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## Getting Ready for the Chinese Push in the Arctic

Lieutenant-Commander Ian Bilodeau

### JCSP 45

#### Exercise Solo Flight

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### PCEMI n° 45

#### Exercice Solo Flight

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**Getting Ready for the Chinese Push in the Arctic**

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## Getting Ready for the Chinese Push in the Arctic

In January of 2018, The Chinese Communist Party (CPC) released China's official Arctic policy. The policy outlines the importance of the Arctic with respect to scientific research, environmental protection, sea passages, and natural resources.<sup>1</sup> China acknowledges that it is not an Arctic nation but insists that it is a "Near Arctic State"<sup>2</sup>. Based on international law, as the melting ice opens new opportunities for all nations, they will explore the Arctic. The ambition of the CPC of exploiting natural resources and sea lines of communication in the Arctic is very comparable to the ambition in the South China Sea. I do not anticipate China creating islands in the Arctic however, this paper will argue that if China conducts an Unrestricted warfare campaign in the Arctic, Canada does not possess the capabilities, assets, or doctrine (to include mindset) to be able to ensure Canadian sovereignty.

## Importance of the Arctic to China

The CPC's number one strategic goal is to grow their economy to be the biggest in the world. This will enable them to develop and grow their military both in technology and numbers, to be able to protect their interest and secure the future of the CPC<sup>3</sup>. The CPC sees that opportunities in the Arctic will help in their goal of growing their economy. China states that its goal in the Arctic is to participate in an international agreement on the use of the Arctic to ensure peace and stability in the area. The CPC understands that the Arctic is in a special geographical location that was unavailable in the past due to the presence of ice. However, now that the opportunity to use the Arctic is becoming a reality, the CPC emphasized that the only way China could counter global warming is by conducting scientific research in the area<sup>4</sup>. The CPC relies heavily on foreign trade, and as their economy grows bigger every year, they believe the sea routes including the Northwest, Northeast, and Central passage will open new customers and opportunities. This is called their "Polar Silk Road" initiative. The CPC anticipates that by using the passages, it could reduce CO2 emissions due to routes reducing transit times, and thus fuel, by up to 35% compared to current shipping routes.<sup>5</sup> They also stressed the opportunities for exploiting oil, gas, and other minerals in the area.

The CPC has already started to invest in international opportunities in anticipation of using the passages once they open. China has invested heavily in Iceland in 2008 when Iceland's economy collapsed. The intention is that China will build a large logistical hub that will help support Arctic activities<sup>6</sup> and the two countries signed a free trade agreement in 2013. In Canada, China has invested in mining companies operating in the north and intend on using the passages in the future.

## China's Arctic Intent

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<sup>1</sup> China. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. *China's Arctic Policy*. Beijing, China, 2018, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p3

<sup>3</sup> Feng Hang. "Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea and the Future of Regional Security." *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 132 Number 3 2017, 437.

<sup>4</sup> Heather A Conley. "China's Arctic Dream" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. February 2018, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Gisela Grieger. "China's Arctic Policy" *European Parliamentary Research Service*. 2018, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Heather A Conley. "China's Arctic Dream" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. February 2018,8.

Despite the CPC's claim that they are looking for an international peaceful "win-win" policy in the Arctic<sup>7</sup>, not everyone agrees with the intention of the CPC. China has claimed in their defence policy that there is a need to counter U.S unilateral policies that are undermining global strategic stability<sup>8</sup>. The growth of NATO in numbers and international involvement along with Russia's strengthening of its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities<sup>9</sup> is forcing China to develop a more modern military that can expand its influence globally. This new technologically advanced military will act as a deterrent at home but will also be needed to protect sea lines of communication, Chinese maritime rights, and overseas economic interest.<sup>10</sup> China's "win-win" policy focuses on protection of the environment and countering global warming. Why would China take this series in the Arctic when there is evidence that they do not take this seriously in their own country? There have been multiple reports that the country has a long history of having a disregard of their own environment<sup>11</sup>.

There is growing concern that China could one day use direct and indirect methods to exercise influence in the Arctic as they have already demonstrated in the South China Sea and use their influence in the Arctic to leverage their political goals in Arctic Nations. The opening of the passages will bring the Chinese military that much closer to North America thus increasing their capability to conduct direct and indirect influences. China has invested heavily in the ability to have a top-tier military that can project power internationally<sup>12</sup> and carry modern weapons to intimidate their adversaries. Canadian sovereignty is based on the principal that our government in Ottawa controls the law and political procedures within the political and geographical boundaries of Canada<sup>13</sup>. However, if China uses direct or indirect influences as they have displayed in the SCS this would be difficult to maintain.

### **Canadian Sovereignty**

Canada has emphasized the importance of maintaining our sovereignty in the Arctic and this was highlighted in two key documents. The first being the Minister of National Defence Mandate letter which states that we need better surveillance and defence and rapid response capabilities to protect our sovereignty<sup>14</sup>. The second being the "Strong Secure Engaged" defence policy that states that the Arctic is now a priority and we need to invest in communication, naval presence, and space capabilities<sup>15</sup>. The question most Canadians are asking is will this be enough to counter a Chinese unrestricted warfare campaign?

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<sup>7</sup> China. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. *China's Arctic Policy*. Beijing, China, 2018, 3.

<sup>8</sup> China. "China's National Defence in the New Era" *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*. Beijing, China, 2019, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* 3

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 9

<sup>11</sup> Adam Lajeunesse. "Finding "Win-Win" China's Arctic Policy and What It Means for Canada" *The School of Public Policy Publication*. Volume 11:33 December 2018, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas G Mahnken. "Testimony Before the U.S. – China Economic and Security Review Commission" *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*. June 20, 2019, 3.

<sup>13</sup> David J Bercusun. "Canada's Sovereignty: The Threats of a New Area" *Canadian Global Affaires Institute*. November 2018, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Canada. "Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter" *Office of the Prime Minister*. December 13, 2019

<sup>15</sup> Canada. "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy" *Minister of National Defence* 2017

## China's Indirect Operational Strategy

China has used a variety of indirect means to influence the SCS that could also be used in the Arctic. One method that China has already commenced is its legal influence using international and maritime law. There has been a dispute to Canada's claim that the Arctic Archipelago has been historical designated as inland waters. However, the U.S. sees seas as an international straight. China agrees with the U.S. and claims that they will respect international law and all Nations shall have the freedom of navigation in the passages<sup>16</sup>. An increase in shipping by Chinese vessels will only solidify their legal influence in the area. As stated earlier, China's intent is to have military assets in international waters to protect their interests. China has also gained legitimacy by joining organizations such as the Arctic council and regularly conducted Arctic research<sup>17</sup>.

China has invested heavily in an international communications campaign to both influence Chinese abroad and to misinform certain populations. To influence Chinese abroad, the CPC has established media outlets in other countries with the aim of displaying the CPC in a positive way and influencing potential Chinese voters. Canada has an estimated population of 1.8 million people who identify as Chinese origin<sup>18</sup> and the majority live in the west. They are the ideal target for the CPC media outlets to focus their efforts on to influence them to put political pressure to help achieve their goals. China's political Interference Activities displayed in the SCS also used companies and economic interests to lobby the CPC's political interest in another nations<sup>19</sup>. The CPC has also been funding think tanks and institutions such as Confucius Institutes<sup>20</sup>

China routinely uses economic pressures to influence other nations to achieve their operational goals. This strategy was already used when the RCMP arrested a Huawei executive. Nine days later the Chinese police arrested two Canadians and blocked the imports of Canadian canola seeds. This cost the Canadian Government over 150 million dollars to support canola farmers<sup>21</sup>. China is currently Canada's third largest trading partner<sup>22</sup> and as we have seen in the recent trade war with the U.S., China will use tariffs and bands in the future to influence Canadian political decisions.

China has already commenced cyber operation in the U.S. to manipulate information and interfere and influence politics<sup>23</sup>. They have also been accused of conducting cyber operations to steal intellectual property from industry and military establishments. China has also been accused of conducting espionage against the U.S. Again, the goal is to steal intellectual property

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<sup>16</sup> Adam Lajeunesse. "Finding "Win-Win" China's Arctic Policy and What It Means for Canada" *The School of Public Policy Publication*. Volume 11:33 December 2018, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Kyle D Christensen. "China in the Arctic Implications of China's Arrival in an Ice-Free Arctic" *Defence Research and Development*. November 2011, 56.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-canadians> 22 May, 2019

<sup>19</sup> Ross Babbage. "Winning Without Fighting" Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. June 2019 p29

<sup>20</sup> David J Bercusun. "Canada's Sovereignty: The Threats of a New Area" *Canadian Global Affaires Institute*. November 2018, 2.

<sup>21</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/5865874/canada-china-wto-canola-ban> September 9, 2019

<sup>22</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1210001101>

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Hicks, Joseph Federici and Connor Akiyama, *China in the grey zone* Hybrid COE Strategic Analysis Paper 4/2019, 3.

and gain technological advantages. China's growing space program will only strengthen their cyber and espionage abilities as they will have the ability to conduct operations worldwide.

### **China's Direct Operational Strategy**

The potential introduction of Chinese military assets in the Arctic to protect sea lines of communication and Chinese interest will give them the ability to conduct Intelligence Operations and will be a substantial capability for the Chinese military. They will be able to conduct communication intercepts at frequencies that are line of sight. Signal intelligence collection against Arctic Nations submarine assets will help the Chinese military in establishing a pattern of life and gain signals to help classify submarines.

The Arctic may also provide a potential operational area for Chinese nuclear ballistic submarines. Before China had a large Maritime and Air presence in the SCS, their nuclear ballistic submarines were restricted in operation of the coast of China. Now that the military has expanded in the SCS and the ballistic fleet has air support, there have been indications that China plans on expanding the patrol area for the nuclear fleet<sup>24</sup>. As the Peoples Liberation Army's Naval forces move into the Arctic, there is a potential for nuclear ballistic missile submarines to conduct patrols in the operating area<sup>25</sup>. Combine that threat with the protection of an aircraft carrier and a naval task group, China could potentially strike forces in Alaska and northern Canada.

### **Canada's Current Capabilities**

Is Canada prepared to counter an unrestricted warfare campaign to maintain Canadian sovereignty in the North? Not yet! The first challenge that Canada has is a lack of presence in the Arctic. Once a year there is a joint exercise run out of The Joint Task Force North where all the services train together but there is a minimal permanent presence in the North. The Canadian Rangers are a permanent presence, but they operate on land and would have minimal contribution in the maritime and air domain. The intent is that in an emergency they would be the first responders however, with the small numbers and lack of equipment, their response would be minimal. With increase in air and maritime traffic in the Arctic, much more assets will need to be deployed to deal with SAR, environmental disaster, and establish a military presence.

The Royal Canadian Navy will be receiving the first Arctic Offshore Patrol Vessels (AOPS) but they will not possess anti-submarine capability (detection or deterrent) or any anti-air or anti-missile defence capability. Their lack of sensors will have little contribution to the COP and until a permanent logistic base is established in Nanisivik, their on-station time is limited to the fresh food and fuel. Another limitation on the AOPS is they can only operate in first year ice<sup>26</sup> thus limiting their ability to operate in certain locations all year long without the dependence of a coast guard ice breaker.

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<sup>24</sup> Ross Babbage. "Stealing a March" *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*. July 2019, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Kyle D. Christensen. "China in the Arctic Implications of China's Arrival in an Ice-Free Arctic" *Defence Research and Development* November 2011, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Lajeunesse. "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Purpose, Capabilities, and Requirements" *The School of Public Policy Publication*. May 2015, p8.

The Canadian Army (CA) has a small presence and routinely deploys to a forward operating base in the Arctic however, it has been noted that the greatest challenge for the Army is the lack of tactical movement<sup>27</sup> as the CA does not possess an appropriate vehicle that can use maneuver warfare or transport troops and equipment efficiently. Another vulnerability the CA has in the Arctic is without a Ground Based Air Defence in the Operating Area, the bases and troops would be vulnerable to Chinese precision strike missiles from Naval vessels or submarines.

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) can gain their recognized Air Picture (RAP) with Aurora aircraft<sup>28</sup> and are upgrading them now with better sensors for surface and sub-surface detection. They will feed the picture to NORAD. NORAD has some radar coverage in the North that was developed to defend against a Russian Air and Missile attack, but the radars are currently monitoring minimal air traffic. It is estimated that countries like China and Russia will increase their polar commercial flights from 25-30 flights per day over the pole to 300 per day in 10 years<sup>29</sup>. The increase in traffic will most likely mean an upgrade of the radar systems and the communication data link between the hubs. The Canadian Forces operates a commercial satellite that provides Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)<sup>30</sup>. SAR provides a high-altitude picture, however this would not be sufficient to get time sensitive information to deal with a search and rescue of submarines.

## **Preparation**

To prepare for the potential of an unrestricted warfare in the Arctic, planners should examine the campaign in the SCS and other example of unrestricted Warfare to determine if the U.S. could have done something to prevent such rapid growth and influence. Analysts have determined that one major factor that contributed to the Chinese expansion in the SCS was that western allies do not have well-developed capabilities dealing with hybrid or unrestricted warfare.<sup>31</sup> Not only do they not have the capabilities but they do not possess the doctrine and ROE to be able to respond. A major difference between Western doctrine and Chinese doctrine is that in the Western culture, we are either at war or we are at peace with a nation. If we are at peace with a nation then we can trade, invest, and prosper with that nation. If we are at war, we will execute operations and use violence if necessary.

In the late 1990's, Chinese doctrine was created with the understanding that they are always at war with their adversaries, but that does not mean they have to use violence. The CPC believes that they are involved in a long term continuous struggle with the U.S. and western world<sup>32</sup> and the most efficient way to win this struggle is to use unrestricted warfare, as it is seen to utilize weaknesses of democracy in the western world. "While we are seeing a relative reduction in military violence, at the same time we are definitely seeing an increase in political, economic,

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<sup>27</sup> Adam Lajeunesse. "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Purpose, Capabilities, and Requirements" *The School of Public Policy Publication*. May 2015, p4.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Lajeunesse. "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Purpose, Capabilities, and Requirements" *The School of Public Policy Publication*. May 2015, p10.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle D Christensen. "Arctic Maritime Security and Defence: Canadian Northern Security Opportunity and Challenges" *Defence Research and Development*. November 2011, 43

<sup>30</sup> Gilles Labonte. "Canadian Arctic Sovereignty: Local Intervention by Flocking UAVs" *Defence Research and Development Canada*. January 2010, 3

<sup>31</sup> Ross Babbage. "Stealing a March" *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*. Vol 2 July 2019, 49

<sup>32</sup> Ross Babbage. "Stealing a March" *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*. Vol 1 July 2019, 36.

and technological violence.”<sup>33</sup> The CPC is always strategically conducting unrestricted warfare at an Operational level to achieve their political agendas and they continue to do this because the western nations allow them to. The CPC understood that any direct conflict with the U.S. could result in a nuclear reaction, so the goal was to avoid a direct conflict with the U.S. and to focus on activities against a weaker adversary and undermine the strength and unity <sup>34</sup> to obtain their political goals. “Unrestricted warfare means multiple attacks on the social, economic and political system of the opponent”<sup>35</sup>

China continues to use unrestricted warfare on Western nations because many of the unrestricted warfare tactics are in a grey zone when it comes to the Law of Armed Conflict. Cyber Warfare is a perfect example as there is no definitive answer to whether a cyber-attack is an act of war. Military decision makers rely on, and take the advice of, legal advisers. However, the international law of armed conflict does not cover these types of operations. Therefore, the western nations are constrained by their decentralized decision making<sup>36</sup> and the political risk of a military decision maker on making a bad decision or the unwillingness to hold the military accountable, is too great. This does not exist in Chinese Unrestricted Warfare techniques and the CPC are willing to take the risk to gain an advantage.

## **Recommendation**

Unrestricted warfare is a whole of government approach to warfare. Therefore, to counter the threat, Canada must adopt a whole of government response to the threat and not just focus on the Canadian Armed Forces. However, I will focus on recommendations that effect the CAF. I am recommending that Canada continue to apply pressure on China using the same unrestricted mindset that China uses, combined with military forces.

Military forces deployed in the Arctic should focus on multi-domain, network centric, distributed operations. Multi-Domain refers to the deployment of joint forces that are able to achieve desired effects in all domains including cyber and space <sup>37</sup>with an understanding of how that effect will influence the other domains. Network centric forces will need a common network that will distribute the COP and other Intelligence information to decision makers and allow them to make timely decisions. Distributed Operations will allow many pockets of small forces to use maneuver warfare, create the situational awareness in operations, and react in all domains to an unrestricted warfare<sup>38</sup>. This means that Canadian doctrine and Rules of Engagement would have to be developed with the understanding that the associated level of risk associated with commanders making time sensitive decision is accepted and understood politically.

The COP would have to be joint, timely, and distributed to decision makers. The COP can be

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<sup>33</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. “Unrestricted Warfare” *PLA Literature and Arts Publishing*. Beijing. February 1999, p6

<sup>34</sup> David Carment. “War’s Future: The Risk and Rewards of Grey-one Conflict and Hybrid Warfare” *Canadian Global Affaires Institute*. October 2018, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Iulian Chifu. “Hybrid Warfare, Lawfare, Informational War. The Wars of the Future” *Center for Conflict Prevention & Early Warning*. Bucharest. 2014, 4

<sup>36</sup> David Carment. “War’s Future: The Risk and Rewards of Grey-one Conflict and Hybrid Warfare” *Canadian Global Affaires Institute*. October 2018, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffery Reilly. “Multidomain Operations” *Air & Space Journal; Maxwell AFB*. Vol 30 Iss 1, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Department of the Navy, *A Concept for Distributed Operations* (Washington, DC:U.S. Marine Corps), 1



achieved by using a mixture of Unmanned Aerial, Surface, and Sub-surface Vehicles, that would focus on choke points and areas of interests.

In conclusion, if China conducts an unrestricted warfare campaign in the Arctic, Canada does not currently possess the capabilities, assets, or doctrine (to include mindset) to be able to ensure Canadian sovereignty. The CAF's focus should be on establishing a joint network and achieving the COP in the Arctic.

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