

Statement

Discours

Department of
External
Affairs



Ministère des
Affaires
extérieures

88/50

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"SOVEREIGNTY IN AN INTERDEPENDENT WORLD"

NOTES FOR REMARKS BY THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY

OTTAWA

October 18, 1988.

Secretary of State
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I would like to address the question of Canadian sovereignty, what it is, whether it is threatened, what the government is doing to defend and strengthen it. In particular, I want to talk about the North, where our sovereignty has been an issue.

Let me begin with a definition. Sovereignty is a concept of law. It is the legal condition necessary for the inclusion of particular lands and waters within the boundaries of a particular independent country. It is a matter of who is in charge.

Canada has no real problems with sovereignty over our land. All the land, including islands, that Canada claims is recognized internationally as Canadian. There are some questions of where borders run but that is a problem common to most nations, a problem of frontiers, not sovereignty.

But Canadian sovereignty has been questioned regarding some waters in our North. Canada views as internal the waters that lie between the islands of the Arctic archipelago, and between those islands and the mainland. Some of those waters are known as the Northwest Passage.

Throughout our mandate we have received much advice on how to defend and buttress sovereignty in the North. It has come from the Parliamentary Committee that we asked to review our foreign policy. It has come from Canadians from coast to coast, in letters, submissions and conversations. It has come in useful studies such as the one on The North and Canada's International Relations that was published earlier this year by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. That is a piece of a work which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in our North. We thank these parliamentarians and these citizens because much of that advice has been useful. Much of it has, in fact, been adopted.

Let me review what this government has done in the North and more specifically what we have done to reinforce our sovereignty in the North. The two issues are linked because the resolution of any competing claims will come in time through negotiations and international law. Our case will be reinforced by the steps we are taking to demonstrate Canadian activity, Canadian presence and Canadian control. Canada's claim will be judged by the actual things we have done to demonstrate use and control of our own North. There are six significant steps we have taken to strengthen Canada's sovereign claim to the lands and waters of our North.

-- On September 10, 1985, we drew straight baselines around our Arctic islands confirming that the waters between them, and between them and the mainland, are internal.

- On the same date we withdrew our reservation to allowing our claim to be tested, if we wish, before the International Court of Justice. We prefer a negotiated settlement but we have confidence that we would win if our position were argued in court.
- On January 11, 1988, George Shultz and I signed the Canada-United States Arctic Cooperation Agreement ensuring that from then on American icebreakers would require prior Canadian consent to enter waters we consider to be Canadian including the Northwest Passage.
- Last November the government awarded a contract in Vancouver to design a Polar 8 Icebreaker. It will be the largest in the world. It will be an important element in ensuring safe navigation in the North and Canadian control of that navigation.
- It is our North and we are providing the infrastructure necessary for the safe use of it: aids to navigation, ice reconnaissance, coordination of Northern activities, conservation, protection of the environment. We have created a new national park on Ellesmere Island; established two months ago the Canadian Polar Research Commission; and, separately, put in place an Arctic Marine Parks and Sanctuaries Commission.
- In defence of our independence and our sovereignty we are expanding airfields, upgrading radar systems, deploying sonar systems, increasing surveillance flights and holding more military exercises in the North. We are acquiring nuclear-propelled submarines for defence, surveillance and control of our Northern waters. While that is not the primary role of those submarines, it is an important one, because they alone can operate under ice.

The fact is we have done more to assert Canadian sovereignty in the North in four years than any other Canadian government. We will do more, as our means allow.

I mentioned our recent agreement with the U.S.A. on Arctic navigation in the waters of the Arctic Archipelago. The immediate background to that negotiation was the 1985 voyage of the U.S. icebreaker Polar Sea through the Northwest Passage.

We regard these waters as internal by virtue of historic title. They are covered by ice most of the year; they are part of a continuous landmass, they have never been used for international navigation, and they have long been used by native Canadians. The U.S. on the other hand, is concerned that if this passage is declared internal, then other countries may make similar claims regarding waters actually used for international navigation.

On January 11, 1988, I announced an agreement on Arctic cooperation that met Canada's goals. Neither side moved from its stated position on the principle of sovereignty, but the agreement is entirely consistent with our position on sovereignty. What that agreement accomplished is that, from then on, the U.S.A. would ask our permission for American icebreakers to use Arctic waters.

That means they cannot enter waters we claim without our prior consent. We have achieved control over U.S. icebreakers in our waters, and there can be no repetition of the Polar Sea incident. We gained a substantial increase in effective control, and that is a significant step forward.

Recognition of this new fact came just this month. An American Coast Guard icebreaker, the Polar Star - in fact, the sister ship of the Polar Sea - was attempting to sail around northwestern Alaska to return to its home port in Seattle. It could not do so because of impossible ice conditions in those waters.

As a result the American Government - in accordance with our new agreement - sought our consent to have that vessel transit the Northwest Passage to the Atlantic Ocean. After satisfying ourselves as to the ship's condition and after receiving an American undertaking on environmental liability for its journey, we gave our consent. That American ship, accompanied by a Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker and with a Canadian Coast Guard officer on board, is now en route to the more hospitable waters of the North Atlantic.

A further important step in asserting control over our Arctic waters has come through U.S. recognition that their commercial vessels are subject to the provisions of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act of 1970. That means that a U.S. commercial tanker like the Manhattan, which sailed through the Northwest Passage in 1970, is also now subject to Canadian control.

A country asserts its independence and sovereignty by being active internationally. Being engaged in the world is not to surrender sovereignty but to assert it. That is true about treaties on the ozone layer, or treaties about trade, or agreements about the movement of caribou or icebreakers. Agreements with Canada are a recognition by other countries of Canada's independence. This makes a foreign policy that protects and advances Canadian interests in the North especially important for this country. Here is what Canada has done:

- In the 1960s, we played a leading role in the formation of the International Permafrost Conference and our cooperation with Northern neighbours on science and technology is increasing;
- We have participated in numerous international efforts and agreements to protect the Arctic environment and its wildlife. Just over a year ago, we successfully negotiated an agreement with the United States designed to protect and safeguard the magnificent porcupine caribou herd that migrates through the Yukon and Alaska.
- In the 1980s we supported the development of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference; Canada hosted the Inuit Youth Camp this year;
- In 1987 we opened an Honorary Consulate in Greenland, reflecting the growing relations between our Government and peoples;
- In 1987 I led a delegation of Canadians - from the federal government, the private sector and from the Territorial Governments of the North - to an historic seminar on Northern issues in Tromso, Norway where we and our Nordic neighbours discussed environmental, economic development, defence and cultural questions relating to our North. I hope we will be able to carry the Tromso process a step forward with a follow-up meeting in Canada next year.

The issue of circumpolar cooperation of course raises the question of our relations with our huge Northern neighbour across the Pole.

We are the only nation in the world that has as neighbours both superpowers. There are changes within the Soviet Union that require sensitive and careful Canadian attention. Some of them affect the wider world interest of the Soviet Union - we are, for example, encouraged that the Soviet Government now shows more interest in strengthening the United Nations system, and in resolving some regional conflicts. We continue to press the Soviet Union to respect its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act. In other specific areas, cooperation is increasing.

Our police and customs authorities collaborated in making a major seizure of illegal drugs. Canadian and Soviet space scientists have teamed with French and American colleagues to produce SARSAT - the space based satellite search and rescue system. We are developing a broader programme of Canadian-Soviet space cooperation. The USSR is one of our leading trading partners, and that trade is becoming more sophisticated, particularly in the oil and gas industry and in the provision of services. Overall the potential for bilateral cooperation is enormous, and some of it affects the North especially. That's why we were particularly struck by some of the intriguing proposals made by General Secretary Gorbachev a year ago in a speech in Murmansk, and reiterated in Krasnoyarsk.

Mr. Gorbachev called for better cooperation on the environment, on resource development on scientific cooperation and, for the first time, for multilateral cooperation. We are pleased with these positions because we have long worked towards such cooperation in the North.

In fact, his proposal for a meeting of Arctic scientists has been overtaken by events -- such a meeting has taken place earlier this year in Stockholm. Efforts to develop a framework for Arctic scientific cooperation which includes the Soviet Union are proceeding and we are having increasing success with that country in resource development.

Mr. Gorbachev called for cooperation among Arctic peoples. At that time the USSR had never allowed its Inuit to attend Inuit conferences, which led to some genuine skepticism about his call for cooperation. However, it is now my understanding that Soviet Inuit will attend the 1989 Inuit Circumpolar Conference. This is something Canada has long worked for, and we welcome this example of international glasnost.

Next month, a Canadian delegation will travel to Moscow for negotiations on an Arctic cooperation agreement. It is our hope that such an accord would provide for a broad range of exchanges in the scientific and environmental fields. We have also been encouraged by Mr. Gorbachev's publicly expressed concerns over air pollution in the Arctic. A concern which should open doors for multilateral discussions on the problem of Arctic haze - a subject of very real importance to us.

At Murmansk Mr. Gorbachev also made some security proposals, some new, some restatements of previous Soviet positions. They include: The creation of a nuclear-weapon free zone in Northwestern Europe; The limitation of military activity in certain waters; And the examination of a total ban on naval activity in mutually-agreed zones.

Secretary Gorbachev's northern security proposals have aroused considerable enthusiasm in some quarters. They have contributed to his portrayal as the man of peace, and Western leaders as obstacles to peace. Today I want to discuss the substance of his proposals and not their use as propaganda. But it is important, throughout this process, to judge what the Soviets are doing as well as what they are saying. What I am asking, in these cynical times, is that Westerners accord Mr. Gorbachev at least the same scepticism they apply to Western leaders who speak of peace.

Let me begin with some basic facts that come immediately to mind when the Soviet Union's northern security proposals are more carefully scrutinized.

The Soviet Union is the only Northern nation with an extensive and permanent deployment of nuclear weapons in the Arctic. In the North-western quadrant of the Soviet Union, the Kola Peninsula boasts a military arsenal that is enormous.

It includes about one quarter of the Soviet Union's strategic nuclear capacity -- its submarine launched missiles and strategic bombers. The Soviet Northern fleet, based there, includes 126 submarines, of which 90, incidentally, are nuclear-powered: 38 of those vessels carry in them 580 submarine launched ballistic missiles.

It also includes 12 cruisers, an aircraft carrier, 18 destroyers, 17 frigates and an array of smaller naval surface vessels.

Soviet land forces in the northwest Arctic region, more than 13 full divisions, would amount to two full armies when mobilized with a complement of 2,000 artillery pieces.

So any steps towards weapon reductions in the North would require a massive change in Soviet deployments, we would therefore be very interested in seeing the details of what Mr. Gorbachev proposes.

Even if the Soviet Union were to withdraw those armies, dismantle that fleet, reduce and destroy its ballistic missiles and bomber squadrons in the Arctic, that would not remove the threat to Canada. The simple fact is that the shortest distance between the Soviet Union and the United States is over the Arctic. This would be one axis of attack but it is not, of course, the only one given the threat from other Soviet bases, aircraft and naval forces. That threat can come from any direction -- on, over or beneath the waters, including those of the Arctic Ocean.

It is, therefore, a great myth to think that reducing armaments in the Arctic would make North America or even our own North safe. The threat to Western security is global. Reducing our Northern defences would do nothing to reduce the threat from global strategic weapons. On the contrary, in weakening deterrence it would be destabilizing. It would make the world less safe, not more.

The place to address the global problems of armaments is in the negotiations on arms control and disarmament under way in Geneva and Vienna. In the context of the Soviet-American Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, Canada has advocated the negotiation of effective limits on air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, weapons which could increasingly threaten us directly, as intercontinental missiles do now. We are pleased that at the Washington Summit there was agreement to tackle this problem. Our NATO Allies, including the Danes and Norwegians, agree fully that Arctic security cannot be dealt with in isolation. This is a NATO issue not a Northern issue, and we will stand fast with our Allies.

The other alternative some would advocate for Canada -- neutrality -- also deserves comment in this regard. Let me quote from the recent study by the Canadian Institute for International Affairs:

"Neutrality would be a hollow option, because we could not defend it, and doing nothing about our own defence would be incompatible with our self-respect and prejudicial to our sovereignty and security. Moreover, the only defence policy that makes sense in the nuclear age is the prevention of war through deterrence. Therefore it is in Canada's interest to cooperate with other members of NATO in the collective defence of Western Europe, the North Atlantic, and North America and in the protection of the U.S. nuclear deterrent force. The Arctic has a particular bearing on this latter role ..."

While our eastern and western sea boundaries in the Arctic are to be settled eventually with our neighbours, let me repeat then that Canada has only one major sovereignty challenge and that concerns Arctic waters. Step-by-step we are making significant progress in strengthening our claims to those waters. We are doing so by expanding Canada's control, presence, activity and international cooperation in the North.

Even taking this dispute into account, Canada is and will remain as free, independent and sovereign a country as any in the world. As such we enter those international agreements that are on balance advantageous and, as a sovereign nation, we can withdraw from them if we choose.

Living and working in the global village naturally involves obligations. That is true of the UN and NATO, of the GATT and the Free Trade Agreement, and it is true of agreements on pollution and a hundred other issues. That is what international order is all about. But the agreements we have signed and the organizations we have joined help preserve and enhance our security, our independence, our prosperity and our way of life. They may limit the freedom of unilateral action for all countries who sign them but they do not limit sovereignty.

Isolation has never been a Canadian option. Internationalism has long been a Canadian tradition. We will maintain that tradition. And we will protect and enhance Canadian sovereignty on your behalf.