

ASSERTING CANADIAN ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY: IS THE BEST OFFENCE A GOOD DEFENCE?

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Abstract

The Canadian Arctic has always occupied a space within our identity as a nation. Recently, however, propelled by a changing climate, the expanding search for natural resources, and the actions of international actors, the Arctic has assumed a position of political prominence as well. Canada's Northern Strategy, introduced in 2009, outlines four areas of priority: exercising Canadian Arctic sovereignty, protecting environmental heritage, promoting social and economic development, and the devolution of Northern governance. Furthermore, 2010 saw the announcement of the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy (NSPS)—a \$36.6 billion initiative that at once asserts Canadian Arctic sovereignty as a priority for the present government, and displays the Defence-heavy approach that will realize this goal. In light of the growing significance of the Canadian Arctic region, is such an emphasis on Defence initiatives advantageous for the assertion of Canadian Arctic sovereignty? Through the analysis of Cold-War era Defence memoranda, a juxtaposition of the past and present political environment of the Arctic region is presented. The economic precariousness of the \$3.1 billion plan to procure Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships is explored through consideration of the October 2014 budget analysis released by the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Finally, the social implications of the current government's Defence-heavy approach are framed by the narrow definition of human security that they imply. The current NSPS initiative is found to be incompatible with the existing political environment of the Arctic circumpolar region, not only for economic reasons, but because of social implications that threaten Canada's Arctic sovereignty itself.

The National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy (NSPS) at a Glance

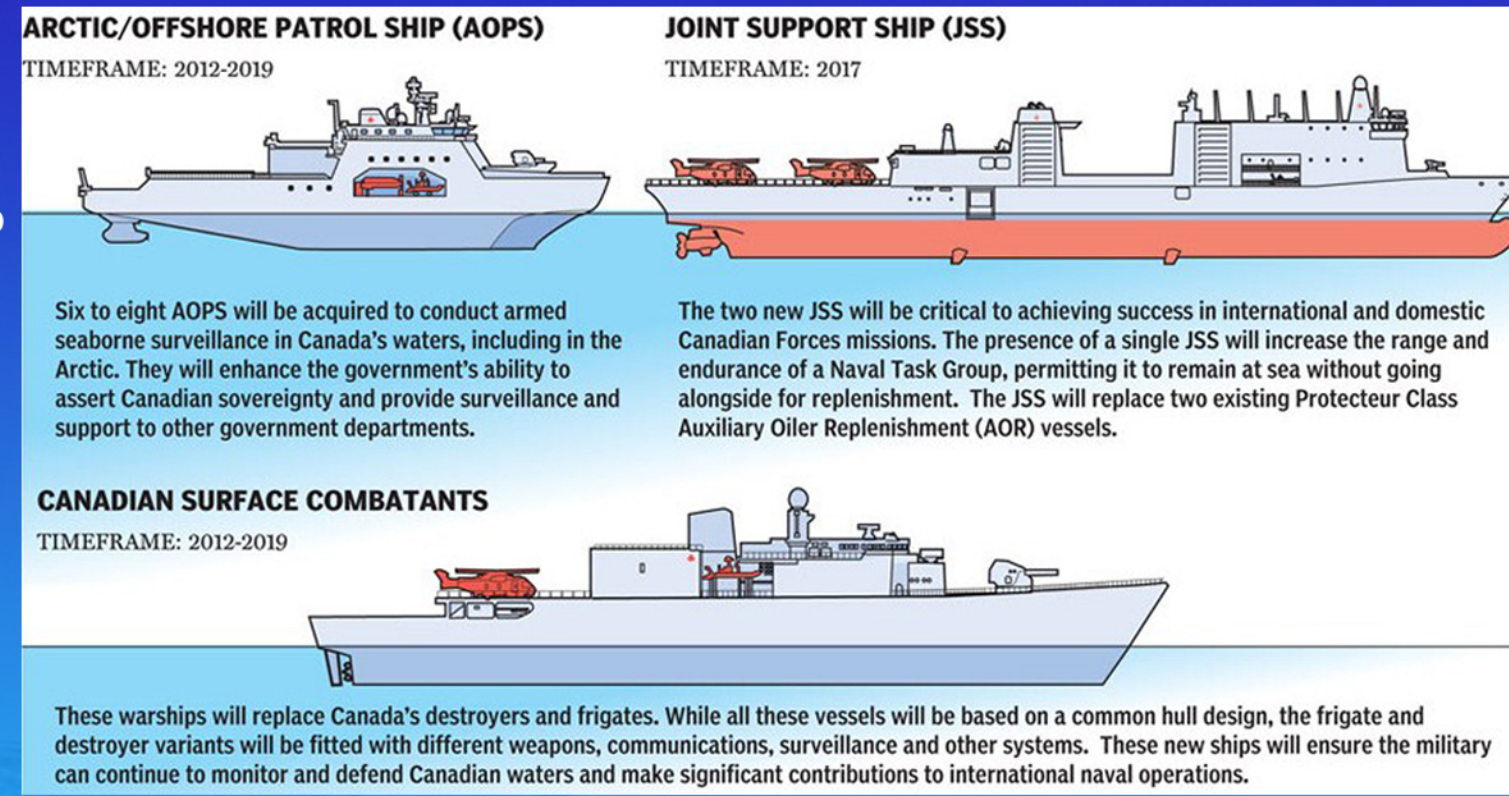
The \$36.6 billion National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy (NSPS) includes the following projects:

Combat Vessel Work Package (\$29.3 billion):

- \$3.1 billion allocated towards the construction of 6-8 Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships (A/OPS);
- \$26.2 billion allocated towards the construction of up to 15 Canadian Surface Combatants (CSC);
- Irving Shipyards Inc. has been selected to construct the A/OPS and CSC vessels.

Non-Combat Vessel Work Package (\$7.3 billion):

- \$244 million for 3 Offshore Fisheries Science Vessels;
- \$144.4 million for an Offshore Oceanographic Science vessel;
- \$2.3 billion for 2 Joint Support Ships (JSS) for the Royal Canadian Navy;
- \$1.9 billion for up to 5 Offshore Patrol Vessels for the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG);
- \$1.4 billion for up to 5 Medium Endurance Multi-Tasked Vessels (CEM);
- Vancouver Shipyards has been selected to construct the Non-Combat Vessel Work Package.



The Changing Political Climate of the Arctic

The atmosphere that existed within the Arctic circumpolar region during the Cold War was marked by the concept of security adopted by the Arctic states that "linked [security] to the ability to build a nuclear weapon capability sufficient enough to deter the opposing side from attacking" (Huebert 2011). As such, international cooperation between states that did exist was precipitated by shared security interests and thus led to a heavily militarized environment in the Canadian Arctic.

Cold War Era Arctic International Relations

- international cooperation centred on Defence initiatives (e.g. DEW Line, NORAD)
- highly tense, heavily militarized environment
- little cooperation between non-NATO arctic states on social/environmental matters concerning the arctic
- little to no natural resource development/economic activity
- state monopoly on human security; security tied to physical threats that legitimized military response

Post-Cold War Arctic International Relations

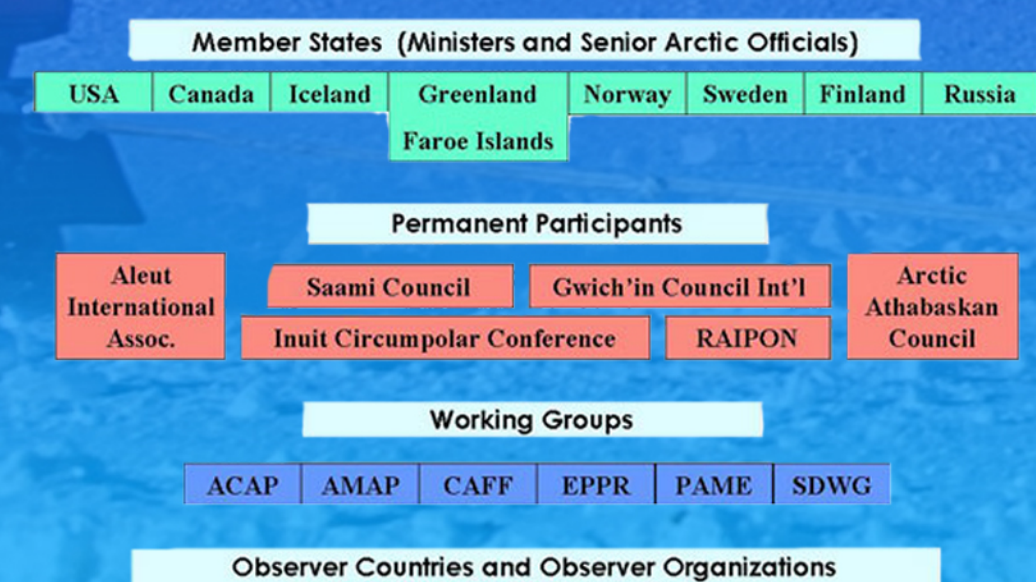
- established international forum to accommodate cooperation
- increased agency/involvement of non-state actors on social and environmental matters in the arctic circumpolar region
- increased natural resource development/extraction
- cooperation between arctic states with regards to seabed jurisdictional delimitation
- movement towards a broader definition of human security that identifies the most pressing concerns for the arctic population
- cooperative approach to conflict-resolution



"Hypothetical Canadian Surface Combatant frigate variant" (www.casr.ca).

Ultimately, the cumulative effect that the addition of up to 23 heavily armed and Arctic-capable vessels would have is a regression of the Canadian Arctic region to a militarized state not seen since the end of the Cold War.

Members of the Arctic Council



Threat Assessments - Then and Now

Excerpts from Defence memoranda during the Cold War:

- "It is unlikely that incursions of Canadian northland territory, air space, and waters (including sub-surface) would be deliberately attempted by Soviet armed forces" -Col. R.M. Withers, 1969 (Lackebauer, 2010);
- "Large scale military activity in the Canadian North would not be justified on the basis of the direct military threat alone" -Col. R.M. Withers, 1969 (Lackebauer, 2010);
- "There are both definable and undefinable threats of a non-military nature to Canadian interests in the North" -BGen. R.M. Withers, 1971 (Lackebauer, 2010);
- "In summary, surveillance and reconnaissance targets in the North...are not hostile [and] can be approached...these operations suggest a flexible...inexpensive surveillance and reconnaissance system" -BGen. R.M. Withers, 1971 (Lackebauer, 2010).



Present-day Arctic Threat Assessment:

- "The most significant security threats today...involve nonstate actors such as drug smugglers, gunrunners, illegal immigrants, and even terrorists, who might take advantage of ice-free Arctic waters" (Byers, 2010).

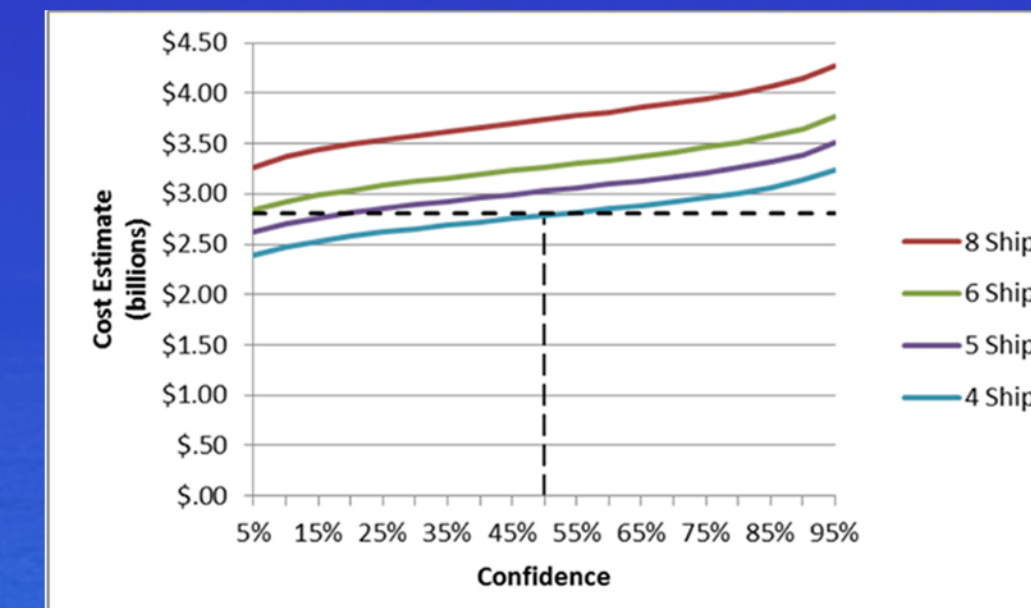
The AOPS Project Budget - On Thin Ice

The \$3.1 billion A/OPS project within the NSPS was the subject of an October 2014 budget analysis prepared by the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO). The conclusions of the PBO were less than optimistic:

- "PBO analysis suggests that the current budget will be insufficient to procure [6-8] A/OPS as planned" (PBO, 2014);
- "If there are no delays, the current budget will allow for...only four ships [to] be delivered...at the minimum acceptable confidence level of 50%" (PBO, 2014);

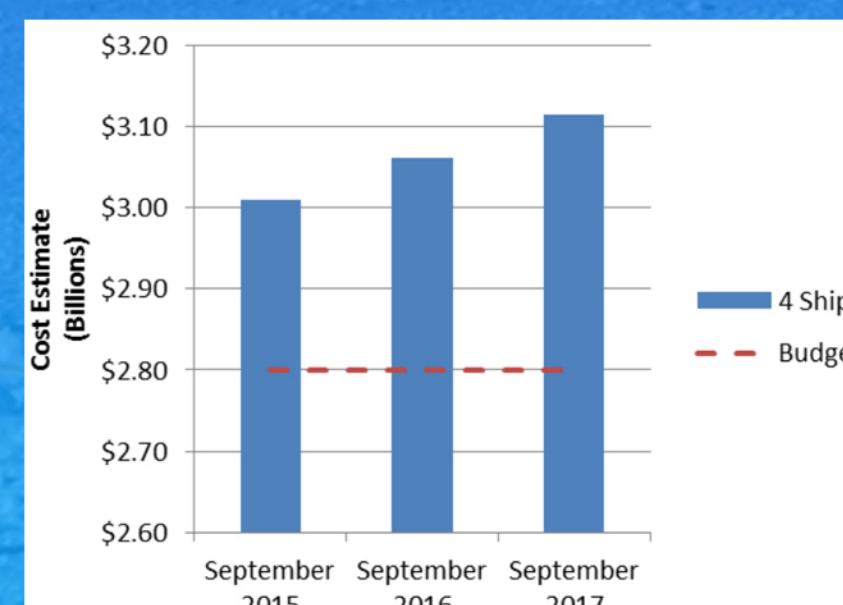
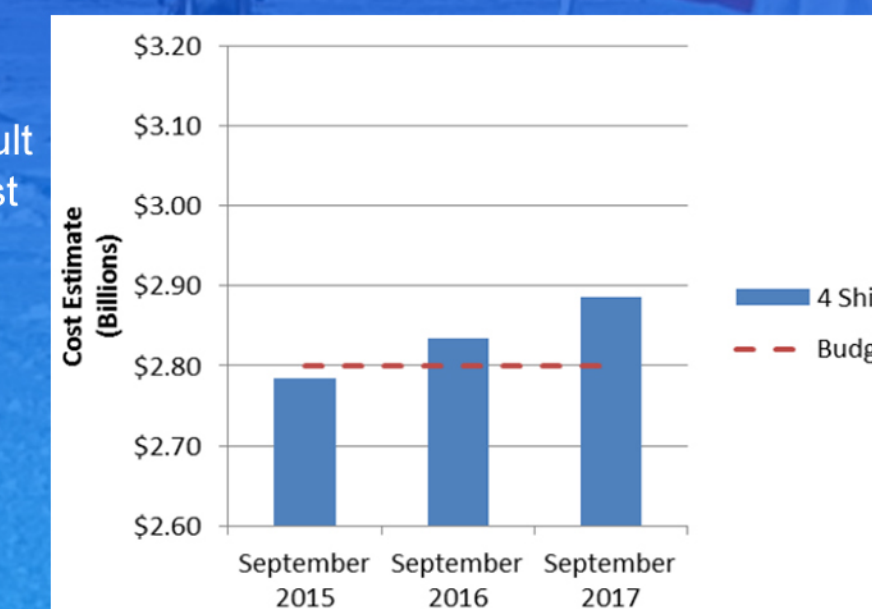
AOPS - Ship Characteristics	
Length	103.6m
Beam	19.0m
Lightship weight	5,200 tonnes
Steel weight	2,800 tonnes
Speed (open water)	17 knots
Speed (in ice)	1m new ice at 3 knots
Propulsion	Electric Power and Propulsion 2 x 4500kW Motors, 4 x 3600kW Diesel Generators
Crew Complement	65
Accommodation	85
Endurance	120 days
Range	6,800 nautical miles

Characteristics of the Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ship (Irving Shipyards).



- "Schedule slips...may have a significant impact on...other projects down the pipeline, such as the Canadian Surface Combatant" (PBO, 2014);

- "A one year delay [in the start of construction] would result in the project being \$34 million over budget. A two year delay would result in the project being \$85 million over budget. These figures suggest that if there is a delay, one or a combination of three things will happen: the budget will be increased, the number of ships paired back, or the ship's capabilities will be paired down" (PBO, 2014);



"Ship cost increase due to delay with a 80% confidence level" (PBO, 2014).

- "With a one-year delay, the cost of four ships is estimated to be \$206 million over budget and with a two-year delay it is estimated to be \$310 million over budget. Even with no delay, to achieve four ships with 80% confidence is \$201 million over budget" (PBO, 2014).

Social Implications - Defence and Human Security

The results of the monetary emphasis placed on Defence and military initiatives in the assertion of Canadian Arctic sovereignty:

- A "violence-centric definition [of human security] that excludes from...its analysis the most pressing insecurities in the Canadian North" (Greaves, 2012);
- Narrowly defines human security to include only threats that are external and violent in nature, thus legitimizing the need for a military response such as the NSPS;
- Monopolizes the power to respond to such threats in the hands of the state.

Amongst the Canadian Inuit, threats to their human security that remain unaddressed amidst the Defence-heavy focus on Canadian Arctic sovereignty include:



- High suicide rate amongst young Inuit males;
- Cultural erosion;
- Language loss;
- Adverse effects of climate change on traditional way of life.

Missed Opportunities

The focus on asserting Canadian Arctic sovereignty has resulted in what arctic scholars have lamented as "opportunities forgone as a result of defence spending" (Griffiths, 2011). Such missed opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- The improvement and devolution of Northern governance (one of the four pillars of Canada's Northern Strategy);
- The simultaneous promotion of Aboriginal peoples' human security and state security interests through the devolution process that includes self-governance provisions (Slowey, 2011);
- Opportunities to "[solidify] Canada's relationship with its Arctic peoples and over Arctic lands" (Slowey, 2011).

Conclusion

Despite introducing a Canadian Northern Strategy that promised a balanced approach to Canadian Arctic policy, the evident emphasis placed on the assertion of Canadian Arctic sovereignty through Defence initiatives is in keeping with Prime Minister Stephen Harper's mantra, "[w]e either use it or lose it". Due to the environment of cooperation that has emerged in the Arctic, the uncertainty of the economics that underlie the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy, and relegation to the periphery of those social initiatives that might be beneficial to both Northern human security and Canadian Arctic sovereignty itself, the current focus of the Harper government is ultimately misplaced.

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