

Challenge and Commitment: The Failed Pledge to Canadian- Arctic Sovereignty

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Fourth Year Paper

Citation Style: MLA

“Canada must look to itself to safeguard its sovereignty and pursue its own interests. Only we as a nation should decide what must be done to protect our shores, our waters and our airspace. This White Paper, therefore, takes as its first priority the protection and furtherance of Canada’s sovereignty as a nation” - Brian Mulroney (Dept. of Natl. Defence 2)

Canadian defence policy during the 1980s was constructed in light of external challenges to East-West relations as well as the closer-to-home Canadian–United States relationship. The 1987 White Paper on Defence *“Challenge and Change: A Defence Policy for Canada”* was formulated under the Progressive Conservative party to adjust Canadian defence policies to the international environment of the late Cold War era (Halstead 2). Policy formulation during this time directed commitments to the security and defence of internal Canadian territories as well as external commitments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. Thus, the White Paper was a strategy of sovereignty, security and defence (Halstead 2). This paper will specifically explore policies within the White Paper related to the sovereignty and defence of Canada’s northern Arctic regions, analyzing the importance of having solid defence policies in these territories. During the 1980s, the question of Arctic sovereignty, security and defence was of great concern to the Canadian government and one of the key elements of the 1987 White Paper (Eyre 298). The Conservative government recognized that Canada had always been a maritime nation with oceans on three sides, thus effective naval and military defence of these regions was seen as necessary to not only achieve security, sovereignty and defence of the Arctic, but linked to the overall defence of Canadian territories (Fetterly & Wu 164). Arctic defence was mainly about the perceived threat of the Soviet Union but also linked to the immediate threat to Canadian sovereignty posed by the United States, who refused to acknowledge Canadian sovereignty and control of Arctic regions such as the North West Passage (Lajeunesse 74). The Conservative government proposed to transform Canadian military forces with a plan of increased military personnel and projects geared towards modernizing surveillance

and defence equipment to secure the Arctic in times of immediate threat, while also maintaining a presence of surveillance during peacetime (Eyre 299). Further, lack of commitment to Canadian foreign policies and its limited contribution and presence on the world stage, such as its commitments to NATO, were to be further reconciled with the White Paper (Halstead 2). However, the 1987 White Paper was never fulfilled and by 1989 much of the projected programs were abandoned. This was due to issues surrounding the lack of Canadian public support for much of the proposed defence measures, such as acquiring nuclear powered submarines, the subsequent decline of the Soviet Union, and issues of national budget deficits (Lajeunesse 81). Lack of fulfillment of the 1987 White Paper compromised Arctic and Canadian sovereignty, security, and defence and also diminished Canada's international credibility as a high-ranking contributing nation to its NATO allies. Theoretically, the 1987 White Paper was supposed to close the gap between stated commitments to defence policy and actual military capability and would have been the greatest overhaul of Canadian military defences since WWI (Fetterly & Wu 167). Its abandonment demonstrates Canada's deficiency at the federal level to increase its sovereignty and to improve its security and defence policies.

This paper will be organized by first examining the historical background of Arctic policies specific to the 1971 White Paper on defence led by the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau. Second, there will be an analysis of the proposed defence measures in the 1987 White Paper under the Conservative government as well as a comparison between the concerns of the 1971 and 1987 White Paper. Next will be an overview of the Canadian–Soviet relations and Canada–United States relations in the Arctic, while finally looking at the dissolution of the 1987 defence document and the negative effects that it had on Canadian security, sovereignty, defence and international credibility.

The 1980s marked the transition from the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau to the Progressive Conservative Party led by Brian Mulroney which came with a promise of renewed Canadian defence policies (Halstead 1). The Conservatives criticized the previous Liberal government for neglecting Canadian defences and jeopardizing Canada's image as a powerful and independent nation that can defend its own territories while also contributing to the Western alliance (Halstead 2). The Liberal government in the early 1970s felt that Canadian foreign and defense policy was too heavily determined by its commitment and priority to NATO, and felt

that internal affairs were of greater importance than external commitments (Eyre 296). Trudeau felt limited need to contribute extensively to the collective security measures of NATO and was more concerned with national sovereignty, security and surveillance of Canadian territory (Keeble 548). He actually slashed defense spending in Canada in the 1970s and part of these cuts were aimed at reducing contributions to NATO forces in Europe, thereby showing his desire for domestic rather than collective security policies (Keeble 548). Yet in terms of Arctic policy, Trudeau felt that the sovereignty and security of the region were important, especially in terms of threats from the United States with incidents such as the *SS Manhattan* voyages between 1969 and 1971. These voyages were of U.S super-tankers that were being tested for their feasibility in transporting crude oil from the Alaskan North slope operating throughout the Northwest Passage (Eyre 296). Liberal concerns over the Arctic at this time developed around threats of pollution and environmental issues as well as Canadian claims to the internal territorial status of these northern regions (Eyre 296). Trudeau formulated Arctic policy in response to such events and wanted to assert legal and sovereign jurisdiction over Arctic waters stating responsibility to Arctic environmental issues (Kinsman 7). This led to the 1970 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act which defined regulations in transporting bulk cargoes through Canadian waters; this became a solid contribution to Canadian sovereignty and international law in the 1970s (Kinsman 7). The particular incident of the U.S voyages and subsequent prevention act was a precursor to the Canada–United States relationship over Arctic regions that would be later ignited in the 1987 White Paper. Canadian claims to sovereignty and surveillance of Arctic territories carried through from the 1971 White Paper to the 1987 document; however the protection and furtherance of Canadian sovereignty became a key priority to the Conservatives. In contrast to the 1971 White Paper, which held internal security as its main defence goal, the Conservatives felt this objective to limit the agenda of Canadian sovereignty (Fetterly & Wu 164). Unlike the Liberal campaign of Arctic sovereignty, the Conservatives believed sovereignty to be directly tied to the ability of Canada to defend itself from foreign attack, controlling national territory during peacetime, and the enhancement of Canadian contribution to NATO commitments in order to maintain an independent and sovereign status (Fetturly & Wu 164). Therefore the ability of Canada to maintain its sovereign credibility became heavily dependent the defence and security measures it outlined to secure its Arctic territories.

The definition of sovereignty can be provided as “ [the] prevention of trespass, the provision of services and the enforcement of national and international law within (Canadian) territory, waters and airspace” (Lajeunesse77). Furthermore, a nation must be able to “administer and control its territories and, when necessary, defend its territorial integrity through the effective application of force” (Lajeunesse77). The 1987 White Paper was directed under the Department of National Defence (DND) Minister Perrin Beatty. A key statement in the White Paper became the assurance of Canadian sovereignty particular to the Arctic and saw sovereignty, security and external commitments as intimately connected (Lajeunesse 79). Being able to maintain a presence and exert authority over Arctic regions was necessary to the sovereignty and independence of Canada. However, Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic was limited as “its de jure control was disputed by its superpower neighbour and its de facto control was confined to rare over flights by patrol aircraft (from sixteen flights in 1985 to twenty in 1986) (Lajeunesse 76).

The inability of Canada to boast a solid presence in the Arctic to both monitor American activity and ward off potential Soviet attack limited Canadian ability to exercise authority of its own territories (Lajeunesse 76). The Conservative government claimed that Canadian navy and defence forces were unable to efficiently assure the security and sovereignty of the Arctic regions with the limited personnel and equipment already provided (Dept. of Natl. Defence 50). Funding for the White Paper under the government established financing over a fifteen-year framework which would provide defence budgets with annual real growth of two percent over fifteen years (Halstead 2). Thus, the Conservative commitment to internal and collective security measures was important and needed essential military resources for Canadian and Western defence. Conservatives recognized that the refurbishment of its naval forces was necessary to protect the maritime status of Canada and outlined the creation of a three-ocean navy to monitor and defend the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic oceans (Halstead, 2). The White Paper proposed an increase in military personnel and the acquisition of developed military equipment which included six frigates, 45 EH-101 shipborne helicopters, twelve mine countermeasure vessels and six additional Aurora long-range patrol aircraft (Fetterly & Wu, 165). Furthermore, among developments in underwater surveillance and sonar capabilities, the White Paper planned for the modernization of Tracker medium-range aircrafts and updating the TRIBAL Class Destroyers

along with the most infamous acquisition of ten-to-twelve nuclear-powered submarines (Dept. of Natl. Defence 55). This would have left Canada capable of providing an effective naval force to provide defence and surveillance of all three territorial oceans. The largest contribution to the White Paper was the acquiring of nuclear powered attack submarines which were for the protection of both Canadian territory and national sovereignty (Eyre 298). It was necessary for Canadian forces to have a physical presence as well as surveillance system in the northern regions to maintain control, since sovereignty and defensive measures were seen to go hand-in-hand (Lajeunesse 75). Even during peace time the SSNs were to patrol the Arctic regions to ascertain a Canadian presence and maintain sovereignty (Lajeunesse 75). The proposition of nuclear-powered submarines was a key piece of operational equipment in the White Paper and brought about controversy in its nuclear capability, cost and defence capabilities (Halstead 3). However the Conservatives and the DND cited the purchase of nuclear-powered submarines as “the best way to achieve the required operational capabilities in the vast Pacific and Atlantic oceans. In addition, the SSN is the only vessel able to exercise surveillance and control in northern Canadian ice covered waters.” (Dept. of Natl. Defence 53).

It is important to note that the supposed threat of East-West tensions with the Soviet Union was linked to security concerns in Arctic regions. The strategic significance of the northern Arctic regions became very important in response to threats from close contact with Soviet navy vessels in Arctic waters, which was increasing in the late 1980s (Dept. of Natl. Defence). Developments in Soviet submarine technology possessed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was eighty SSNs and sixty-two ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) which were capable of firing cruise missiles (Lajeunesse 75). Proximity of Soviet submarines in Canadian territories caused alarm as the Soviet’s could fire from areas such as the Lawrence Sea of the Davis Strait with missile fires ranging up to five thousand kilometres (Lajeunesse 76). Soviet submarine technology was believed to have the ability to intercept allied submarines entering the Arctic and the White Paper outlined the need for Canadian naval military capabilities to deter aggressive invasion from Soviet enemies. Acquiring Canadian nuclear-submarines would have created a strong defence system in the Arctic regions with the ability to maintain defensive and sovereign capabilities and present a strong national capacity for territorial defence and security, while also contributing to the defence of Canadian allies.

Moreover, Canada's protection from potential threats to security, and more importantly sovereignty, not only came from the Eastern portion of the world, but from its American neighbour to the south. Canada–United States relations, in terms of Canadian claims to sovereign independence over all its territories, has been an ongoing and contested issue in Canadian foreign policy. The 1987 White Paper recognized that areas in the Arctic such as the Northwest Passage have been recognized by the United States as international rather than internal Canadian waters (Dept. of Natl. Defence 23). This disrespect for Canadian sovereignty has become a serious challenge to the North American relationship. In the years leading up to the 1987 White Paper, the United States had another voyage, similar to the issues of the SS Manhattan, where the consent of Canada to allow the voyage was disputed (Bankes 285). In 1985, the United States claimed that the voyage of the U.S CGS *Polar Sea* had the right to navigate throughout the Northwest Passage without the consent of Canada and also held similar ideas about the rights of American nuclear powered submarines (Bankes 285). This affected Canadian sovereign rights over Arctic regions with its southern ally, who ideally should be working in cooperation with instead of fighting for territorial rights. The Canadian government ultimately saw the 1985 American voyage as a critical concern to the status of Canadian waters and pushed the government to impose stronger policies of authority against American violation of Canadian sovereignty (Bankes 289). Furthermore, the 1987 White Paper recognized issues in not only lack of sovereign recognition by the United States, but also concerns of dependency on the United States for national defence capabilities (Lajeunesse 78). For Canada, its geopolitical neighbour to the south has greater military power and defence capabilities than Canada, and if Canada decided not to enhance its defence policies for the sovereignty and security of Canadian territories, the United States would not hesitate to defend them itself (Halstead 8). However dependence on the United States for security undermines Canadian sovereignty and credibility. For Canada, the capability to protect its own territories from invading attacks in the Arctic by ensuring a well-equipped navy and military capability would allow Canadians to refrain from calling on the United States for help thereby not threatening Canadian sovereignty, security and defence (Lajeunesse 78).

Unfortunately, and much to the desire of safeguarding United States interest in the Arctic, the American government was actually unsupportive of Canadian attempts to maintain a

sovereign military presence in the Arctic by acquiring nuclear submarines (Lajeunesse 78). During a 1987 trip to Washington by Defence Minister Perrin Beatty he was told by members of the U.S Defence Department that “a Canadian nuclear submarine program was unnecessary and even unwelcome” (Lajeunesse 80). Consequently, the more Canada relies on the United States for defense reinforcement; the more Canadian policy is influenced by the United States making it more dependent on US interests rather than Canadian interests (Halstead 13). With the acquisition of nuclear submarines Canada could defend itself, ensure security and also weaken Canadian dependence of American army forces and equipment (Lajeunesse 80). In terms of sovereignty, independent foreign and domestic policy formulation and implementation must be catered to Canadian interests. If our closest international ally does not recognize Canadian claims to sovereignty over all Canadian territory, the assumption of unity among the two nations becomes tested. Canada should be able to produce effective security and defence policies that are in agreement, rather than in contestation with the United States, and should benefit the Canadian national reality.

Conversely, the proposed enhancement in Canadian-Arctic sovereignty, security and defence outlined in the 1987 White Paper was scrapped by 1989 due to the decline of the Soviet threat, lack of public support, and the rise of the Canadian national deficit (Lajeunesse 80). The ending of the Cold War changed the international environment and challenged the security and defence position that the Canadian government had proposed in the White Paper. Thus, decline in Canadian support for such intensive defence and security measures mirrored the decline of the Soviet threat (Lajeunesse 80). Before the White Paper was initially scrapped in 1989, the Canadian public did not respond positively to the document’s defence propositions. Specifically, the security value of SSNs in Canada was largely opposed in spite of attempts by the DND to promote Canadian sovereignty and security as a national issue (Lajeunesse 80). Throughout public opinions polls, most Canadian were very opposed to the ideas of purchasing nuclear-powered submarines (Fetterly & Wu 168). In 1987, thirty-seven percent of Canadians were opposed to Canadian Cold War projects such as SSNs, by 1988 this number climbed to sixty percent (Lajeunesse 80). The proposition of a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines was criticized for paving the way towards nuclear proliferation and many Canadians believed it would do more to increase East-West tensions than mend it (Halstead 3). Moreover, Canadians were

discomforted with the government spending billions of dollars on SSNs, particularly so on a defence project that was aimed at a declining Eastern European threat (Lajeunesse 80). Although the ending of the Cold War eased the international environment, and public distaste inevitably changed the defence and security position of the Canadian government, cuts to the Canadian budget in 1989 ultimately resulted in the termination of the 1987 White Paper (Halstead 3).

With the growing concern of the national budgetary deficit the government could not afford many of the projected programs in the defence budget and became interested in deficit reduction (Halstead 3). Furthermore, the Conservatives had a hard time justifying cuts in government spending for programs related to health, social services such as unemployment while allowing for billions of dollars to be spent on defense programs such as nuclear SSNs (Fetterly & WU 168). The 1989 federal budget planned to cut financing in the DND by 2.74 billion over a five year period (Fetterly & Wu 162), this had consequences for the priority of defence and security in the Arctic and questioned Canada's ability to implement effective security and defence policies. The 1989 budget cancelled many of the proposed defence measures of the White Paper which included the scrapping of the Tracker fleet, Aurora aircraft and SSNs (Fetterly & Wu 165). However it is important to note that funding for the acquisition of six new frigates, four TRIBAL Class Destroyers and EH-101 shipborne helicopters was not abandoned by the Conservative government (Fetterly & Wu, 165). Yet, the dissolution of the 1987 White Paper not only compromised internal Canadian security and defence measures, but also limited its commitments to fellow members of the NATO alliance. In the 1980s, Canada's defence spending represented a minimal two percent of the gross national product which ranked Canada close-to-last in defence spending among its NATO members (Fetterly & Wu, 167). The 1987 White Paper was supposed to develop Canadian defence forces to share responsibility in contributions to the defence of the Western Alliance. For example, Canada was to re-equip its presence in Europe by strengthening Canadian forces in the central front of southern Germany which was stated to be an effective contribution of Canadian defence (Fetterly & Wu, 166). However the cancellation of much of the White Paper by the 1989 budget cuts affected commitments to Germany and neglected Canada's overall contribution to its NATO members (Fetterly & Wu, 166). Unfulfilled pledges of the White Paper to external defence and security

measures injured Canada's international credibility and reputation as a strong, sovereign and responsible nation able to defend its own territories and its allies.

Also, the election of William McKnight as the new Minister of Defence (replacing Perrin Beatty) changed the landscape of defence policies in the security of Canadian territories (Fetterly & Wu 162). Canadian policy on Arctic sovereignty and defence was overturned with the new defence minister who catered to the outlook that Canadian defence should be left to fellow allies which harmed Canadian sovereignty and international credibility (Halsted 7). The scrapping of the 1987 White Paper and a recall on Canadian national defence measures in the Arctic brings into question the will and strength of the Canadian government to propose and implement successful defence policies. Although funding plays a huge role in national defence measures, Arctic defence and sovereignty has been a fluid issue for many years (Bankes 287). Addressing Arctic defence with proper security and defence plans will maintain Canada's internal responsibility to the security, prosperity and sovereignty of all its territories, but will also uphold Canada's international credibility on the world stage. The dissolution of the White Paper subsequently softened Canada's stance on security and sovereignty, in not only the Arctic regions, but in Canada as a whole.

In conclusion, the termination of the 1987 White Paper expressed Canada's lack of effectiveness in formulating and implementing efficient defence policies at the federal level to maintain Canadian independence and sovereignty. If the 1987 White Paper had been accomplished, it would have been a step forward in Canada's ability to sustain solid foreign and defence policies, and would have been the largest re-equipment program of the Canadian military since WWII (Fetterly & Wu 167). The government would have also been able "to prove that Canada was an independent nation with the ability to control its own waters, its own territory, and participate on an equal footing with its allies" (Lajeunesse 80). Having SSNs and modernizing maritime defence forces would support Canadian claims to Arctic sovereignty and contributions to NATO, giving Canada credibility in both independent and collective defense ranking (Halstead 7). The concern of national security is also closely tied to Canadian relations with the United States and the dependency that Canada has on American forces for security and defence, not to mention the lack of sovereign recognition of Canadian territory by the United States (Bankes 289). A developed nation should have the capacity to control and maintain

sovereignty over all territorial regions and cannot produce solid and effective policies in defence or security without internally and internationally recognized sovereign status. The establishment of the 1987 White Paper would have created Canadian identity as a reflection of full independence and sovereignty with the ability to control, monitor and defend its territories. Protecting Arctic sovereignty has continued to be a concerning topic in current years with the Canadian government facing criticisms of the limited armed forces and sparse defence equipment it has to defend its national territory (Kikker & Lackenbauer 4). For example, the Conservative government in the last few years has issued statements on the need to establish policies of stronger military capabilities to “demonstrate a visible Canadian presence in the Arctic” (Kikker & Lackenbauer 4).

The importance of maintaining a recognized presence in Canada is increasingly becoming more important not only politically and nationally, but also economically. The Arctic has increasingly proven over the years to be a region of economic prosperity for Canada and the importance of maintaining sovereignty over this territory will ward off posed economic threats such as those from the United States (Lajeunesse 76). Growing profits from gas and oil mining in the Archipelago is an example of the increasing importance in surveillance and defence system for Canadian territorial resources (Lajeunesse 76). Also, the Northwest Passage is a vital shipping route in the Arctic and has been used to ship resources between markets of the USA, Canada and Europe and is an effective way of traveling to reduce shipping distances between countries in Asia (Bankes 290). The status of these northern water routes as Canadian territory should be well-defined and internationally recognized by all countries including the United States. If countries such as the United States see areas of the Canadian Arctic as international waters, they can lay claim to resources found in these areas as well as travel freely through these waters without Canadian permission, thus an effective defence system is necessary to deter this. The steps taken and policies proposed by the Canadian government in defence of the Arctic should be critical of our internal and international environment.

The unpopularity among the Canadian public on defence measure such as the acquiring of nuclear-powered submarines in the late 1980s was key to abandonment of the White Paper. One could argue that if the Canadian government found alternatives to nuclear-powered submarines, while also promoting the notions of sovereignty and security past the Cold War

threat, the Canadian public would have been more inclined to support national defence measures of territorial sovereignty. The White Paper held significant and constructive proposals for the defence of Canada and had the Conservative government allowed the Canadian public to evaluate the merits of all the suggested programs on its basis of not only security against the Soviet Union, but the importance of maintaining sovereignty for the future, the paper may have succeeded. The importance of the White Paper is the development of solid Arctic defence policy which is critical to Canadian foreign and defence. Furthermore, the external relations between Canada and its allies, as well as its presence on the world stage cannot be successful without the ability to sustain and develop national defence policies to sustain the prosperity of Canada politically, socially and economically.

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