



ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY STRATEGY IN THE ARCTIC - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Date: November 15, 2023

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KEY EVENTS

On November 15, 2023, Captain Doug Layton, Deputy Commander Joint Task Force (North), Canadian Armed Forces (Navy), presented *Royal Canadian Navy Strategy in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the effects of climate change in the Arctic Region, the Canadian Armed Forces' roles and policies in the North and the Royal Canadian Navy's Arctic objectives.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Captain Layton discussed how the Canadian Armed Forces are increasing their presence, capabilities, and techniques in the Arctic Region to address the problem of increased accessibility across the global arena. Environmental impacts and technological advancements have changed the way operations in the region can be conducted and, as a result, Canada can no longer rely on its austere geography as a main method of protection. These changes allow for increased opposition from strategic competitors to challenge Canadian sovereignty.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Captain Layton stated that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Arctic strategy is to always be present within the region; however, he acknowledged that given the size of the CAF relative to the size of the Arctic region this strategy is not always

possible, though they are increasing their presence in the north to the best of their ability through policy implementation. He explained that the most present challenge within the Arctic region is climate change, as related emergencies increasingly require domestic responses from the CAF. This has resulted in the CAF being occupied domestically and reduces capabilities to address opposition from strategic competitors.

Captain Layton listed the CAF's roles in the Arctic region as: a visible and persistent presence; surveillance and control; support of Northern people and communities; and contributing to the whole of government. To demonstrate a visible and persistent presence in the region, the CAF employs a combination of both hard assets and sensors such as NORAD and, relatedly, surveillance and control are achieved through domain awareness. To support Northern People and communities, the CAF works alongside the Canadian Rangers, who are local individuals with military training within northern communities who have been integrated into the intelligence network. The Rangers play an integral role as they allow the CAF to have eyes and ears in remote communities. Lastly, the CAF contributes to the whole of government, which means ensuring Canadian sovereignty in the region through increased cooperation with domestic and foreign partners.

Captain Layton discussed the Operation NANOOK series, which was created to address the CAF's lack of operational capacity in the north and consists of four distinct operations, each addressing a specific objective. Captain Layton stressed that the key to success within the Arctic is strong partnerships consisting of both domestic groups, achieved in part by the Inuit Nunangat Policy, and international partners.

Captain Layton stated that the future of the maritime operating environment is to become increasingly more usable due to the effects of climate change, emerging technological advancements, and increased remote internet access. He touched upon how the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) has set out specific lines of effort to address this, for example through increased northern engagement as well as adaptation and innovation in the region.

Captain Layton stated that the RCN is present and interested in the Arctic region, and can no longer rely upon the harsh geography to isolate the area from strategic competitors. He stated that Canada must increase their capabilities, techniques, and domain awareness in the region.

Question and Answer

You talked about climate change and how that drives strategic competition, the Arctic is a frontier that does not belong to any singular nation, what are Canada's biggest potential issues within the realm of strategic competition?

Canada's largest issues for concern are resource extraction from strategic competitors and that they are able to maintain sovereignty over its two hundred nautical mile exclusive economic zone in the Arctic region. These are two of the main potential issues as increases in climate change continue to make the region increasingly accessible for resource extraction.

What strategies can Canada use to further strengthen its Arctic security in its current form without adjusting its defence budget?

Without a significant increase to the budget, the main way to strengthen Arctic security is to strengthen Canada's human intelligence network by changing its culture of security. Every day citizens can see that Canada's geography is no longer enough to protect it from effects on Canada's homeland. As such every individual has a role to play in national security so when something out of the ordinary occurs that information is passed into the security apparatus.

What can Canada do to support combating human trafficking in the Caribbean?

Canada can support combating human trafficking by acting on intelligence to disrupt and destroy the trafficking networks. This may be done in Canada, in the Caribbean or by ruining the modes in between such as methods of transportation.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Climate change and technological advancements continue to make the Arctic region more accessible to strategic competition because of environmental changes. Canada can no longer rely on its geography as a method to shield itself from the effects of this competition.
- Canada must increase its presence and domain awareness in the Arctic region through a combination of hard assets, sensors and human intelligence.
- The key to success in the region is strong partnerships with both domestic groups such as the First Nations, in addition to international allies.
- Technological innovations and adaptations are vital for Canada to maintain its sovereignty over the Arctic Region in an evolving environmental climate.



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