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An International Monitoring Agency for the Arctic

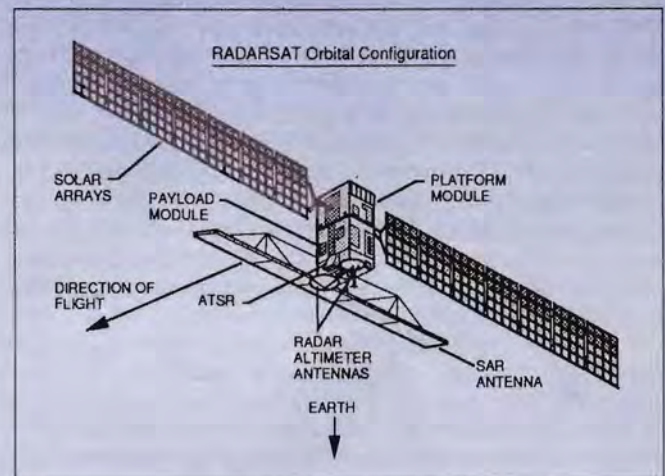
By Walter A. Dorn

In recent years the North American public has witnessed a significant increase in military activity in the Arctic. The polar region has become a new arena for superpower rivalry, and other countries are now beginning to contribute to its progressive militarization. Many of us would prefer to see escalating international cooperation rather than confrontation among neighbouring circumpolar nations. New weapons systems, shrouded in secrecy, raise the level of tension, fear and mistrust among nations. Instead, or at least in parallel, sincere efforts should be made to foster confidence, peace and security in this distinctive region of the globe.

One way for governments and peoples of circumpolar states to foster international peace and security in the Arctic is to vigorously share information about the Arctic and to build an international regime of openness in the region. This article outlines a proposal for an international arctic monitoring agency, which could be created by an international agreement to promote these ends. Through the agency, participating nations could also share the cost and the equipment required for joint arctic monitoring. Over time, the range of information gathered would expand from environmental and scientific data to include military activities, both above and below the surface. At first, the agency would monitor only international territory, covering the ice and surface waters of the polar basin. Subsequently it could expand its surveillance to include territories within the 200-mile exclusive economic zones and the 12-mile coastal zones. At the request of a state, the agency could also carry out specific monitoring tasks within national borders. It will take considerable time, resources and political will to develop a mature agency. A modest beginning to the agency would be as the sponsor of regular information-sharing meetings among the circumpolar powers: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Soviet Union and the United States.

An international arctic monitoring agency would offer participating nations a unique opportunity to safeguard this special region of the earth against damage. The agency could identify activities that adversely affect the physical environment of the circumpolar region or threaten the security of circumpolar nations. The monitoring agency could sponsor environmental and security impact studies. The agency could

help reduce the risk of civil or military accident or confrontation and play a key role in the coordination of many arctic activities.



The Canadian RADARSAT satellite to be launched in 1994. (Courtesy of the Radarsat Project Office.)

RADARSAT and Peace-Keeping Technologies

Certain modern technologies have made possible the progressive militarization of the Arctic. Similarly, other forms of modern technology can be a means to secure peace in the region. Satellite remote sensing, in particular, provides us with an unprecedented means of observing surface activity over vast ranges of territory. In this regard, Canada will soon be taking a very significant step with the launch of the civilian satellite RADARSAT (Energy, Mines and Resources, 1985).

When placed in orbit by a U.S. rocket in 1994, RADARSAT will be the most advanced remote sensing satellite to employ synthetic aperture radar. With this radar, the satellite will be able to "see" day and night, under all weather conditions. With a resolution capability of 10 metres, it will be able to identify objects such as buildings and military bases and track ships and large vehicles (Freeman, 1985). The images will be produced in

From the Director's Desk

Satellite technology is nothing new to the circumpolar Arctic — in fact satellite dishes have introduced a new wave of television communication in the Arctic since the late 1960s. In this issue of *Information North* we bring you an interesting new application for this technology, one that goes beyond imported TV fare in its significance. Why not utilize RADARSAT to share circumpolar information, and thereby increase the prospect for arctic peace and security?

At the community level too, RADARSAT has the capability to reconcile some long-standing arctic community concerns. Its fast transmission capability will potentially enable hunting parties from eastern High Arctic communities to learn of the approach of ice breakers and modify hunting trips accordingly. Conversely, its near real-time reporting will enable ship skippers to avoid game migrations and other wildlife impacts associated with ship tracks through ice-infested waters.

We can all gain from the thoughtful utilization of this technology.

— Mike Robinson

near real time, making possible a leap forward in arctic marine transportation. For example, a ship navigator will be able to plot his course using RADARSAT ice maps obtained just hours earlier. Every day, RADARSAT will survey the Canadian High Arctic and look down at the polar basin. During its 16-day repeat cycle it will also pass above all regions of the globe, including each of our circumpolar neighbours.

While RADARSAT was primarily justified on its merits for resources development in Canada, it could also be used to enhance arctic peace and security. It offers Canada a special opportunity to contribute to an international arctic monitoring regime. Besides increasing its own security, Canada would also receive valuable information (and possibly compensation) in return.

The Tasks

At first, the agency might take on projects that do not involve monitoring sensitive military developments. One possibility is the development of a geographic-oceanographic data bank (Morley and Clough, 1975) for the entire arctic region to include maps, charts, survey data and data on water and ice conditions. Other potential tasks include monitoring for sustainable resources development, protection of the environment, sea traffic management and navigation, fisheries and wildlife control, emergency pollution control and cleanup, and weather forecasting. The agency could provide information on the arctic ozone layer, the greenhouse effect and other environmental problems. It could help identify medical problems affecting arctic wildlife and help establish marine sanctuaries. Search-and-rescue operations are already aided by the SARSAT-COSPAS project, which is a cooperative initiative of Canada, the United States, the Soviet Union and France and is now enjoying the participation of other nations. Search and rescue in the Arctic would be further enhanced by the agency.

In order to strengthen the United Nations system, which already contributes much to world peace and security, the arctic monitoring organization should establish a relationship with the UN, either as a UN agency or with a relationship agreement. Information from the agency should be made available to the UN secretary-general at all times.

Some Precedents

There is a considerable variety of precedents and models of international cooperation in the Arctic that lends hope to this proposal. As long ago as 1882-83, during the first International Polar Year, 25 countries jointly conducted a detailed polar research program, "one of the greatest steps forward, in any subject or any part of the world, toward international communication and cooperation in science" in which the observations and data were reported to a central commission and made available to the whole world (Roots, 1989). Since its establishment in 1958, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) has communicated and coordinated scientific activities in the southern polar region. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which demilitarized the entire continent, allows signatories complete freedom of access at any time to any area, including installations of any other nation. The Norwegian government has, in the spirit of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, offered researchers "of all political colourations, unimpeded access and equal working opportunities" on the arctic islands of Svalbard (Østreng, 1978). There is currently an initiative to form an International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), an idea that has been steadily gaining the support of governments. Bilateral agreements on arctic cooperation have already been negotiated between several arctic rim countries.

There are also many significant precedents for international monitoring of actual or potential military activities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspects nuclear plants in nations that have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty to make sure that nuclear material is not diverted for military purposes. The 1986 Stockholm Document requires 35 NATO, Warsaw Pact and other participating countries to give advance notification of large-scale military maneuvers and allows for significant inspection measures. In 1978, the president of France proposed the establishment of an International Satellite Monitoring Agency (ISMA) to allow for *global* satellite coverage by a UN agency. This and other proposals are reviewed in the monograph "Peace-keeping Satellites" (Dorn, 1987). Nuclear risk reduction centres currently allow the superpowers to exchange data in order to lessen the possibility of nuclear war through miscalculation or accident. Ways of enhancing the role of the United Nations in international monitoring and clarification are now being discussed in a number of forums.

A variety of circumpolar confidence-building measures (CBMs) have been reviewed in an article by Macintosh and Slack (1988). These include information and communication CBMs, such as information exchanges, hotline and crisis control centre provisions, prior notification of exercises and invitations to observer teams. Other CBMs consist of constraints on military activities, such as commitments not to interfere with

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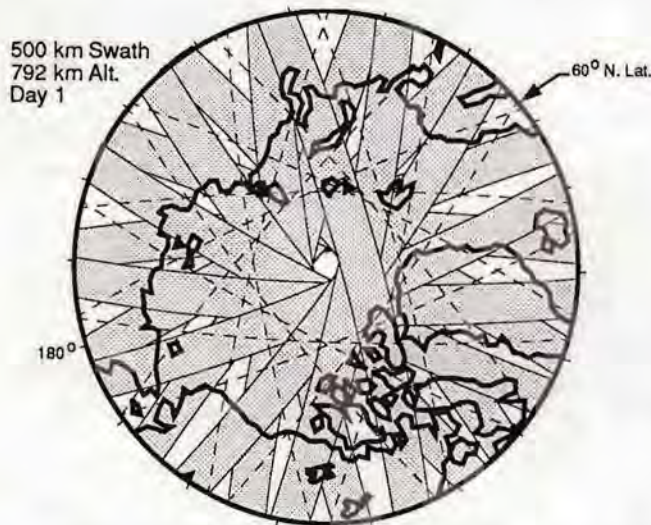
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monitoring systems, not to carry out mock attacks or tests of enemy defences, and the establishment of nuclear weapon free zones and demilitarized areas.

Arctic Arms Control

Arctic arms control is likely to be seriously addressed in the near future, given the new international political and economic climate. When negotiations begin, an international arctic monitoring agency could play an important role in establishing objective information on military armaments and activities. The Soviets have expressed a willingness to discuss any proposal relating to arctic arms control (Gorbachev, 1987). By developing new and constructive proposals, the West can meet the "Gorbachev challenge" and help to build the openness that the West has promoted since World War II.



RADARSAT arctic coverage in one day using the 500 km swath mode. The North Pole can be viewed using a different mode. (Courtesy of the Radarsat Project Office.)

After an arctic arms control treaty has entered into force, the agency could collect information required for treaty verification and feed it to a possible UN verification agency or carry out the analysis itself. By using an established agency, the needed expertise in monitoring could be developed beforehand. For example, the IAEA was established more than a decade before the Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed, and the nuclear risk reduction centres were already operating before they were used in the data exchange and verification process of the INF Treaty. Cooperative verification has already proven valuable in many other areas, including the Antarctic. At present, verification in the arctic region is considered a very difficult, if not impossible, task, and few studies have been published on this topic. The agency could foster such research.

Verification is needed not only for arms control treaties, but also for the implementation of international law, including other types of arctic treaties, such as those involving pollution, fishing quotas and oil exploration. The enforcement of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the adjudication of sovereignty disputes before the International Court of Justice would be enhanced by objective information from an international source.

Arctic arms control is an area in which Canada should play a primary role, since a substantial amount of Canadian terri-

tory, activity and sovereignty is involved. It is an area in which Canada can negotiate outside the shadow of the United States. In addition, there is a great deal of support in the populations and in the parliaments of Nordic countries for arctic arms control and especially the creation of a nuclear weapons free zone (Newcombe, 1980) in the Arctic. In light of the positive developments in international affairs during the second half of this decade, such possibilities should now be actively discussed.

Even if arctic arms control is not successful in the near future, some sort of open monitoring system is needed to keep track of the militarization that takes place in the Arctic. The public should not be kept in the dark about such developments. Establishing a monitoring system would provide an opportunity for the Soviets, and indeed for the entire international community, to demonstrate a commitment to the principles of *glasnost* in the Arctic.

The Canadian Dimension

Many of the existing and potential challenges to Canadian sovereignty claims in the arctic region stem from the arms race (Griffiths, 1979). By decreasing the military activities in the polar region and placing more importance on civilian cooperation in arctic development, Canada would be better able to meet its national objectives. Furthermore, by taking a lead in establishing an international circumpolar regime (similar to its role in the elaboration of the Law of the Sea Treaty), Canada can best ensure that the regime reflects Canadian priorities in peace making and arctic development.

Many Canadians feel that both the Canadian public and government are left largely uninformed about military, especially submarine, activities in the Arctic, even when it involves our own territory. It is a Canadian concern that the superpowers may play games of hide and seek under the ice. We would like to be reassured, with adequate objective information, that this is not happening. Instead of pursuing a unilateral approach to this problem and contributing to the proliferation of military activity in the Arctic, the Canadian government should investigate multilateral solutions, including the establishment of an arctic monitoring agency. An open information regime, in which release of certain information would be mandatory, would reduce much of the concern over secret and unwanted intrusion. In addition, the agency could employ underwater sensors to monitor arctic channels. This would release Canada from its strong reliance on the United States for such information, which is usually provided on a "need to know basis."

Aboriginal peoples fear that their homelands are becoming increasingly militarized. They often feel that they are innocent bystanders, not even able to understand the nature and reason for the militarization that is occurring in their fishing areas, on their hunting grounds and over their heads. The native peoples should be given an active role in the development of the agency and in the assessment of the data it collects.

A Modest Beginning

The international arctic monitoring project need not begin in a grandiose or costly way. It would be desirable to involve all the arctic rim governments from the beginning, but this is not a necessity. The project could begin bilaterally; one possibility, given the current international climate, is between Canada and one or both of the superpowers. It could begin as an extension of the current Canada-USSR or USA-USSR scientific exchange programs. Even the most modest sharing of information in a



A circumpolar confidence-building regime should be developed in the Arctic and an international arctic monitoring agency is a potential first step. (Courtesy of *Canadian Defence Quarterly*.)

formalized or informal framework would be a welcome development. The sharing could begin with surface events of a benign nature, such as the exchange of environmental and climatic information. As new monitoring systems are developed or converted from military use, they could be offered (or sold) to the agency. Gradually the agency could provide more extensive coverage of the arctic region, beginning with international territory and then expanding to include national territories, as requested by participating states. The creation and development of the agency would provide a significant test of the declared Soviet intention to create a zone of peace in the Arctic.

The agency could begin with an extremely modest budget, of the order of \$10 million, to be shared among member nations. The agency could facilitate and codify the exchange of information among nations and arrange periodic conferences. It could develop links with existing organizations, such as sister international agencies, and create the structures and communication channels necessary for wider circumpolar cooperation.

Conclusion

We must ensure that the vast, delicate arctic region does not become either a future battleground or a strategic playground involving weapons of mass destruction and that more nations do not feel the need to enter into this game. The Arctic represents common ground to develop common security.

An international arctic monitoring agency would be a catalyst for international cooperation. It would help prevent further militarization of the Arctic by helping to remove the underlying suspicion and mistrust behind militarization. It would increase our knowledge about the region and would save governments money by allowing them to share the costs of arctic monitoring. The positive effects of an open arctic monitoring system would be felt far beyond the circumpolar North. At this special juncture in history, while arctic policy is being cast and East-West relations are favourable, joint arctic monitoring is an opportunity we must consider seriously.

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