

13. ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY

BACKGROUND

Successive Canadian Governments have attributed great economic and political value to the Arctic and its resources. Active involvement in the High Arctic began in the 1890s in the form of exploration and patrol expeditions. During World War II, the Canadian Arctic took on a new strategic significance when Canada gave permission to the United States to build a chain of weather stations and airfields in the Arctic in order to deliver military aircraft to the Soviet Union.

In 1955, Canada and the United States signed an agreement to build the Distant Early Warning (DEW) system, a line of early-warning radar stations stretched across the Canadian North. The main purpose of the system was to provide warning of a Soviet bomber attack across the North Pole against the continental United States.

While this increased activity in the Arctic was initiated primarily by the United States, cooperative agreements satisfied Canadian Government concern about the protection of sovereignty. This situation changed when a privately owned oil tanker, the *Manhattan*, attempted to cross the Northwest Passage without seeking the permission of the Canadian Government. Concerned with the threat to sovereignty and a possible increase in commercial shipping, the Canadian Government passed the *Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act*, 1970, which established Canadian environmental jurisdiction for up to 100 miles off the Arctic coasts. As late as 1969 considerable confusion seemed to characterize the Canadian Government's position on the precise nature of Canadian claims to the Arctic waters. After 1973, however, Canadian Governments were consistently claiming the waters of the Arctic Archipelago as internal, with no right of innocent passage through them.

At the Quebec Summit, in March 1985, Canada and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding on developing the North Warning System (NWS), a line of modern long- and short-range radars to replace the DEW Line. Unlike the earlier system, which was largely manned and operated by US personnel, the NWS will be manned and controlled entirely by Canadians. (For more information, see NORAD, Chapter 15 of *The Guide*.)

Although the first nuclear-powered submarine operated under the Arctic icecap for an extended period of time as early as 1958, it is comparatively recently that both superpowers are believed to have initiated regular submarine patrols under the ice. This development has raised the prospect of the Arctic becoming an area of growing strategic importance to the superpowers, and has created dilemmas for the Canadian Government. As nuclear-powered submarines are particularly difficult to detect and monitor effectively under the ice, their operation in the Arctic poses a new challenge to the assertion of Canadian sovereignty in the region.

In August 1985, a more visible threat to Canadian sovereignty presented itself with the voyage of the US Coast Guard vessel, the *Polar Sea*, through the Northwest Passage. The declared purpose of the voyage was to shorten the sailing time to Alaska. The US Government failed, however, to request the Canadian Government's permission to make the voyage. Although the US Government made it clear that it did not agree with