

We regard these waters as internal by virtue of historic title. They are covered by ice most of the year; they are part of a continuous landmass, they have never been used for international navigation, and they have long been used by native Canadians. The U.S. on the other hand, is concerned that if this passage is declared internal, then other countries may make similar claims regarding waters actually used for international navigation.

On January 11, 1988, I announced an agreement on Arctic cooperation that met Canada's goals. Neither side moved from its stated position on the principle of sovereignty, but the agreement is entirely consistent with our position on sovereignty. What that agreement accomplished is that, from then on, the U.S.A. would ask our permission for American icebreakers to use Arctic waters.

That means they cannot enter waters we claim without our prior consent. We have achieved control over U.S. icebreakers in our waters, and there can be no repetition of the Polar Sea incident. We gained a substantial increase in effective control, and that is a significant step forward.

Recognition of this new fact came just this month. An American Coast Guard icebreaker, the Polar Star - in fact, the sister ship of the Polar Sea - was attempting to sail around northwestern Alaska to return to its home port in Seattle. It could not do so because of impossible ice conditions in those waters.

As a result the American Government - in accordance with our new agreement - sought our consent to have that vessel transit the Northwest Passage to the Atlantic Ocean. After satisfying ourselves as to the ship's condition and after receiving an American undertaking on environmental liability for its journey, we gave our consent. That American ship, accompanied by a Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker and with a Canadian Coast Guard officer on board, is now en route to the more hospitable waters of the North Atlantic.

A further important step in asserting control over our Arctic waters has come through U.S. recognition that their commercial vessels are subject to the provisions of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act of 1970. That means that a U.S. commercial tanker like the Manhattan, which sailed through the Northwest Passage in 1970, is also now subject to Canadian control.