

# 13. Protecting Canada's Arctic Interests - Canada's Losing Battle

## DESCRIPTION

Canada's Arctic is the future of Canada in several ways with many relying on Arctic Sovereignty and the Northwest Passage (NWP). Currently, the Panama Canal is the only viable route in North America to ship goods from east/west and vice versa. With the melting of the Arctic region, the attraction of the NWP has grown significantly as a shipping route as well as the potential for economic independence.

## BACKGROUND

According to research published in the journal Nature Climate Change, the Arctic could be "functionally ice-free" by 2044. This also opens the concern of other militarized nations asserting their presence in the NWP. This concern of "the Canadian Arctic's security and safety" is highlighted in the recently released Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic "Northern Lights: A Wake-Up Call for the Future of Canada" <sup>2</sup> and was even addressed by the US Embassy in a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau in Nov/2019 due to our lack of federal investment in our military which would include the financial support of Arctic Sovereignty

Two routes are connecting the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. That is, the Northeast Passage (hereinafter NEP) and the NWP (see in below). The NEP also called the Northern Sea Route (NSR), is made up of all the marginal seas of the Eurasian Arctic, such as the Chukchi, the East Siberian, the Laptev, the Kara, and the Barents Seas. The NSR makes up approximately 90% of the NEP.

The NWP runs between Greenland and Newfoundland in the Atlantic Ocean, and along the northern coast of Canada and Alaska, ending in the Bering Strait. The Bering Strait is an 85 km wide strait separating Russia and Alaska between the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea (part of the Pacific Ocean).

Since the year 2000, Russia has become the foremost military and shipping leader in its NSR in the circumpolar region. <sup>51</sup> Russia has aggressively pursued the development of enhanced Arctic gas pipelines, icebreaking freighters, and trans-shipment facilities for natural gas and LNG. These are of global economic and strategic significance. Russia is in a position of strategic military and commercial strength throughout the circumpolar area. Russia has 40 icebreakers – 4 double the size of Canada's – 6 military bases, 16 deep-water ports, and 13 airbases. <sup>52</sup> Additionally, Russia has built a new nuclear-powered icebreaker – the world's biggest and most powerful.

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<sup>51</sup> 1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/ice-free-arctic-this-century-1.5370504>

<sup>52</sup> 2. June 2019 Northern Lights: A Wake Up Call for the Future of Canada  
C:\Users\Richard\Documents\Ppresentations\Northern Lights.pdf

Canada, on the other hand, has done little in enhancing its ability to navigate and protect the Arctic Archipelago. Canadian Prime Ministers and federal cabinet ministers have regularly visited Canada's North, Canada has held the G-7 finance ministers meeting in Nunavut in February 2010, investing in Arctic patrol ships under The Canada First Defence Strategy, and the expansion of the Canadian Rangers to provide a military presence in remote parts of Canada. [3] The only icebreaker that can compete with the Russian fleet of icebreakers is the CCGS John G. Diefenbaker, which is expected to become operational between 2021-2022. The Canadian Government announced the National Shipbuilding Strategy in 2015, which is scheduled to end in 2042. There are no icebreakers slated to be built under the National Shipbuilding Strategy. This will leave Canada vulnerable in the Arctic.

The symbolic gestures of visiting the Arctic archipelagos, investing meagerly into the military, and the sub-par icebreakers currently deployed and planned for deployment are inadequate investments into protecting Arctic sovereignty.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

1. As recommended by the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic implement at the very least recommendations 23 through to 25 which state:
  23. That the Government of Canada ensure the Canadian Arctic's security and safety and assert and protect Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic.
  24. That the Government of Canada, on an immediate basis, establish a robust governance regime to regulate activities in Canada's Arctic waters, including shipping corridors, and bonding and insurance requirements. Such a regulatory regime must include the active involvement and participation of Arctic Indigenous governing bodies and communities.
  25. That the Government of Canada enhance maritime and aerial situational awareness of the Canadian Arctic, including improving the icebreaking capacity of the Canadian Coast Guard, and equipping the Canadian Rangers' with marine capabilities.