Rangers in Aboriginal communities. Not only were the Rangers "sensitive to the relations between people and the Arctic environment," they also allowed local residents to share responsibility for Canadian

⁶⁷ Rob Huebert, "A Northern Foreign Policy: The Politics of Ad Hocery," in *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984-93*, ed. N. Michaud and K.R. Nossal (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), 84-112. On the submarine program, see Adam Lajeunesse, "Sovereignty, Security and the Canadian Nuclear Submarine Program," *Canadian Military Journal* 8, no.4 (Winter 2008), pp. 74-82.

⁶⁸ See P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Research Note: The Role of the Canadian Armed Forces in Defending Sovereignty," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 2009); Lackenbauer, *From Polar Race to Polar Saga: An Integrated Strategy for Canada and the Circumpolar World* (Toronto: Canadian International Council, 2009), pp. 21-22; and Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert, *The Canadian Forces and Arctic Sovereignty: Debating Roles, Interests, and Requirements, 1968-1974* (Waterloo: Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies / WLU Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ See, for example, Frances Abele, "Confronting 'harsh and inescapable facts,'" in Edgar Dosman, ed., *Sovereignty and Security in the Arctic* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 189

security.⁷⁰ After the Oka crisis in 1990, the simple reality of having Aboriginal Canadians wearing red sweatshirts adorned with maple leaves, serving in the Canadian Forces (albeit in a highly unorthodox unit), and exercising sovereignty took on heightened significance. The Inuit motto, “Canadians first, first Canadians” (coined by Jose Kusugak), struck home that there was ample middle ground in the North to build and reinforce Aboriginal-military partnerships.

Over time, the Rangers evolved to make unexpected contributions to *human* development in remote communities. Beginning in the 1970s, Northerners and soldiers alike expressed a growing concern about skill fade -- the erosion of those traditional skills that allowed people to safely and confidently operate on the land and waters. The “DEW Line generation,” raised in settlements, had missed traditional child-rearing on the land. Thus, when elders passed away (or retired from Ranger service), the Canadian Forces lost access to their knowledge of the land, the seas, and the skies, and each successive generation had fewer basic survival skills. There was obvious value in having elders train younger Rangers, as well as the value of Ranger patrols in providing resources and incentives to get people out on the land.⁷¹ Accordingly, journalists and community members applauded the Rangers’ role in teaching the military and in encouraging elders to share their traditional knowledge to younger people *within* Aboriginal communities. This was clear in the creation of a youth program, the Junior Canadian Rangers, in 1998. For peoples still dealing with the tragic legacies of residential schools, the eagerness of Aboriginal communities to have military instructors come north to train their young people – and even to send their youth away to summer camp – is a resounding testament to the trust relationship that existed through the Rangers. Furthermore, some community elders also played a direct role in identifying Ranger sergeants and master corporals who they could groom as future

⁷⁰ Quoted in Richard Langlais, *Reformulating Security: A Case Study from Arctic Canada* (Göteborg, Sweden: Department for Interdisciplinary Studies of the Human Condition, Göteborg University, 1995), pp. 151-53, 155-56, 190, 236.

⁷¹ “I’ve had people that didn’t know how to make a snow block, didn’t even know how to try to start an igloo,” Ranger Sergeant Solomon Voisey from Whale Cove (Tikiraqjuaq) explained to reporter Bob Weber in 2004. Voisey estimated that less than 5 percent of Rangers younger than twenty-five possessed much traditional knowledge. Even older people used their skills less frequently; without more resources to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, Voisey predicted that traditional land skills would gradually die out. Bob Weber, “Rangers Less at Home on Their Range,” *Globe and Mail*, 9 August 2004, p. A4.

leaders for their communities and territorial governments. It presented a “win-win” situation for communities and for the military, which made it so popular.⁷²

In this context, the line between what is of military value and what is of national value becomes blurred. Rather than creating an organization that conformed to military rules and culture, some commanding officers of the Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups did the opposite: they bent the military to fit with Aboriginal culture, selling the Ranger message to promote nation building and cultural survival.⁷³ And it worked. As a bridge between diverse civilian and military cultures, and between North and South, the Rangers successfully integrated national sovereignty and defence agendas with local interests. Accordingly, the number and geographical scope of the Rangers have grown continuously since the late 1980s, their footprint now extending across the provincial norths.

The concept of mutual benefit underpinned the entire organization. The positive relationship that the Rangers embodies aligns perfectly with the spirit of political cooperation and national support that Ottawa hopes to foster with Aboriginal communities. The connection between encouraging traditional land skills, sharing local knowledge, and sustaining military operations in remote regions has become increasingly clear.

The Rangers have attracted their highest profile when patrolling the remotest reaches of the Arctic. During these operations, Rangers have a chance to work with other members of the Canadian Forces (and foreign militaries on occasion), operate in unfamiliar environments, share skills, and build confidence. They are trumpeted as nation-builders in media coverage, showing the flag in some of the most austere and challenging conditions imaginable. Standing at the Magnetic North Pole in April 2002, Ranger Sergeant John Mitchell explained that the Rangers linked not only the whole North but also northerners with the south. “People don’t realize how far we are from

⁷² Lt.-Col. Rory Kilburn, interview with author, Yellowknife, NT, 22 March 2000. With no mandatory retirement age in the North, some Rangers served well into their seventies and eighties.

⁷³ See, for example, “3 CRPG Briefing Working Group Nov 00,” CRNA, f. “Rangers 2001”; “3 CRPG Briefing to CRNA WG,” October 2008. Copies provided by CRNA.

the nation's capital," he noted. "The Rangers make you feel more like you're a Canadian."⁷⁴

The Rangers also regularly support other government agencies in responding to the broad spectrum of security and safety issues facing isolated communities. They frequently conduct search and rescues – a subject of growing interest given the escalating tempo of activity in the North. Their leadership and training makes them the *de facto* lead during states of emergency -- from avalanches, flooding, extreme snowstorms, and power plant shutdowns, to forest fires and water crises. Communities turned to the Rangers in times of need, and the Rangers help the government achieve its national objectives. Most importantly, their commitment does not fluctuate with the southern political winds – the Rangers are not built on the "shifting sands" of political sovereignty.

The Rangers' third broad task -- to maintain a military presence in local communities – remains fundamental. A strategic review completed in 2000 confirmed the Rangers' status as an inexpensive operational resource, but the representational and functional roles that the Rangers performed in their communities went beyond simple service as "eyes and ears." They had become respected role models. Aboriginal communities had suicide rates up to seven times higher than in the Canadian population at large, and they also had higher-than-average rates of illness, family violence, alcohol abuse, and incarceration. The Rangers offered a ray of hope in an otherwise dreary picture:

By their nature, the Canadian Rangers are having a tremendous impact on the lives of the people and communities in which they are located ... They are active community members who are in a position to have a positive influence on their local environment. Rangers, in those communities where there is no other federal presence, are often perceived to be the elite of the community and are held up as role models for others. Frequently the Rangers represent the only identifiable and formed group that is readily available to the community in times of need ... The Rangers have now taken

⁷⁴ "True North Strong, Free Thanks to the Rangers," *Toronto Star*, 11 April 2002. Since 2007, Rangers participate in three major annual exercises: Nunaliut in the High Arctic (which is going on right now), Nunakput in the Western Arctic, and Nanook in the eastern Arctic.

on a new role -- they are educators and role models for over a thousand youth that participate in the JCR Programme. Consequently, there is beneficial value in the presence of Rangers in a community both from the perspective of enhancing the community environment as well as adding to the image of the federal government and the Canadian Forces.⁷⁵

The Rangers serve as a consistent, visible link to the state. This is nation-building at its core – and the military is embraced as a positive force by most Northerners as a result.

“If Canada’s Arctic sovereignty has a brand, it’s the red Rangers hoodie,” journalist Tim Querengesser noted in *Up Here* magazine in 2010.⁷⁶ The military does not take this symbol lightly. As I mentioned, southern academics and commentators often associate military practices (and those of the state more generally) with physical dislocation, environmental degradation, political disruption, and culture shock.⁷⁷ In the case of the Rangers, however, the interconnectedness between the military, remote communities, and Canadian society is respected as a constructive force. In the new north, it still comes down to human relationships – and the military’s roots in the Canadian North are deep.

In terms of development more generally, most politicians, Northerners, pundits, and defence planners now recognize that the Arctic is a homeland as well as a frontier. This spirit is captured in the four pillars of Canada’s Northern Strategy, where sovereignty and security have their place alongside environmental protection, sustainable development, and stronger Northern governance. Despite the emphasis on Arctic defence from 2006-08, the days of military projects leading the Northern development charge are long past – even though some commentators may seek to rekindle this role. The Canadian Forces will continue to support nation-building, but the civilian public and private sectors now play the central role in facilitating sustainable development. When emergencies arise, the Canadian Forces will be prepared to play what is technically a supporting role coping with and adapting to the

⁷⁵ Director General Reserves and Cadets, “CAN RAN 2000: A Review of the Canadian Rangers and of the Junior Canadian Rangers,” 27 January 2000, pp. 16, 49.

⁷⁶ Tim Querengesser, “Embedded with the Canadian Rangers,” *Up Here* (October/November 2010), p. 24.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Abele, “Confronting ‘Harsh and Inescapable Facts,’” p. 189, and Mary Simon, “Militarization and the Aboriginal Peoples,” in *Arctic Alternatives: Civility or Militarism in the Circumpolar North*, ed. Franklyn Griffiths (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1992), p. 60.

complex challenges posed by climate change, increased ship traffic in Canada's Northern waters, and more Arctic activity write large. In practice, it will have to "lead from behind."

So although civilian departments and agencies have assumed control of most communication and transportation facilities in the North, the military's historic footprints are still everywhere. As we have seen, defence-related activities have contributed to Northern development for more than a century, both directly and indirectly. And there is every indication that this will continue in modest form. The Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre, co-located with the Polar Continental Shelf Program in Resolute, is a prime example of how defence investments can be leveraged for civilian benefit – and vice versa.⁷⁸ When developments do not bring obvious community benefits (like the decision to refurbish the dock at Nanisivik as a berthing and refuelling facility rather than building a port at Iqaluit) resentment now runs deep. Whether satellites or contracting civilian airlift, opportunities for public-private partnerships remain. The military played a role in laying the foundation for Northern development – it is now up to Canada, as a whole, to build upon it.

But what of Ken Eyre's major point – that "while the military has had a considerable impact on the North, the northern fact has had surprisingly little impact upon the Canadian military." Perhaps this too is changing. The Canadian Rangers are clearly an exception, an unorthodox, community-based Reserve organization easily overlooked when Eyre wrote in the early 1980s but now a recognized operational asset and an unmistakable success story in capacity-building that contributes to sustainable, healthy communities. This success could not have been achieved without the military embracing and accommodating the North's diversity in unique ways.

Colonel Kevin McLeod, the commander of Canadian Forces Northern Area (now Joint Task Force (North)), identified in 2003 that the military's "Centre of Gravity ... is our positive relationship with the aboriginal peoples of the North. Deploying out on the land, conducting patrols, training and supporting the youth ... and being involved in

⁷⁸ This also avoids the "empty building" syndrome associated with the Forward Operating Locations (FOLs). I have heard community members express their frustration at NORAD infrastructure sitting largely vacant while communities face acute housing and other infrastructure shortages.

the local communities, are why we are here, and this must not be forgotten.”⁷⁹ Even if this is a regionalized message, it does speak to a different military philosophy than down south.

And if we return to Prime Minister Harper’s quote from 2007, it is clear that there is a sense that the Arctic may be a means to drum up support for military. For a prime minister to explicitly identify the North as his legacy project – and to sustain this interest while in office, particularly in a time of economic restraint – is truly novel. Although I argue strenuously against the probability of an Arctic conflict in the foreseeable future, the Arctic focus has encouraged Canadians to focus on the “home game” while our military recalibrates as its mission in Afghanistan winds down. How much is the North serving the military, and how much is the military serving the North? How much sustained influence the Arctic will have on the twenty-first century Forces, in the face of budget cuts, economic and election cycles, and competing priorities, remains to be seen. The sky no longer rains military boxes as it once did, but the military’s nation-building legacy -- positive and negative, direct and indirect, fleeting and enduring – helps to explain how we have got to today, and where we might place our emphasis in the future.

⁷⁹ Canadian Forces Northern Area [CFNA], Operations and Training Directive 2002/03, Jun 2002, file NA 4500-1 (Comd).

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