

I want to talk to you today about Canadian Sovereignty, and Canadian interests, and how we advance them together in a world that has become more competitive and more complex.

Sovereignty is an evocative term that is suddenly so charged with symbolism as to become a kind of shorthand for control over our national destiny. Some have argued that softwood is sovereignty, so are auto parts, so are shakes and shingles. That is a distinctive Canadian definition, that you would find nowhere else in the world. You do not hear the Japanese talking about a trade dispute as an assault on their sovereignty. Indeed, you do not hear Canadians talking about a trade dispute with any country other than the United States, as an assault on our sovereignty. The abuse of the term is not very helpful to clear thinking; worse, it cheapens an important concept.

Sovereignty is in fact a concept in law. It is the legal condition necessary for the inclusion of particular lands and waters within the boundaries of a particular country. It gives that country, within those boundaries, the right to exercise the functions of a state, to the exclusion of any other state.

At the moment, Canada is faced with only one pure sovereignty issue of truly major proportions; the status in international law of the waters of the Arctic Archipelago. Given the singular features of the Archipelago - islands joined by ice much of the year; ice and territory occupied by Inuit and other Canadians for literally centuries - this is a uniquely Canadian issue. The other unresolved sovereignty questions facing Canada are disputes with the United States, with Denmark, with France, regarding certain maritime boundaries or special bodies of water. They are important, but not unique. A great many countries - perhaps even most countries - have these kinds of differences with their neighbours.

The Arctic has a very special place in the Canadian sense of nationhood, and any threats against our sovereign control of that region of our country justifiably provoke the most intense concern. That is why this Government has gone to such great lengths to safeguard our jurisdiction within the Archipelago. In our response to the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee on Canada's International Relations, we have stated four clear goals for our North: affirming Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic; preparing for commercial use of the Northwest Passage; promoting more cooperation with other Northern countries; and modernizing Canada's northern defences.