



Washington over Cuba, and the brief “fish war” with Spain. Although very different, they all were (and are) broadly endorsed and supported by most Canadians.

Yet to consider a “Northern” or “Circumpolar” dimension to Canadian foreign policy while domestically the North remains — save for those brief passionate moments — below the horizon of Canadian political consciousness, may be a tall order. For, if it is only important to the current stakeholders, Northerners and a small group of Southerners whose lives are tied to the North by vocation or avocation, then there will be not much interest.

Conversely, if the North, in terms of its opportunities and its challenges, is directly relevant to the rest of Canada’s future and its relations abroad, then the constituency must be broadened beyond the existing stakeholders.

To be blunt; if a “Northern” or “Circumpolar” dimension to Canadian foreign policy matters only to those who attend forums like these, then it won’t happen. Broadening the domestic constituency may be the biggest hurdle to the development of any vibrant and meaningful “Northern” or “Circumpolar” dimension to Canadian foreign policy.

“The problem”, as Franklyn Griffiths says, “comes down to the great disconnectedness. Arctic (and) Northern spaces and issues in Canada are separated from the rest of the country. Canada as a whole is disconnected from the Circumpolar world. Circumpolar relations are disconnected from the rest of world affairs and from the preoccupations and priorities of the centres of decision to the South.”

Too often, perhaps, the North is regarded in isolation, perhaps especially by those, Northerners and the small cadre of professionals, whose

preoccupation is with “things” Northern. This self-selected group seems sometimes to almost revel in the lament that they and the North are ignored and misunderstood by “outsiders”.

Yet without some broader relevance to non-Northerners, the paradox of Canadians at once “feeling” Northern yet giving the North short shrift on the national agenda, seems likely to extend to foreign policy.

Just whose North is it anyway — lines on maps, real or imagined threats

Old-fashioned foreign policy began with the assertion of sovereignty and the protection of the nation state against “foreign” threats. Canada with its “world’s longest undefended border” has long been able to place a lower priority on security as a foreign policy imperative. And now, in the post-Cold War world, it is increasingly suggested that with the end of the superpower rivalry and its strange logic of stability through mutually assured destruction, a new dawning in international relations is at hand. That the new threats are collective; like global warming or trans-boundary pollution or errant asteroids or fast-mutating new epidemics.

Perhaps. But after a decade filled with genocide, ethnic cleansing, the violent disintegration of formerly proud federations, and the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons among rogue states, it may be too soon to dismiss the old threats.

The question may be whether new means can achieve new ends, or whether Canada would be at risk of relinquishing its sometimes tenuous hold on “our” Arctic by abandoning the old means.