



HEALTH SECURITY, ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY, AND HARD SECURITY IN THE ARCTIC: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

Date: February 17, 2022

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On February 17, 2022, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS)-Vancouver hosted a digital roundtable titled *Health Security, Environmental Security, and Hard Security in the Arctic: A Complex Relationship*, conducted by Dr. Rob Huebert, a research fellow for the Center for Military, Security and Strategic Studies and an associate professor at the University of Calgary. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS-Vancouver executives. The main discussion topics centered around health, the environment, geopolitics, and hard power in the Arctic.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Dr. Huebert's presentation focused on the growing challenges in Canadian security and the multipronged outlook required to deal with Arctic security and sovereignty. Environmental, military, and health security require similar levels of attention, as they are all relevant to how Canada can ensure its sovereignty along its northern borders. Dr. Huebert suggested Canada should approach Arctic security with a wider and more determined outlook, while still adhering to the core values of Canadian interests in the region. Dr. Huebert's comments also took place just immediately before the Russians renewed their 2014 attack on Ukraine.

Question and Answer Period

Security as a broader concept considers many differing aspects even when framing them under certain regions such as the Arctic. Dr. Huebert ascertained

that security in the Canadian Arctic must be multi-spectrum, encompassing critical security aspects such as climate change and sovereignty, as well as hard power, which include military procurement and infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Traditional and non-traditional security aspects are important for Canada to exercise sovereignty and to protect its territory and people. As climate change continues to alter the Arctic, Canada will have to ensure that the environmental impacts are mitigated. Geopolitically, Canada will have to be vigilant of other states' intentions and presence in the Arctic, as conflict elsewhere spills into the region. Finally, the hard-power aspect of security will require changes to correspond with the security threats that Canada faces globally and in the Arctic.

Dr. Huebert noted that access to government institutions, such as healthcare, is important for the maintenance of sovereignty in the Arctic. A state's ability to properly administer and claim sovereignty over a region is tied to the ability to provide government assistance such as welfare and healthcare. The pandemic has revealed the limitations of Canada's state reach, as healthcare remains limited by the geography and accessibility. The remoteness of the Arctic region makes the issue of a robust healthcare remain a major issue, as COVID-19 has had a greater impact on Canada's Arctic communities than the rest of Canada. While the gross numbers of infections are low, the Northwest Territories has the highest percentage of COVID-19 infections and the worst vaccination rates in Canada. While the exact reason for the low vaccination rates is currently unknown, apprehension or even infrastructure and interconnectivity could be potential issues.

Dr. Huebert argued that if Canada is to take on a serious role in developing and maintaining its sovereignty over the region, the challenges and issues regarding climate change must be addressed. Climate change is a major issue when it comes to the Arctic, with the region expected to see the most drastic environmental changes that will impact human and animal life. Warming temperatures are also melting the ice, which is increasing the accessibility to the region by an increasing number and variety of foreign actors. Climate change will impact economic activities such as fishing, tourism, and shipping, which will invariably impact how Canada engages with its Arctic neighbours and how local communities sustain themselves. Dr. Huebert ascertained that while the impact of climate change may appear to some to be mild, the context in which these

transformations are taking place are key to understanding the extent of climate change's impact on the Arctic. Once again, infrastructure and interconnectivity with the rest of Canada plays an important role, as maintaining key infrastructure in the region will require additional funds that could come at the cost of Canada's environmental policies.

While responding to Climate change is something that the Canadian Government has taken seriously, Dr. Huebert compared its environmental policies with its Arctic neighbours. Norway, the United States, and Russia, all pursue Arctic policies that aim to exploit and expand the oil and gas resources of the region, not decrease them. Dr. Huebert used Norway as a key example, as it maintains strong environmental policies but at the same time is now attempting to expand its offshore production.

In Dr. Huebert's assessment, Canada is also going to face's diverging views with its Arctic neighbours which do not encompass just environmental and economic aspects, but also expands to geopolitics. Dr. Huebert stated that with the requirements of investing and building the infrastructure and policies required for the Arctic, foreign influence via foreign aid will become a point of contention for Canada's position in the Arctic. The geopolitical reality is that Canada must contend with Russia and China, both of which have geopolitical goals that rely on military force in the region as well as their efforts to extend their economic interests in the region. As such, the hard-power requirements for ensuring Canadian interests in the region are protected from other states cannot be ignored. With the use of collective security under NATO, Canada can still ensure that its security threats are mitigated. However, the matter of Canada's own capabilities and strategy is still something that must be considered.

D. Huebert noted that the repercussions of both Russian and Chinese actions must be taken into consideration when structuring Canadian security policies. Russia's resurgence as an antagonistic power in Eastern Europe poses a threat to the security architecture that Canada helped create. China's ambitions to become a global power and increasingly involvement in the Arctic for scientific, governance, economic, and military purposes also pose a threat. This new and developing security landscape requires a more capable military to be able to respond to these new challenges and threats. Dr. Huebert pointed out that high-level military modernization will be expensive but crucial to Canada's ability to defend itself and its allies. Because a modernization and re-structuring of Canada's military takes time to adjust and perfect, Canada's focus on environmental over economic policies could leave Canada lagging in military

capabilities. Canada needs to be able to respond to the environmental threat and the security threat at the same time.

Question and Answer Period

Dr. Huebert noted that the changing security landscape requires states to upgrade, change, or further develop their security strategies to better allow them to adjust to dynamic security threats. Dr. Huebert used the example of environmentalism, with states that pursue environmental policies, such as Norway, but remain pragmatic and allow for exploitation of natural resources in the Arctic. This pragmatism is important in military security, as it allows nations to adjust their strategic outlooks to deal with growing threats such as Russia.

Dr. Huebert pointed out that sovereignty remains a point of contention in the Arctic, as Canada and the United States differ on the status of the Northwest Passage (NWP). The United States considers the waters to be a strait used for international navigation, whereas Canada classifies them as internal waters. The point of contention regarding sovereignty is in Canada's ability to match rhetoric with policy and programs. Without adequate investment into Canadian maritime infrastructure, or any major infrastructure for that matter, Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic remains at risk. Dr. Hueber then noted that we may claim the NWP as internal waters, but can we enforce that claim?

According to Dr. Huebert, in terms of military equipment, the most important capability for Canada is to be able to detect and respond to the new threat created by hypersonic missiles (cruise and glide variants), autonomous underwater vehicles, and tactical nuclear weapons being developed by Russia and China. New land and space-based detection systems must be developed and deployed. Furthermore, Dr. Huebert also called for the purchase of the F-35 as a system that Canada requires, as it offers interoperability with all of Canada's allies and friends in the Arctic. The US, UK, Finland, Denmark, and Norway all operate the F-35, or will in the near future, and Canada's security would be best protected if Canada were to also operate such aircraft. However, Dr. Huebert reiterated that the environment and economy are invariably linked to Canada's ability to procure advanced military systems.

Dr. Huebert also addressed domestic issues as a pressing security challenge. Unity of people is the biggest strength of democratic and thriving states. As a result, divisions within society, either due to the pandemic, lack of politician accountability, or deliberate efforts on the part of our enemies to sow discord, pose a major issue and require a reset in civility. According to Dr. Huebert, the

political leadership is also partially at fault, as the lack of willingness to address issues that divide society only serves to further inflame the divisions.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- The Arctic provides opportunities and challenges that require Canada to take a more pragmatic but robust approach; the changing geopolitical landscape will necessitate changes to Canadian policies.
- While security challenges may appear to be isolated, they are interconnected and require a thorough understanding of the region, its geopolitics, economy, and environment to produce fruitful policies.
- Healthcare in Canada's Arctic region is hindered by the geography, remoteness, and environment, which means that Canada's ability to retain sovereignty within healthcare capacity in the Arctic requires development.
- To remain abreast of any geopolitical developments and formulate its own strategy in the Arctic, Canada must take into consideration the interests and plans of its Arctic neighbours, not only by maintaining healthy alliances but also by holding military power in the same regard as civil dialogue.
- Enhancing military capabilities will be necessary if Canada is to ensure its own sovereignty and security. This would require an alteration in Canada's environmental policies, as the funds that hydrocarbons create would be necessary to overhaul Canada's military.

Question and Answer Period

- Developing new security alliances as a response to military threats allow states to adapt and prepare for growing or newly developed threats.
- Military modernization is crucial for Canada, as the F-35 and other high-tech systems could provide Canada with the military power it requires.
- Achieving a more pragmatic approach when it comes to economic development and environmental policy will be important in harnessing Canada's resources to help develop its ability to retain sovereignty over its Arctic provinces and territories.
- Unity is the biggest strength of democratic and thriving states; divisions within society, either due to the pandemic or racial issues, pose a major issue and require a reset in civility.



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