

IT'S ABOUT OIL!—THE COLD, COLD WAR IN THE ARCTIC
LECTURE 21 MAY AT CALGARY MILITARY MUSEUMS

By
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Good Evening. My subject tonight is a proposal for a joint Canadian-US Arctic Ocean Command. It is to provide a **continuous, high-level focus**—and contingent force projection, if necessary, for the Arctic Ocean Theater. My proposed Command is based on a US “specialty command” I served with in the early 1980s, that was both highly effective and influential, **and inexpensive to start up.**

We need such an Arctic Command because it appears that the Cold, Cold War is returning to the Arctic—**and this time it about oil!**

INTRODUCTION

Neither Canada nor the US has a high-level advocate, commanded by an admiral, that can provide in a timely fashion to the highest levels of both governments the critical intelligence, meaningful operational plans, and can project the potential for countering operations in the Arctic Ocean that are inimical to North American interests.

The urgency for this is clear, if you have been following the international news. To set the stage for discussing a Joint Command, I will first discuss some of the new geo-politics that relates to this Theater, as well as the sea-ice environment that characterizes the Arctic Ocean.

The sea ice that covers vast parts of the Arctic Ocean is perceptibly thinning, and even disappearing. This is encouraging not only increased volume of maritime shipping of all sorts from many non-Arctic countries, but active exploration for oil and gas and other minerals on the undersea continental shelves of the Arctic Ocean.

Basically, this new potential Cold War—and with Russia—is about oil. Oil and Gas are what I see as the root cause of a new Cold War in the Arctic!

Twenty-two years ago during the last Cold War—**which was about nuclear deterrence**—I designed a plan for the US Navy, knowing that many more Soviet nuclear ballistic missile submarines were on station in the Arctic Ocean than the US had the capability to counter. And North America was at an extreme disadvantage, especially toward the end of that Cold War.

My proposal, [COMNAVFORARCTIC](#), was published in Proceedings, US Naval Institute, and provides the core structure for the Command I will talk about tonight. Copies are at the back.

My plan then, as it does now, provides the needed high level advocate for Arctic Ocean concerns. Also, like it was then, that **maritime ADVOCATE** has no assigned assets, i.e., no ships or aircraft, so that it can be inexpensive to establish!

And therefore, there should be no excuse for not doing so!

Now, about this sea-ice thinning: it is real and I became aware of it years ago.

Under-ice data recorded between 1958 and 1962 by five separate US nuclear submarine cruises that I analyzed for the US Navy and published in 1980 was compared with similar data recorded some 30 years later by SSNs in the 1990s.

These data comparisons were used by researchers at the U of Washington in a paper published ten years ago that showed this thinning quite clearly.

Canadian and US officials, as well as the Russians, are finally beginning to recognize the ramifications of this “**Thinning of the Arctic Sea-Ice Cover,**” the title of the U of W technical paper.

What does Arctic ice look like?

This ice thinning appears to be increasing and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. That means increasing levels of maritime activity by many nations will likely occur both for commerce and for exploiting the Arctic’s resource potential.

This raises numerous problems for both Canada and the US, and to several European countries, also.

But first, a disclaimer:

I am speaking as a private U.S. citizen. I have been an official resident of Canada for more than 20 years. My views are my own and may not represent the views of the U.S. Government from which I retired before settling in Canada, or the Canadian Government.

But these views do represent the knowledge I gained as a result of that service to U.S. Government organizations in the polar regions, and especially the Arctic.

As well, this Arctic knowledge resulted from serving in 1965 and 1966 as the Polar Regions Project Officer for the 1967 Canadian World's Fair Corporation.

I gained much technical knowledge on Arctic offshore oil and gas exploration in a variety of sea ice conditions in the Beaufort Sea. That knowledge was gained in the late 1970s and early 1980s from contract work I performed for Dome Petroleum, Gulf Canada Resources as well as for seven of the largest US oil companies.

And speaking of oil companies in the Arctic, that is largely what I expect is driving our current concerns with respect to the Arctic theater—**Oil and gas.**

THE NEW POLITICS OF THE ARCTIC OCEAN

A number of us in the Calgary, Alberta military community sniggered a bit when some Danes claimed the tiny Hans Island for Denmark—That's in the Nares Strait between Greenland and Canada's Ellesmere Island.

With bemused interest we thought it would be fun to eavesdrop on how Canadian and Danish diplomats would finesse that one. And we knew eventually they would.

However the question of the Russians planting a Russian flag directly beneath the Geographic North Pole and claiming the entire Lomonosov Ridge—extending from Siberia to Greenland as an extension of the Russian continental shelf, is no laughing matter.

It would require substantial geological and geophysical work by scientists on the North American side of the Arctic Ocean to disprove (or substantiate) that claim.

LET US TAKE A LOOK AT THE BROAD PICTURE OF THIS ARCTIC THEATER

The Russians who were masters of the Arctic even before WWII, are now blatantly and belligerently flexing their muscles there, e.g., a 13 February 2009 AP dispatch from Moscow by Vladimir Isachenkov, titled, "**Arctic is Russian Priority,**" begins:

"Russia will modernize its icebreaker fleet and station more researchers in the Arctic as part of its push to stake its claim to the vast resources of the disputed polar region, a presidential envoy said yesterday. Artur Chilingarov, a famed polar scientist recently appointed to the post, said Russia's sizeable icebreaker fleet gives the nation a strong edge in Arctic exploration."

There is a lot at stake here. Both Canadian and U.S. oil companies, since the early 1980s, knew that much of the Arctic Continental Shelf was prospective for hydrocarbons.

They were merely waiting for the oil price to be sufficiently attractive, and the logistics for exploration to become easier for them, to begin exploiting these resources.

With the unmistakable warming of the Arctic, the thinning of the ice cover, and the concomitant increase of open water, all types of marine operations, from geophysical exploration, **to off-shore drilling**, to water-borne transport of all sorts, will likely increase.

Producing oil and gas is the major source of income for Russia.

With the dissolution of the USSR, Russia lost more than 50% of its oil when Kazakhstan became independent.

Russia relies on oil sales for almost its entire budget. Sale of arms, mostly to countries that don't like us very much, is their other source of revenue. So Russia wants as much oil and gas as it can get, oil and gas that is close at hand.

They say that hydrocarbon resources in "their Arctic" will increase their current reserves by 2 to 4 times.

In fact, the USGS estimates that 25% of all the oil that has ever been found worldwide, now remains to be found in the Arctic.

And speaking as an old intelligence officer, I think North Americans will need as much of that oil as international law will ultimately permit us to exploit.

I personally applaud the search for "green" alternatives to oil and gas, and I believe they may **eventually** be realized, but only over a lengthy period.

In the short term—the next several decades—oil and gas will remain the primary energy sources for both the developed, as well as for the developing countries of the world.

With the ever-increasing turmoil in the Mid-East how much longer can we reasonably expect to rely on supplies from there?

Remember the embargo on oil to the US in 1973 owing to OPEC's displeasure?

And remember Osama bin Laden's urging his fighters nearly five years ago to target Iraq's and Saudi Arabia's oil fields to withhold it from the West?

And remember the piece in the Globe & Mail, “**Warning: Don’t Count on Saudi Arabia**”? It was published 17 December 2004 by Harold Waller, a professor of political science at McGill.

While much of governmental interest in the Arctic concerns issues of sovereignty, boundaries, rights of passage, environmental concerns and the usual political matters, what is really at stake, and what is driving this new potential Cold War, **is ownership of the oil and gas rights**, and how far out on our continental shelves can we claim, exploit, and protect them.

By protect, I mean, protect not only the resources, but the resource producers, **and the ecology of the surrounding waters as well.**

I see such an Arctic Command as I am proposing as necessary to protect North American interests of all sorts from encroachment by a newly resurgent Russia, a Russia that already has considerably more experience in the Arctic than has either Canada or the US.

Russia is acting aggressively on this technical experience.

Further, it appears that counter to what we in “The West” might have desired with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the new Russian government, with Vladimir Putin as still the de facto leader, appears to be reverting to the old Soviet way of behaving, i.e., “**might is right.**”

This is not a surprise to me, considering Putin’s long-term career in the KGB.

I am not naïve about the fiscal, political and diplomatic problems that my Joint Canadian-US proposal engenders. I have lived in Western Canada for 23 years.

In 1990 I was the **Moderator** of the seminar sponsored by NOAC “**Maritime Defence Strategy and Resource Development in Canada’s Arctic.**” I know first-hand what Canada’s issues with the US in the Arctic are, and I am sensitive to them!

But I also am a realist. I spent time in Russia; in 1965 and 1973 at the height of the Cold War. I visited many of the Soviet organizations dedicated to Arctic operations, science, engineering, meteorology and oceanography.

Even then their Arctic capabilities were excellent. That is, those capabilities that are critical to the success of their mission.

I stress critical capabilities, because non-critical capabilities like food supply, housing, fueling, while necessary, were marginal at best if the mission could succeed relying on these marginal capabilities.
But if it were critical for the accomplishment of the mission, no effort was spared by them to obtain the best resources possible.

And they have developed a large professional corps of Arctic scientists, engineers, naval officers and merchant marine officers that spend their entire careers in the Arctic and on Arctic-related matters.

Their first Arctic Ocean drift station, NP-1 was established in 1937, before WWII.

I spent most of my US Navy career as an intelligence officer.

And in this intelligence officer's lifetime, all political manifestos from that of Hitler's "Mein Kampf," Khrushchev's boast of Soviet military power, predicting he would "bury" the U.S., to Osama bin Laden's pronouncements about world-wide jihad need to be carefully examined, and their threats heeded.

For example, in a report in the Globe & Mail, 17 Dec 2004 it stated, "*In an ominous threat, Mr. bin Laden urged his fighters to target oil sites not only in Iraq, where insurgents have been blowing up pipelines and installations, but also in the Persian Gulf States.*

"Take jihad to stop the Americans getting hold of the oil. Concentrate your operations on the oil in particular in Iraq and the Gulf," he said. (Estanislao Ozievicz)

Over the past century, it seems that people who make such outrageous or threatening statements may not always succeed in what they set out to do, but they tell you loudly what they are planning, and they certainly intend to try, and continue to try until forcibly stopped!

We ignore them at our peril.

In "Putin's New Cold War," Norman Friedman (Proceedings, U.S. Naval Institute) October 2008), observes that:

*"in 2005 Vladimir Putin, who is still de facto ruler, described the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest political tragedy of the 20th Century, **one he was determined to reverse.**"*

Witness Ukraine and Georgia. And now Russia is firing shots across our bow.

A Reuters dispatch from Moscow of 23 February 2009 states:

“Russia will respond to any attempts to militarize the Arctic, the head of the country’s armed forces (General Nikolai Makarov) was quoted as saying on Monday during a visit to Abu Dhabi.”

But the Russians, themselves, appear to be doing just that!

Just a few days later a Russian “Bear,” long-range bomber, the quintessential Soviet force projection tool of the earlier Cold War era, was intercepted by two CF-18 fighters from Cold Lake, Alberta approaching Canadian air space, **or possibly, actually in Canadian air space**, on the eve of President Obama’s first visit to Ottawa.

Is this not Symbolic?

It is my opinion that the Arctic will be one theater in which Putin fears little competition, especially in Arctic resource development, and Russia, by its currently overwhelming superiority in polar operational capability, will attempt to stretch “international boundaries” in the Arctic as much as it can get away with.

Thirty years ago I wrote a classified paper on the threat of the continuing buildup of Soviet SSBNs in the Arctic in the late 1970s.

It lead me to believe that Soviet ballistic missiles from essentially untouchable Soviet assets hiding in the Arctic Ocean bastion were a greater threat to North America than the Cuban missiles in 1962 ever were.

That piece was published in 1979 in the Office of Naval Intelligence journal, “Naval Intelligence Quarterly.” That Soviet SSBN buildup continued to the end of the Cold War in 1990.

This continued concern led me to recommend the establishment of a new U.S. Navy command—as I mentioned earlier—to address this buildup, “COMNAVFORARCTIC” (Proceedings, U.S. Naval Institute, September 1987).

In view of Russia’s recent and continuing aggressive posturing with respect to the Arctic, it seems the time has come to seriously re-visit that proposal for establishing either COMNAVFORARCTIC, or some command like NORAD that is a joint Canadian-U.S. command that specifically focuses on Arctic concerns.

COMNAVFORARCTIC, was modeled after Commander, US Forces Caribbean (or COMUSFORCARIB). COMNAVFORARCTIC would be a “think-tank” command, like COMUSFORCARIB was, and a highly successful one at that.

It would comprise personnel with Arctic experience, but with **no permanent assets initially assigned.**

That means **it would not be expensive to establish.** As in the case of the Caribbean Command, ships and aircraft would be assigned, as needed, from existing commands.

At the outset, the costs would only be for specially qualified officers and men (perhaps 30-50) under the command of an admiral. All that is needed is the collective will of Canada and the U.S. to do it.

As an intelligence officer, I quickly learned that to evaluate a potential adversary, you learn as much as you can not only about their **capabilities**, but their **intentions.**

While some critical pieces of intelligence come from SECRET sources, most comes from the open literature! An intelligence officer—who usually is a PRACTICAL HISTORIAN—with his or her experience and abilities at deduction, can often divine valuable intelligence from the open literature.

I have a practical example of this, **and it is about oil:** I wrote a piece that was published in OilWeek—Canada’s Oil and Gas Authority—on 7 April 2003. That was just a few weeks after the invasion of Iraq. We all surmise that if Iraq had the market on tomatoes, rather than oil, there would have been no invasion. **It was about oil, and the “safety” of the Mid-Eastern supply.** I wrote:

“Although the apparent U.S. strategy on Iraq seems to envision a brief war on one front, there is another possibility. An attack on Iraq may unleash a protracted and worldwide reaction by Islamists that inhibits, for years to come, easy access to oil in their homelands.”

I believe that has already happened. And will continue to happen.

Despite all the political, environmental and legal concerns we all know about, the overriding interest in the Arctic now is about oil—the one interest that might end up in conflict, **should a countervailing, restraining force not be available.**

I said earlier that Russia needs all the oil and gas it can find. Selling it on the world market has been its major source of income. A substantial amount of hydrocarbons have been lost to Russia with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Much of the Caucasus, as well as Kazakhstan, are major producers whose oil no longer enriches Russia.

Hence their major focus now on Arctic Ocean sources, especially since Russia realizes that reduction of the ice cover will reduce logistic problems in exploration.

As far as Russia is concerned, that country has already made both its capabilities and its intentions clear, and in the open literature too!

I studied the Russians.

In the mid 1970s I conducted studies for the Office of Naval Intelligence about Soviet capabilities in the Arctic Ocean. During this same period I was being prepared for possible assignment as US Naval Attaché in Moscow.

Both of my parents' families came from Russia—the Ukraine. I am a first generation American. I have learned something about Russian behavior.

On my first visit to the USSR I was soon accosted in Moscow by a couple of KGB officers who, smiling, announced in quite passable English, “you are from the Ukraine, are you not, Mr. LeSchack?”

It was clear they already had a dossier on me. They even attempted setting up a “honey-trap” for me in Leningrad, using the pretty young woman interpreter assigned to me at the Arctic and Antarctic Institute, a “swallow” in KGB parlance, to entrap me.

When the Russians state that:

“Russia will modernize its icebreaker fleet and station more researchers in the Arctic as part of its push to stake its claim to the vast resources of the *disputed* polar region....” (and it is disputed!.....)

My reaction is, **they mean it.** Make no mistake about this!

MY PROPOSAL FOR A JOINT COMMAND

As I propose this Joint Canada-US command, I am not unmindful of the state of the world economy, and the state to which both Canada and the United States have let deteriorate their once Arctic Ocean-capable assets, as well as the Arctic-capable state of readiness of their respective forces.

While both of our democracies' governments dither on how to protect all our legitimate Arctic interests, the Russian government, now essentially totalitarian, much like the Soviet system of yore, has **directed** that the Russians **must have** a huge stake in the Arctic.

The Russians are now actively funding this development, so that they can assure effective hegemony over a major portion of the mineral resources of the Arctic. And they are way ahead of us, more so now than ever before!

Sooner or later, to protect our interests, we will need to operate effectively within the Arctic Ocean Theater.

I am proposing the first thing we do is put the framework in place that will permit us to do what eventually I believe will be necessary to protect our mutual interests in this Theater.

Until that time comes, however, it is important now that we have a **high-level military advocate** that can talk directly with the highest levels of both governments, providing the latest intelligence on all players in the Arctic theater, and focusing on Russian **capabilities and intentions**.

Twenty-two years ago I was extremely concerned about the overwhelming build up of Soviet SSBNs in the Arctic Ocean—a threat, as I said before, I thought more dangerous to North America than the missiles in Cuba in 1962 ever were.

Accordingly, I published a proposal for establishing just such an Arctic Command for the USN, COMNAVFORARCTIC, to address that concern. That proposal was published in the September 1987 issue of the Proceedings of the USNI.

Shortly thereafter, the USSR disintegrated so, naturally, no action was taken on my proposal.

My 1987 paper, available for you at the back of the room, spells out a course of action for an Arctic Ocean Command.

I am now proposing a similar concept that is a Joint Canadian-U.S. Command. Like its proposed predecessor, COMNAVFORARCTIC, this new Command would be patterned after the U.S. Forces Caribbean Command (COMUSFORCARIB), a command which **had no operational units permanently assigned**.

I became involved with that command almost immediately after its formation in 1981.

Briefly, I had just returned from extended active duty in the Caribbean and in Panama in 1980 and 1981. And because the admiral who established this command already knew me personally I quickly became involved, and learned how valuable this **“military think-tank command”** could be, and how it functioned.

The Command focused on gathering and interpreting intelligence, planning operations, and running numerous large scale exercises, **using assets provided by other commands.**

One of those exercises was a mock invasion of an unnamed Caribbean island. That operation was training for the soon-to-occur **Grenada—Rescue—Mission, “Urgent Fury.”**

The Grenada—Rescue—Mission actually occurred a year after that Command’s mock invasion exercise.

By early 1983 I had established a Navy Reserve Intelligence Unit to support the J-2 (intelligence) of the Command, and I became the Unit’s first CO.

I often found myself serving as the Deputy or Acting Command Intelligence Officer, while the regular forces were afloat. I served there until the end of 1985, and was involved in numerous exercises in the Caribbean using assets **from other Navy commands and the Marines, the Coast Guard, Army, and Air Force units.**

COMUSFORCARIB, I therefore believe, is a good model for a Joint Arctic Command, as you shall see. **Let me show you the similarities.**

COMUSFORCARIB, THE MODEL FOR A JOINT CANADIAN-US COMMAND

The Caribbean Basin is a small geographic entity within the purview of Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic (CincLant). For years, the Caribbean, despite many policy studies and high-level blue-ribbon recommendations, was overshadowed by other concerns in the Atlantic region.

For years the US government did not see a threat of catastrophic proportions in the Caribbean. By the end of 1981, however, as a result of Castro’s continuing export of revolution and the increasing threat of Communist-inspired insurrections in Central America, the Caribbean Contingency Joint Task Force was established at Key West, Florida.

Its task was to study Caribbean problems, especially Cuban-related ones. Shortly thereafter, the Command was up-graded to COMUSFORCARIB, a sub-unified command under CinCLant.

COMUSFORCARIB's continued—as **opposed to reactive**—focus on Caribbean problems, through detailed intelligence analysis and the development and exercising of numerous plans, did more to promote understanding of the threat in the Caribbean and the development of appropriate responses than the more globally oriented staff at CinCLant ever could.

Headed by a succession of dynamic and articulate flag officers, COMUSFORCARIB, **with no permanent assets**, ensured that defense-related problems in the Caribbean were regularly brought to the attention of the **highest levels of government** and realistic responses were developed and employed.

Through numerous exercises, both active and reserve forces became acutely aware of this theater's specific problems, and they were now in a much better position to function effectively.

Our joint Canadian-U.S. Arctic theater is similar in many ways to the Caribbean theater before COMUSFORCARIB was established.

As in the case of the Caribbean, policy studies and high level committees in the U.S. had expressed deep concern over operational problems in the Arctic. For example, in the U.S., the Arctic Program Steering Committee was created in 1982 at the three-Star level to coordinate development of fleet Arctic capabilities.

Yet several larger US commands with world-wide concerns share operational responsibility for the Arctic theater, and meaningful attention was given to the area only when the US occasionally planned Arctic nuclear-powered attack submarine operations.

In January 2009, President Bush issued **National Security Presidential Directive 66/ Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25** that “establishes the policy of the U.S. with respect to the Arctic region and directs related implementation actions.”

The Directives assert that “the U.S. is an Arctic Nation with varied and compelling interests in the region.”

In Canada White Papers abound stating more or less the same concerns for Canada and **its** concerns for its Arctic.

These Directives and White Papers address the issues, in general. But without the implied force projection capabilities of maritime and aviation assets that

ensure the Russians claim no more than is allowed under the Law of the Sea Treaty, and capabilities that provide the protection of the Arctic offshore oil industry, activities that only our navies and coast guards can provide, how many companies will now venture forth there again?

And without the implied force projection capabilities of maritime and aviation assets, who will maintain and enforce our respective laws there, and ensure protection of the fragile oceanic environment?

CONCLUSION

Both the Canadian and U.S. governments have publicly stated they are “Arctic Nations.” However, at present, each has only one operable icebreaker apiece.

In these fiscally austere times it does not seem that much will happen quickly to build back our respective capabilities in this theater.

What can be done, however, and can become valuable almost immediately, is to go the route of the “Caribbean Command” that had no assets assigned, yet gained rapidly in stature, once it began “showing its expertise, knowledge and capabilities” to the highest levels of the U.S. Government.

After displaying its importance and capability in the U.S.’s command structure, it became a powerful stabilizing influence in its Caribbean Area of Responsibility. At the outset, COMUSFORCARIB just had manpower enough to staff all the usual command elements: Administration, Intelligence, Operations/Plans, Logistics, and Communications, perhaps 30-50 officers and men.

Even without ships and planes assigned, that Caribbean Command grew in strength and importance and in power to influence events at the highest levels, owing to its **powerful focus on intelligence, plans, operations and its overall expertise in its Area of Responsibility.**

I was there and helped make it happen.

I believe this kind of **Think-Tank Command** can work for the Arctic also. In time, the Arctic Command might also gain significant assets.

But in the meantime, establishment of a joint Canada-U.S. command focused on protection of North American interests in the Arctic will show the other polar countries **that we are finally paying attention, and are not “paper tigers”!**

Surely our governments can find enough money, or budgets can be re-programmed in both Canada and the U.S., to fund a “think-tank” command such as COMUSFORCARIB was at the outset.

To summarize:

- As opposed to the 1946-1990 Cold War in the Arctic that focused on nuclear deterrence, the one just started is about legally securing and protecting oil and gas rights in the offshore Arctic.
- The world's Arctic countries will likely need these oil and gas assets in the future owing to uncertainty of supply from the Mid-East.
- As the oil supplies from the Mid-East become increasingly uncertain and Arctic Ocean ice continues diminishing, increasing offshore Continental Shelf exploration and shipping will occur in the Arctic.
- Russia, the most experienced, and increasingly the most aggressive operator in the Arctic, with the most effective military force in this theater, will stretch its claims to as much of the Arctic as it can.
- A Joint Canadian-US Maritime Command, as proposed, can assure compliance with our respective laws governing this region.

I believe a North American Arctic Maritime Command can be initiated that shows we are seriously concerned, at the highest levels, about our Northern Backyard!

Shouldn't we try before it's too late?