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BOOTS IN THE SNOW: THE NEXT STEP FOR THE CANADIAN ARMY IN THE ARCTIC

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Service Paper

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**BOOTS IN THE SNOW: THE NEXT STEP FOR
THE CANADIAN ARMY IN THE ARCTIC**

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AIM

1. The Arctic makes up approximately 40 percent of Canada's total land mass¹ and yet has no permanent presence of Canadian Army (CA) tactical units. The CA also does not possess the skills and equipment required to thrive in the Arctic. The aim of this service paper is to propose to the Commander of the CA a next step for the establishment of a tactical Arctic capability within all three Canadian Mechanized Brigade Groups (CMBG). The paper will analyze strategic direction within Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE) and look at the other member nations of the Arctic Council for comparison.

INTRODUCTION

2. The Canadian Arctic is becoming more accessible and this has economic and security issues for Canada. Rob Huebert, a political scientist with the Arctic Institute of North America states, "Perhaps the greatest current challenge for Canada is the worldwide realization that the Canadian Arctic is melting so that it is more accessible than ever before."² The Canadian Rangers' patrols provide a surveillance capability, but due to lack of training and weapons, they are insufficient as a deterrence force.³ Security must rely on surveillance coupled with a credible reaction force capable of responding to all spectrums of conflict. This capability does not currently exist within the CA. In order to achieve it there needs to be CA units permanently tasked with Arctic security.

3. SSE provides direction for the CA to operate in the Arctic.⁴ The CA will be receiving equipment in order to move, shoot, and communicate in the Arctic, but there needs to be an implementation plan so that the influx of equipment equates to a credible and responsive Arctic capability. This paper will present a course of action that is Person Year (PY) and infrastructure neutral. All recommendations will be in addition to the CA's current approach to Arctic operations via Arctic Response Company Groups (ARCG), Canadian Armed Forces Arctic Training Centre (CAF ATC), and participation in Operation NANOOK.⁵

DISCUSSION

4. The discussion will first analyze the strategic direction for the CA within SSE and Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy. Secondly, it will outline and analyze the Arctic

¹ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 79.

² Griffiths, Franklyn, Rob Huebert, and Whitney Lackenbauer. *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship*. 2011, 13.

³ Department of National Defence. *Canadian Rangers*. 2018. <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/canadian-rangers/index.page>.

⁴ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 80.

⁵ Department of National Defence. *Operation NANOOK*. 01 October 2018. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-canada-north-america-recurring/op-nanook.page>. Op NANOOK has five events per year featuring elements from all branches of the CAF operating in the Arctic.

capability of the other Arctic nations. Finally, it will outline an implementation plan for a permanent, regular force, Arctic capability within the Canadian Army.

Strategic Direction

5. The last time Canada released an Arctic policy was in 2010 with the Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy, however the development of a new policy is currently underway.⁶ The 2010 policy states that "Canada does not anticipate any military challenges in the Arctic and believes that the region is well managed through existing institutions, particularly the Arctic Council."⁷ Since 2010 countries like China, Russia, and the United States have released policies that have changed the situation. This has translated into the high priority operations in Canada's north receives in SSE.⁸ The strategic level of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) acknowledges that there is a gap in capability which is limiting the CAFs ability to operate in nearly half of its territory.⁹ The CA has taken action with the creation of ARCGs, but these reserve units are not responsive enough to be a credible reaction force.

6. The Arctic as a region is undergoing a drastic change and SSE describes it as "an important international crossroads where issues of climate change, international trade, and global security meet".¹⁰ Where before only a few had the ability to operate in the Arctic, it is becoming more accessible. This accessibility will bring with it a requirement for Canada to enforce security.¹¹

7. Senator Dennis Patterson stated, "If Canada does not consistently and firmly reassert its ownership claim over the [Northwest] passage, it could eventually become an internationalized straight. [...] sovereignty often relies on the *realpolitik* principle of use it or lose it."¹² This means that the CAF must be capable of conducting Arctic operations. Air, Naval, and Special Operation Forces certainly have a role in the Arctic, but as SSE details, the CA will be integrated into a "system of systems" approach comprising of air, land, sea, and space assets connected through modern technology.¹³ The CA will be expected to be inserted into a remote area and to conduct sustained operations. Possible tasks for the CA in the Arctic include:

- a. Support to Search and Rescue operations;
- b. Support to disaster relief operations;

⁶ Government of Canada. *Toward a New Arctic Policy Framework*. 2018. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1499951681722/1537884604444>.

⁷ Government of Canada. *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*. 2010, 27.

⁸ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹² Patterson, Dennis. *Canada must assert sovereignty over the Arctic while there's still time*. 2017. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/canadas-must-assert-sovereignty-over-the-arctic-while-theres-still-time>.

¹³ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 80.

- c. Presence patrols in contested or uncontested terrain; and
- d. Tactical operations against an incursion into Canadian territory.

8. These Arctic operations will require specialized equipment and training and these capabilities are not organic to regular force units. The basic winter warfare training that is conducted annually is insufficient for the individual soldier and does not provide training in sustainment for higher headquarters. There is also currently inadequate equipment to complete Arctic operations.

9. SSE has specifically detailed the procurement of a “family of new ground vehicles capable of navigating the harsh landscape of the Canadian North.”¹⁴ This family of vehicles could be concentrated into one unit per CMBG and will give the CA the ability to mount operations at the company to battalion level.¹⁵ They could also be forward positioned in the Arctic to reduce some logistical issues.

Capabilities Within Arctic Nations

10. The Arctic Council describes itself as “the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic indigenous communities, and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues.”¹⁶ There are eight member nations of the council. Only five of those members (the Arctic Five¹⁷) have coastlines on the Arctic Ocean. The member states of the council are:

- a. Canada;
- b. Denmark;
- c. Finland (non-costal);
- d. Iceland (non-costal);
- e. Norway;
- f. The Russian Federation;
- g. Sweden (non-costal); and
- h. The United States of America.

11. The Arctic Council is also open to non-Arctic states. Currently thirteen states are given observer status and they can contribute to its work.¹⁸ Each of the observer states

¹⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁵ Depending on the quantity of equipment acquired.

¹⁶ Arctic Council. *Arctic Council*. 2018. <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/>.

¹⁷ Kuersten, Andreas. “The Arctic Five Versus the Arctic Council.” *Arctic Yearbook 2016*, 2016, 390.

¹⁸ Arctic Council. *Arctic Council*. 2018. <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/>.

has produced policy indicating their interests in the Arctic. The important deductions for Canadian Security are that these policies include economic interests from each of these countries. These countries will want to increase their presence in the Arctic and this will increase the requirement for the CA to be able to conduct Arctic operations.

12. The following will be a description of some of the Arctic land capabilities of the other seven Arctic states for the purpose of comparison to the CA:

Denmark

13. The Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020 identifies that NATO article 5 is their first line of defence, but stresses that enforcement of sovereignty is “exercised by the armed forces through a visible presence in the region where surveillance is the central task.”¹⁹ The document goes on to establish a Joint Arctic Command (located in Nuuk, Greenland²⁰) and an Arctic Response Force. This response force “would not be established permanently, but designated from existing armed forces and emergency preparedness units with Arctic capacity or the potential to develop one.”²¹

14. Denmark also maintains three Special Forces units with Arctic capability. The Frømandskorps unit is based in Greenland and the Jaeger unit in Denmark. Both units are staffed at 150 - 300 troops each.²² The third is a military dog sled force called the Sirius Patrol which consists of six patrols of two people each. They are armed with small arms for self defence and their task is surveillance and sovereignty enforcement in Greenland.²³

Finland

15. Finland’s strategy for the Arctic region was released in 2013 and updated in 2016. In the strategy they indicate that a military conflict in the Arctic is improbable, but stress the importance of cold climate expertise within The Finnish Defence Force.²⁴ The units of the Finnish Defence Force have excellent capabilities for Arctic operations. The lead unit for Arctic operations is the Jaeger Brigade and it conducts world class Arctic training for other militaries as well as 2,200 Finnish conscripts per year.²⁵

Iceland

16. Iceland released its Arctic Policy in 2011 and the policy stresses cooperation with other Arctic users.²⁶ Iceland maintains no standing army and relies on its membership in

¹⁹ Kingdom of Denmark. *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020*. 2011, 20.

²⁰ Wezeman, Siemon. “Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A New Cold War in the High North?” *SIPRI Background Paper*, 2016, 7.

²¹ Kingdom of Denmark. *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020*. 2011, 20.

²² Wezeman. “Military Capabilities . . .”, 9.

²³ Danish Defence Force. *Sirius Patrol*. 2015.

<https://www2.forsvaret.dk/OMOS/ORGANISATION/ARKTISK/ENHEDER/SIRIUS/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁴ Prime Minister's Office Publication. *Finland's Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013*. 2013, 14.

²⁵ Finnish Defence Force. *Jaeger Brigade*. n.d. <https://maavoimat.fi/en/jaeger-brigade>.

²⁶ Government Offices of Iceland. *A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy*. 2011, 2.

NATO and a bilateral defence agreement with the United States for its security. They also have close ties to the Nordic countries and intend to develop and strengthen Nordic cooperation on security and defence.²⁷

Norway

17. Norway's Arctic Policy states that "membership of NATO and the transatlantic security community is the cornerstone of Norway's security policy."²⁸ It identifies Russia's increased military activity as a threat to their security and emphasizes the role of the Norwegian Armed Forces in exercising sovereignty.²⁹ The policy also stresses the need for their armed forces to be interoperable with allies.³⁰ When Norway restructured their land forces in 2009, their winter-trained brigade (North Brigade) became the largest unit in their army.³¹

18. The North Brigade is mostly stationed in Troms County (above the Arctic Circle). It is a full mechanized brigade group based on the Leopard 2, CV9030, and BV206. The Norwegian Armed Forces also has a winter warfare school which is one of the key elements of the NATO Centre of Excellence for Cold Weather Operations.³² The Norwegian Home Guard is a central piece to their security. With conscription active in Norway they currently have 8,000 conscripts complete compulsory military service each year. The concept of compulsory training significantly increases the depth of reserves their land forces can access if needed.

The Russian Federation

19. In 2008 The Russian Federation released a State Policy on the Arctic that stated "somewhere between 2016 and 2020 the Arctic was expected to become Russia's leading strategic resource base."³³ This document was updated in 2013 to include specific direction to the Arctic Group of Forces. This included changing the land force's structure and composition as well as improving equipment, training, and readiness. These forces will be expected to deter potential threats and protect Russian interests.³⁴

20. In 2014, for the first time, Russian Military Doctrine included the task of protecting Russian interests in the Arctic.³⁵ It also included the establishment of Joint Strategic Northern Command. Russia has established two heavy Arctic brigades and

²⁷ Government of Iceland. 2018. <https://www.government.is/topics/foreign-affairs/national-security/>.

²⁸ Norwegian Ministries. "Norway's Arctic Strategy." 2017, 18.

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

³¹ Wezeman. "Military Capabilities ...", 12.

³² Norwegian Armed Forces. *The Army*. n.d. <https://forsvaret.no/en/organisation/army>.

³³ Sergunin, Alexander, and Valery Konyshov. "Russia in the Arctic: Hard or Soft Power?" *Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society Vol. 149*, 2018, 42.

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ Wezeman. "Military Capabilities ...", 13.

conducted Arctic exercises with up to 12,000 soldiers.³⁶ The increased military activity by Russia in the Arctic is concerning for all other Arctic states.³⁷

Sweden

21. Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region focuses on the relationship between the United States and Russia as well as Swedish alliances with Nordic countries and the European Union.³⁸ The Swedish Army has an arctic regiment (Norrbotten Regiment) consisting of two mechanized and one ranger battalion. The regiment is tasked with training Arctic light infantry battalions from the Swedish Home Guard.³⁹ Sweden's Home Guard is an integral part of their armed forces. It has a strength of 22,000 soldiers and with the reinstatement of conscription in 2017, it will continue to factor into Swedish Arctic capability.

United States of America

22. The United States National Strategy for the Arctic Region was released in 2013. Its first line of effort was to "Advance United States Security Interests."⁴⁰ The policy's highest priority is the protection of American people and their sovereign territory. It goes on to focus on collaboration with other users of the Arctic. This policy does not mention any specific threats, but was issued before Russia's actions in Ukraine.

23. The United States Army does have land forces stationed in Alaska. There are two brigade combat teams, one airborne and one based on the Stryker platform. For Army aviation there are attack and utility helicopters. The US Army also has their Northern Warfare Training Centre in Alaska.⁴¹

Deductions From Arctic Nations

24. While it would be effective for Canada to create a new Arctic battalion or move an established battalion north of the Arctic Circle, neither of those options is immediately viable. There currently exists neither the availability of PYs to create the unit nor the financial capacity to move a unit. When studying the other Arctic nations, the Danish Arctic Response Force concept balances viability and effectiveness. The CA should task a battalion from each CMBG as the Arctic response unit. Further, it should develop a managed readiness plan for the CA to maintain one company on high readiness from across the CA.

25. The Arctic training establishments available to other Arctic nations should be further studied with a view to improving the capacity of The Canadian Army Advanced

³⁶ Ibid., 14.

³⁷ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 79.

³⁸ Government Offices of Sweden. *Sweden's strategy for the Arctic Region*. 2011, 14.

³⁹ Swedish Armed Forces. *Home Guard*. 2018.

<https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/about/organisation/home-guard/>.

⁴⁰ Government of The United States of America. *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*. 2013, 6.

⁴¹ U.S. Army. *USARAK Units*. 2016. <https://www.army.mil/article/163749/>.

Warfare Centre and the CAF ATC. The ability of the CA to force generate Arctic soldiers will rely on the capacity of these training centres to produce the required quantity and quality of soldiers.

Implementation Plan

26. The CA cannot wait for the delivery of new Arctic equipment to be the impetus for deciding on how to employ it. Also, the CA cannot expect the Department of Land Requirements to procure the best equipment if it is not given a frame of reference for its employment. The best method for completing an in depth analysis of the requirements is to task a unit with Arctic Operations. This course of action is also PY and infrastructure⁴² neutral.

27. With the permanent task of Arctic Operations to a unit in each CMBG the CA will have the work force required to define the capability gaps, test the application of new theories / equipment, and apply lessons learned. This will all be done with a long term view to Arctic Operations. These conditions will result in a higher level of capability for the CA.

28. The units best suited to be tasked with an Arctic capability are the light battalions within each Division. Each of the light battalions already maintains skills (parachuting and mountain operations) that will complement the mobility requirements in the Arctic. The soldiers in the light battalions are trained to close with and destroy the enemy through a variety of insertion methods.⁴³ These battalions are accustomed to operating in austere conditions with only periodic sustainment.

29. The training required to operate effectively in all seasons of the Arctic is extensive. It encompasses more than the soldier skills required to survive. All levels of command must be experts in the five joint operational functions for Arctic operations to be successful. This expertise will come through training and a sustained presence in the Arctic. The training should not be limited to soldier skills, but should also be included in command and staff courses. Sustained presence can be achieved through increased participation in Op NANOOK, creating another series of land focused annual sovereignty exercises, and hosting more Arctic nations during these exercises.

30. Once Canada's Arctic capability is matured and equipped the CA will be able to establish an Arctic Response Force. This response force should be one company group in high readiness at all times with the other units having one company each either on the road to high readiness or in reconstitution.

⁴² This assumes that some infrastructure will come with the Arctic mobility equipment project.

⁴³ Canadian Army. *3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*. 2018.

<http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/ppcli/3rd-battalion.page>.

CONCLUSION

31. The Arctic will be a busier operating environment than it has ever been. There will be Arctic and non-Arctic nations testing the resolve of Canadian Sovereignty. Strategically the Canadian Government and the CAF have identified this. It is now time for the operational level of the CA to take action. Canada needs to have a credible land force that can respond to all spectrums of conflict in the Arctic.

32. SSE tasks the CA with projecting force into the Arctic.⁴⁴ The Canadian Rangers are not sufficient for this task. This can be accomplished by assigning the permanent task to a battalion in each of the CMBGs. With this task Canada will gain a credible Arctic capability with a minimal investment of PYs and infrastructure.

RECCOMENDATION

33. Below is a summary of all proposed recommendations.
- a. Task the light battalion in each CMBG with Artic operations;
 - b. Allocate the incoming equipment and any attached infrastructure to the tasked battalions and supporting units;
 - c. When viable, establish an Artic Response Force of one company group;
 - d. Increase participation in joint and multinational Arctic exercises; and
 - e. Increase Arctic operations training in command and staff courses.

⁴⁴ Department of National Defence. *Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy*. 2017, 80.

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