

GIVE THE UN SOME TERRITORY TO RUN

Canada could solve its Arctic sovereignty conundrum with a daring act of internationalism – give ownership of most of the Arctic archipelago to the United Nations.

BY CLYDE SANGER

THIS ARTICLE IS DELIBERATELY provocative. After all, what is there left to be? Many high strategists and others have had a bite at the Arctic, and penned thousands of words about the importance of asserting Canada's sovereign rights against (almost) all comers, or about the possibility of making the Arctic a demilitarized zone or some sort of nuclear weapon-free zone. I shall summarize the most noted of these schemes and then take a wild leap off the ice-cap.

Hanna Newcombe was one of the first into the Circle, in 1980. Her plan for a nuclear weapon-free zone North of 60 has often been cited, and criticized. If the line were rigidly along that parallel, it would include the Kola Peninsula where half the Soviet submarine fleet is based, and the Soviet military would understandably object. If the line were, as she said later, "flexible," all sorts of people would object to its waviness.

The scheme of Owen Wilkes, a New Zealander who worked for a time with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, has been criticized from another standpoint. His Circumpolar Demilitarized Zone left the Barents Sea as a submarine sanctuary and also did not touch the larger radar stations which the United States operates from Alaska to northern England.

Ronald Purver, writing for the Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament in May 1987, concluded that "the most promising approach to Arctic arms control is to avoid Arctic-specific measures per se, and to concentrate instead on arms control measures of wider applicability." This

was good cautionary stuff, but not very encouraging for those who say, "We have to start somewhere." Later, in an Occasional Paper for CIIPS, Purver embraced the idea of excluding submarines from a "stand-off zone" of up to 2,500 kilometres off a foreign coast, and also accepted a scheme for submarine sanctuaries in the Arctic – both in the name of confidence-building measures. Well, good luck if he can make superpowers play to such rules!

Meanwhile in June 1987 came the Defence White Paper, announcing plans to acquire ten to twelve nuclear-powered submarines. We are all still wondering what they will do if they meet other countries' submarines under the Arctic ice. Department of National Defence strategists admit, in private, that the submarines make no sense militarily but have a political significance, presumably in this business of asserting sovereignty, in company with the Class 8 ice-breaker. The White Paper raises a concern about Soviet submarines using the Northwest Passage to break out into the Atlantic to attack convoys of other ships. David Cox says there is "not a shred of evidence" that Soviet submarines have yet gone through the Passage, but suggests that the Canadian military may need to familiarize itself with these waters in order to mine the egress into the Arctic Basin to stop westbound US submarines, which assuredly have gone through these waters without a word to their dearest ally.

The New Democratic Party policy statement this past April, *Canada's Stake in Common*

Security, argues that the Arctic is "a more volatile area" than Central Europe. An NDP government would "redeploy" our 7,200 troops now in Germany, but not necessarily in the Arctic. Who, after all, wants to fight on foot, or in tanks, there? Its main Arctic concern would be to build with Nordic neighbours a "cooperation and security regime," and lobby hard to control or eliminate the sophisticated generation of cruise missiles coming over the technological horizon. These are virtuous intentions, if a little vague.

Among other schemes for demilitarization, Franklyn Griffiths came up in 1979 with the idea of a demilitarized zone seaward of everyone's 200-mile economic zone. Purver, saying this was too modest, suggested it should be seaward of the 12-mile territorial sea.

And then there are Mikhail Gorbachev's six proposals in his speech of last October in Murmansk. They are for (1) a nuclear-free zone in Northern Europe; (2) an endorsement of the Finnish proposal to restrict naval activity "in the seas washing the shores of Northern Europe;" (3) peaceful co-operation in developing the resources of the North, the Arctic; (4) a conference in 1988 to coordinate scientific research in the Arctic; (5) co-operation of the northern countries in environmental protection; and (6) depending on a political thaw, the opening up of what he calls the North Sea Route (i.e. the Northeast Passage) to foreign ships, with the aid of Soviet ice-breakers.

At the Norway-Canada Conference on Circumpolar Issues in Tromsø in December 1987,

External Affairs Minister Joe Clark criticized the first two points in these words: "Mr. Gorbachev appears to focus exclusively on the Western Arctic without discussing the Barents Sea or other waters adjacent to the USSR. He does not offer any detail as to how a ban on naval activity would be verified or enforced." So he said Canada had asked the Soviet authorities for clarification on these points.

Mr. Clark did, however, welcome all the ideas about co-operation, and indeed ended his own speech with a page about co-operation – in sharing information, experience and technology, in learning lessons from the Inuit and the Saami, and so on. Earlier, he had repeated the government's "four broad themes" of its comprehensive northern foreign policy: affirming Canadian sovereignty, modernizing defences, extending circumpolar co-operation and preparing for the commercial use of the Northwest Passage.

SO WE COME TO THE ISSUE OF THE Northwest Passage. Throughout the Third UN Law of the Sea Conference (UNCLOS-3) Canada managed to stay out of the discussion on international straits. It now says that the Passage runs through internal waters. In an article in the *Globe and Mail* of 10 November 1987 Franklyn Griffiths produced a scheme for winning US acknowledgement of Canadian sovereignty over the surface waters of the archipelago, in order to create "an international regime for safe and efficient commercial navigation in the Arctic waters of North America." The agreement would make no mention of activities below the surface, so that Canada