

The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy

Executive Summary

In an increasingly interdependent and globalized world community, Canada's long-standing foreign policy tradition of promoting international co-operation in pursuit of shared objectives, through institution building and pragmatic problem solving, continues to take on greater importance. This established and successful approach has taken on, as a new guiding theme, the protection and enhancement of human security.

Both the tradition of transnational co-operation and the new emphasis on human security are particularly applicable to the shaping of the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy. The circumpolar world that includes the northern territories and peoples of Canada, Russia, the United States, the Nordic countries plus the vast (and mostly ice-covered) waters in between was long a front line in the Cold War. Now it has become a front line in a different way — facing the challenges and opportunities brought on by new trends and developments. The challenges mostly take the shape of transboundary environmental threats — persistent organic pollutants, climate change, nuclear waste — that are having dangerously increasing impacts on the health and vitality of human beings, northern lands, waters and animal life. The opportunities are driven by increasingly confident northern societies who, drawing on their traditional values, stand poised to take up the challenges presented by globalization. Whereas the politics of the Cold War dictated that the Arctic region be treated as part of a broader strategy of exclusion and confrontation, now the politics of globalization and power diffusion highlight the importance of the circumpolar world as an area for inclusion and co-operation.

A clearly defined Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy will establish a framework to promote the extension of Canadian interests and values, and will renew the government's commitment to co-operation with our own northern peoples and with our circumpolar neighbours to address shared issues and responsibilities.