

# **Arctic Sovereignty not just a military concern**

By Dennis Bevington, MP Western Arctic

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After years of Liberal neglect, Ottawa is taking an interest Canada's Arctic, with its minerals and oil and gas. The current interest is focusing on protecting Canada's claim to the North, Arctic Archipelago in particular, and the waters around these islands. Under international law, the rule for protecting a nation's sovereignty is "use it or lose it." Unfortunately, the debate on how best to protect our territorial claim to the Arctic (to use it) has focused almost exclusively on military solutions.

This is not to say that our military presence in the Arctic doesn't need improvement. As a nation with more than one-third of its land mass North of 60, it is sound national policy to have a military which is capable of operating effectively and defending Canadian interests in the Arctic. For example, with the increase in trans-polar passenger air travel, there is a definite need for improved search and rescue capability in the North. As well, the development of port facilities and an Arctic training centre would have beneficial impacts for the people of the North through reduced shipping costs and increased employment opportunities. These items, which would be the most beneficial to the North, could have a one-time capital cost of as much as \$200 million.

Building an Arctic port and a training centre, increasing the capability of 440 Squadron, and recruiting more Rangers, along with the already existing Forward Operating Locations, the North Warning System, and CFS Alert, should be sufficient to provide military muscle to Canada's claims.

However, the discussion has gone beyond these solutions and into the need for armed icebreakers (three at a minimum of \$500 million each), a web of underwater sensors (cost unknown) and two UAV squadrons (cost unknown). It is difficult to cost these, but it would most likely not be too far off the mark to give a cost of \$3 billion. The benefits of this capital spending to Northerners in particular, and Canadians in general, would be negligible and the operating costs would be enormous.

If Canada's Conservative government is committed to spending over \$3 billion on Arctic Sovereignty and a paltry \$200 million would do the trick, what other ways could Prime Minister Harper spend \$2.8 billion that would benefit all Canadians?

In response to many Northerners, last spring I forwarded a Private Members Motion to change Canada's motto so that it would reflect the fact that this country is bounded by three oceans. In reality, the opportunity to debate the issues of Northern sovereignty in the House of Commons would be priceless. Changing the motto would likely cost less than a million dollars, peanuts when compared to the military costs seen above. While only symbolic, such a gesture would help to galvanize the support of Canadians for our ownership of the Arctic.

As well, Canada can build sovereignty by supporting its Northern residents in occupying the land. This could include:

- increase the Northern Resident's Tax Deduction, which would help reduce the high cost of living, making the Arctic a more attractive place to live
- assist communities to find alternatives to high priced fossil fuels for electricity generation and for heating
- increase funding to health care, housing, education and economic development
- build roads to all the communities on the main land

Another idea is increasing funding to Arctic scientific research, something which is rarely discussed as a possible way of protecting Arctic Sovereignty. However, scientific research is already being used as a means of protecting territorial claims in a polar region.

Antarctica is protected from military activity by international treaty. Like Canada's North, it is believed that Antarctica is a treasure trove of non-renewable resources and it is also home to competing territorial claims, from Australia, Great Britain, and among others, the U.S.A.

According to the United States Antarctic Program, some 3,500 Americans are involved each year in research and logistical activities at three bases. For fiscal year 2006 the program's entire budget is \$295 million US (about \$350 million CDN). These men and women, through their day to day activities, defend the United States' territorial claims on the continent. Scientists are cheaper than military personnel. The fact that they provide important information about our planet and carry out their sovereignty duties without the hint of violence are only bonuses.

In Canada, the Polar Continental Shelf Project (PCSP) provides support to about 150 scientific research projects, which employ about 800 researchers each year. All this is done at a cost of \$7.9 million. For this small amount of money, the PCSP operates 12 bases and an icebreaker. A four-fold increase to PCSP's operations (bringing us closer to the United States' participation in Antarctica) would only cost about \$40 million per year.

Clearly, there are other ways where we can spend Canadian taxpayers' money to protect our sovereignty in the Arctic and advance other priorities of Northern development. Incremental increases in our established military, encouraging civilian occupancy of

Northern regions, and ramping up needed scientific research in the Arctic will accomplish much more for this country than excessive military spending.