



INTERNATIONAL OCEAN INSTITUTE



## **CANADA AND THE CIRCUMPOLAR WORLD: THE COMING BLIZZARD**

Rob Huebert Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary

### *Abstract*

Since the turn of the century Canada has been “re-discovering” the need to defend its Arctic region. When the Cold War ended, almost all efforts to maintain a northern military presence and capability also ceased. A token ability remained that was more symbolic than real. However by 2000, it increasingly becoming apparent that new developments in the Arctic required Canada to address its neglect of the north. Specifically, the growing realization that climate change was about to make the entire arctic region more accessible to southern interest means that the many resources of the north would become available for exploitation. Ranging from the promise of new maritime transportation routes, to the development of natural resources such as oil, gas and fish stock, the recognition that Canada will see renewed international interest in its north meant it needed to re-think its Arctic security policy.

However, much has changed since the end of the Cold War. As dangerous as the Cold War period was, it provided clarity of purpose for understanding the threat to Canadian security. In 2009, the threats to the north are less dangerous, but much more confounding. State based threats are currently minimal, but have the risk of increasing as relations with Russia currently seem to be at risk. But at the same time, it is clear that climate change and environmental degradation pose serious risks to the environmental security of the entire north. In turn the warming of the region is transforming the very way of life of Canada’s northern people to such a degree as to raise very troubling issues about the increasing risks to them in terms of human security. The entire economics of the north is changing. Some will adapt others will not. Thus it is reasonable to expect serious and dangerous threats to the social well-being of those living in the north. And to further confound the issues, the growing international interest in the north will soon be leading to an wide array of international diplomatic disputes over maritime boundaries and the status of the various northern waterways.

Perhaps what is the most complex element of understanding the developing challenges for Canadian policy-makers is the uncertainty as to how all of these threats are developing. All of these threats are developing at different temporal rates. But many of them are interacting with each other in ways that are not well understood.

Thus this presentation will address three main questions:

- 1) What are the challenges for Canada that are now developing in the Arctic?
- 2) What is Canada doing to meet these challenges and how successful have they been?
- 3) What will be Canada’s role in the circumpolar world as these new realities develop?

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