

CANADA AND THE ARCTIC

The exploration and development of Canada's North, which spans 3.9 million square kilometers (1.5 million square miles), and stretches to within 800 kilometers (500 miles) of the North Pole, has been and remains an integral part of Canada's national heritage. Canada's stewardship of the North imposes a special responsibility toward the environment and people of the Arctic.

In 1986, in response to the Simard-Hockin parliamentary report, the Canadian government outlined a northern foreign policy, composed of four dominant themes: modernizing northern defences; affirming Canadian sovereignty; promoting enhanced circumpolar cooperation; and preparing for commercial use of the Northwest Passage, including preservation of the environment and safeguarding the interests of the inhabitants.

As Canada's closest Arctic neighbour, it is inevitable that US interests in the Arctic will affect Canada, and vice versa. Despite differences of view on some issues, Canada and the USA have been able to reach mutually-beneficial agreements. This process continues.

Security

Recently Canada has taken a number of security measures in the Arctic. These actions, many taken in cooperation with the USA, will enable Canada to make a more significant contribution to meeting our mutual defence objectives.

An improved radar system, the North Warning System, is being built; forward airfields and bases are being established and the installation in the Arctic of fixed underwater detection systems is planned; and a fleet of 10-12 nuclear-propelled submarines (SSNs) are to be acquired. The SSNs, although primarily for service in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, will, because of their under ice ability, provide an increased measure of security and control in the Arctic.

In October 1987, the Soviet Union suggested the possibility of a nuclear weapon-free zone and limitations on naval activity in certain northern ocean areas. Canada does not support these proposals.

Canada is interested in developing realistic policies aimed at enhancing security and stability in the Arctic and supports efforts for balanced reductions in nuclear arms.